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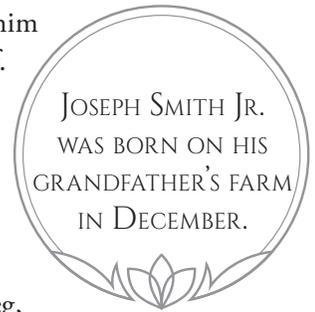
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# JOSEPH'S YOUTH



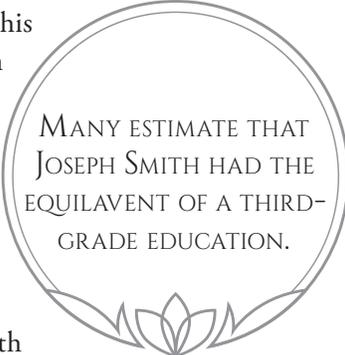
34. Joseph Smith Jr. was born on December 23, 1805. For historical context, he was born only one month after Lewis and Clark reached the Pacific Ocean on their expedition.
35. Joseph Smith Jr. was born on farm property owned by his maternal grandfather, Solomon Mack.
36. Many believe the birth of the first latter-day prophet would be a day full of miracles, visions, heavenly signs, and the like, similar to the signs and miracles that occurred when Jesus Christ was born. This was not the case. Joseph Smith Jr.'s birth was nothing out of the ordinary. In fact, in Lucy's autobiography, she writes about Joseph's birth in only two sentences. He was an ordinary man who was later called by God to bring forth Christ's restored gospel.
37. The doctor who delivered Joseph Smith Jr. was Dr. Joseph Adam Denison. Years later, he wrote that he wished he knew back then to kill the baby so he could never grow up to found the Church.
38. When the Prophet was about seven years old, the Smith family was living in New Hampshire. Several members of the family became sick with typhus fever, caused by the typhoid epidemic in the area. After Joseph recovered from the illness, he had a very painful fever sore on his shoulder. The doctor cut a slit into it, which caused the pain to quickly travel down to Joseph's lower left leg.
39. With modern medical knowledge and technology, doctors and scientists have concluded that the disease on Joseph's leg was osteomyelitis. Osteomyelitis still affects some people today.
40. The severe pain in his leg produced extreme swelling over the next three weeks.

41. During the first two weeks, Joseph's mother carried him around so he did not have to walk and hurt himself. She worked so hard to take care of him that it made her sick from stress and overexertion. Hyrum took over, caring for Joseph and carrying him around.
42. Hyrum would sit at Joseph's bedside and hold his leg in between his hands to help him bear the pain.
43. At first, the doctor made a small incision in the leg, which alleviated the pain until the wound started to heal. Then the pain came back, worse than before. The doctors tried this twice, with the same results.
44. After the second incision failed to correct the problem, Joseph's parents requested a council of surgeons, who decided the only way to fix Joseph's leg was to amputate it. At the time, it was the only proven cure to save his life. Back then, amputations were brutal. They were only performed as a last resort and required several men to hold down the completely conscious patient. Sometimes the operation was so severe that it killed the patient anyway.
45. Lucy begged the surgeons not to amputate her son's leg. She pleaded with them to just try cutting out the diseased part, as a last-ditch effort before removing the leg. She would not even let them into Joseph's room without first hearing them promise to try saving the leg. The doctors decided to try her suggestion.
46. At this time, eleven-year-old Hyrum Smith was attending Moor's Charity School, which was associated with Dartmouth College. He returned home sick. He knew of a doctor teaching at the Dartmouth medical school named Dr. Nathan Smith. Nathan Smith was the fifth graduate from Harvard Medical School with a bachelor's degree in medical science. He would eventually be the man in the council of surgeons to save Joseph Smith Jr.'s leg.
47. Many historians believe Dr. Nathan Smith to be the only man in the world who was capable of doing such a complicated, unproved surgery on the seven-year-old boy.
48. During this time, surgeries were generally done at the patient's home, on their own bed, without anesthesia. It resulted in agonizing pain for the patient.



49. The doctors said Joseph needed to be tied down during the procedure, and they offered him some liquor to take the edge off the pain. Seven-year-old Joseph refused to do either. He said that he would instead let his father hold him in his arms on the bed, completely conscious and sober, while the surgeons cut into his leg.
50. Joseph did not want his mom to have to watch him experience the excruciating pain. He asked her to leave the house so she would not have to witness or hear it. He also reassured her that God would help him.
51. The surgeons removed one large piece of bone from Joseph's small tibia, and then they removed fourteen additional pieces from the bone after removing the largest chunk.
52. Even though Lucy walked several hundred yards away from the house, she heard Joseph screaming loudly in pain when the first piece of bone was removed. She immediately ran back to the house and into Joseph's room. Joseph urged her to leave and promised to tough it out if she would go. She left but heard him cry in pain again. She ran inside to see Joseph's leg wound wide open and the bed covered in blood. Joseph was pale and sweating excessively. She had to be forced out of the room and detained until the operation was over.
53. In the months following the surgery, Lucy Mack Smith carried Joseph around the house so he would not put weight on his recovering leg. Eventually, he was able to start using crutches, and then he was able to walk without any assistance.
54. Joseph gradually made a full recovery, minus suffering from a slight limp for the rest of his life with one leg a little shorter than the other from the surgery.
55. Joseph Smith was never subject to military duties in any state. He was exempt due to his limp.
56. Amputation was still the main treatment for osteomyelitis until the First World War. Joseph's leg surgery was a miracle and unheard of at the time.
57. The leg operation performed on Joseph Smith would not be completed successfully on another patient until the early 1900s.
58. While living in Vermont, young Joseph would often gaze at the beauty of nature and wonder about the vastness of the sky and universe. He knew that God must have created it; this regularly strengthened his testimony of God's existence and power.

59. Joseph was still recovering from his leg surgery when he and his family moved to New York. On the way there, he was riding in the sleigh when the driver knocked him off. He was left behind, bloody and unable to stand up and walk the rest of the way himself. Luckily, a stranger was walking by and found Joseph. He carried Joseph to Palmyra to be reunited with his extremely worried family.
60. The Prophet was ten years old when the family moved to Palmyra, New York.
61. Wrestling was a popular activity in the Smith family during Joseph's youth. It was one of the favorite family games, especially among the boys.
62. The Smith family was not wealthy. Every member of the family had to work on the farm in Palmyra to help support their large family. They were not financially able to go to school. Joseph claimed he could read without much difficulty, write a little, and he understood the basics of mathematics. Many estimate that his education was equivalent to that of a child in third grade.
63. Lucy Mack Smith once said that of all her children, Joseph was the least inclined to read books.
64. Joseph and his brothers' job on their father's New York farm was to plow and cultivate the soil for the crops. His sisters helped Lucy with indoor chores like cooking and cleaning. They all worked from day to night, six days a week.
65. Before Joseph was physically able to help his father and brothers in the fields, he helped his mother and sisters with their duties. Aside from helping cook and clean, whenever there was a big town gathering, Joseph took his family's pies and other goodies on a handmade cart and sold them to the other citizens. He helped support the family that way.



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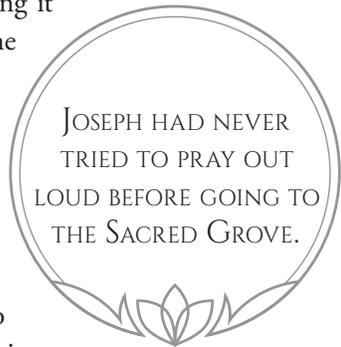
# THE FIRST VISION



66. Beginning around the year 1818, several religious leaders in Palmyra began to rise in popularity. They contended against each other about which of their churches was correct. The members of these churches argued with members of other churches frequently as well. The conflict seemed never-ending.
67. During the religious excitement, Lucy Mack Smith and three of her children—Hyrum, Samuel Harrison, and Sophronia—joined the Presbyterian church.
68. It is believed that Joseph Smith Jr. had at least one family relative in every denomination in Palmyra.
69. Joseph did attend the different church meetings whenever he could, but he was never sure about joining any of them.
70. Joseph claimed that during this time, he felt he believed most of the doctrines taught in the Methodist sect, but he was still not completely convinced. The constant religious clash around the town led to a lot of confusion, especially in Joseph Smith Jr.'s mind. He really wanted to make sure he did what was right and joined the true church, but he did not know which was true. He did not know how he would ever find out the truth.
71. One day, while reading the Holy Bible, Joseph read James 1:5, which reads, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." He expressed that no passage of scripture had ever been so powerful to him. He decided that if he wanted answers, he needed to ask God which church to join.
72. In the spring of 1820, he went to a grove of trees (now referred to by Latter-day Saints as "the Sacred Grove") near his father's farm to pray

privately for an answer about which church to join. He had never before made an attempt to pray out loud.

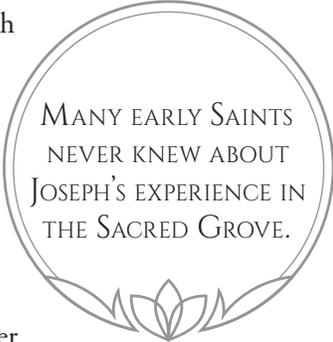
73. Joseph decided on a specific location in the Sacred Grove to pray before he went there. He had been planning it for a while and took it very seriously. However, he likely never expected what happened next.
74. Almost immediately after Joseph kneeled to pray in the woods, he heard what sounded like footsteps coming toward him from behind. He looked to see if somebody was there but found nobody. He tried praying again. The footsteps grew louder and louder, as if getting closer to him. He sprung to his feet and looked around again, but found nothing that could have caused the sound of footsteps. He knelt once more.
75. Joseph was then seized upon and overcome by a strong force or being that he could not physically see. His tongue swelled and seemed stuck to the roof of his mouth. He could not speak.
76. He had to try hard to pray, using all of his strength. His mouth and tongue were finally freed so he could speak again.
77. Once he could speak, he began his prayer. Then, he saw a pillar of light. The light looked like fire. At first it seemed like the “fire” was going to destroy the trees around him. Joseph was afraid and almost ran away until he realized the light was not burning the grove at all. So he stayed.
78. The light descended gradually until it rested on him. According to Alexander Neibaur’s journal entry regarding Joseph’s account of the First Vision, Joseph saw one personage, with fair complexion and blue eyes, come down in the light. This personage was God the Father.
79. The next personage, Jesus Christ, came down next to the first. He resembled the other in both “features and likeness,” like how a son would resemble the features and likeness of his father.
80. The two personages’ brightness and glory are impossible to explain. Their countenances, as well as the light they stood in above Joseph in the air, were brighter than the sun at noon day.
81. When the light surrounded Joseph, he was filled with the Spirit of God; it was so strong that he said it sent a shock throughout his entire body.



82. The first personage spoke to the young prophet while pointing to the second, “Joseph, this is my beloved son. Hear Him!”
83. What was the first known word spoken by God to any of his earthly children in this dispensation? “Joseph.”
84. Along with these two personages, Joseph also saw angels. Many Latter-day Saints have wondered who else would have been permitted to accompany the Father and Son as angels in this vision.
85. In the Sacred Grove, Jesus Christ told the young boy that all his sins were forgiven of him.
86. Joseph asked the two personages if he should join the Methodist church. They said no. He then asked which church was true, so that he could join it. The answer he received was that he should join none of the churches, because they were all corrupt. Jesus Christ told him that the fulness of His gospel was about to be restored. If Joseph would keep the commandments and prepare himself, then he would be an instrument in bringing forth the fulness of the gospel.
87. Before asking in prayer which church he should join, it never occurred to him that all the churches on the earth at the time were incorrect.
88. Joseph claims that the personages told him many other things that he could not reveal at the time of recording. It is generally believed that he never revealed these things during his life, or at least not in writing.
89. When the vision was over, Joseph found himself sprawled on his back. Joseph felt like he had no physical strength for a little while after his vision. This turned out to be very common with his visions later in life as well. For example, the morning after the angel Moroni first visited him, Joseph passed out while walking home from working in the fields due to extreme spiritual and mental exhaustion.
90. Just a few months before his visitation from Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, Joseph was out on an errand for his parents. He was just about to reach the house on his way home when he heard a gun being fired in his direction two times. Somebody was trying to shoot him. He was frightened and quickly ran inside. The family went outside later to try finding the shooter, but they failed.
91. They did find the tracks in the snow where the shooter hid under a wagon. The next morning, they found two balls in the head and neck of a cow nearby, which the shooter hit instead of Joseph. They never found the shooter and never learned why someone tried to randomly kill the

fourteen-year-old farm boy. This was before Joseph received persecution for the First Vision. To the Smith family, the motive of the attempted murderer was a total mystery.

92. Joseph went home after his vision in the Sacred Grove. He stood near the fireplace, unusually quiet. When his mother asked him why he was so somber, he replied assuring her that he was fine but that he learned for himself that the Presbyterian church (the church she and three of her children had joined) was wrong. It was a very interesting thing to say to his mother after seeing Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ in practically his own backyard.
93. A few days after Joseph saw the Father and the Son in the Sacred Grove, he went to his Methodist preacher and told him about his visitation. The preacher responded that there were no visions or revelations anymore. He said that Joseph's vision was all from the devil because visions and revelations ceased with the deaths of the original Twelve Apostles. This was the beginning of Joseph's persecution in Palmyra.
94. Joseph Smith did not speak about the First Vision very often. In fact, many of the early Saints never learned about Joseph's First Vision during his lifetime. Joseph knew how sacred his story was, and he took it very seriously. Another reason he kept the First Vision mostly private was that telling the story almost always led to persecution. He learned this lesson for the first time after telling his Methodist preacher only a few days after the visitation.
95. It is not clear when he told his family about his vision or which family member Joseph told first. His family likely knew soon after it occurred, but they did not speak of it frequently either. That is probably why there is no documentation of their initial reactions and feelings.
96. Many modern nonbelievers challenge Joseph Smith's First Vision account, claiming that there is evidence that the Smith family was not yet in Palmyra in 1820. However, in 1819, Joseph Smith Sr. and Alvin Smith sued a man in Palmyra for selling them horses that almost immediately died after the purchase. The horses were not healthy enough to be sold to a couple of farmers who needed them for farm work. Joseph and Hyrum had to testify in court for this case. The court



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record was recently discovered by historians. It therefore disproves any theories that the Smith family did not live in Palmyra by 1820.

97. All of the religious sects in Palmyra only seemed united on one thing: persecuting Joseph Smith. As word spread around town of Joseph's vision, Joseph and the Smith family endured more and more opposition.
98. The constant persecution from religious leaders made him wonder why people of such education and power would think that an obscure fourteen-year-old boy would be important enough to persecute so heavily.
99. Through all this trial from persecution, Joseph Smith often took comfort in the story of Paul in the Bible. Like Joseph Smith, Paul had to defend his visions before powerful people (in Paul's case, it was King Agrippa) who called him a liar. Yet it did not change the fact that Paul, like Joseph, beheld a vision. Joseph knew that because both he and God knew of his vision, he could never deny it without upsetting God, and he never did.
100. There are nine known written accounts of the First Vision. There are four firsthand accounts of Joseph himself and there are five accounts recorded by those who heard the Prophet speaking about his experience.
101. The first of the four firsthand accounts was written in the summer of 1832. It is the most personal account and is the only one that features Joseph Smith's handwriting. The others were written completely by his scribes. The next account was written after Joseph told the story of the First Vision to a Jewish man who was visiting his Kirtland home in 1835. It was written down and later copied to Joseph's journal. The third account is the most well-known. It is found today in the Pearl of Great Price. The last firsthand account was prepared at the request of a Chicago newspaper editor. It was published with Joseph's signature. This account is also nicknamed "the Wentworth Letter."
102. The first of the five secondhand accounts was written by Orson Pratt in 1840. It was published as a pamphlet that circulated throughout Scotland.



THERE ARE NINE  
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103. The next account was written by Orson Hyde at first in English, and then he translated it into German so it could be published in Frankfurt in 1842.
104. The third of the secondhand accounts can be found in Levi Richards's journal in 1843, which he wrote after hearing the Prophet speak about it in church.
105. The fourth secondhand account was published in 1843 by David Nye White in the *Pittsburg Weekly Gazette* article titled, "The Prairies, Joe Smith, The Temple, The Mormons, &c." During his interview with Joseph Smith in Nauvoo, White recorded what Joseph said about his vision.
106. The final account is found in the journal of Alexander Neibaur on May 24, 1844, about one month before the Prophet's death. Neibaur visited Joseph's home and listened to his story seeing God the Father and Jesus Christ in the Sacred Grove, and he wrote about it in his journal.
107. Each account of the First Vision is told with slight differences. Joseph Smith's story never changed. However, he would focus on different elements of the story based on who was listening. For example, in 1835, a Jewish man visited the Prophet's home in Kirtland, Ohio. When Joseph told the First Vision story to this man, it seems that he did not mention seeing Jesus Christ; he only mentioned that he saw God. This is probably because the man did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah and therefore would not benefit from hearing the full story.
108. Besides his First Vision account, Joseph also included a list of Latter-day Saint beliefs to disprove any confusion or rumors circulating at the time about the Saints in the Wentworth Letter. Today, we call them the Articles of Faith.