

**Home Worship for January 2018 – Revd Bruce Jarvis**

**7<sup>th</sup> January 2018 (Epiphany Sunday)**

**He parted the heavens and came down : Psalm 18:9**

Read Numbers 24:17-19, Psalm 18:1-9 and Matthew 2:1-12

What thoughts and ideas do you take with you into 2018 from the lovely time of Advent and Christmas, and now this feast of Epiphany? It's so easy for us to be just sentimental about the whole Christmas thing, especially when we reflect on Christmases past. It's certainly true that, alongside all the hard work and busyness, the Christmas period does produce much kindness and warmth and generosity. But is that all we're left with as the decorations come down, and we get on with another year? Is there not more to recall and rejoice in from Christmas than happy, sentimental memories? Is there nothing deeper, of eternal value, for us to reflect on, to treasure, and to use over the coming days and months?

The world had been waiting so long for God's promise to be fulfilled. For the Jewish people, who formed the Church of that day, the promise had become so distorted that all they hoped for was a messiah to save them from their enemies, and restore their nation to its rightful status. Once it was past the early phase of devotion to the risen Lord, the Christian Church also descended into darkness. A desire for earthly power and riches led the Church into a concoction of compromised doctrinal agreements that distorted the understanding of who and what God is. How easily we human beings become so distracted by earthly and natural attractions that we lose the essence and core of what life is really about. We can see that in our Christmas celebrations, when the true, essential message is easily lost in all the noise of materialism and self-indulgence. That's why our Lord has to keep coming to us, to pull us back from the brink.

Those Magi we read about in the Word were among the small number of people who were able to recognise the fulfilment of ancient prophecies, and to whom God could reveal His coming amongst us. Balaam's prophecy of a star appearing was fulfilled when their minds were opened to see the light of heaven, just as those simple, faithful shepherds were able to see the angelic choir appearing in heaven to celebrate God's birth as a baby in Bethlehem. There was no hesitation. The Magi knew they had to make the long journey, led by the star shining in their minds, until they could worship the new-born king and present Him with their gifts.

How vital it is in this day and age for faithful followers of the risen and glorified Lord Jesus Christ to focus our celebrations, and then our daily living, on the one God of heaven and earth. How vital it is, for ourselves and for the whole of humanity, that there are people who know Him, and who honour and worship Him for His comings to His people. He came in His humanity to lead His people out of darkness and into the light. He always knew from the beginning that He would have to do this, and the Old Testament Scriptures bear witness to His intention and readiness. The New Testament bears witness to His coming, and how that took place. It tells us, too, how God lived in human form, and what He did to glorify that human so that the Son and the Father became one.

The New Testament also testifies to the Lord's intention to reveal Himself even more completely in a second coming in time, not in a personal incarnation but in a further revelation of truth. The clouds of heaven, the letter of the Holy Word, would be opened up to allow men and women to understand so much more, and to see and think in heavenly light.

As we have remembered and celebrated God's first coming, may we also celebrate the fulfilment of His promise to come once more. And alongside our outer celebrations, may we resolve to follow Him faithfully and devotedly in the way we live one with another, showing love, faith and obedience to Him and His Word.

***"He parted the heavens and came down;  
dark clouds were under his feet." Psalm 18:9***

**Prayer.** Lead me over the coming weeks and months to reflect on Your incarnation, and to see how Your saving life can bring about genuine changes in me. Guide me on my journey, and inspire me to want to worship You with my whole being. May faithfulness and obedience become my guiding stars. Amen.

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**14<sup>th</sup> January 2018**

**Being Bound Together : John 17:22**

Read John Chapter 17, and then meditate on verses 20-26

The saying that "blood is thicker than water" is an ancient one, and no-one is quite sure of its origin. You might like to think about what the phrase means to you. It's strange how these ideas can become part of a culture, and seem to be just accepted, often without much thought, by the majority of people. Like everything else, there is a grain of truth in it, but that's about all! Of course, our family ties are important for us human beings. We gain so much from being part of close-knit family groups. Where these ties work well, they are of great use and support to us. But let's be sure of one thing: the bonds that we're able to forge with another person are not dependent upon our gene inheritance, or our common blood ancestry.

For me, the evidence and confirmation of a very different basis for relationships is provided in the teachings of the New Church, which suggest quite clearly that what links us to other people when we enter the spiritual dimension are not genealogical ties or any other physical or natural connections. No, what joins us together in intimate relationships, friendships and groups in the spiritual world are our affections and our common values and aspirations.

Our capacity to form relationships that are deep and long-lasting, and even eternal, is a gift from our Creator. It's from His very creative drive that He wants to be as closely united with each one of us as we are willing to be. The limits to being linked with our Heavenly Father are all on our side. And the origin of those limitations, which mean that we often mess up other relationships, lies in His other great gift: human freedom and liberty.

Have you ever tried forcing someone to be a friend? Or tried forcing someone to love you? It can be an agonising, pointless exercise! You see, even our Maker cannot force us to love Him against our will. Love has to be given and received in freedom. Love cannot be coerced.

Even when we have discovered "love", and established a relationship with someone, there still remain years and years of working at it, of developing our awareness of another's needs, of becoming willing to listen as well as demand attention, of giving as well as receiving – and receiving as well as giving. There is no automatic, immediate perfect relationship. It doesn't even happen between ourselves and our God – where there is the advantage of a perfect lover on one side! Our relationship with our God takes a lifetime, and longer, to become rock solid.

And that's true for all other linkings and bindings that we seek to make with one another. It's well-known that without the experience of love and affection, of trust and support when we are young, the God-given potential in us is severely weakened.

But the great thing is that our Heavenly Father yearns above all else for us to be united to Him and to one another. So he moves heaven and earth to provide opportunities where we can give freely and unconditionally of ourselves to the people around us. It's what makes us truly human, angelic even. And it's what can give us peace, security, acceptance and joy.

Prayer        *Bind us together, Lord, so that it may be truly wise love that moves me in everything I do. May that binding also affect all my relationships, all my desires, and all my actions. Amen.*

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**21<sup>st</sup> January 2018**

**“One as we are One” (John 17:22)**

Read John 17:20-26 and Arcana Caelestia 3451.1-2

You will notice that this week, which is the annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, we are again looking at some verses from John 17. Meditate specifically this time on verses 22 and 23.

*Jesus prayed, I have given them (all believers) the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one. I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity....*

What do you make of Jesus' words? How do you act on them in your daily life, and in relationships with people of other denominations and faith groups? Think of situations involving friends and acquaintances. Might you have responded differently, or maybe thought differently? Are Jesus' words a challenge to you?

Now read through this extract from our Church's teachings, and then quietly think over again this matter of relationships and friendships that break through some of our man-made barriers:

**AC 3451 (adapted)**

It is the Word which joins the Lord's kingdom on earth with His kingdom in heaven, and so with the Lord Himself. The Church, which is the Lord's kingdom on earth, draws its teachings from the literal sense of the Word, so it is inevitable that these will be diverse. In other words, one group declares that a certain idea is the truth of faith because this is what it says in the Word. Another group declares that another idea is the truth because that likewise is stated there, and so on. Consequently, because its matters of doctrine are drawn from the literal sense of the Word the Lord's Church differs from one group to the next, and not only from group to group but sometimes from individual to individual within a group. But disagreement in matters of teachings to do with faith does not mean that the Church cannot be one Church, provided all the people are of one mind in willing what is good and doing it.

Have you reached any conclusions about anything you might wish to change as a result of thinking on the Lord's revelations?

Prayer        In your own words offer up to the Lord whatever it is you wish to change, asking Him to give you the qualities needed to cooperate as He works on the inside.

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**28<sup>th</sup> January 2018**

**A Clean up Job! Psalm 51:2 & 7**

Read Psalm 51 and Matthew 23:25-28

When a situation or event causes us to stop and think, one of the things we do is diagnose or examine what's going on, and look for symptoms. That's true of our bodily health, and our mental health, too. Doctors and medics are trained to search for symptoms, to see patterns and

connections, and then to draw conclusions about what the condition might be. A contemporary development is a recognition of the need to look at the whole person, and not only at the surface symptoms, which may be concealing deeper problems.

We can look at society and communities and families in this way. Social workers, counsellors and pastoral workers are trained to look for symptoms and link them together to form a picture, so that actions might be taken to remedy dysfunctional behaviour. These behavioural patterns reveal something about society and people's attitudes and values.

In this country, our general tendency to be untidy and careless about litter, and for vandalism and graffiti to be so common and wanton, must be symptomatic of something. The underlying causes obviously need healing and cleaning up - literally so far as our surroundings are concerned. But more importantly, it's quite obvious that in this instance, as in many others we can identify, values and attitudes have become distorted, and only a purifying process can bring about change.

When we reflect and talk about self-centred impulses, the unanswered question is usually, Why? Where does it come from? The short, direct answer drawn from the Lord's revelations is that all negativity comes from communities of people in the hellish part of the spiritual world. They are human beings like us, who have freely committed themselves to lifestyles which have rejected love and affection and compassion, and all the other good qualities we know, in favour of self-centred, materialistic values. It is their desire to attract you and me, and so we feel their influence in the form of malevolent, hateful, destructive urges and feelings and lusts.

Part of the growing up process, nurtured by loving and wise adults, is to learn to favour and cultivate the good and the positive, and to discover that these are what truly give us delight and satisfaction. But it is in adult life that we begin to discover how strong the influence of hellish communities is. Feelings and urges we don't really like or want continue to affect us for years and years. Sometimes we resist and say no. Sometimes we yield and give in. It's a lifelong process.

One of the most significant discoveries we make is that, in the end, **we** don't actually have the power to make the changes. That power is at the same time outside us and within us. Yes, we have to want it, we have to ask for it - sometimes desperately. Yes, we have to feel that it is **we** who are doing the resisting and fighting the battles. But, eventually, we come to realise that it's really the Lord our God who is doing the cleaning for us; He is the one who is purifying us from what drags us down and destroys relationships and true values. He is the only source of power and strength who can rid us of evil influences and replace them with heavenly love.

Jesus' metaphor of a cup which is clean on the outside but filthy on the inside is just marvellous. It tells us what we really know already. He doesn't condemn us for our condition but yearns passionately for us to let him help us. He wants us to be clean inside **and** out, to be whiter than snow. He **wants** us to experience his joy and gladness. **Our** part is to entreat him to create in us a pure heart, and to renew a steadfast spirit within us, to restore to us the joy of his salvation. For all of that we need a willing spirit to sustain us as we undergo change and inner growth.

Read Psalm 51.1 and meditate on our Lord's loving mercy.

**Prayer**        *Heavenly Father, at the end of the first month of this new year, be with me as I struggle to hold to my commitment to live my life as You would wish me to. Quieten the noise in my head as I deal with earthly responsibilities and demands, so that Your still small voice is not drowned out. Strengthen my resolve, Lord, and renew a right spirit within me, so that the joy you want me to experience may become a living and daily reality for me.*

**The Lord's Prayer.**

**Blessing.** May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

## **Home Worship February 2018 [adapted from Leslie Chambers' Home Worship February 1997]**

### **February 4                      Noun or Adjective**

Readings: Matthew 5:43-48; Luke 10:25; 1 John 3:18

We speak of a Christian nation, implying that the principal faith taught in the country is Christian. We must not, as many do, presume that a Christian country acts in a Christian way. Many in the country may not be Christian. The Anglican Church is the state Church – the Church of England, but it would be wrong to assume from that that everyone living in England is an Anglican.

We all tend to use language in a general way – a kind of shorthand; and the result is that many of our assumptions are wrong. With all the many foreigners in our country, and their subsequent religions and creeds, it would be wrong of us to speak of England as a Christian country. We might speak of it as a religious country, but even that statement will not stand the test today.

So to say I am a Christian does not tell us very much; it merely states that you are not of another religious persuasion. And it certainly does not mean I am Christian in my attitude. Indeed, the indefinite article between the questions – “Are you **a** Christian?” and “Are you Christian?” is very pointed indeed. Many might claim the former, to be a Christian, but not exercise the Christian ethic in their attitude. Was it not the case of the Samaritan in the parable? He was outside the pale, but his actions showed that his faith was true, for he was exercising the highest ideals.

We need then to examine the criteria which mark off the Christian from others; and let us state at the beginning that it has nothing to do with labels. The epistle speaks of love, not being a matter of words or talk, but genuine - showing itself in action. Love in action - that is the criterion. What we do, more than what we say, shows whether or not we are Christian. No doubt what we say, more determines if we are **a** Christian.

Christian is a rather important word: it can be a noun, a naming word – Are you a Christian? It can be an adjective, a describing word – Are you Christian? And we might say that in its adjectival form it is the more powerful, and the more searching. Are we Christian? Or simply a Christian? Do we just speak the Christian language, or do we seek to live out its principles in life? As Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, said long ago, “I may not only be called a Christian, but also found to be one”.

Love in action as the criterion of life – Christian in action and deed, and not only in words – is a message that is found throughout the Writings of our Church. What is the New Church? It also is noun and adjective. It can also stand for an institution, for a denomination, for a mere label: but it can also express the very spirit that must infill the life. The ideals we find in the New Church must not become mere words or talk – they must be seen as love in action. There must be a living fulfilment in the action of life, for only in that way will the Church of the Lord grow.

The New Church is inclusive – not exclusive. It is open to all no matter the denominational label. But the criterion for entrance into the New Jerusalem, is to walk on the road towards the New Jerusalem. It is not simply to pick up a book, and shout “I have found it”. It is to live out what one has found – to make the adjective – the describing word, be a true manifestation of the noun, the naming word; that we are Christian, we are New Church, we are children of our heavenly Father.

### **February 11                      Good Shepherd**

Readings: Psalm 23; John 10:1-16

Perhaps there is no more impressive image than that of the Lord as the Good Shepherd. Is that why Psalm 23 is such a favourite? Jesus is the Good Shepherd; the shepherd cares; he leads his flock into pastures new. He leads so that they do not fall into harm. It is said that the Eastern shepherd goes before the flock. In the West the shepherd leads from behind urging the flock to go ahead.

In life we all need help and support. This we find in family and friends. They go alongside us in life. Within the Church we find those who help us on our spiritual journey. Here are folk acting as shepherds. The Good Shepherd is there to support – he is concerned for the flock. Jesus hints that he is prepared to help those who are not of his flock, because his concern is for all mankind. Here is the hint of intimate knowledge, for the shepherd knows the sheep by name. He calls them and they follow.

It is a measure of the Lord's concern for us all that he is the good shepherd. He feeds and protects; he is as a model for us to follow. Little do we realise how much others need our help. There are times when we see it clearly, in the case of someone in hospital. But folk can be ill of mind and spirit. They can be lacking in confidence. They can be without hope. They can be in the depths of despair. They can be like lost sheep - no flock to be a part of, no life to share with another. In such states the shepherd-like qualities in us must show themselves. The sense of hope, concern and vision for the future. And these qualities we see symbolised in the shepherd who cares for the sheep. The one who cares for young and old.

Jesus said, "*I am the Good Shepherd*". He is the supporter and protector of all. But he equally offers a way, a direction that we also in his name may offer to others. We need those shepherd-like qualities in us as we are to share our faith with others. We are also to be as sheep ready to follow the Good Shepherd, when the need arises, if we would be of the kingdom.

We read in the Word of God not only of the Good Shepherd, but the Bad Shepherds. These bad shepherds are those who care only for themselves. They fail in their duties because they are not interested in what happens to the flock. If the wild animal attacks, they flee in order to save their own skin. We equally can be bad shepherds if we lack concern for the spiritual things of our life.

We have the dual task to perform, being shepherds and sheep. A collection of qualities for the maintenance of a good spiritual life; here is the shepherd in us. And all the qualities we possess make us sheep, building the gift of charity, which expresses itself in our concern for our neighbour, and the willingness to be a child of God. The Lord is our example and we are to follow Him. He is the Good Shepherd. And we have to shepherd the qualities of good within us, so that we may better serve the needs of our neighbour in the Lord's name.

## **February 18                      True Worship**

Readings: Psalm 84; Psalm 122

*Arcana Caelestia: 7038*

The dome of St. Peter's basilica dominates the skyline of the 'eternal city'. If I had felt like a dwarf against the statue of David, I certainly felt like a dwarf walking up the steps to the great basilica. The size of the building is your first impression – and it towers over you. But for me this was no church, as I know a church building. There was nothing of the intimacy of a chapel or a church building. Here was a magnificent hall that puts to shame the halls, or entrances, of any of the stately homes here in England.

To me, St. Peter's is a place for celebration rather than for public worship. It is the ideal meeting ground for Christians to gather in large numbers to celebrate but not for intimate worship. I could see it well as a place of pilgrimage – each visitor to St. Peter's touching the statue of the saint – a statue whose legs and feet have worn smooth over the years, with the silent homage given.

To sit in front of the altar is to sense the grandeur of western Christianity. For here Christianity began. There may be a reflection of the Eastern Greek Orthodox Church in some of the mosaic work of the various domes – but principally here is our western style Christianity. It is reflected in all our cathedrals. Round the base of one dome I could read a Greek inscription, and on the outer dome, a Latin inscription. I did not see any Hebrew – but I guess it was there.

A Church for celebration – rather than for personal worship. I suppose this has always been so. The large building lends itself well for the united congregation; but is a little out of place for the regular worshippers. I noted at times in the basilicas I visited, that as I was walking round viewing history, in some corner, almost remote from me, a service of worship was taking place.

When we think of worship, what strikes our mind? Is it the intimacy of the chapel – or the united service: each appears to play its part – but I guess the intimate has the greater impact upon us. Is this what the Psalmist felt? Or again was it the feeling of the pilgrim going to the great temple in Jerusalem? Maybe he was reflecting on the visit, but thinking of the homely synagogue at home.

Worship is a personal affair – it is our offering to the Lord what worth we have. It is offering to the Lord our life, in dedicated service. The Psalmist knew this well. He speaks of the altar as the central point of our worship; the reminder of the presence of God in our midst. And he speaks equally of the altar in our life. Is this dedicated to the Lord or to our own achievement, or position in the world?

Our altar of the spirit is that to which all our thoughts return, and from which they take their life. The birds are said to shelter in the house of God. All our thoughts of life find their home in the house of God – whether externally in worship, or within the spirit in worship. And those thoughts find security - that habitation, that home - as they are reflected in life itself. We say all religion has relation to life – and we are expressing the supreme truth. We worship the Lord in life. We express the meaning of religion for us in the daily runs of life.

We can make our life a place of worship, or a den of thieves, or some place that comes only to life in the great celebration. All of us are invited to worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness, in those precious states of mind on which our life is truly formed. From that house of prayer our thoughts take wing, and our worldly life is filled and influenced by such aspirations as our soul yearns.

## **February 25                      Language**

Readings: Genesis 11:1-9; Mathew 13:33-42

How do we learn our native language? Babies listen to sounds, store them in the memory, eventually putting meaning to them, and when they are ready, they speak. Speech is the form of communication best known to us – it is there long before school or reading books. From the odd word come sentences and then conversation. Communication is there without the long process taken to learn a foreign language.

I remember it said that you have mastered the language when you can think it. I am conscious that my son Philip can walk through the door, speaking Spanish; come into the living room and

speak English; and then turn on the radio and listen to the news in French. It is as though the mind just knocks the switch from one language into the other – but then he is a linguist.

So it would appear that we learn to speak our native language unconsciously – effort is required when we want to speak in another language. So why all the various languages? In his simple way the writer of Genesis accounted for all the languages with the myth of the tower of Babel. Here he expressed a reason for the languages, which cause confusion. Everyone desired their language, their interpretation, their understanding to be accepted, for they felt only they were right.

It is said that we English are lazy when it comes to learning languages. And there is much truth in this. I recall in France ordering a cup of tea, and the waitress asked if I wanted cream. Before I had time to speak a Japanese girl said, “Do you want cream?” She understood the French girl and communicated to me in perfect English, yet her native tongue was Japanese.

We know that we can communicate with others through signs and gestures. But that does limit the extent of the conversation. A smile may convey the thought that you are friendly. You might know a few words of the language, but that does not get you into conversation. Language demands understanding and appreciation. Think of the phrase, “So and so can sew really well”. In the written form you can see the difference; the spoken form leads to confusion.

What about language in heaven? Is it all gesture? Do we know through affection what the other is saying? Do we have to go to a heavenly school to learn how to speak, or are we aware in the same way as with our native language? The following are extracts from *Heaven and Hell*:

*Angels talk with each other just the way people in the world do, and of various things. (234)*

*There is a single language for everyone in heaven. They all understand each other no matter which community they come from. The language is native to everyone. It actually flows from their very affection and thought. (236)*

*Angelic language has nothing in common with human language – the Angels cannot produce a single word of earthly speech. (237)*

*Angelic speech corresponds to their affections. (238) Because of this an angel can say more in a minute than a human being can say in half an hour. (340)*

In heaven we shall speak to one another and have a greater awareness than we do now, of the love and affection and attitude of the person to whom we are speaking. Perhaps if folk on earth spoke to each other with affection, it might be a much better world.



*"If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple. And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples. Luke 14: 26-27, 33*

'Hate father and mother'— can we believe Jesus is really saying this? He wants us to hate not only our father and mother but our entire family? It seems outrageous, impossible, unbelievable. All those we know closest, who brought us up, and with whom we shared our earliest life and common experience – to give them up? It feels like tearing our life in two. What would remain?

On the surface this is what Jesus seems to be saying. And not only that, but also 'give up everything you have', the whole lot. Not even left with half! The other half has to go as well. Shattering, too much! Who would be a disciple?

What does he really mean by father and mother, brothers and sisters? What really makes us who we are and supports us in our life? Haven't we moved on from dependence on family to instigate all we do ourselves? What motivates our life now? Career? Our own family? Making a better world? Peace and quiet? Doing what's expected of us or following our heart's desire? How close is that to following Christ, being his disciple?

Our desires can lead us in all directions. To gorge on food or deny ourselves food. To surround ourselves with lots of things or people, or keep ourselves to ourselves. To search for meaning in life or give up on it. To seek everlasting life for ourselves and others. To follow Christ, which means keeping his commandments. And what stops us from doing this?

Our own immediate needs can certainly demand our attention and fulfilment. What serves ourselves, our own self-interest, comes to the fore. This is the state we are all born into and from which we are to turn if we wish to follow Christ. Swedenborg clearly states that this is the 'family' we are to hate in order to become disciples. Jesus teaches us to love others – even our enemies – so in no way would he want us to hate the family we are born into or our children.

*Who cannot see that father, mother, wife, children, brethren, and sisters... are not here meant, but such things as belong to persons themselves, and are called their own? For these things people must leave and hate, if they desire to worship the Lord, to be His disciple... and to obtain the inheritance of life eternal. The things that are one's own are those that are of one's love, and thus of one's life into which one is born, consequently they are evils and falsities of every kind; and because these are of one's love and life, it is therefore said that people must also hate their own soul...*

*The love of self and consequent love of the world are their father and mother, and the desires arising therefrom, and their evils and falsities are the children...*

*That this is the meaning is clearly evident from this, that the Lord could not desire that any one should hate their father and mother... since this would be contrary to the spiritual love implanted in every one from heaven, which is that of parents for their children, of children for their parents...,*

Swedenborg: Apocalypse Explained 724 [5]

**Sunday March 11     Mothering Sunday     Mary, Jesus's mother     Luke 8: 19-21**

*"My mother and brothers are those who hear God's word and put it into practice." 8:21*

Who wouldn't be startled at hearing these words: *"Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you... you have found favour with God."* [1:28, 30] And even more so at being told you would have a son, who would reign over a kingdom without end! And she just an ordinary girl engaged to be married to an ordinary man called Joseph. And this announced to her by an angel, Gabriel, no less! No wonder she took a step back and wondered what was happening and how this might come about. Yet her acceptance and humility are enshrined in her response, *"I am the Lord's servant. May your word to me be fulfilled."* [1:38]

This is how we are introduced to Mary in the first chapter of Luke's gospel. This amazing happening is affirmed by her cousin Elizabeth, who is also pregnant miraculously in her old age: *"Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfil his promises to her!"*

Mary is overjoyed and responds: *"My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant."* [1:46-48]

How hard it must have been for her to understand her role. It is not easy for any parent bringing up their first child. The reality is relentless. The caring non-stop – 24/7. The joy unspeakable. In her heart she must have wondered what her real role was - how it would differ from that of other mothers. Jesus was her child and yet God's too. He had a destiny she could not imagine. She could care as any mother – and then what? Simeon at the temple warned Mary, *"This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel... And a sword will pierce your own soul too."* [2:35] Did this fill her with dread? Did she rejoice in the child she could bring up as any mother and put these words to one side until such time? Did she get a hint of them when Jesus stayed behind in the temple at twelve years old? Her anxiety and astonishment burst out then, *"Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you." "Why were you searching for me?" he asked. "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" ...But his mother treasured all these things in her heart.* [2:48-49, 51]

Fear and joy must have accompanied Mary throughout Jesus's life. Did her humility and trust in the Lord temper how she responded to all the strange happenings with regard to her first child? Did the 'sword start piercing her soul' when he seemingly rejected and ignored her and his brothers when they tried to see him preaching to the crowds. [Read Luke 8: 19-21.] Or had she felt its touch many times before as he went about his life gradually focusing elsewhere? Any mother has to cope with letting go of her son to find his own way in life and fulfil his own particular use and destiny. With Jesus it had to be a complete letting go. He had to let go of all his human heredity from his mother as he took on divinity from the Father, leading to union of his human with the Divine [glorification].

Such loss for Mary - so that all people could have the opportunity of heavenly life! What sacrifice! How merciful that she had other children with whom she could have a normal relationship! And yet Jesus must have been an incomparable blessing to her, alongside untold pain and anguish of heart and soul. For all of us any child is a gift whom we hand into the Lord's safe keeping.

*A woman in the crowd called out, "Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you." Jesus replied, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it."* Luke 11: 27-28  
Lord, thank you for the depth of love between mother and child, no matter what happens. Amen

**Sunday March 18      Jesus again predicts his Death      Luke 18: 31-34**

*"We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. He will be delivered over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him and spit on him; they will flog him and kill him. On the third day he will rise again."* Luke 18: 31-33

"We are going up to Jerusalem." A simple, clear statement of intent, despite Jesus' knowing that the church authorities found him a threat and were seeking to kill him. His life was in danger. Maybe because of this, he determined to face what was before him. The time was near. His work on earth ending. The final test to be undertaken – on the cross.

The 'Son of Man' would be attacked verbally, physically abused and condemned to death. He had knowledge of this from the prophecies read regularly in the synagogues, but his understanding of them was beyond that of any scribe or pharisee. He had fought and overcome battles with the hells during temptations, thus bringing the heavens and the hells into order. This work was almost completed and would be finished with his 'death' on the cross. But his life would not end there. He told his disciples he would rise again on the third day. They did not understand a word of what he was saying. It was beyond their imagination - but they went with him anyway.

*'Everything... will be fulfilled' means subduing the hells, restoring them and the heavens to order, by his own power, and at the same time glorifying His Human. All this was accomplished by means of the temptations which the Lord allowed Himself to undergo, thus by means of the conflicts with the hells which He underwent repeatedly, even to the last on the Cross.* Arcana Caelestia 10239.4

The pattern of our life, our spiritual growth and development, is similar to that of Jesus. Outwardly though, we will not face anything like the extreme onslaught Jesus encountered, nor inwardly will we be tested to such utter depths. His work was in a cosmic realm, our milieu is much more limited. We will face testing times when our loyalty is challenged, when we feel the whole world is against us, when we feel our life is about to end. This is what our little egoic self thinks and feels when our true self seeks to align itself with the higher power of the Divine. As we follow the commandments outlined in the Bible, or Word of God, we can become aware of resistance to this. We cannot overcome this by our own will power and determination, but need to call on the Lord to fight on our behalf. He alone conquered through his own power, the divine within him. This is now available to us as we struggle with opposing forces without and within. It might feel agonising at times, but the scale is totally different. Jesus battled with the total forces of the hells to bring order to the whole spiritual world – that we would not be overwhelmed but have the freedom to choose life.

*A person's regeneration is an image of the Lord's glorification.* AC 10239.4

*By the glorification of his human the Lord filled Himself with power, in order that by His Divine Human He could keep the hells in subjection forever, maintain the heavens in order, and so regenerate a person, that is, deliver him from the hells and save him.* AC 10239.5

We need to head to 'Jerusalem', towards a 'higher' life – an inner spiritual life in which we open ourselves to the inflow of divine love and light.

Lord Jesus Christ, you are the strength of my life. Of whom shall I be afraid? I acknowledge I have no power of my own to overcome the selfish inclinations I am aware of. With you all things are possible. Be at my side, Lord, giving me the strength to say, 'No!' and to resist. Guard me and keep me from harm, but when tempted, come closer still and fill me with power to overcome. Thank you for your saving presence with me at all times, loving Lord. Amen

## **Readings and reflections for Holy Week from Luke's gospel**

**Journey with Jesus** through his last week in Jerusalem, experiencing his joys and sorrows, trials and tribulations, as you read the narrative for each day and then quietly dwell on the words chosen, or others that strike you. Let them speak to you in your life.

Lord, as I journey with you during your last days on earth, may I gain some inkling of how it was for you. Be with me also, where I am in my life at this moment. Help me remember that when I am tempted, suffering, under stress or tormented, you are with me knowing exactly what I am enduring, since you suffered likewise in a far greater and deeper way. Amen

### **Sunday March 25 Palm Sunday Jesus comes to Jerusalem as King Luke 19:28-40**

*Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!*

*From the house of the Lord we bless you. Psalm 118:26*

*"Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!"*

*"Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" Luke 19: 38*

### **Monday Jesus at the temple 19:45-48**

*"It is written, 'My house will be a house of prayer'; but you have made it 'a den of robbers'."*

Luke 19:46

### **Tuesday Judas agrees to betray Jesus 22:1-6**

*Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve. And Judas went to the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard and discussed with them how he might betray Jesus. They were delighted and agreed to give him money. He consented, and watched for an opportunity to hand Jesus over to them when no crowd was present. 22:3-6*

### **Wednesday The Last Supper 22:14-23**

*'This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.'*

*'This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you. 22:19-20*

### **Thursday Jesus prays on the Mount of Olives, is arrested and disowned 22:39-48**

*'Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.'* 22:42

*'Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?' 22:48*

*The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: 'Before the cock crows today, you will disown me three times.' And he went outside and wept bitterly. 22:61-62*

### **Friday Jesus before Pilate and the crucifixion 23:1-5, 20-23, 32-43**

*So Pilate asked Jesus, 'Are you the king of the Jews?' 'Yes, it is as you say,' Jesus replied.*

*Then Pilate announced... 'I find no basis for a charge against this man.'*

*'Crucify him! Crucify him!' 23:3-4, 21*

*Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.'*

*'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.'*

*Jesus answered him, 'Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.'*

*'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.' 23:34, 42-43*

Lord, thank you for helping me to let go and surrender myself to your unfailing love. Amen