

HOME WORSHIP: 3RD JANUARY 2021 PREPARED BY PAULINE GRIMSHAW

LED BY A STAR

READINGS: PSALM 47:1-11; MATTHEW 2: 1-10 CONJUGIAL LOVE 160

“ Every society of heaven sometimes shines like a star to those who are below; and the societies of heaven are innumerable, all ordained according to the affections of the love of good. The Word in the temples of heaven shines like a great star.” CL 160

Finding our way in the world of today is very much easier than it was many years ago. We have a wide variety of maps and most of us have Sat-Navs. People interested in pursuits such as mountain climbing or sailing may use compasses or sextants.

Two thousand years ago there were none of these devices. Nights would have seemed far darker without the faint orange tint to the night sky of today. There were very few settlements of any size and these were certainly not illuminated by electric lighting. The darkness of the night would have been absolutely pitch- black darkness, deeper even than the deepest blackout of the last war. The only light for the brave night-time traveller would have been the light of the moon and when the moon was not visible the pin-prick of light from the stars would have been the sole source of light. It is small wonder that phrases such as ‘black mood’ or ‘kept in the dark’ are used to describe not just physical situations but also mental and spiritual states.

The Writings of our church tell us that states of darkness are those times in our lives when, spiritually speaking, we are at our lowest ebb; when we no longer feel the love and goodness of the Lord and when we are in states of ignorance and despair. There are many times too when society as a whole appears, spiritually speaking, to be in deep darkness, no longer believing in truth from the Lord and being unaware of his goodness and love.

Yet spiritually speaking, whatever the appearance, the Lord never leaves mankind totally alone. However desperate a situation, however black it might appear, pin-pricks of light, the stars in the heavens, still light and guide our way. What do they represent in our spiritual lives? They stand for the small snippets of goodness and knowledge that cheer us up and comfort us in our times of darkness. These might be things that we learnt long ago as children or a kind word that someone speaks to us. Small things in themselves but they keep us on track and guide us during the night-time of our spiritual journey. Our reading from Conjugal Love tells us that heavenly societies or groups of angels can appear to be like shining stars and that each angelic community in heaven appears to those below it as a star. What a wonderful thought! As we look up at the stars on a clear night may we think too of the angels of heaven showing to us the Lord’s love and truth and guiding us in the dark times of our lives.

PRAYER

When night comes Lord help me to face
The dark on my own with the help of your grace

When night comes Lord, help me to cope
With worries and fears for you are my hope

When night’s gone, Lord, help me give praise
For you are my helper through all of my days.

HOME WORSHIP 10TH JANUARY 2021 PREPARED BY PAULINE GRIMSHAW

OBSCURITY AND EPIPHANY

READINGS: NUMBERS 24:15-17; Matthew 2 11-23; AC 9293(3)

I enjoy watching quiz programmes on TV and one that I often watch is 'Pointless.' The aim of the game is for the contestant to provide pointless answers -answers which are correct but also obscure. Obscurity is what the programme is all about and much obscure but interesting information features in it.

What is obscure information? I looked up 'obscure' in my dictionary and some of the definitions were:- 'dark,' 'not easily understood,' 'hidden,' 'enveloped in darkness', 'shadowy,' and words of a similar nature. The origin of the word comes from the Latin word SCUTUM meaning a shield, hence to shield something or to cover it up.

The story of Christmas does not end with the birth of the Lord in a stable, for of course a birth is a beginning and not an ending, In the Christian world the 6th of January is celebrated as the feast of the Epiphany. The word 'epiphany' again from my dictionary, means 'a showing or manifestation' or a ' sudden insight into the essence or spiritual nature of an event or a person.' Obscurity and Epiphany -or light and darkness- brings us back to the essence and purpose of the Lord's birth as revealed in the Gospel of John Chapter 1 -to bring light into darkness.

There is a degree of obscurity about the visit of the Wise Men as recorded in the gospel of Matthew. We do not know how soon after the birth or exactly where after the birth this took place. The gospel says only that, 'they went into the house.' We know nothing definite about who the wise men were or where they came from, except 'from the east.' It has been assumed that there were three because they brought three presents and it has been assumed that they were scholars or astronomers because they were aware of the prophetic texts foretelling the birth of a Messiah, particularly the prophecy through Balaam in the book of Numbers.

Winter is the darkest time of our year. It is also symbolic or representative of a spiritual state where the mind is obscured by darkness. It was of course a star that led the wise men to Bethlehem. Astronomers of today have searched records and scanned galaxies to find evidence of an appropriate star. Whether or not there was a physical star does not matter for they were guided by a star that they saw with their spiritual eyes, the star of knowledge and learning or doctrine. When they saw the child it was truly an epiphany, their recognition of the essential spiritual essence, the Divinity with the baby, the light coming into the obscurity of darkness within the world.

The reading from AC states the reasons for the presents of gold, frankincense and myrrh as being correspondential and representing the three degrees of goodness the celestial, the spiritual and the natural. Herod and the scribes and Pharisees represent the other side of the coin, the evil that tries to destroy everything that is good. Babies and young children represent innocence and Herod's attempt to massacre newly born boys mirrors the evil that desires to kill off the principles of innocence. And so in the story Joseph and Mary were warned in a dream of Herod's intent and fled to Egypt to a place of security and obscurity, a place where the infant Lord could descend to the lowest degree of humanity and as a child begin the process of learning in the ways in which as children we all do.

PRAYER

We thank you Lord, that you came into the world to be a light in our darkness, to banish obscurity. May we, like the wise men, come to worship you and try to live in the way that you teach us AMEN

THE BOY JESUS

READINGS: LUKE 2:40-52; ARCANA CAELESTIA 1461

“The Lord received instruction in childhood as anybody else does. In childhood the Lord wished to take in no other knowledges than those of the Word which were laid open to Him, from Jehovah, his father, with whom he was to be united and become one. And that wish was even stronger for the reason that no statement occurs in the Word that does not in-mostly have regard to Him and does not in the first place come from Him; for his Human Essence was purely an addition to the Divine Essence which existed from eternity.”

The third Sunday in January is usually chosen by our National Sunday School organisation as a day when we think about and give thanks for both children and teachers in our organisation. We were all children once upon a time and we are the people we are today because someone once taught us. Human babies, unlike most animal babies, are quite helpless and have to be taught many things before they can take their place in an exceedingly complex world. Much of what a child learns, particularly before going to school is absorbed from those closest to it, from the example of loving parents and the atmosphere they impart. The youngest children are particularly receptive to the angelic sphere emanating from the spiritual world. What is absorbed and taught at this age provides a foundation for life. There is a great deal of truth in the old Jesuit saying ‘Give me a child until he is seven and there you see the man.’

When our Lord was born into the world he went through the same processes of development as any human child. He was loved and cherished by his earthly parents and was educated in the same way as any other child of his times. The Jewish nation was perhaps unique amongst the nations of the ancient world in that boys of all stations in life were taught to read in order to study the sacred scriptures of the Old Testament. The Word of the Old Testament was providentially kept as a living link with the spiritual world by the scribes who painstakingly copied out the books of the Old Testament by hand. Mistakes in this copying process quite simply were not allowed!

The synagogues in the villages of the Holy Land were not just meeting places for worship but also schools for the boys of the village. Studying the scriptures was and still is an integral part of the Jewish faith and way of life. By the time a Jewish boy begins his thirteenth year he is regarded as being a man and old enough to be responsible for his own actions.

We have only one specific story in the life of the Lord between the family leaving Egypt and the beginning of his adult ministry and that is in Luke’s gospel which records how the twelve year old Jesus was left behind as his family returned home from celebrating the traditional Passover feast in Jerusalem and was later discovered in the temple sitting with the scholars ,philosophers and academics of those times asking and answering questions with such assurance and authority that all were amazed. When his parents asked what he was doing he replied in words that puzzled them. ‘Do you not know that I must go about my father’s business’ This incident marks the completion of his external earthly education. From then on we know only that he was ‘subject to his parents and that ‘he increased in favour with God and man.’

We ourselves learn many things about the world around us but our true spiritual journey begins when we start to live according to the things that we have learnt. Learning and wisdom are not the same thing; wisdom is the interior depth of learning and is acquired gradually in the course of our earthly lives. Between the age of twelve until he was thirty the Lord increased in wisdom until he was ready to embark on the work of his earthly life.

Today then we give thanks to the Lord for the children in our lives and for our own lives which began as children. Hopefully we can ensure that we ourselves set the best possible pattern for the children of today by the way in which we lead our own lives.

PRAYER: Lord, our heavenly Father, make us worthy to care for Your children and to help them to grow into Your likeness. Fill the wonder and learning of childhood with your presence that children may know this wonderful world as Yours and the service of life as a way of happiness.

HOME WORSHIP 24th JANUARY 2021 PREPARED BY PAULINE GRIMSHAW

A SERVANT OF THE LORD

READINGS: ISAIAH 49:1-7; MATTHEW 12:15-21 AE 409

‘Servant does not imply servitude but being of service. Hence servant is said not only of natural man relatively to the spiritual, but also of men who perform a work for others, and of angels who effect the mandates of God. Also of the Lord himself as to the Divine Human when here on earth, and also of truths from good because good acts and effects through truth.’

Servant these days is often used in a derisive or derogative sense as in phrases such as ‘Do it yourself I’m not your servant’ or ‘What did your last servant die of.’ Although many people today have jobs in which they help or serve others they would most certainly not describe themselves as servants. To today’s ears it has a definite old fashioned, not to mention demeaning or humiliating meaning to be a servant. Even formerly esteemed and respectable job descriptions such as Civil Servant have a cynical ring today.

In past times many more people worked as servants in the households of wealthier people-gardeners, grooms, coachmen, cooks, butlers, valets-manservants and maid servants of every variety all slotted into the hierarchy of a household. As far back as we can go in recorded history there were servants whose purpose was to carry out the wishes of their masters or employers. Whenever people have lived together in societies there has always been some sort of structured hierarchy with those at the top of the pyramid so to speak and the vast majority underneath. Social experiments to restructure societies so that all are equal have met with little success and have succeeded only in establishing yet more hierarchies.

In the Spiritual World there is a hierarchical structure to the heavens. Heavenly societies are structured in the heavens according to the states of the angels with in them. The reading from Apocalypse Explained tells us that the functions of the angels are to ‘effect the mandates of the Lord’ or in other words to carry out the wishes of the Lord or to be his servants.’

In the reading from Isaiah, we read in its vivid imagery how the Lord called his servant from the womb and prepared him like a sharp sword and a polished arrow. We can imagine the tireless patience and care taken by the craftsmen of that time as they fashioned their weapons. The same intricate care is used to prepare the servant to do the Lord’s work. All of us are prepared to be servants from birth. We have the potential to be prepared from birth to grow to be servants of the Lord in this earthly preparation ground. A servant, unlike a slave has the freedom to choose to work. The consequences of not doing a job may not be pleasant but the servant does not have to serve. In the same way we too can choose by the lives that we lead whether or not we will serve the Lord. To serve the Lord in the lives we lead is not demeaning or humiliating rather it is liberating and fulfilling. It frees us from the shackles of worldly materialism and the feeling that we are not omnipotent gives us a true sense of proportion and perspective.

Today we approach the anniversary of the birth of Emanuel Swedenborg, a servant of the Lord-for that is how he considered and described himself. He was born into a loving and God-fearing family where his thirst for knowledge could be fostered and expanded. Throughout his earlier life he was constantly seeking for knowledge and mastered most of the scientific and academic disciplines of his time. Were it not for being called to serve the Lord in middle age it is no exaggeration to say that he would have probably been as widely recognised as Isaac Newton as a scientist. Instead he devoted himself to recording all the things that the Lord revealed to him. He continually stressed that he was only a channel, an instrument and a servant through whom the Lord worked.

We too are also servants of the Lord. We may not be required to perform great tasks as the world would see them. The task before us as servants of our Lord is to love the Lord our God with all our hearts and to love our neighbour as ourselves. Funny how seemingly simple things can be so difficult!

PRAYER: Dear Lord, Help me to obey Thy commandments and to love my neighbour as myself. Help me to serve others and in so doing serve you. AMEN

HOME WORSHIP 31ST JANUARY 2021 PREPARED BY PAULINE GRIMSHAW

SUNDAYS

READINGS: GENESIS 2: 1-7 MARK 2:23-28 TCR 301

I live opposite a church at the end of a cul-de-sac and it is always a shock to go out into the 'busy-ness' of the outside world especially on a Sunday when there is often far more traffic than on a weekday. Not so many years ago shops were closed on Sundays and Saturday was the day for shopping and leisure activities whilst Sunday was a time for church and quieter pursuits. What then should our attitude be towards Sundays?

In the Commandments we are told to 'Remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy.' In Judaism and Islam the Sabbath or special Holy day is kept on Saturday. Christians changed the observance day from Saturday to Sunday to commemorate the Resurrection. Having worked in a Jewish school and having lived in a Jewish area at one time, I think it is fair to say that most orthodox Jews keep the Sabbath absolutely literally in a way which the Lord would have recognised whilst on earth. Even the smallest tasks like switching on lights and fires were regarded as work and often non-Jewish people were engaged to do these essential things. However, although the commandment was kept meticulously outwardly, the inner spirit of the commandment was not always observed. It was a point that the Lord made to the Pharisees in the reading from Mark's gospel.

The Lord's own attitude to work and the keeping of the Sabbath was certainly not one that many of those around him shared. At the beginning of his ministry the Lord challenged the most deeply held attitudes of the Pharisees by breaking the Sabbath as they saw it. He did this in two ways:- by plucking the ears of corn as he walked through the fields and by healing the man with the withered hand. He answered his critics in two ways – firstly by citing king David who ordered his hungry soldiers to eat the sacred 'show bread' in the temple and then by asking the question 'is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath day – to save life or to kill. There was no answer they could give to this. The Lord showed that the Sabbath day should not be a day divorced from reality but should be a day when good could and should be done.

The word Sabbath in the original tongue means rest. What is rest? Not necessarily sleeping the clock round! Rest is perhaps a break from the daily routine of work and housework and a chance to escape from our daily worries and concerns and become physically, mentally and spiritually refreshed.

As always in the Word of the Lord there is a deeper or inner spiritual meaning. The seven days of creation represent the stages of creation in our own inner mind. This is the process known as regeneration or being spiritually recreated in the image and likeness of the Lord. Our new regenerate self is formed when we fight against and overcome temptations within ourselves. When we have faced temptation there comes a period of spiritual peace and rest -the seventh day- a day in which we feel spiritually at peace.

To help us on our spiritual journey through life, we need times when we can learn of the Lord and listen to his Word, when we can worship him and express our thanks to him and when we can think about deeper things than shopping lists and TV programmes and the thousand and one things of this world. This should be a time when we can consciously try to do good-to be extra helpful to others, to restrain one's temper and perhaps to enjoy the peace and beauty of the Lord's creation.

The Lord gave his disciples food on the Sabbath Day -not just literally-for the grains plucked and offered did not satisfy natural hunger- but he gave them spiritual food in the same way that he feeds us spiritually through His Word.

Keeping the Sabbath Day holy does not mean rigidly observing it as the Pharisees did but it does mean setting aside a space during the day to remember, to learn, to worship and to thank HIM with our hearts and minds. We should also try to use this special day for the benefit of others rather than for ourselves and truly try to worship the Lord in his Holy Temple.

PRAYER: Lord Jesus Christ, we thank Thee for gifts without number, for light in our darkness, for joy beyond our deserving and for life without ending. Help us to remember to keep Thy Sabbath day holy AMEN

Home Worship for February 2021 prepared by Revd Clifford Curry

The story of David's life spans over 40 chapters, from 1 Samuel Chapter 16 to 1 Kings Chapter 2. I hope you may be encouraged to read more widely than the selected texts, and get a sense of the challenges, temptations, triumphs and struggles that the Lord's humanity faced as "Son of David". David's life also shows the way the Lord truly understands how we have to challenge and overcome the humanness we inherited, with its tendencies to self love that cause us all to stumble.

Feb 7th "Man looks at the outward appearance but the Lord looks at the heart"

1 Samuel 16 v7

Please read - **1 Samuel 16 v 1 - 13**

True Christian Religion 114 - The Lord in His priestly function is called Jesus, in His kingly function Christ; and in the Word He is also called in His priestly function Jehovah and Lord, and in His kingly function God and the Holy One of Israel, as well as King. The distinction between them is like that between love and wisdom, or, what is the same, between good and truth. Therefore whatever the Lord did or performed from Divine love or Divine good, He did in His priestly function; whatever He did from Divine wisdom or Divine truth, He did in His kingly function.

In the Word, 'Kings' represent ruling principles in our lives - both true and false. These 'rulers' set the style and pattern of our lives just as a king does in the kingdom over which he rules. In our reading, Saul has just been rejected as king. The reason was that he had been disobedient to the Lord's instruction through the prophet Samuel, as described in Chapter 15. Saul's downfall is a moment we all recognise: *knowing* what is right, but *doing* what suits us instead. Like Saul, we then try to wriggle out of the consequences. This is no way to govern at any level.

Saul's outward obedience is not good enough because he tries to wriggle out of its demands - his heart isn't in it. David represents a different kind of king, and therefore a different kind of ruling principle: one that accepts the challenge to go further than changing what we *do*, to changing who we *are*. David is a truly spiritual ruling principle, described by one New Church writer as 'heart faith'. Saul was tall and good looking; but 'looking good' is not enough.

David and the kind of true ruling principle he represents, we call spiritual. That is to say, it has its inner energy, strength and life from an attitude of heart. This inner attitude within David comes out in the Psalms, many of which carry his name. The most famous, the 23rd, looks back to his youthful role as a shepherd, and his inner trust and dependence then on the Lord.

Humble trust in the Lord his God and in his guidance, is an established relationship in David's heart. His inner sense of identity is of being a sheep (spiritually representing a good affection) being shepherded by the Lord.

We are challenged to look at what rules in our lives. Is it 'outward appearance' and the desire to *look good*, or the 'heartfelt' endeavour to *do good*?

PRAYER Lord Jesus, we thank you for the truth in your Holy Word, given to us so that it might rule in our lives. Help us all to truly take to heart the truths that it reveals to us. May we go beyond just doing our duty, to loving the heavenly way and trusting your Holy Spirit to guide our feet in finding it. Amen

Feb 14th "Jonathan stripped himself of the cloak that was upon him, and gave it to David"

1 Samuel 18 v4

Please read - **1 Samuel 17 v 57 to 1 Samuel 18 v 9**

Apocalypse Explained 395/7 - Jonathan, the son of Saul, stripping himself of his cloak and his garments, and giving them to David,

By this was signified, that Jonathan, the heir of the kingdom, transferred all his right to David; for all the things that Jonathan gave to David were representative of the kingdom, that is of the Divine truth of the church, which Saul represented; for, as said above, all the kings who reigned over the sons of Israel represented the Lord as to Divine truth, and their kingdom, the church as to that [truth].

The response of king Saul's son Jonathan, the heir to the throne, to David, is remarkable.

In effect, Jonathan's gifts to David signal his willingness to step back from his role as heir apparent, acknowledging David as the one who should take priority. Later, at risk to himself, he acts to protect David from Saul's jealousy and defends David's integrity to his father.

Jonathan is a wonderful example of what it means to really love someone: giving them the best you have, and seeing their needs and safety as more important than your own. This is the reverse of 'possessive love' that wants to own someone as 'mine', and also to 'demanding love' that requires being given love and attention before it will love in return.

There is also a deeper meaning here, related to the truth that rules in our inner world of thought and intention. The tall and handsome Saul represents the literal sense of the Word as we read it. 'Born' from it (his son Jonathan), is the teaching related to outward life and conduct, that is derived from the biblical stories and characters. David however is the Spiritual Sense of the Word. This is less about the world around us and our interaction with it, and more about our attitudes, our inner world of thought and feeling, and our relationship to the Lord.

Those who seek a life inspired and guided by God's Word, soon realise that more than the right outward behaviour is involved. Inner attitudes and motivation in the heart need to be right. It is this recognition that Jonathan's love for David represents. *Why* we behave in a particular way, is the important issue. Earlier on in the story we read of Saul attacking David. This highlights the clash between the letter of Scripture that can be seen as hard and stern, (presenting the Almighty as a judge to be feared), and its spiritual sense that reveals the ways of God's saving love. In the Gospels, similar tensions exist. There, they are between the Pharisees' stern rules, and the Spirit of Truth that our Lord promises his disciples, which will support, guide and comfort them on their spiritual journey.

However difficult some biblical stories and statements seem to be, because they appear to ignore spiritual principles to do with love and forgiveness, we are to retain our loyalty and respect, as David did for Saul. We can aspire to understanding them better by and by, when the Lord chooses to enlighten us as to the Divine love and Wisdom they inwardly contain.

PRAYER Lord Jesus, we thank you for your Holy Word. Help us to revere its outward sense as a sacred casket that contains and protects its treasured inner meaning.

We praise you for the powerful light that many verses of your Word shine into our living to guide us day by day. We pray for the wisdom yet to be revealed to us, in the deeper meaning of the passages that at present perplex and challenge us. Amen.

Feb 21st “Let your maidservant speak in your ears” 1 Samuel 25 v24

Please read **1 Samuel Chapter 25 vs 1 – 41**

Arcana Caelestia 9397 - Since not only hearing and discerning are meant by 'the ears' but also obeying, expressions such as 'speak in their ears' and 'read in their ears' are used very often in the Word, not speak or read to them,.....

In the first Book of Samuel:-

“They spoke those words in the ears of the people.” 1 Samuel 11 v4.

“Let your maidservant speak in your ears” 1 Samuel 25 v24.

In our reading, Nabal’s response to David’s generosity and protection is an insulting ingratitude. This is more than David’s pride can swallow, and he just loses his temper. As he does so, he loses all sense of proportion - an all too human reaction. Nabal has offered no threat to his life, yet David, who earlier twice forgave Saul trying to kill him, overreacts - “may God deal with David, be it ever so severely, if by morning I leave alive one male of all who belong to him!” 1 Samuel 25 v22. The initial gut reaction in David’s cry to his men “Put on your swords!” was to destroy Nabal’s household, which he had up to then protected!

When faced with disappointment, and especially when our feelings have been hurt, we need to beware of weaponising our words. We may be stating a truth, but when we do so to hurt, or get our own back, or to establish our superiority or the other’s inferiority, we ‘shed blood’; that is to say, the truth has been falsified by being misused. The question David needed to ask himself was: where is my heart in all this? what is motivating me? is my reaction constructive or destructive?

Beautiful Abigail’s words to David “My Lord, let the blame be on me alone”, change the focus of David’s attention from her husband - the arrogant greedy ‘fool’ Nabal - to herself. Her name means ‘*the source or cause of delight*’. She brings an abundance of the things David had hoped for, when at a time of feasting and thanksgiving he had reminded Nabal that for months he and his men had been protecting his prosperity. She reminds David that he is to apply his standards of truth and goodness first to his own attitude and behaviour. Her appeal to David brings out the best in him. He recognises his first reaction is further out of line than Nabal’s was, and openly admits it. This will bring no delight to anyone and leave blood on David’s hands.

Faced with the initial hasty reactions we have to the world’s foolishness, greed, intolerance and put downs, the angels, who watch over our lives, try to redirect our attention as beautiful Abigail did. Before I react perhaps I should ask “what would it *delight* the Lord to hear me *say* and watch me *do* now?”

PRAYER Lord Jesus, it is all too easy for us to react badly to the ways others behave, especially when we feel unfairly treated. Help us to reflect before we thoughtlessly react out of hurt feelings. Open our inner ear to the voice of your Holy Spirit calling us to be peacemakers, rather than taking hasty decisions or speaking harsh words that once said cannot be easily taken back. Instead open our eyes to our own faults, that we might find compassionate and constructive ways to love our neighbour, even when we find it difficult to like them. Amen.

Feb 28th “You will not get in here; even the blind and the lame can ward you off!”

2 Samuel 5 v6

Please read **2 Samuel Chapter 5 vs 1 - 12**

Heaven and Hell 530 - Spiritual people believe in the Divine Being and act honestly and fairly not just because it follows civil and moral laws but also because it follows divine laws. when this is our nature, the Lord adopts and leads us without our realizing it,doing what is honest and fair from a spiritual source is doing it from genuine honesty and fairness, or doing it from the heart.

There is a long time between David being anointed king, and his becoming the king recognised by all the twelve tribes with his throne secure in Jerusalem. This pictures spiritual truth taking its rightful place in our thinking and activities by a gradual process - a life journey.

There is truth as ‘the Law’ that Saul represented, distinguishing right from wrong and demanding our obedience and loyalty. Then there is ‘the Spirit of the Law’ that David represents. This is the overarching intention and purpose for which the law exists as a guide and enabler - this is not only just, but also good, merciful, and peace loving.

David’s conquest of Jerusalem – the city of Peace - represents putting a peace loving attitude at the centre of our life. Yet, we read of the exploits of David as a warrior, initially a guerrilla leader, later a universally recognised and respected warrior king. Why if peace is so central to spirituality and the Lord’s heavenly kingdom, does the Bible have so much bloodshed, war and conflict? Surely Jesus teaches that “Blessed are the Peacemakers for *they* will be called sons of God”

The answer lies in the Spiritual Sense. This is concerned with our inner personal world of thoughts and feelings rather than the world around us and our relationships with it. The battles picture the inward struggles we have in overcoming our faults and failings, our pride, greed, intolerance, and all the rest, pictured by the nations David defeated. The false gods they worshipped, represent the soul destructive worship of self and the world’s ‘idols’.

David needed a new capital city. He chose the city no one had conquered, high on Mount Zion with great walls so high that even the ‘blind and lame’ could defend it. We can feel we don’t deserve a place in Jerusalem, the Lord’s heavenly kingdom. The standards seem too high, like the city’s walls. Our patience, tolerance, will power and faithfulness, are still growing and hardly worthy of being described as angelic. Yet Jesus tells his hearers “Fear not little flock, it is your Father’s good pleasure to *give* you the kingdom” Luke 12 v32

So how can I join the angels and enter ‘Jerusalem’, when the wall is so high? David’s answer is up the water shaft that supplies the city’s water. Step by step follow where the living water of truth leads. Make a heartfelt commitment to ‘the spirit of truth’. Follow what you believe is the right way to live, *and* the right attitude to take. For as Swedenborg reminds us - “It is not so hard to live the life that leads to heaven as many believe” Heaven & Hell 528

PRAYER Lord Jesus, thank you for the many words of loving reassurance we find addressed to us as we read and reflect on your Holy Word. Thank you for showing us that although we are all imperfect with failings we have to fight against, we are still loved. Enable us to find the place you have prepared for us in your heavenly kingdom. Lead us to follow the guidance from your Word that your Holy Spirit – the spirit of truth - provides in our heart. Amen

March Theme: The final weeks of Lent closing with Palm Sunday

Prepared by Revd Alison Southcombe

Week 1 the third Sunday of Lent

Lent is a time of giving up or we could say emptying out, preparing ourselves to be filled anew with the spirit of the Lord Jesus at Easter. This is the highpoint of the Christian calendar marking as it does both His death and the resurrection, and being born to new life.

By observing Lent, we remember and mark the sacrifice Jesus made as he withdrew into the wilderness for 40 days, and we will start with that story this week.

Lent can be a way for us to foster simplicity and self-control, and acts as a reminder to reflect and pray, to turn away from purely material concerns in order to focus on spiritual matters.

Quiet practice: Take some time to quietly look back over the last year. Ask the Lord to show you what He wants to show you. When have you felt full of life? Where have you experienced joy? Notice times you have chosen 'life,' what did it feel like? What has it led to? Turn to the Lord now in the silence and in your mind speak to Him about all that has given you life this year.

Please read Luke 4: 4-13 Jesus in the wilderness

Swedenborg tells us that forty represents the complete or the fullest period of time, so rather than think of this wilderness state lasting forty days, forty here represents the whole life and ministry of the Lord Jesus.

The devil tempts Jesus in three ways 1) to command the stones to turn to bread in order to relieve his hunger. 2) That the devil will give Jesus authority over the kingdoms of the world if Jesus will worship him. 3) For Jesus to throw himself down from a high place and call on God to protect him.

To look a little deeper at these temptations, in AC 1690.2 we find the following: *The temptation that is recorded in Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13, incorporates in a summary form all temptations, namely this, that out of His love towards the whole human race He fought against self-love and love of the world, with which the hells were filled completely.*

Swedenborg wrote extensively about the 'loves' and that all Christian life was concerned with setting these in the right order, which is as follows: love of God, love of the neighbour, love of the world then lastly love of self. These last two loves are what Jesus fought against in the wilderness and what He calls us to tackle in the regeneration of our lives. Turning back to the **Quiet practice** above, gently reflect which of the loves gave you 'life'?

Closing prayer: Bless this day, Lord Jesus. May all I think or do or say be in your Holy Name.
Amen

Week 2 the fourth Sunday of Lent

Spend a little time with the following: Lord, I offer you whatever challenges I am facing today. Don't let them cause me to lose sight of your love.

Please read John 4: 5-42 Jesus meets the woman at the well

Jacob's well still exists. It is not, as were many other wells, a cistern filled with collected rainwater that could become stale and polluted in hot weather, rather it is fed by underground springs that filter through the bedrock. Therefore, the water remains fresh and cool and continues to be replenished from the underground source. Jesus talks to the Samaritan woman about 'living water' which we are told represents divine revelation or truth.

To go a little deeper and understand this better, let's focus in on what Jesus says about this living water by looking at verse 13-14 more closely: ¹³ *Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."*

That the water of Jacob's well had been filtered through rock is interesting, as Swedenborg tells us that rock or stone represents the truth of faith, or the divine truth of the Word. Water in this particular instance, 'water of life' represents divine truths from the Lord through the Word. E. Swedenborg *Apocalypse Revealed* 932.

The great Swedenborgian commentator William Bruce has this to say about this water of life in this story from John's Gospel: *Jacob's well is the Word of God. More expressive is it when read "Jacob's fountain;" for the Word is a fountain, a well of water springing up unto eternal life.* This water then is the truth that initiates right living and then brings forth goodness in our lives. Throughout life, the spiritual aspect of man will require fresh supplies of truth, as the body also needs fresh supplies of water to quench its thirst. We even talk about 'a thirst for knowledge' which can be the seeking out of the truth.

In his speech with the woman, Jesus makes a distinction between the water from the well as a supply from without which we can supply for ourselves and the living water welling up from within which only the Lord can supply. **Gently consider the following:** what does living water mean to me?

Before you begin your prayer, take a little time to recognise that you are in the presence of the Lord and notice how this makes a difference to you and how you approach prayer.

Closing prayer:

Dear Lord, set me free from all that holds me back from showing, kindness, compassion and understanding. Grant in me the means to show your love to one unexpected person today.

Amen

Week 3 the fifth Sunday of Lent

Spend some quiet time with the following: Lord, help me to take today as it comes and see each moment, good or bad, as a gift from you.

Please read John 8: 1-11 Jesus is challenged about the woman caught in adultery

This passage opens with: *“Jesus went unto the mount of Olives; and early in the morning he came again into the temple courts.”*

We can think of this opening passage using the idea of correspondences as follows: that the Lord came into His divine love corresponding to the mount of Olives, and the temple being His divine wisdom. This He applies when challenged by the teachers of the law and the Pharisees.

A woman has been caught in adultery and the teachers of the law and the Pharisees want to use this example to catch Jesus out. However, her case becomes the Lord’s means of challenging her accusers.

If we look at the final line of Hosea 1: 2 in the English Standard Version, we can start to get a deeper understanding of what this woman represents: *“...for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the LORD.”*

There is then, two things going on here, a woman that very likely was an adulterous wife in the sense of the world, but in a spiritual sense, the sin committed represented the separation of the Israelite people from the Lord God or the profaning of the principle of good in the church.

When thinking of the idea of church, we have to consider multiple layers: most outwardly it is a physical building. Spiritually however, ‘church’ can be a body of people joined together in communion with the Lord, and at the most intimate level, the conjunction of the Lord with the heart of man as an individual.

In the highest sense, a chaste wife is a type of church, and is the pure and faithful wife of the Lord. The woman taken in adultery therefore represents the Jewish church, devoted to and corrupted by the pleasures of the world separated from the goodness and truth of the Lord.

In this story there is judgement for the woman who is ultimately forgiven but told to sin no more, and chastisement for the Jewish teachers and Pharisees for faithlessness. Jesus also draws our own attention to the false position we can all fall into by diligently attending physical church, but lacking charity to others and failing to take stock of how spiritually ‘divorced’ we can become from the pattern of His true goodness and truth in our own lives.

Closing prayer: Lord, let me be still and at peace, just for a few moments, in the busy-ness of my day. Let me be attentive to where I have been and where I am headed. And let me see where you have been present in my life today.

Amen

Week 4 Palm Sunday the start of Holy Week

As you begin your study and contemplation of Home Worship gently mull over the following: Dear Lord, let my behaviour today not be modelled on that of the world but of the new mind which you have given me.

Please read Luke 19: 28-40 The Triumphal Entry

The Swedenborgian commentator William Worcester gives us a vivid description of the Lord's entry into Jerusalem: *The multitudes in the temple courts learned that the Lord was coming; perhaps they heard the shouts and singing from the hill. Many people took branches of palm trees, the large Feather-shaped leaves from the date-palms which probably then were plentiful in the valley and on the hillside, and went forth to meet Him. They went out by the eastern gate of the city, crossed over the Kidron bridge and up the hill, and joined in the cries, " Hosanna! Hosanna in the highest!"*

Gently imagine yourself there in that scene as part of the crowd. Look at the people's faces, hear their cries, sense the mood. There is an overall feeling of celebration and joy but there is also suspicion and mistrust from the law givers and Pharisees who look on. But amid all this rejoicing, and with the glorious city before Him, as the Lord comes closer on the colt, you can see that he is sad and we know that he wept over this city, saying: *"Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes..."* The Lord scans the crowd and his gaze rests upon you momentarily. What passes between you in that moment?

As well as contemplating the wonder of the Lord's entry into Jerusalem, there are some points of interest for us to examine. Notice that the Lord is able to be seated and then ride on an unbroken colt. Straight away this should make us wonder, as an unbroken horse or ass would immediately try to unseat the rider. The Lord's nature is able to quell this animal which is symbolic of our natural thought and life. We are like that colt, untried, unschooled needing to be guided by a skilful hand at the reigns so we become turned in the right direction. Garments are spread upon the back of the colt, these robes or clothes correspond to ideas, our ideas that need to be subjugated to the Lord's rule and guidance.

As we enter Holy Week, are there old thoughts and ideas that no longer serve, that you would like to surrender to the Lord? Use this time to examine your mind and conscience.

Entering into Prayer: Recall a place where you feel at peace. Imagine it if you can, or in some way get a sense of it. What do you notice about it? Let the Holy Spirit be there with you, in the breeze or the air you breathe.

Closing prayer: Dear Lord, light of love, you shine in the darkness to illuminate our lives with hope. Bring me close today to those who need me so that I may be a light to them too. **Amen.**