

History of the Gilbert Arizona Temple

In 1847 members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints settled in the Salt Lake Valley after a harrowing 1,300-mile journey across the United States. Church President Brigham Young recognized that expansion outside of the Utah Territory would be vital to Church growth and western colonization. But expansion south of Utah's initial borders introduced the pioneers to the forsaken deserts of the American Southwest. President George Q. Cannon, then a counselor to Brigham Young, commented prophetically, "Good countries are not for us. The worst places in the land we can probably get, and we must develop them. If there be deserts in Arizona, thank God for the deserts."

Among the first efforts to develop the deserts of southern Arizona were those made by settlers from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the 1860s and 1870s. Church members had proved to be successful colonizers and pioneers — as evidenced by their communities in Ohio, Missouri and Illinois — despite difficult climates and terrains. These early colonizers were required to be resourceful or perish. Yet from perilous beginnings, and with selfless foresight, their endeavors assisted in laying the foundation for the expansive cities we now see in the Phoenix area.

The town of Gilbert was initially established as a railway depot in 1902. The stop was named "Gilbert" after the landowner who allowed the railroad to cross his property. Latter-day Saints of early Gilbert attended congregations established in Mesa and Chandler. Eventually, Sunday worship services in Gilbert were held in the elementary schoolhouse, and in February of 1918, a congregation in Gilbert was officially organized. A new chapel — the first in the town — was completed the next year.

On 24 August 1975 the Gilbert Arizona Stake (similar to a diocese) was organized with Newel K. Barney as stake president. Gilbert is now home to 25 stakes of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In April of 2008, to support the steadily increasing Latter-day Saint populations of the Gilbert and Chandler areas, worldwide Church leader Thomas S. Monson announced the plans to build a fourth temple in the state of Arizona — this one to be located in Gilbert. Two years after this announcement, in November of 2010, ground was broken and temple construction commenced.

At 85,000 square feet, the Gilbert Temple is the largest temple the Church has constructed in 17 years. The temple is the tallest building in Gilbert and one of the tallest in the entire East Valley. The highly detailed ivory exterior features high-quality precast concrete and stone accentuated with fine rustications and beautifully crafted art glass windows. Within the walls of the temple is seen the repeated artistic motif of the agave plant, native to the deserts of the Southwest.