

# Mother in Heaven

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints teaches that all human beings, male and female, are beloved spirit children of heavenly parents, a Heavenly Father and a Heavenly Mother. This understanding is rooted in scriptural and prophetic teachings about the nature of God, our relationship to Deity, and the godly potential of men and women.<sup>1</sup> The doctrine of a Heavenly Mother is a cherished and distinctive belief among Latter-day Saints.<sup>2</sup>

While there is no record of a formal revelation to Joseph Smith on this doctrine, some early Latter-day Saint women recalled that he personally taught them about a Mother in Heaven.<sup>3</sup> The earliest published references to the doctrine appeared shortly after Joseph Smith's death in 1844, in documents written by his close associates.<sup>4</sup> The most notable expression of the idea is found in a poem by Eliza R. Snow, entitled "My Father in Heaven" and now known as the hymn "O My Father." This text declares: "In the heav'ns are parents single? / No, the thought makes reason stare; / Truth is reason—truth eternal / Tells me I've a mother there."<sup>5</sup>

Subsequent Church leaders have affirmed the existence of a Mother in Heaven. In 1909, the First Presidency taught that "all men and women are in the similitude of the universal Father and Mother, and are literally the sons and daughters of Deity."<sup>6</sup> Susa Young Gates, a prominent leader in the Church, wrote in 1920 that Joseph Smith's visions and teachings revealed the truth that "the divine Mother, [is] side by side with the divine Father."<sup>7</sup> And in "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," issued in 1995, the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles declared, "Each [person] is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each has a divine nature and destiny."<sup>8</sup>

Prophets have taught that our heavenly parents work together for the salvation of the human family. "We are part of a divine plan designed by Heavenly Parents who love us," taught Elder M. Russell Ballard of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.<sup>9</sup> President Harold B. Lee stated, "We forget that we have a Heavenly Father and a Heavenly Mother who are even more concerned, probably, than our earthly father and mother, and that influences from beyond are constantly working to try to help us when we do all we can."<sup>10</sup>

Latter-day Saints direct their worship to Heavenly Father, in the name of Christ, and do not pray to Heavenly Mother. In this, they follow the pattern set by Jesus Christ,

who taught His disciples to “always pray unto the Father in my name.”<sup>11</sup> Latter-day Saints are taught to pray to Heavenly Father, but as President Gordon B. Hinckley said, “The fact that we do not pray to our Mother in Heaven in no way belittles or denigrates her.”<sup>12</sup> Indeed, as Elder Rudger Clawson wrote, “We honor woman when we acknowledge Godhood in her eternal Prototype.”<sup>13</sup>

As with many other truths of the gospel, our present knowledge about a Mother in Heaven is limited. Nevertheless, we have been given sufficient knowledge to appreciate the sacredness of this doctrine and to comprehend the divine pattern established for us as children of heavenly parents. Latter-day Saints believe that this pattern is reflected in Paul’s statement that “neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord.”<sup>14</sup> Men and women cannot be exalted without each other. Just as we have a Father in Heaven, we have a Mother in Heaven. As Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has said, “Our theology begins with heavenly parents. Our highest aspiration is to be like them.”<sup>15</sup>

## Resources

1. Genesis 1:26–27; Moses 3:4–7; Romans 8:16–17; Psalm 82:6; Doctrine and Covenants 132:19–20.
2. See “Becoming Like God”; see also Elaine Anderson Cannon, “Mother in Heaven,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, 5 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 2:961. For an extensive survey of these teachings, see David L. Paulsen and Martin Pulido, “‘A Mother There’: A Survey of Historical Teachings about Mother in Heaven,” *BYU Studies* 50, no. 1 (2011): 70–97.
3. Zina Diantha Huntington Young recalled that when her mother died in 1839, Joseph Smith consoled her by telling her that in heaven she would see her own mother again and become acquainted with her eternal Mother. (Susa Young Gates, *History of the Young Ladies’ Mutual Improvement Association of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints* [Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1911], 15–16.)
4. See W. W. Phelps, “Come to Me,” in “Poetry, for the Times and Seasons,” *Times and Seasons* 6 (Jan. 15, 1845): 783.
5. “My Father in Heaven,” in “Poetry, for the Times and Seasons,” *Times and Seasons* 6 (Nov. 15, 1845): 1039; “O My Father,” *Hymns*, no. 292; see also Jill Mulvay Derr, “The Significance of ‘O My Father’ in the Personal Journey of Eliza R. Snow,” *BYU Studies* 36, no. 1 (1996–97), 84–126.
6. “The Origin of Man,” *Improvement Era* 13, no. 1 (Nov. 1909): 78.

7. "The Vision Beautiful," *Improvement Era* 23, no. 6 (Apr. 1920): 542. At this time, Gates was the recording secretary of the Relief Society general presidency.
8. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2010, 129.
9. M. Russell Ballard, *When Thou Art Converted: Continuing Our Search for Happiness* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2001), 62.
10. Harold B. Lee, "The Influence and Responsibility of Women," *Relief Society Magazine* 51, no. 2 (Feb. 1964): 85.
11. 3 Nephi 18:19–21; Matthew 6:6–9; John 17:1, 5, 21, 24–25; see also Matthew 4:10; Luke 4:8; and 3 Nephi 13:9; 17:15.
12. Gordon B. Hinckley, "Daughters of God," *Ensign*, Nov. 1991, 100.
13. "Our Mother in Heaven," *Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star* 72, no. 39 (Sept. 29, 1910): 620. Rudger Clawson was the editor of the periodical and likely author of this editorial.
14. 1 Corinthians 11:11.
15. Dallin H. Oaks, "Apostasy and Restoration," *Ensign*, May 1995, 84.

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