

## OPENING A TEMPLE IN REXBURG

*Val R. Christensen—President, Rexburg Temple*

After having served for a number of years in a variety of church callings, Ruth Ann and I were satisfied with the assignment to serve as ordinance workers, and I as a sealer, in the Bountiful Utah Temple. Blessings are associated with service in the temple, and we were experiencing many of them. On 3 August 2007, the security of living in a routine life, with time for some travel and plenty of opportunity for family activities, came to an end with a phone visit from President Gordon B. Hinckley. He was kind enough to extend a call to serve as president of the new Rexburg Idaho Temple, which he indicated would not become fully operational until February 2008.

Temple assignments for presidents usually begin in November of each year. After being set apart on 15 October 2007 by President Hinckley, it was suggested that we begin an early transition to our new roles as president and matron of the temple. Over the next few weeks, we moved to Rexburg, called two able counselors and assistants to the matron, and began planning for the opening of the temple. Within a few weeks, the activity of the new presidency changed from simple meetings to workshops. We had excellent guidance from church headquarters, but we were given much latitude in organizing the operation of the temple and calling the numerous members to serve as ordinance workers and volunteers.

Most of my professional life took place in Logan, Utah, where I worked as an administrator at Utah State University. Ruth Ann and I enjoyed the benefits of working in a university atmosphere among lively and dedicated students. The call to serve the Lord in Rexburg seemed quite natural in many ways. After arriving here, I was pleased to learn that the pioneers who settled this area also came from Cache Valley. Early settlers such as Thomas E. Ricks, William F. Rigby, Francis Gunnell, Fred Smith, and others moved from Logan in the late 1800's. The weather and college atmosphere in Rexburg and Logan are similar. Our travel to the area many times over the years to visit the campus and family members allowed us to feel comfortable with the assignment to serve the Lord for a few years in the lovely Upper Snake River Valley.

This beautiful valley reminds me of the words from Deuteronomy 8:7-9: "A land of wheat, and barley, and vines...a land of...honey; A land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, thou shalt not lack any thing in it." This assurance was confirmed to me with the comments of Don C. Driggs, who in 1888 offered these words as he viewed the Teton Valley: "I shall never forget our reaching the summit beyond Canyon

**Blessings are associated with service in the temple, and we were experiencing many of them.**

Creek where we could look into the [Teton] valley. The vision we beheld was overpowering. Indeed, it looked like the promised land.”

Brother Driggs’ thoughts were reinforced years later by Hyrum Manwaring, the 7th President of Ricks College, who offered these observations:

On the evening of July 23rd, I came to Rexburg to deliver the “oration” at the 24th of July celebration.... Ricks Academy seemed nothing but a massive stone building standing in the center of a rugged ten acre plot of ground [with] sagebrush and lava rock.... I stood lonely and very depressed and silently shed tears to think I was bringing my dear wife and children to this place to try to make a home. I climbed further up the slope and looked farther over the great valley; I suddenly seemed to catch the spirit of the pioneers, and to dream of the great potentials that lay before me. I saw the future of a fine residential city and a great college. Later that morning when I went to the new tabernacle to deliver my speech..., I was inspired as I have seldom been and made a speech that was full of hope and enthusiasm. As I gave courage and determination to my eager listeners, I received ten fold of that spirit for myself. I finished that day full of the old pioneer spirit that builds empires. I left Rexburg happy.... I felt that I had found a challenge for my young mind, heart, and muscles.<sup>1</sup>

What makes this place productive and beautiful are the faithful saints and their wonderful neighbors. I think Alma, when speaking to the saints in the city of Gideon, may have been referring also to the dedicated members in this valley: “For I perceive that ye are in the paths of righteousness; I perceive that ye are in the path which leads to the kingdom of God; yea, I perceive that ye are making his paths straight” (Alma 7:19).

**Idaho now has another gem to compete with Old Faithful for the most photographed location in the region.**

Idaho now has another gem to compete with Old Faithful for the most photographed location in the region. There were a number of predictions that many temples would come to the area. In an address by President J. Reuben Clark at the ceremony marking the laying of the cornerstone and dedication of the Idaho Falls Temple, 9 October 1940, he stated, “This is the first temple in Idaho, but as surely as we are here we shall build other temples in Idaho.”<sup>3</sup> And other temples have followed: Idaho Falls was dedicated in 1945, Boise in 1984, Rexburg and Twin Falls in 2008.

It was on 30 September 1949, that mayor J. M. Parkinson and city clerk Loretta M. Rigby verified the sale to the Church of the land on which the temple is located. The purchase price was \$5500.<sup>4</sup> The land was used for many years to raise farm crops. There was always a hope and a prayer that it might be used someday as the site for a temple. When President Hinckley announced that a temple would be built in Rexburg, many saints rejoiced to know that it would sit on this prominent spot in the city, next to the campus of BYU–Idaho. It is viewed from at least

10 miles away in every direction, especially at night. President Boyd K. Packer provides a perfect description for the temple:

The temple itself becomes a symbol. If you have seen one of the temples at night, fully lighted, you know what an impressive sight that can be. The house of the Lord, bathed in the light, standing out in the darkness, becomes symbolic of the power and inspiration of the gospel of Jesus Christ standing as a beacon in a world that sinks ever further into spiritual darkness.<sup>5</sup>

The process of opening the temple in Rexburg has been a humbling experience. Over the past few months, at least 1200 members have been interviewed and called, and many have been set apart to serve as temple workers. Everyone accepted the invitation to serve with faith and devotion. The response to the open house and dedication was impressive. The thousands of volunteers who assisted with these events brought much appreciation and admiration from leaders.

**At least 1200 members have been interviewed and called, and many have been set apart to serve as temple workers.**

There was an early plan to build a large temple in Rexburg but to operate it with a small temple philosophy. We were authorized to have a small professional staff to supervise key functions such as recording, engineering, and custodial duties. But the majority of temple workers would be volunteers, called from the local wards and stakes. The saints in the temple district have responded to the call to serve in the temple. Many are giving numerous hours of their personal lives to ensure that the temple operates with efficiency and success.

At the Logan Temple cornerstone dedication, President George Q. Cannon made this statement:

Every foundation stone that is laid for a Temple and every Temple completed according to the order the Lord has revealed for his holy Priesthood lessens the power of Satan on the earth, and increases the power of God and godliness, moves the heavens in mighty power in our behalf, invokes and calls down upon us the blessings of the Eternal Gods and those who reside in their presence.<sup>6</sup>

Already we note the fulfillment of that promise as the saints come to the temple in large numbers. Youth occupy the baptistry from 6:00 a.m. until 9:00 p.m., families are sealed for eternity, and couples are enjoying the blessings of eternal marriages. The work for the dead remains a high priority for the members. Enthusiasm for the temple and its saving ordinances is bringing patrons to the temple in large numbers, and we believe the spirituality of the members is enhanced among the wards and stakes.

The temple brings peace and joy to those who attend. From the helpful pamphlet, *Preparing to Enter the Holy Temple*, we read:

Sometimes our minds are beset with problems, and there are so many things clamoring for attention at once that we just cannot think clearly and see clearly.

At the temple the dust of distractions seems to settle out, the fog and the haze seem to lift and we can “see” things that we were not able to see before and find a way through our troubles that we had not previously known.<sup>7</sup>

I watch as couples enter the temple for proxy endowment sessions. Many of them are in a rush because they are late. Others reflect frustration with each other. Many still have in their minds the activities and difficulties of a busy life at work and home still in their minds. It is a joy to watch these same couples leave the celestial room after a session at the temple. They often hold hands and reflect an obvious love for each other. The frustrations have subsided, and they return home with more determination to love their family and to serve the Lord.

I watch these couples walk together out of the temple, I’m reminded of President Gordon B. Hinckley’s thoughts:

Can anyone believing in eternal life doubt that the God of Heaven would grant his sons and daughters that most precious attribute of life, the love that finds its most meaningful expression in family relationships? No, reason demands that the family relationship shall continue after death. The human heart longs for it, and the God of Heaven has revealed a way whereby it may be secured. The sacred ordinances of the house of the Lord provide for it.<sup>8</sup>

**The temple is a  
place to which I  
bring my problems.**

The temple is a place to which I bring my problems. I can have them more clearly defined and organized in my mind and heart, with more apparent solutions. Our family has more love for each other because of the patience and consideration we feel for them after a regular reminder of the covenants we made in the temple when we were first sealed. We are certain that because of the example of our own marriage and our regular attendance, our children desire to operate their own lives with the influence of the Lord’s spirit. They have desired to attend seminary and institute, serve missions and seek their own marriages in the temple. These are blessings that may come to families who serve the Lord in His house. It may take time in some cases for this to happen, but the sealing power binds families together forever, and in time those eternal blessings promised by the Lord will be fulfilled with every parent and child.

I invite everyone to come to the temple. Its beauty draws attention to the spiritual influence it will have in this valley. The words of the Lord to the saints at the dedication of the Kirkland Temple have application here: “And the fame of this house shall spread to foreign lands; and this is the beginning of the blessing which shall be poured out upon the heads of my people” (Doctrine and Covenants 110:10). This is especially true for the saints who live in the Upper Snake River Valley.

It is a blessing and honor to serve the Lord in the beautiful Rexburg Idaho Temple. The faithful saints in the valley are enjoying the spiritual growth that comes from participating in the ordinances provided in the

House of the Lord. The Lord is pleased with the overwhelming response from the saints as they visit the temple in large numbers. I believe that the members will continue to be blessed by the Lord as they visit his holy house. ☺

**The Lord is  
pleased with the  
overwhelming  
response from the  
saints.**

## NOTES

- 1 Hyrum Manwaring, *Ricks College: a history of fifty-six years* (unpublished).
- 2 Dwayne L. Crowder, *The Spirit of Ricks*, 1997, 50-1.
- 3 Delbert V. Groberg, *The Idaho Falls Temple: The First LDS Temple in Idaho*, (1985) 104.
- 4 Manwaring, *ibid.*
- 5 Boyd K. Packer, "The Holy Temple," *Ensign* February 1995.
- 6 "The Logan Temple." *Millennial Star*, 12 Nov. 1877, 743.
- 7 *Preparing to Enter the Holy Temple* (2002), 36.
- 8 Gordon B. Hinckley, "Why These Temples?" *Temples of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (1999), 17.