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| **Stirling, Scotland**  July 5, 2018  Elder Jeffrey R. Holland |

**Beginnings of the Church in Scotland**

I am delighted for the invitation to be with you today for such significant moment in my own history as well as in the history of beautiful Stirling. I want you to know that I stand before you as a bona fide son of Stirling, the shire if not the city proper. I am very proud to have Scottish blood flowing through my veins. Surely every civilized person should have at least a wee drop of that precious liquid coursing through their body. I hope the fact that I do legitimizes my participation on this program today.

My third-great grandfather, Robert Gardner, Sr., was born in Houston, Renfrewshire, in 1781. His wife and my third-great grandmother, Margaret Calinder, brought me closer to home. She was born at Falkirk, Stirlingshire, in 1777. Their son and my great, great grandfather, Robert Gardner, Jr., was born in Kilsyth, Stirlingshire, on October 12, 1819. Unfortunately the family emigrated to Canada two years later, in 1821, but I hope those roots qualify me to be in Stirlingshire today and to enjoy this magnificent corner of bonny Scotland.

In the spring of 1820 in upstate New York in America, a young man of only 14 years of age beheld a vision of Divine Beings that started the series of events that brings me to Stirling today. Organizing in 1830 The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, erroneously nicknamed the Mormons, the popularity of the Church spread quickly through the American frontier and into Canada. There in the mid-1830s, two natives of Scotland, Alexander Wright and Samuel Mulliner, joined the Church and were called to serve a mission back to their native Scotland in 1839.

Crossing the Atlantic took a month but they eventually arrived in Glasgow on December 20, five days before Christmas. Determined to visit their relatives as soon as possible, these two missionary elders first traveled to Edinburgh to visit Mulliner’s parents, after which Wright walked over 100 miles to Marnoch to see his parents. While visiting a relative in Bishopton, near Glasgow, Mulliner was introduced to Alexander and Jessie Hay to whom he taught the gospel of Jesus Christ as he had found it restored and renewed in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Within a few days they were baptized and are believed to be the first Latter-day Saint converts in Scotland.[[1]](#endnote-1)

By February 1840, Elders Wright and Mulliner reunited as a companionship and within three months about 60 people had joined the Church in and around Bishopton. Those were our humble beginnings in Scotland., leading to a Church membership today of more than 25,000 members in five stakes[[2]](#endnote-2) and one mission.

Fast forward with me now from those first missionaries to the experience of a later missionary that sets the stage for this memorial event today. The name that forever links The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is that of David Oman McKay, a tall, handsome Scot who played American football, became the president of a university, was called at the relatively young age of 32 to be a member of the Church’s Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, and in 1951 at age 77 was sustained as the 9th president of our Church. He was the prophet/president of my youth, the man I grew up idolizing and wanting so very much to be like. I was 10 years old when he was made President of the Church and I was 30 years old when he passed away at age 96. It is an incident in his life that brings us here today.

President McKay’s grandparents, William and Ellen McKay, converted to the Church in Thurso, Scotland, in 1850 and emigrated to America in 1856 where they joined up with the growing body of their new Church in the mountain west of the United States, later to be the state of Utah.

They had three children and another on the way when their eldest son, David, received a mission call to Scotland in 1881. David was apprehensive about leaving his young wife with the responsibilities of the family and a farm. But Jennette insisted that he fill his mission and responded: “Of course you must accept; you need not worry about me. David O. and I will manage things nicely!”[[3]](#endnote-3) David O. McKay, the man we celebrate today, was seven years old when his father departed for Scotland and even at such a tender age he did assume a great many of the farm chores alongside his mother. His father returned from Scotland two years later but that relatively brief time proved to be a formative period in the life of young David O., work, faith and sacrifice that prepared him for a lifetime of devotion and commitment to the Lord.

Shortly after graduating from the University of Utah in 1897at age 23, David O. McKay looked forward to securing a teaching position and making a living in the world of education, but instead he, too, received a mission call to Europe and so put his academic career on hold. In his response to his leaders in the Church, he stated he would “be ready to start on a mission to Europe on the 7th of August,” paying his own way as all Latter-day Saint missionaries do, and anxiously inquiring about which country he would be assigned to labor in.[[4]](#endnote-4) After nearly three weeks of travel across two-thirds of the United States by rail and then crossing the Atlantic by ship, Elder McKay arrived in Liverpool and was appointed to labor in Scotland, the beloved land of his ancestors. He could not have been happier or more confident. He arrived in Glasgow on August 27 and reported to mission headquarters on Barrack Street there, ready to turn the world over with his success.

But you have to understand something about Latter-day Saint missions, then and now. This was a discouraging time for missionaries in Scotland who saw little success by way of converts. At the time there were still fewer than 400 Latter-day Saints in the entire country and only a portion of those were active churchgoers. After serving in Glasgow for his first six months or so, Elder McKay was transferred here to Stirling. He arrived in his new area by train on the evening of March 25, 1897, feeling “somewhat gloomy.” The following morning McKay and his companion secured a furnished apartment located at 9 Douglas Street. They spent the afternoon visiting numerous local sites—Stirling Castle, the statue of Robert the Bruce, Ladies’ Rock, and the Bannockburn battlefield. None of this did very much to boost the young missionary’s spirit. He was going through what virtually every Latter-day Saint missionary experiences, whether in Scotland, Europe, Asia or America. The work was hard, the weather sometimes disagreeable, the people were unreceptive for the most part, and one inevitably wonders whether the sacrifice of time and money is worth it. In the midst of such doldrums, young Elder McKay noticed an inscribed stone on the side of an apartment building under construction as they returned to their flat that evening. It read in a bold, clear message to him personally, “What e’er thou art, act well thy part.”[[5]](#endnote-5)

That moment, that difficult day, highlighted by that inscription had a profound impact on McKay for the rest of his life. He referred to it repeatedly, lacing it into remarks at various points along the more than 70 years of Church service he would give following that mission. In his own words he said of this pivotal turning point in his life: “I was discouraged, [he said] . . . I had been snubbed that day in tracting. I was homesick, and we walked around the Stirling Castle, really not doing our duty, and as we re-entered the town I saw a building, half-finished, and to my surprise, from the sidewalk I saw an inscription over the lintel of the front door, carved in stone. I said to Brother Johnson, [his missionary companion] ‘I want to go over and see what that is.’ I was not more than half way up the pathway leading to it, when the message struck me, carved there: ‘What e’er thou art, act well thy part.’ As I rejoined my companion and told him, do you know what man came into my mind first? [as I read that inscription?] The custodian at the University of Utah, from which I was just graduated. I realized that I had as great a respect for that man as I had for any professor in whose class I had sat. [Why? Because] He acted well his part.”[[6]](#endnote-6)

From those earliest years on, the stone remained an important monument to missionaries serving in Stirling long after President McKay completed his mission in 1899. So legendary was this message that in 1965, upon learning of the planned demolition of the building containing the inscription, two missionaries negotiated with the operator of the wrecking crane to save the stone until they could talk to their mission president, Phillip D. Jensen. With the immediate involvement of President Jensen, the stone purchased and removed for the grand sum of £30 which included delivery of the stone to mission headquarters in Edinburgh. For five years a brick encasement housed the stone on the front lawn of the mission home before it was transported to Salt Lake City. The stone was displayed in several locations there at the headquarters of the Church during the 1970s before being sent to the foyer of the Missionary Training Center in Provo, Utah, on the campus of Brigham Young University where I had the privilege to serve as president at the time. By 1984, a new Museum of Church History and Art was dedicated back in Salt Lake City and the stone was transferred there once again for inclusion in the portion of the museum devoted to President McKay’s memorabilia and administrative mementos. Copies of the stone were later created for placement at the two earlier locations, the Missionary Training Center in Provo, Utah, and the mission office in Edinburgh, Scotland.[[7]](#endnote-7)

Even with this history I am not sure you marvelous citizens of Stirling can understand how almost sacred this stone and the incident behind it is for us as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, simply because it meant so much to a beloved prophet of our Church who revered it so much. It “changed the course of [my] mission and became a guideline for [my] future activities.” He would often say. President McKay reflected in his own integrity and via the manner in which he lived his personal life just how powerfully this message changed him as a person and the way he served as a missionary and Church leader from that time forward. The spiritual nature of the experience was reinforced when he said, “The message came to me, not only in stone, but as if it came from One in whose service we were engaged.” During a 1955 visit to Stirling, now as President of the Church, President McKay found his old apartment and proceeded to find the inscription on what he called the “crisis stone,” that phrase revealing its importance as a turning point in his young life.[[8]](#endnote-8)

As I have noted, it was just six and a half years after completing his mission to Scotland that David O. McKay was called as an Apostle. He then became President of the Church in 1951 and served in that position for nearly 20 years. During his presidency the Church experienced substantial growth. Membership tripled, the number of missionaries called grew six fold, and the first temple in Europe was dedicated in Switzerland. President McKay was the first Church President to travel outside of North America extensively, visiting missions and congregations across Europe, Latin America, Africa, and the Pacific. Over and over again, in almost every land and island of the sea, President McKay used the story of the Stirling stone, “the crisis stone” with its inscription, inspiring young people, adults, and thousands of missionaries with the message of integrity, duty and resolute character that so moved him as a young man. “What e’er thou art, act well thy part.”

1. Buchanan, 268-269. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Glasgow Scotland Stake (1962), Dundee Scotland Stake was organized by Elder Mark E. Petersen (1975), Aberdeen Scotland Stake by Elder David B. Haight (1980), Edinburgh Scotland Stake by Elder David B. Haight (1980), and the Paisley Scotland Stake by Elder David B. Haight (1980). [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Llewelyn R. McKay, *Home Memories of President David O. McKay* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1956), 6. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. David O. McKay to George Reynolds, June 29, 1897, First Presidency missionary calls and recommendations, Church History Library. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Stan Larson and Patricia Larson, eds., *What E’er Thou Art Act Well Thy Part: The Missionary Diaries of David O. McKay* (Salt Lake City: Blue Ribbon Books, 1999), xxxiii-xxxvi. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. David O. McKay, *Conference Report* (October 1954), 83. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Matthew O. Richardson, “‘What E’er Thou Art, Act Well Thy Part’: John Allan’s Albany Crescent Stone,” *Journal of Mormon History* 33, no. 3 (Fall 2007): 50-59. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. A. Hamer Reiser, “Sunday School Pioneer,” *The Instructor* 101, no. 9 (September 1966): 334-335. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)