



Home Worship



The General Conference of the New Church

Home Worship for October 2024

Revd Mary Duckworth

Sunday October 6 The Light of the world

Read Genesis 1:1-5 John 1:1-3

“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” John 8:12

At this time of year we are aware of the days growing shorter and the lessening of light. At the end of the month the clocks go back an hour and our daylight diminishes even further. Yet every day we rise into the light and sleep through the darkness of night. Imagine only having darkness! It would be impossible to live!

God gives us light so that we can live our lives on this wonderful planet he has provided for us, and can see and appreciate the world he has created. How different the world appears in the day, the freshness of morning light and then the dimness of twilight, our bodies generally following this rhythm with energy in the morning and slowing down in the evening.

Not only do our bodies need light to live by, but our minds do too. Our minds need to see and understand what life is about so that we can discern how to live. The Lord provides us with the light of truth to guide us. Light is what he created first of all: *“Let there be light,” and there was light. God saw that the light was good.* Genesis 1:3. It is good because it comes from God who is goodness itself. He cannot do anything other than what is good. He leads us to good by his truth.

Left to our own devices we live in the dark – as if the world centres round us – and everything gets out of control causing mayhem and destruction both for ourselves and others. But the Lord doesn’t leave us in the dark. Not only does he shed light on the world, but he came into the world as Jesus Christ, Son of God, to shed light on our human condition by both teaching us and showing us how to live as human beings in relation to himself and each other. *“I am the light of the world.”* he reminds us. *“Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”* To have a light-filled life we have *only* to do as he says, live as he lived, obeying the two great commandments [Luke 10:27]. Let the light of these shine in your mind as you reflect on your daily actions. Then the following will have a chance to come true:

“You are the light of the world... let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” **Read Matthew 5:14-16**



Home Worship



The General Conference of the New Church

When we follow the Lord, obeying his commands, the Lord fills our hearts with goodness and love. We want to say with the psalmist, *'Send forth your light and your truth, let them guide me; let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell.'* Psalm 43:3

'The Lord appears to those in the lowest or first heaven only as Light, a light far more brilliant than light in the world.' Arcana Caelestia 6832.2 Let him shine his light on you.

Prayer: Lord, guide me this day that I might open my mind to your truth and live by it. Guard me this night against false ideas and thoughts, wicked ways and selfish desires, that I may love you and live your way, loving others and showing kindness. Amen

Devotion: Each day **read and reflect** on a Bible passage on light. e.g. Psalm 27:1; Ps 43:3-4; John 1:1-3; Jn 3:19-21; Jn 9:5; Jn 12:35-36, 46; Judges 5:31

Sing: A hymn or song about light. e.g. Shine, Jesus, shine..., God shine a light..., This little light of mine... Jesus bids us shine...

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Home Worship



The General Conference of the New Church

Sunday October 13 Flames of Fire

Read Exodus 3:1-12 John 15:9-17

There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Exodus 3:2

The burning bush which Moses saw in the desert is one of the most arresting images in the Bible. It drew Moses' attention. He crossed over to see it because *'it did not burn up'*. It continued to blaze but the bush was not consumed. Who wouldn't be fascinated by such a phenomenon?

As Moses approached, not only did the bush not burn up but a voice came from within it calling, "*Moses, Moses,*" to which he replied, "*Here I am.*" His sense of something out of the ordinary increased even further when told, "*Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.*" He was fully alert now. Then... "*I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.*" God! Right here! What an encounter!

Why did God appear as flames of fire? According to Swedenborg *'The Lord appears to those in the inmost or third heaven as the Sun from which light beyond description radiates, the reason being that those there are governed by the good of love to the Lord.'* AC 6832.2. A sun is a flaming fire, so it would be quite in keeping to appear as a few flames of fire in a bush on earth. But why does God appear as the Sun in heaven or flames of fire on earth?

Who or what is God? In his essence or being God is love. Love is warm. We are warmed initially by our mother's love and by the love of others. We grow cold when starved of love, lifeless. It makes sense for God, who is Love itself to 'appear' as the biggest fire of all – the Sun – and to appear to a human being, Moses, as flames of fire. God's love is so great it would burn us up if we got anywhere near. Moses hid his face to protect it when God revealed himself to him, because God was known to be so powerful that no-one could see God and live.

Appearing as flames of fire shows God's love for the children of Israel. He's heard their cries because of the oppression of the Egyptians making them work as slaves and harder than necessary. God had come to deliver them through Moses' instrumentality.

God is always present with us, loving and leading us though most of the time we are unaware of this. We can become more aware of his love:



Home Worship



The General Conference of the New Church

Devotion Sit quietly and imagine the Lord in front of you. Look at the Lord looking at you lovingly. Look at his face, his eyes, looking at you with love, pouring his love into you. Soak it up. Take it in – your loving heavenly Father loving you, his beloved child, the child he created for a purpose – to be loved and to love.

We can love others because he loves us. That's where our love comes from. The more we love others the more we receive the Lord's love. He sets our hearts aflame. He makes them burn so that we can set the world alight, aglow with his love, a good love for the good of all.

Yet how easily we turn his love into anger and hatred against people who don't conform to our ways. How destructive this is! We need to calm down, cool off and turn to the Lord to change our hurting and hating into looking for the good and not dwelling on aspects we don't like. As Moses looked at the burning bush, so can we look at the Lord looking at us with love.

Prayer Loving Father, keep me from harmful thoughts and hurtful actions. Fill me with your love that I might love others as you love me. Amen

Read John 15:9-17 *"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you..."*

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Sunday October 20

The Lord is the Word

Read Psalm 33

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
John 1:1

God provides the sun with its light and heat and everything else needed to support life on earth. Animals have an innate knowledge of how to live, but we human beings have to learn everything in order to live here. Not only that, we need to learn how to live with each other amicably, peacefully and co-operatively since we are born focussed on ourselves.

For this to happen the Lord makes himself known to us, so that we can learn that we owe everything to him and can grow to focus on him as our centre rather than ourselves. The Lord reveals himself to us through his Word which created and continues to create the heavens and the earth, displaying his magnificence and splendour to us. *‘By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth.’* Psalm 33:6

It is good to see God’s beauty in creation and to be reminded of his magnanimity but he also reveals that he is more than our Creator and Provider. He is our heavenly Father and cares for us as his children every moment of every day. *‘When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?’* Psalm 8:3-4

He knows our every weakness and saves us from ourselves. He guides us through life’s challenges and gives us the courage and strength to meet them. He allows us to be tempted when we have the wherewithal to face and overcome temptations and this brings us closer to him. *‘But the eyes of the Lord are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love, to deliver them from death and keep them alive in famine.’* Ps33:18-19

As well as revealing himself to us, he tells us how to relate and respond to him and to each other. The ten commandments are our basic guidelines here, *“I am the Lord your God... You shall have no other gods before me...”* Exodus 20:1-17; the two great commandments also, *‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart... and love your neighbour as yourself.’* Luke 10:27 He speaks to us throughout the whole Word seeking an ever-closer relationship with us. *Jesus says, “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him...”* John 14:23-24



Home Worship



The General Conference of the New Church

It is good for us to draw close to the Lord with loving thanks and praise for all he provides and does for us. He even gives us words with which to respond to him. At the beginning of Psalm 33 we are encouraged to sing and praise the Lord, *'Sing joyfully to the Lord, you righteous; it is fitting for the upright to praise him.... For the word of the Lord is right and true; he is faithful in all he does.'* At the end is an expression of hope and trust in the Lord and prayer to him, *'We wait in hope for the Lord; he is our help and our shield... May your unfailing love rest upon us, O Lord, even as we put our hope in you.'*

Prayer Thank you, Lord, for reaching out to us through your Word, your Word of truth, revealing yourself to us, speaking to us, that we might know you, commune with you and rejoice in your love. Amen

Each day this week you might like to **look up** one of the above references and **see** what the Lord wants to say to you. **Listen** with all your heart and mind. **Feel** his presence with you. Then **respond** to him in writing, speaking, simply expressing your thoughts or staying with how you feel.

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Home Worship



The General Conference of the New Church

Sunday October 27 The Word through which all things were made
John 1:1-4

...The Word was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men... John 1:2-4

The first thing we learn about God at the beginning of his Word is that he creates. He is the Creator, our Creator and Creator of the world. He doesn't leave things there. He sustains his creation. He lovingly cares for it. He gives it life moment by moment in a constant cycle of life and death, day and night, summer and winter, and for us humans – the opportunity of rebirth and heavenly life – or, if we reject that, the semblance of life in hell.

How does the Divine create? At the beginning of the book of Genesis the Word simply opens with the words, *'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth... and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.'* *'The Spirit of God' – Divine Truth.* At the beginning of John's gospel [see above] it is clearly stated that everything was made by means of the Word, Divine Truth. But how can truth create the world and everything in it? We tend to think of truth as a concept, something insubstantial, and when we create something solid we think of re-forming material we possess into a different shape. So how can truth create?

Let us remind ourselves that God, the Divine, is Divine Goodness and Divine Truth. He is essentially or his Essence or Being is Divine Goodness and his Divine Truth comes forth from that Divine Goodness, forming in turn the heavens and ultimately the natural world.

In AC 6880 Swedenborg expresses it as follows: *...the Divine itself cannot make contact except through the Divine Human, and the Divine Human cannot do so except through Divine Truth, which is the holy emanation of the spirit. This is implied by the words in John 1:3, 'all things were made through the Word'. The appearance to man is that Divine Truth is not the kind of thing that can bring something into being; for it is thought to be like an utterance which is discharged from the mouth and scattered to the winds. But the reality is altogether different. Divine Truth emanating from the Lord is something very real indeed. Its nature is such that it is the source from which all things come into being and from which all things are kept in being; for what emanates from the Lord is the most real thing in the whole of creation. Such is the nature of Divine Truth, which is called 'the Word through which all things were made'.*



Home Worship



The General Conference of the New Church

'What emanates from the Lord is the most real thing in the whole of creation.' We might think that what we do is 'real'. But how can anything 'real' that any of us finite creatures do compare in any way with Divine infinite reality and power?

See AC 6948 [2]:

By the Lord's Divine power one should here understand Divine Truth emanating from the Lord, for power resides within Divine Truth to such an extent that it is power itself...

'Divine Truth... is power itself.' It flows into us, his creation, bringing us life and power!

Divine Truth emanating from the Lord flows into every person by way of his interiors into his exteriors, right down into the external sensory and the bodily levels, and everywhere it flows it stirs to life things attuned to it in their proper order.
AC 6948 [2]

Prayer Dear wonderful and amazing Lord, thank you for creating me and this incredible world in which I live, for giving me life and power to live usefully now and providing for its continuance in your heavenly kingdom. Amen

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Home Worship for 2024 by Revd. Helen Brown The power of Divine Truth in our lives

Sunday 3rd November: Please read: **Exodus 4: 1- 5**

The rod of Divine Truth

This reading takes place straight after Moses' encounter with the burning bush when he is called to lead the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt and embark on their journey through the wilderness to the Promised Land. To grasp the significance of this in our lives, we need to understand the inner spiritual level of this story. It speaks of our inner journey from slavery to a purely mental belief or faith that is held only in the mind [Egypt] which is only knowledge based - towards a faith that is living and vibrant in our whole being, mind, heart and soul [the Promised land]. And the pivotal figure in this is Moses.

Moses stands for the coming of Divine Truth into our consciousness into our busy outer mind. Perhaps we can identify with occasions in our life when we have a realisation, that shines a different light on a situation or our own attitudes towards other people. We view things from a higher or deeper perspective rather than judging from our personal point of view. Perhaps we see more of the whole picture rather than only our piece of the jigsaw. This is our inner Moses at work.

This brings a response from outer mind which judges superficially from the senses, what we see, hear, touch etc. It tends to be reactive and not look any deeper than what is presented outwardly. We can see plenty of examples in social media of reactive superficial judgments.

In the story Moses [He] says: - "What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, 'The LORD did not appear to you'?"

This response is negative, doubtful even fearful. When truth shines a light on our attitudes, intentions etc we often doubt its veracity or find this uncomfortable. We wonder what the consequences will be for ourselves if we follow its lead. For example, if we take this course of action what will people think...?

But in the story, we find the power of Divine Truth demonstrated.

A rod or staff appears in Moses' hand. We find many instances of Moses using a rod in his hand to provide a way forward or protect from danger. But this is the very first occasion the rod makes its appearance. The rod held in the hand of Moses is the power of Divine Truth which can transform our lives, bringing a new insight and a new



Home Worship



The General Conference of the New Church

impetus. This is a turning point in our spiritual journey, if we choose to allow it to change us.

In the story we find the interplay of the rod and the serpent. The serpent stands for the outer mind that takes in the material world and makes judgments accordingly. The sensory level of our mind takes in all these sense impressions and makes choices accordingly. We learn facts about our surroundings and the people we meet. We sift through the information and make choices. This level of our mind is geared up for interaction with the outer world. Our challenge in this life is to live in the material and physical world yet not to be seduced by it into believing that this is all there is. When we only think from our senses, we shut off the influence of the spiritual and therefore our understanding is clouded ... we are in the dark.

Divine Truth can, if we are open to it, reach right down into the outermost level of our thinking, attitudes, reactivity etc and raise it above time, person, place and the material. This is Moses's hand symbolising the almighty power of Divine Truth bring light into our darkness, grasping the tail of the serpent.

Prayer Lord Jesus Christ, We know how imperfect our understanding and judgement is without the light and clarity of your truth shining into our minds. We affirm that you alone have the power to enlighten our darkness and bring love into being in our hearts and minds. We turn to you trusting in your guidance and healing power in our lives now and for eternity.
Amen

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Home Worship for 2024 by Revd. Helen Brown The power of Divine Truth in our lives

Sunday 10th November: Please read: Exodus 14:15 -22

Leaving Slavery

In the story of the Israelites leaving slavery in Egypt we find how the truth fights and protects the process of our reformation. This cumulates in the dramatic parting of the Red Sea by the power of Moses lifting the rod and then stretching out his hand to part the waters to give safe passage.

Spiritual slavery is the experience of being imprisoned by a faith that is only factual, just knowledge held in the mind, in our understanding. We need facts about what is true and what is good, but these are not an end in themselves. Rather they are a foundation on which can be built a spiritual life.

We as fallible human beings make the truths we know as a goal, an end in themselves. This is so much easier because we don't need to change or face our inner motivations and desires. But truth is given to us to enable awareness of the barriers within us that impeded our spiritual growth.

On a spiritual level the voice of Divine Truth calls to each of us in whatever outward situation we find ourselves. Are we open to hear and follow its guidance? For acting on the dictate of truth brings implications and change within. Our spiritual journey is a process of learning and unlearning, we need to become aware of what stops us from moving forward and identify the barriers which block our path. This journey involves times of challenge and times of inner peace and rest, both are part of the process.

One of the pitfalls we easily fall into is to distance ourselves from inner change and its challenges by keeping our spiritual life curtailed to the mind only. This means that we can remain unaware of our inner motives and desires of our will, as they are kept separate from our belief system. And without the influence of love to the Lord and the neighbour, spiritual ideas can be used to condemn both ourselves and others.

We need to learn or have revealed to us what is illusory or false and what is truly spiritually alive. Then we can choose what we want to receive and live out.

So we find Moses, as Divine Truth, leading the Israelites out of Egypt to embark on a journey through the wilderness with many challenges along the way. The first of these being how to traverse the Red Sea. The Red Sea seems to be an insurmountable barrier. Yet in the story the Lord tells the Israelites to keep going forward even though this appears to be a trap between the barrier of the Red Sea and the seemingly powerful



Home Worship



The General Conference of the New Church

Egyptians [false ideas] in pursuit. The Lord provides the protection of the pillar of cloud (truth) to go between the Israelites and the Egyptians which brings a separation in our understanding. With the aid of truth enlightening our understanding we begin to emerge from slavery to our limited and false ideas of truth. What is spiritually alive within us is encircled and protected by the Divine Presence enlightening and holding back the influence of false ideas or illusions.

And then Moses (Divine Truth) puts out his hand and divides the waters of falsity to give safe passage through this testing time. Suddenly moving forward becomes possible. This is not through our own power or work, this is the power of the Lord working in us, hidden... if we co-operate.

Prayer Dear Lord, It is only when we are centred by your Presence, that we can receive the light of truth, which brings both clarity and comfort. You forgive the moments when we are trapped in self-absorption and in darkness. You give us courage and trust that what is revealed is for the good of the whole. You set us free from self-condemnation and hopelessness. You set our feet once again on the path that opens before us. Amen

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Home Worship



The General Conference of the New Church

Home Worship for 2024 by Revd. Helen Brown The power of Divine Truth in our lives

Sunday 17th November: Please read: Exodus 17: 1-7

Refreshing Enlightenment

In this story we find one of the many challenges the Israelites faced in the journey through the wilderness. And here the challenge is a lack of water. A wilderness is a desolate place with sparse food and water and little lives and survives in this environment. On a spiritual level the meaning of 'a wilderness' as that which possesses little life [AC 2708]. Can you identify experiences a lack of the Lord's presence and his truth in your life. Perhaps you doubt that He is with you? Life seems hard, and the connection with your spiritual life seems lost. There doesn't appear to be any comfort, support or any way out of this.

In the story the Israelites turn on Moses, complaining. *And the people thirsted there for water, and the people complained against Moses, and said, "Why is it you have brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?"* Following Divine Truth can be tough at times as we face ups and downs. We yearn to have a clear cut answer or solution to our inner confusion and discomfort. We try to find a solution by ourselves, but nothing works. We experience times of not knowing what to do or how to move forward in our spiritual life. We long for the flow of truth to reveal to us the next step in our journey towards the heavenly connection [the Promised Land].

Our usual ways of connection with Divine Truth don't work. What needs to change?

When we come to the end of our own resources and still nothing had been resolved, then we realise that alone we can accomplish nothing. Divine Truth cannot enter in and enlighten our darkness unless we ask sincerely and wholeheartedly, with humility. In coming to experience our powerlessness we genuinely seek the Lord.

Moses takes the rod in his hand and strikes the rock. Once again this is the power of Divine Truth reaching down into the lowest level of our mind. One of the names for the Lord is our Rock:

The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer;
my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge Psalm 18:2

Furthermore, in the gospels, we read of the safe and sure foundation of the rock of truth provided for a spiritual life in the house built on rock.

'Why do you call me, "Lord, Lord," and do not do what I say? As for everyone who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice, I will show you what they are like. They are like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the



Home Worship



The General Conference of the New Church

foundation on rock. When the flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. Luke 6: 46 -48

What are the foundation truths that have supported you in the past? Is it the reassurance that the Lord is always present in our depths, with his constant love and wisdom? Another foundation could be the two great commandments that remind us to choose to love the Lord and the neighbour as our top priority over and above the concerns of the outer world and our self-absorption.

In difficult times to repeat the words of Psalm 18:2 or another familiar Bible passage can bring to us angelic influences and in time bring us to a safe place.

Dear Lord

We thank you for the assurance of your constant presence
the steadfastness of your love and compassion
and the enduring quality of your truth to guide our steps,
May that truth equip us with courage to step out into the unknown,
to follow wherever you lead us,
trusting in your path. You are the Way, the Truth and the Life. Amen

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Home Worship for 2024 by Revd. Helen Brown
The power of Divine Truth in our lives

Sunday 24th November: Please read: Exodus 17: 8 – 13

Repelling Spiritual Enemies

This last story relating to the power of Divine Truth finds Moses and the Israelites fighting the Amalekites and winning. How this is achieved is significant to our spiritual life and the moments when we are fighting inner battles. We are given this picture of Moses with the rod in his hand and the additional support that is given by Aaron and Hur holding up his hands and the provision of a stone for him to sit on. All these supports are truth coming to us though the heavens to fight our inner battles against illusions, false ideas that currently seem overwhelming. We feel helpless, powerless in the face of the crisis or challenge. It seems as if the Lord is not present. But the reality is quite the opposite.

The rod of God stands for Divine power; this reminds us that it is the Lord as Divine Truth who fights our battles. And all the power the truth has comes from the loving goodness within it. It arises from the Lord's Divine Love that desires to gather all people to himself so that he can bring them out of the pit of hell and into a heavenly life and the blessings that only he can give.

The process involves that gathering of truth in support. When we experience the influx of excuses concerning why we don't need to follow our conscience, we also receive from good spirits with us ideas about what is good for others, for the neighbour. If we listen, we begin to ask or seek help from truths that have supported us in the past. Perhaps we remember a verse from the Psalms.

For example.

I will lift up my eyes to the hills—From whence comes my help?

My help *comes* from the Lord, Who made heaven and earth.

Psalms 121: 1 & 2

When Moses's hands are raised towards heaven there is victory over the Amalekites. When we choose to seek the Lord's help he fights our inner battles and brings victory at the right time. And so, raising our eyes to the hills indicates that our thoughts have been raised up to connect with a higher and heavenly perspective. Our mind is lifted out of the darkness and conflict. The hills correspond to the truths that lead our thoughts to focus on loving to the neighbour. This begins a process moving our focus on what is only of concern to ourselves and our self-absorption to look beyond to consider what is good from the Lord's perspective. This may lead us to ask ourselves what would the Lord do in this crisis?



Home Worship



The General Conference of the New Church

We learn that alone we are powerless to fight our inner conflicts and experience the power of the Lord's truth to fight and save us from what seemed overwhelming. It seems like a miracle!

We read in Swedenborg's writings that being useful to others and the whole is to love the neighbour. This is the way of truly worshipping the Lord. Indeed, the angels in heaven are happy when they are being useful and for them this is what makes heaven. Furthermore, it is loving goodness we receive from the Lord which is the soil that the truths we have received are nourished. When good powers our thoughts and actions, truth is rooted in how we live. And it flourishes bringing more insights and ways of being useful and of service to others.

Loving Lord

We claim to be seekers after truth,
but the reality is that the truth sometimes scares us.
It probes too deeply into areas we prefer to keep hidden;
It challenges us in ways we find hard to deal with;
It exposes issues we would rather not face.
Forgive us and give us the courage and sensitivity to face the truth and have it
transform our life. Amen

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Home Worship for December 2024

Revd Jack Dunion

Welcome to Home Worship for the month of December, which is of course inspired by the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg. This month brings us the opportunity to delve into key themes and teachings from Swedenborg's writings in the hope it will help us deepen our understanding and spiritual growth throughout the month of December.

Week 1: 1st Dec. The True Christian Religion (TCR)

Chapter One of "The True Christian Religion" reflects on the oneness of God and the importance of acknowledging and worshiping the Lord Jesus Christ as the one true God. It also shows us that, in living in accord with this belief, church does not just mean being a part of or attending a Church. Churches on earth can rise and fall according to the spiritual state of the world's population. But, our creator Himself, being infinite love and wisdom, remains a constant. We know that the New Church, which is said to have replaced the old Christian church, is to be a spiritual church, as we read in John 4:23 *"The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth: for such doth the Father seek to be his worshippers"*. The beginnings of a New Church, currently being formed, can be traced back to 1770, in regard to which we read the following:

The Christian church has from the Lord's time passed through all the stages of life, from infancy to extreme old age. Its infancy was during the lifetime of the Apostles, who preached all over the world repentance and belief in the Lord God the Saviour.....It is a notable fact that several months ago the Lord called together his twelve disciples who are now angels, and sent them out throughout the spiritual world with orders to preach the Gospel there anew, since the church the Lord established through their ministry is to-day so close to its end that hardly any remains survive. TCR par. 4

Since this New Church is to be a spiritual church, it should not come as a surprise that such a church wouldn't be visibly recognised as it grows within us and around us. Yet, people often ask, where is this New Church that is being formed among us today? However, we are told that when the Lord first establishes any new church on earth, then the faith of that church comes from the Lord and is therefore initially filled with His love. But, as was the case with all previous churches on earth, the faith of the Christian church gradually became separated from the Lord's love, and, as the love of the church declined, so too did the church itself. Eventually, this decline would cause the Christian church to die out, as had also happened with each of the previous churches on earth, namely: The Most Ancient Church, The Ancient Church and the Representative Church, with the death of each church marking the beginnings of a new church. Since each new church was founded on the Lord's love, with the old church no



Home Worship



The General Conference of the New Church

longer having any of the Lord's love left in it, the new church would perhaps inevitably be unrecognisable, especially perhaps to those who remained fixated on the ways of the old church.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, who art the Creator of all, I come before You in humble reverence. In Your oneness, You encompass all things, guiding Your people with Your omniscience and omnipotence. Help us to see beyond the illusions of separation and division, to recognize Your unity in all creation. May Your love and wisdom flow through us, uniting us in harmony and peace. In Your oneness, we find our true essence, connected to You and to each other. Amen.

- **Reflection:** Consider how the concept of God as one being resonates with you. Is it possible for us to be in the Lord's New Church even though we may not be able to attend a physical church? How do such belief's influence your spiritual practices and daily life?

- **Action:** Practice gratitude and prayer to connect with the divine presence of the one true God throughout your week.

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Week 2: 8th Dec. The Doctrine of Life

In sections of "The Doctrine of Life for the New Jerusalem." Swedenborg puts much emphasis on refraining from evils as sins and the importance of living a life guided by the principles of the Decalogue. He focuses on the transformation of individuals through leading a life in accordance with heavenly principles. This involves replacing our evil desires with good ones, false beliefs with true ones, and selfish actions with loving and wise ones. This process leads to a spiritual rebirth and regeneration of the human spirit, through which individuals develop a genuine care for others and act from a place of heavenly love. The doctrine of life further emphasizes the importance of abstaining from evils, loving truths of wisdom, and having faith to become spiritual. It also discusses the qualities that replace negative traits, guiding individuals towards a life aligned with the teachings for a New Church on earth. Living according to the doctrine of life also involves aligning our thoughts and actions with what is good and true, which ultimately comes from the Lord. Furthermore, it highlights how such a life is acquired only when we approach the Lord, who is life itself. This approach is open to everyone, as the Lord invites all to come to Him and receive life abundantly. This path to wholeness can only be gained by those who are willing to humble themselves and admit that, of themselves, they can do nothing good, as the Lord Himself said in John 15:5 *"I am the vine, you are the branches: He that stays in me, and I in him, the same brings forth much fruit: for without me you can do nothing."*

In essence, the doctrine of life teaches us to love God, exercise charity towards our neighbour, welcome what is good and true, and live in accordance with these principles. It stresses the significance of living a life that is guided by love, wisdom, and the teachings of the Lord, as this is what truly constitutes a fulfilling and meaningful life. From the "New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrines" 282 we read:

"Those born within the Christian church should acknowledge the Lord, his divine nature, and his human nature and believe in him and love him, because all salvation comes from the Lord. That is what the Lord tells us in John: Those who believe in the Son have eternal life. Those who do not believe in the Son will not see life; instead, the wrath of God abides on them. John 3:36 And in the same Gospel, "This is the will of the one who sent me, that all those who see the Son and believe in him will have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day". John 6:40. And again, Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. Even if they die, those who believe in me will live; and anyone who lives and believes in me will never die." John 11:25, 26



Home Worship



The General Conference of the New Church

- **Prayer:** Lord of all living, guide me with the light of Your wisdom, to walk the path of righteousness and freedom. May the Commandments You have etched in my heart, Lead me to choose a life in Your service. Grant me strength to show Your compassion, kindness, and love to all those You place before me in life. In every deed, in every thought, let Your Commandments be my guide. May I uphold truth, justice, and grace, in every challenge I may face. With Your guidance, may I stay true to the principles of Your Word, in all I do. Amen.

- **Reflection:** Reflect on your own actions and behaviours. Are there areas in your life where you can improve by refraining from evils and living a more virtuous life?

- **Action:** Choose one aspect of the Ten Commandments to focus on this week. Strive to embody that virtue in your thoughts, words, and actions.

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Week 3: 15th Dec. Seeking Support from the Word

In the book *Apocalypse Revealed* 484 Swedenborg describes the following experience: *"I once heard in the spiritual world what sounded like the noise of a mill. It was in the northern zone there. I wondered at first what it was, but then I remembered that in the Word a mill and the grinding of grain means to seek from the Word something usable for doctrine"*. Here, during one of his experiences in the spiritual world, Swedenborg hears a noise like a mill, symbolizing the seeking of support for doctrine from the Word. Swedenborg also tells us in TCR 225 *"The doctrine of the church is to be drawn from the literal sense of the Word and supported by it."* So, doctrine should be derived directly from the literal sense of the Word (the Bible). This, Swedenborg tells us, is because the Lord is most present in that sense, teaching and enlightening individuals. The Word, being in its fullness in the literal sense, is where the Lord is especially present to guide and illuminate people. When doctrine is drawn from the Word, it ensures that the teachings are rooted in divine truth and not influenced by personal agendas such as self-glorification or worldly gain. Those who seek support for doctrine from the Word must do so with a genuine love for truth and goodness, desiring understanding for the sake of spiritual growth and enlightenment.

By deriving doctrine from the Word, individuals can gain a deeper understanding of spiritual truths and principles that can guide their faith and life. This process of genuinely seeking support for doctrine from the Word, helps to ensure that the teachings are in alignment with the divine wisdom and are not merely based on human intelligence or personal interpretations. Ultimately, drawing doctrine from the Word allows for a solid foundation for spiritual beliefs and practices, leading to a more profound connection with the divine and a clearer path towards salvation.

One example of drawing doctrine from the literal sense of the Word can be seen in the Ten Commandments. When looking at the literal sense of the commandment "You shall not commit adultery," it is a clear and straightforward statement prohibiting the act of adultery. However, when drawing doctrine from this literal sense, we can delve deeper into the spiritual and celestial meanings behind this commandment. Drawing doctrine from this commandment involves understanding that adultery not only refers to the physical act of being unfaithful in a marriage but also symbolizes a spiritual concept. In a broader sense, adultery can represent any form of spiritual unfaithfulness, such as turning away from the Lord or His teachings. Therefore, the doctrine drawn from this commandment emphasizes the importance of remaining faithful to the Lord in both our actions and thoughts. By exploring the deeper spiritual implications of the literal commandment against adultery, we can develop a more profound understanding of the importance of spiritual fidelity and loyalty to the Lord.



Home Worship



The General Conference of the New Church

This process of drawing doctrine from the literal sense of the Word allows us to uncover hidden truths and apply them to our spiritual lives, guiding us towards a deeper connection with the divine.

- **Prayer:** In the light of Your Word O Lord, I seek guidance and strength, may Your teachings illuminate my path. Grant me wisdom and clarity to understand Your ways. Let Your truth be my compass, through all my days. In the pages of Your Word, I find solace and peace, In Your promises, my fears and worries cease. Revive my spirit in Your righteousness. May Your loving kindness fill my soul, and make me aware how blessed I am. As I walk in Your precepts, may Your Word be my guide, in times of trouble may I confide in You. Teach me, O Lord, to trust in Your statutes, for in Your Word, I find comfort and renewal. Guide me with Your Word for in Your teachings I find strength, hope and victory over the powers of darkness. Amen.

- **Reflection:** Reflect on the importance of grounding our beliefs in scripture. Consider how we seek support for our beliefs. Are we actively engaging with sacred texts and seeking wisdom from spiritual teachings?

- **Action:** Dedicate time each day to reading and reflecting on passages from sacred texts that resonate with you. Allow these words to guide and inspire you.

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Home Worship



The General Conference of the New Church

Week 4: 22nd Dec. The Nativity

The story of the nativity, as depicted in the Gospel of Luke (2:1-20) transcends time and space, inviting us to reflect on themes of birth, renewal, and the Lord's humanity. At the heart of the nativity story is the miraculous birth of Jesus in Bethlehem (v7) a humble event that took place in a stable with Mary and Joseph as witnesses. This humble setting serves as a reminder of the simplicity and purity of the divine message that Jesus brought to the world. The image of the new-born baby lying in a manger, wrapped in swaddling clothes, conveys a sense of vulnerability and innocence, emphasizing the humanity of the Christ child. The presence of shepherds in the nativity story (v8) adds another layer of symbolism, highlighting the universal message of hope and salvation that Jesus' birth represents. The shepherds, who were considered lowly and marginalized in society, were the first to receive the news of the Saviour's birth from a host of angels (v9). This emphasises the inclusive nature of Jesus' message, which is meant for all people, regardless of their race, religion, social status or background. The angels' proclamation of "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good will toward men" encapsulates the essence of the nativity story. It speaks to the divine purpose behind Jesus' birth, which is to bring peace, joy, and salvation to humanity. The birth of Jesus is seen as a manifestation of God's love and grace, a gift of redemption that offers hope and renewal to all who believe in and act on the Gospel message.

The symbolism of the nativity extends beyond the historical event of Jesus' birth to encompass broader themes of spiritual rebirth and regeneration. In the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg, the concept of regeneration is likened to the process of birth and growth, both physically and spiritually. The journey of spiritual rebirth, involves a transformation of the soul and a renewal of one's inner being. The nativity scene serves as a visual representation of this spiritual journey, inviting us to contemplate the deeper meaning of Christ's birth in our own lives. Just as Jesus, our Lord and Saviour, was born into the world to bring light and salvation, each individual is called to experience a personal rebirth through faith and spiritual growth. The symbolism of the nativity is also reflected in our Christmas celebrations, where families and communities come together to commemorate our Lord's birth on earth. The act of setting up a nativity scene in homes and churches, with figures of Mary, Joseph, the baby Jesus, and other characters, serves as a tangible reminder of the sacredness of the Christmas season and the nativity story.

In conclusion, the nativity story is a profound and timeless narrative that continues to inspire and uplift all those who believe in the one true God. Through its rich symbolism and spiritual depth, the nativity invites us to reflect on the themes of new birth and renewal, reminding us of the enduring message of hope and salvation that the Lord our God brought to humanity through His own birth, life and resurrection. As we



Home Worship



The General Conference of the New Church

celebrate the Christmas season, may we be reminded of the transformative power of the Lord's birth and the promise of new beginnings that it represents.

Prayer: O Lord, in this holy season of the Nativity, we come before you with hearts full of gratitude and reverence. We thank you that You were born into our world, bringing light and hope to all Your people. May we, like the shepherds and the wise men, seek You with joy and humility. Help us to reflect on the true meaning of the miraculous event of Your birth on earth. We praise You Lord, for the love, peace, and salvation You brings to all. Amen

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Week 5: 29th Dec. Reflecting on the Incarnation of God

The Apostle John clearly testifies in his Gospel (1:1,2,14) that God Himself was born as a man on this earth, for we read: *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God..... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.”* God took on a human form in order to save and redeem mankind. By becoming a man, God could unite His Divinity with humanity, thereby glorifying His humanity and making it Divine. This act of God becoming man was crucial for several reasons:

- 1. Revelation of God's True Nature:** God becoming man allowed humanity to better understand and relate to the Divine. By taking on human a form, God made Himself more accessible. This act revealed God's true nature of love, mercy, and compassion to humanity.
- 2. Salvation of Mankind:** The Lord making His human Divine provided humanity with a pathway to salvation. By uniting His Divinity with humanity, God overcame the hells and reconciled mankind with Himself. The sacrifice and suffering the Lord went through as a man, played a crucial role in the redemption of humanity.
- 3. Unity of God and Man:** The union of God and man, seen in our Lord Jesus Christ, signifies the inseparable connection between the Divine and human aspects. This unity demonstrates that God understands and empathises with human experiences, while also offering the promise of spiritual transformation and growth for mankind.
- 4. Revelation of Divine Love:** God becoming man is a powerful demonstration of His Divine love for humanity. By entering into the human experience, God showed His willingness to walk alongside us, share in our joys and sorrows, and ultimately offer the gift of a blissfully peaceful and happy eternal life.

In summary, the significance of God becoming a man lies in the revelation of God's true nature, the salvation and redemption of mankind, the unity of God and man, and the profound demonstration of Divine love for humanity. This act of incarnation serves as a pivotal moment in human history, offering hope, redemption, and a deeper understanding of the Divine to all who seek it.



Home Worship



The General Conference of the New Church

- **Prayer:** O Lord, in Your infinite wisdom and love, You chose to come into this world, taking on a human form to walk among us, to teach us, and to ultimately save us, Your Divinity and humanity in one person, we can only begin to grasp. Help us to contemplate the depth of Your sacrifice and the magnitude of Your love for us. May we always remember that in Your human nature, You suffered for our sakes, and that in Your Divine nature, You reign over all creation. Thank You, Lord, for becoming one of us, for showing us the way, and for offering us salvation. Amen.

- **Reflection:** Contemplate the idea of God becoming man to make Himself known to humanity. How does this concept shape our understanding of divinity and the relationship between God and humanity?

- **Action:** Engage in acts of kindness and compassion towards others as a way to embody the love and teachings of God made manifest in human form.

Conclusion: As you journey through the month of December, may these teachings from Swedenborg's writings inspire you to deepen your spiritual practice, cultivate virtues, and strengthen your connection to the divine. Remember to approach each reading, reflection, and action with an open heart and a willingness to grow in wisdom and faith.

Sources:

[*True Christian Religion* 161](#), [*The Doctrine of Life for The New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Teachings* 1](#), [*Worlds in Space* 95\[6\]](#) [*Worlds in Space* 118](#), [*True Christian Religion* 1](#)

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