

HOME *Worship*



January 2026

4th January 2026

Rev'd Christine Bank

“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. Those who lived in the land of the shadow of death, on them the light has shined”

Read Isaiah 9:2 and Matthew 2

Happy New Year! At this time of year the festivals of light, the celebrations around Christmas and New Year bring spiritual and social blessings, but they provide a 'bright spot' in the darkest time of the year. No wonder winter is a time of celebration in human history, it is always easy to enjoy the long light days when life is relatively comfortable, crops grow and travel is as straightforward as it gets.

Move onto winter though and life becomes more of a struggle, so the excuse for a party is welcome, and the very powerful messages around renewal, death and life being connected is absolutely what brings people together.

This time of Epiphany traditionally marks the arrival of the Magi, the Wise Men, and is found in Matthew chapter 2. The travellers have first gone to Herod, the worldly ruler, before being redirected to the spiritual centre they were seeking. Isaiah's words of prophecy resonate today as our world always seems to have areas of moral, social and spiritual darkness to contend with. The idea of light and dark states translates so naturally from the physical day and night or seasonal variation into situations we experience and are involved in emotionally and practically.

Spiritual obscurity is a 'walking in darkness' state, one of being ignorant and not having true knowledge or understanding. 'Seeing the light' is a common phrase for recognising a mental connection or new understanding has taken place, so the recognition of this as also including the reception and acceptance of the Lord's light of wisdom, revelation and truth for our life is perhaps not a difficult step to take.

“Those who lived in the land of the shadow of death” had been caught in the ignorance or rejection of truth, and without truth to help us there is a real risk to the spiritual life. A worst-case scenario leads to potential for spiritual death and inward emptiness which needs the rich and life changing blessing of the light to shine as a first step to something better. The clarity of the light which brings the Lord's presence can fill us with hope, bringing a knowledge of love instead of ignorance as our future guide.

Epiphany, the revelation of the Lord to the world, as symbolised by the Wise Men who were led by the star and travelled so far, is renewed each time people find the Lord and the enlightenment He brings,

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, as we begin this year with you, may we always be looking for the clarity your light alone can bring to our understanding, our affections and our actions. Help us to see clearly the things we need to know each day, then we will be better placed to follow your footsteps and take each new day as the gift which you generously give us to use in your service. Amen.

HOME *Worship*



January 2026

11th January 2026

Revd Christine Bank

Read Daniel 2

The book of Daniel begins with Jerusalem falling to the Babylonians. Daniel and his friends are among those young men who were selected to be trained in the service of the king, and we learn of how they manage to stay faithful to their God while also being the best and most accomplished of all those who were chosen.

Alongside all the references which enable some sort of date reference such as conquests, the names of kings, the years of their reign, we also read of visions and dreams which hold messages that don't easily apply to any timeframe.

Daniel Chapter 2 tells of king Nebuchadnezzar's dream that only Daniel can interpret. The dream is of a statue with head of gold, chest and arms of silver, belly and thighs of bronze, legs of iron and feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay. A rock which was cut out, but not by human hands, destroys and smashes the statue before growing into a mountain.

It's clear that the quality of this figure is highest at the head of gold, and there is a gradual decline in quality and value of materials until the feet of iron and clay are reached. What starts as valuable is debased in stages, initially precious metals but then alloys and finally a clay and iron mixture where there can be no blending or unity.

The Biblical text offers the idea of this being kingdoms and their gradual fall into a state where there is only division and the whole statue is destroyed by a rock representing a new kingdom and this final state is set up by God himself.

Reflecting on this we can see what starts as heavenly being replaced and declining, becoming corrupted and debased by worldly ideas taking precedence, eventually it is made of something without value by the time the feet are reached.

Swedenborg describes this statue and the subsequent destruction as the nature of spiritual history throughout the ages, with each 'church' being a different level of the statue and each being of lesser purity than the one before. Finally, the rock in God's hand destroys everything of this, and once all the old is broken then something new and different is seen. The rock becomes a mountain and fills the earth, establishing a completely new way of spiritual life.

Looking at this in a personal way, the decline sets in when our own sense of importance and self-regard or ego leads us into thinking we are like the gold head, with the top place of honour as ours. Believing such things leads to gradual decline as the selfish inner nature comes to the fore and rather than gaining strength, this leads to lesser and lesser states. This isn't an inevitability for us as individuals as the Lord provides for our salvation and He leads us through a lifetime of reforming and renewing our way of thinking and living, bringing us towards heavenly life as we make the choices to follow Him. His truth, represented by the rock, looks to remove the old ways and replace them with new and enduring life which grows and endures forever.

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, it is very comforting to know you are the Rock which I can safely build my life on. It is less comfortable to recognise that same Rock needs to remove my self-centred thoughts and loves to allow an ultimately better life to be formed. Thank you for helping me this far and be with me through the necessary changes which lead me closer to a heavenly way of life. Amen

HOME *Worship*



January 2026

18th January 2026

Rev'd Christine Bank

Read AC561 (new century edition)

New Church Youth Association Children's Day

The New Church Youth Association invite people to use the 3rd Sunday in January to hold children and young people at the heart of our worship. Not everyone has regular contact with children, but we can all take time at the start of this year to recognise and give thanks for children and young people and remind ourselves of the Lord's love for them.

Our own experiences of growing up will have left us with a store of memories, those hopefully happy times give foundations for our own adult life and we can recognise the importance of doing what we can in practical hands-on ways or in prayerful ways to be involved in helping children to grow up with a knowledge of the Lord and confidence that they are loved by Him.

Swedenborg speaks of us having 'remnants' in our unconscious memory. From our earliest days experiences and memories are formed and preserved within us, and under the Lord's care are never lost. Have you ever remembered a Bible story or some event that has been inspiring and helpful in later life? Even children's fairy stories have 'Beauty and the Beast' type messages not to judge by appearances but to instead recognise goodness where it is found.

The extract below reminds us that these good remnants are part of what the Lord can use in us to help us work against the false ideas which our minds hold within them, a recognition that the work to give children a good childhood is a spiritual as well as a moral and special priority.

AC561. To explain what a remnant is: It is not just the good and true things that we learn out of the Lord's Word from the time we are small and that become stamped on our memory. It is also all the states that rise out of those things, such as a state of innocence from babyhood, a state of love for our parents, siblings, teachers, and friends, a state of charity toward our neighbour and compassion toward the poverty-stricken and needy. In short, it is all states of goodness or truth.

These states, along with the good and true things imprinted on our memory, are called a remnant. The Lord preserves them in us, hiding them away in our inner being without our slightest awareness and carefully separating them from the things that are our own — in other words, from evil and falsity.

The Lord preserves all these states in us in such a way that not even the least significant of them is lost. This I learned from the fact that every one of our states from infancy to extreme old age not only remains in the other life but even returns. When we relive them, they are identical to the experience we first lived through in the world. This happens not only with the good and true things etched on our memory but also with any state of innocence or charity we have experienced. In addition, each and every one of our states of evil and falsity (or malice and delusion) remains and returns as well, in all its minutest detail. And when the latter states come back to us, the Lord tempers them by means of the former. All of which shows that if we had no remnant, we could not help being damned for eternity

Prayer: Lord Jesus, may your love of children be deepened in us, so we can play our part in living lives that show heavenly love in this world. Amen.

HOME *Worship*



January 2026

25th January 2026

Revd Christine Bank

Read Genesis 41

Genesis 41 Pharaoh's dreams

Joseph has been in prison for several years, two years ago he accurately interpreted dreams for the Pharaoh's cupbearer and baker. Now Pharaoh has dreams which trouble him, the seven fat cows and seven thin cows, also seven good ears of corn and seven thin ears of corn. In both cases the healthy are swallowed up by the thin and weaker looking, but with no apparent benefit.

Dreams are always received in sleep, and the obscurity which we associate with sleep states gives a good pointer as to the spiritual states it represents.

For some Biblical stories people receive clear guidance in dreams which can be followed without further interpretation. The other Joseph, the man married to Mary who assumes the earthly fatherly role in the life of Jesus, is both reassured and guided by dreams as he is considering setting Mary aside when he learns she is expecting a baby, and then to take action to keep the child safe from Herod. Matthew's gospel is very clear Joseph is guided through dreams and that angels appear to him in this way.

Pharaoh, on the other hand, isn't getting angelic messengers with clear instructions. He needs someone to help understand and make sense of the confusing images; they are very vivid but not something he can work from as they are presented. Pharaoh is the ruler of Egypt, a role which corresponds to the natural, worldly level of our mind.

When our mind is receptive towards heavenly qualities it is still in need of help, guidance and instruction to bring it into order. For this to happen there is a need for a more spiritual level to help renew thinking and understanding, which will enable that Pharaoh state to serve deeper uses and purposes of regeneration. Joseph fills that role here, he was already present in the palace jail, but Pharaoh was not aware until the time was right for him to be free and his influence to be accepted and useful.

As we are willing to listen, to learn and be led, then the Lord opens up new insights and understanding to us. This happens to us in different ways, dreams can sometimes be a route for us to find solutions to problems or bring clarity to confusing situations, and the advice to 'sleep on it' allows us the space for the unconscious processes to work within us.

Whatever route the Lord uses to speak to us, to connect with us and help us to 'wake up' to some idea or situation, it is only any use if we then put it into action. Our bible story has Pharaoh not only believing the warning of the dream, but taking action to build on that knew knowledge, and therefore to be prepared.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, as we move further into 2026, may we always be ready to receive and respond to the messages which You would have us use in our daily life. Everything from You has purpose, meaning and use; help us to be willing to be a route for Your love and compassion to be spread into the world each day. Amen.

HOME *Worship*



February 2026

1st February 2026

Revd Becky Jarratt

“Get up, take your mat and go home”

Read Read Matthew 9:1-8; Mark 2:1-12

This month we are going to focus on Chapter 9 of Matthew. Matthew, the author of this gospel, was a tax collector, and we hear about his calling as a disciple in this chapter. The passage that we are looking at today lacks some of the drama that we can read in Mark 2 and Luke 5, but the intention behind the message is the same.

Imagine you are in a crowded home where lots of people have come to hear the words of a miraculous teacher. Suddenly, the roof opens and a paralysed man is lowered down to Jesus. In that moment, not only does Jesus heal the man of his paralysis, but he says something surprising: “Your sins are forgiven”.

If we went to see our GP (and actually managed to get an appointment – wouldn’t that be a miracle?) and were given a prescription not only for a physical malady but for a spiritual one, how would we feel? And yet this was seen as normal during the first century after the birth of Jesus – during this time, health and sickness were often understood to have both physical and spiritual dimensions. Many people believed that physical ailments could be a result of spiritual conditions such as sin, uncleanness or evil spirits. Jesus telling the man, “Your sins are forgiven” before healing his physical paralysis would have made sense to the people there.

So, in spiritual terms, what does it mean to be paralysed? This is when our faith is separated from charity, or love. A way of understanding this is to think about what it is like when we believe something, or know it to be true, and yet do not put it into practice in our everyday lives.

We may be aware that criticising other people without looking at what is going on within ourselves is not helpful. But we may be unwilling to examine our own behaviour and try to change it. Another example is when we bow to peer pressure. We may know that what others are doing or saying is wrong, but we cannot find the strength to challenge other people, or to go our own way and do what is right, despite the feelings of others.

Or we may know that we need to build better habits, such as coming regularly to read the Word and pray, but we procrastinate and feel we are “too busy” for this sort of thing – we may feel we will come to it when we have more time, but never end up doing so. The potential for spiritual paralysis seems endless!

HOME *Worship*



February 2026

1st February 2026

Revd Becky Jarratt

What can we do about it? There are a number of steps we can take:

- **We can acknowledge our need for help from the Lord.** The paralysed man needed his friends to help him reach Jesus. For us, we can recognise that only the Lord can help us overcome our weakness. Asking for His help is a first, vital, step.
- **We can reflect on what is holding us back.** We need to examine what it is causing our inaction and be willing to change.
- **We can start with small, practical steps.** Jesus told the man to get up and walk. A concrete action, such as an apology or an act of kindness, can move us forward.
- **Strive to live what we believe.** When we apply spiritual truth in any small way, we invite the Lord to work in us.
- **Accept forgiveness and be willing to begin again.** We read that the Lord forgave the paralysed man's sins. Healing starts with forgiveness. He invites us to let go of what has happened in the past and accept the mercy offered to us to rise up and walk.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, just as You healed the man who was paralysed, I come to You with my weakness and struggles, knowing that I cannot walk forward in goodness on my own. Forgive me for the times I have failed to live to what I know is true. Lift me up by Your mercy, give me the strength to rise, and help me to take the next step in love and kindness. Amen

HOME *Worship*



February 2026

8th February 2026

Revd Becky Jarratt

“For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners”

Read Matthew 9:9-13

Following on from the story of Jesus healing a paralysed man, we read of the calling of Matthew. It seems to be quite simple: “Follow me”, Jesus told him, and Matthew followed.

What would it have meant to have followed Jesus? Each of the disciples would have been leaving their old lives behind. For Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John, it was leaving a fishing business and their friends and family. This required a decision to let go of employment security, social status, and a predictable routine. In the case of Matthew, the life he was leaving was centred around worldly gain.

In this day and age, the thought of completing a tax return does not fill many people with much pleasure! It is unlikely that anyone wishes to receive a bill at the end of a financial year. Today, taxes are collected to fund public services, infrastructure and government operations and are necessary to keep our society afloat. Some people go to great lengths to avoid paying tax.

In Matthew’s time, tax collectors were despised in Jewish society. They were seen as collaborators with the Romans and were often suspected of dishonesty. They were associated with greed, dishonesty and exclusion from religious life. The Pharisees were scandalised when Jesus chose to connect with a man of this type of work. The Pharisees represent those who see themselves as spiritually pure and look down on others. They could not imagine why Jesus would want to spend time with a “sinner”, rather than with them! Jesus tells them that He has come to heal the sick, rather than the healthy, and demonstrates that His message is for all, whether they are perceived as “righteous” or not.

For Matthew to leave this life behind, he would be saying goodbye to those who shared his profession – there could be friendships with others who were on the fringes of society. His future would have been uncertain and he would not have known where his next meal would come from. He would have required courage and trust in Jesus to have done so.

In order for us to truly follow Jesus, what do we need to leave behind? What character traits do we have that are preventing us from doing so?

It is not quite as simple as it sounded for the first disciples, and the Lord is not asking us to leave our family, friends and work behind. Let’s think about what needs to happen internally. There are a number of steps that we need to go through, and we may need to do this more than once in our lives. An initial step is to recognise and admit our faults. and acknowledge that we have tendencies, desires and behaviours that are stopping us from fully offering ourselves up to the Lord. We need to be willing to search our hearts for these things and admit that we need help for change. We also need to be willing to turn away from the things that we have done wrong in the past and ask for strength to resist them.

HOME *Worship*



February 2026

8th February 2026

Revd Becky Jarratt

We need to have trust that the Lord knows what is good for us and will lead us into spiritual freedom and happiness. This requires us to be willing to be led, even though we may not be able to see the path that we are being asked to take. We need to live a life of being useful to other people, rather than focussing on what is important to us.

We also need to learn the truths from the Lord's Word and be willing to put them into practice in our everyday lives. By doing this, we gradually displace the selfish tendencies we all have and move into a new spiritual consciousness. And we need to persevere through temptations and challenges. Spiritual growth involves facing temptation and inner struggle. Just as the Lord's followers faced material hardship, we must also endure times of difficulty, having trust that the Lord will sustain and guide us.

And let us be reminded that we can sometimes take the view of the Pharisees – we sometimes look down on others and view ourselves as somehow superior. Help us to remember that from that lofty position, we have far further to fall than someone who is already close to ground level.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, You called Matthew from his old life to follow You, and welcomed sinners with mercy and love. Call me, too, from anything that holds me back from Your way. Help me to leave behind selfishness and pride, and open my heart to Your forgiveness and leading. Teach me to show mercy, as You desire, and to walk humbly with You each day. Thank You for Your patient love. Lead me on the path of repentance and true charity, that I may follow You more faithfully. Amen

HOME *Worship*



February 2026

15th February 2026

Revd Becky Jarratt

“Neither do people pour new wine into old wineskins”

Read Matthew 9:14-17

This passage starts off with Jesus being questioned about fasting. As often seemed to happen, Jesus does not answer the question directly but paints some fascinating images for us: we are given the image of someone sewing a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment and the implications of this. We are also given the vivid image of pouring new wine into old wineskins, and the latter is what we will focus on today.

Firstly, a little thought about fasting. Jews fasted as part of their religious rituals and observances, based on the commands given by Moses. This was an outer act of being humble before God, saying sorry for any wrongdoing and asking for forgiveness for them. Over the years, additional times of fast were added, particularly by groups like the Pharisees. By the time of Jesus, fasting was really an external act. The Lord came to teach that true spiritual life must involve inward repentance and renewal, not just outward ritual.

Let's think about pouring new wine into old wineskins:

“Neither do people pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved.” (Matthew 9:17)

The image of wineskins would be a familiar one from daily life in those times as wine was stored in skins made from animal hides. New wine is still fermenting and it expands as it develops. The new skin stretches with it, whereas an old skin would have done its stretching with a previous batch of wine and would now be brittle from this occurrence. The pressure of putting new wine into this skin would cause it to burst. This is why new wine is put into new, flexible skins – they can expand and hold the wine in a safe manner.

How recently have you bought a new phone, or moved your computer onto Windows 11? There are some fundamental changes when we start using new software. We have an old laptop in our house that starts up nicely and works agreeably when it is plugged in. But it has well and truly resisted having Windows 11 installed on it! No matter what those who are more tech-savvy than I try, it goes more and more slowly until it is utterly useless. I think we have now admitted that it is no longer fit for purpose, and even the Yorkshireman-accountant of our house is considering purchasing a new one

HOME *Worship*



February 2026

15th February 2026

Revd Becky Jarratt

New wine represents new spiritual truths and ways of understanding given by the Lord. Our minds and hearts are meant by the term “wineskins”: the way we live our lives and our actions and beliefs. From this passage, we can understand that the Lord was teaching that His ways cannot just be added on to old habits, like fasting to demonstrate we are sorry, rather than thinking about our behaviour and wishing to change. The new teachings are about living out truth and mercy in our everyday lives, and they will not fit easily into an old “container”. Our minds need to be willing to change, and our hearts to be flexible enough to want to follow the Lord.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, You offer us new wine – Your living truth and love – so that we may be renewed from within. Help us not to cling to old habits, rigid thoughts, or outward forms alone, but to yield our hearts and minds to Your gentle guidance. Make us willing and ready vessels, open to change and filled with a desire to live according to Your Word. Pour Your spirit into us, so that Your love and wisdom may grow, and we may shine with a new life from You. Amen.

HOME *Worship*



February 2026

22nd February 2026

Revd Becky Jarratt

“Take heart, daughter,” he said, “your faith has healed you”

Read Matthew 9:18–26

This passage narrates two intertwined miracles. In the first, we hear that Jesus is asked to raise a synagogue leader’s daughter from death, and the second is about a woman who has bled for twelve years being healed. For the people of the day, these miracles showed the Lord’s divine power over sickness and death, but they also carry a deeper, spiritual lesson. Both miracles come about because of the faith and belief of those who wished for them.

Jesus is asked by a religious leader to perform a miracle that was beyond all of those He had performed so far – to bring a girl back to life. While He is on His way, a woman who had been bleeding for twelve years touches His cloak. Jesus turns, acknowledges her faith, and she is instantly healed.

This is a very interesting story as the woman was cured just by her belief, rather than by asking Jesus to heal her. This woman needed to act on her belief – she had to take a step forward to touch Jesus’ cloak. In our lives, we need to take steps towards acting on our faith. These can be as simple reading the Word or praying, or having trust that the Lord is always present in our lives. Jesus carries on to the religious leaders’ home and declares, “The girl is not dead but asleep.” He takes her hand and she rises, restored back to life.

These two stories interact and reflect aspects of our own spiritual journeys. The daughter represents the will, which is our love for good. At times, our love for good can seem “dead” if we are very sad, despairing, or not wishing for virtuous things. The crowd of mourners and the noise they were making reflect voices in us that reject hope. At times, our inner voice insists things cannot change. I am sure we have all had this experience at times!

The woman with the issue of blood represents our understanding. Publicly talking about menstruation brings up thoughts of shame in many women, and this is mirrored here – our understanding can be damaged by long-standing errors, shame or guilt. This can make us feel “unclean”, and in this context it pictures prolonged spiritual struggle. We may feel isolated and hopeless.

Both stories show us that we need to approach the Lord with faith. The leader of the synagogue humbles himself and seeks Jesus, a sign of recognising our desperate need for the live-giving power of the Lord. The woman’s humble, hopeful touch represents reaching out with whatever little faith we have, believing that being in the Lord’s presence is enough to bring healing. Let us think about someone who has lost their sense of hope or of being useful. They may have lost their job or lost someone close to them, and they may feel like the joy or purpose in their life has “died”. Or someone else may carry a continued feeling of shame about a mistake they made, meaning that they feel “unclean” or isolated.

HOME *Worship*



February 2026

22nd February 2026

Revd Becky Jarratt

This passage shows us that no spiritual condition is beyond hope. If we reach out, even with a little faith, the Lord can heal us, restore hope, and revive our capacity for love and goodness. When life feels hopeless or stagnant, we can approach the Lord with humility and trust, knowing that He brings new life and healing, transforming despair into renewal.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, when we feel hopeless or weighed down by sorrow and weakness, help us reach out to You in faith. Heal our hearts and restore our spirits, so we may rise and live in Your love. Amen

Blessing: May the Lord's compassion and healing touch revive you and fill your life with hope and peace. Amen

HOME *Worship*



March 2026

1st March 2026

Jan Millar

Read Matthew 6: 1-6, 16-21, Luke 9: 1-27

Of all the seasons of the Christian year, probably none is as misunderstood or misrepresented as Lent. For many Christians it is a time during which they give up things, whether it be indulgences such as chocolate or alcohol or bad habits an individual may have. But that, surely, is not what is at the heart of Lent. It should be a time of reflection on our relationship with the Lord and with self-denial in a meaningful way.

Our relationship with the Lord is the very core of our spiritual life and happiness. It is a unique reciprocal relationship built on trust, receptivity and above all love. The Lord is always present, loving us and dwelling within us, but true conjunction with the Lord requires our free acceptance, love and cooperation. Loving the Lord means striving to live a good life in harmony with His teachings.

Above all, we need to recognise that He never forces this relationship; it must be freely chosen by us. Our relationship with the Lord is a living partnership of trust and love. We play our part by living a life of faith, obedience, gratitude and goodwill towards others. In so doing, we are led by the Lord, making Him central to our lives rather than letting our self-love come between ourselves and the Divine.

According to the Word and New Church teachings, self-denial means turning away from our own self-centred wants and desires to follow the Lord and live our lives according to heavenly principles. "if any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it" [Luke 9: 23-24]. This denying of oneself means turning away from self-love and the love of the world. By doing this we move from spiritual darkness into the light of the Lord's love.

Swedenborg tells us that when we love only ourselves and what is our own, we become closed to heaven, and lose touch with charity, faith, conscience and the spiritual life itself. If we are immersed in the love of self and worldly considerations, we close ourselves to the Divine and the Lord's heavenly light and this leads to spiritual death. True self-denial means recognising that our intelligence and good intentions originate from the Lord not from we ourselves. We open ourselves to receive from the Lord all wisdom and goodness, allowing our inner self, or spiritual life, to rule over our outer self, or natural desires. This leads us to genuine love for the Lord and for our neighbour.

Self-denial is therefore the beginning of regeneration and true discipleship: putting aside self and following the Lord. This enables His life and love to be within us, for this is the essence of spiritual growth.

So, instead of concentrating on giving up things for Lent, only to return to them once the Lenten season is past, take the time instead to reflect on your relationship with the Lord and the meaningful acts of self-denial that lead to spiritual growth, and which are eternal.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to know You better, to understand more of Your purpose and what You would have us do and be. Make up for where we are lacking and where our commitment is weak. Help us to turn away from the love of self and respond to You that we may be led closer to You and become the people You want us to be. Amen

HOME *Worship*



March 2026

8th March 2026

Jan Millar

Read Genesis 3, Matthew 4: 1-11 Secrets of Heaven 128, 129

Temptation as described in the Word and in the teachings of our Church, is a spiritual state in which we face an inner conflict between good that comes from the Lord, and evil that comes from the hells. Temptations are not just ordinary struggles or external trials, but they are deeply spiritual battles within the hearts and minds of all people. The Lord allows temptation to enable us to grow spiritually, but He is always there to give us the strength to overcome it if we look to Him.

There are two types of temptation. There are natural ones that concern our external desires, actions and feelings where we may be tempted to act dishonestly for our own natural wants and desires. And there are also spiritual temptations which involve inner struggles over the things that we love most deeply such as doubting the Lord's love and truth or fearing that we cannot be saved.

The temptation of Adam and Eve is a parable of our own internal spiritual struggles. The story shows us that when we choose to rely on our own senses and thinking alone, and subsequently turn away from the Lord, we lose the state of spiritual innocence and openness to Him. It warns us of the dangers of relying on appearances and our own desires rather than listening to God, as true wisdom and happiness can only come from our trust in and obedience to Divine guidance.

In our reading from Matthew's Gospel we hear of the period after His baptism when Jesus was led into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil with three temptations.

The first is to turn stones into bread and so put bodily needs and self-love first. The second is to throw Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple and trust the angels to catch Him; which is the temptation to test God. Finally, the last temptation is to gain all the kingdoms of the world by worshipping the devil so being tempted toward worldly power and the love of dominion. Jesus resisted all these temptations by turning to the Word and affirming His trust and obedience to God alone.

These were not just personal trials, but they were spiritual battles that the Lord underwent for the sake of the human race that mankind might be saved. Remember that Swedenborg tells us that the temptations suffered by the Lord, and indeed by all of us, are the result of the conflict between the evil that come from the hells and the good that comes from the Divine.

We all suffer temptations throughout our lives – periods of doubt, fear, negativity, pride, selfishness and greed. These are permitted by the Lord who gives us the freedom to succumb to temptation or reject it. It is the means of strengthening our faith, implanting within us the good of charity, and gradually rooting out our selfish and worldly loves. We know, however, that whatever trials and tribulations we may have to face and whatever temptations we may have to overcome, the Lord is there to give us the courage and the strength we need. All we have to do is turn to Him, the source of all goodness and truth. Ultimately, by resisting evil "as if from ourselves" yet acknowledging the Lord's power, we become fit for heaven.

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, we thank You that You showed us Your strength, courage and commitment by overcoming temptations far greater than those we may be called upon to face. Forgive our weakness when we are all too often led astray, trusting in what the world has to offer rather than listening to You. Help us to respond to Your love by following You more faithfully, today and every day. Amen.



HOME *Worship*

March 2026

15th March 2026

Jan Millar

Read Ruth 1: 1-18, Luke 1: 39-56, Mark 3: 31-35

I wonder how many people handing over cards and presents today have any idea of the origins of the festival of Mothering Sunday and its religious significance. A festival of motherhood was held in Ancient Greece on the Ides of March and it became widespread in many lands. The early Christian Church adapted this festival, giving it a Christian bias, and ever since, Mothering Sunday has been held on the fourth Sunday in Lent.

Initially it celebrated the Mother Church, the church into which people had been baptised, but it later also became a day to remember and, if possible, to visit your earthly mother. This is the tradition that we see today on what most people call Mothers Day.

Despite the materialistic hype that surrounds the day, for Christians it has a much deeper meaning as the Church is seen as our Spiritual Mother. We not only have earthly parents, but we have spiritual ones as well. The Lord is our Heavenly Father who provides for our spiritual needs, and the Church is our Spiritual Mother who administers it to us. We need the Church just as much as any child needs their mother, but all too often, we don't recognise this.

When things are going well in our lives we so often feel that we don't need the Church. It is, however, a different matter when things go wrong in our lives and we feel we cannot cope any longer. It is then that many of us turn to the Church seeking comfort, reassurance, strength and hope. However far we may have strayed from the Lord and from the Church, like a true mother the Church will always be ready to give us the comfort and help we need.

But what role as individuals do we need to undertake to be the Lord's Church here in the 21st century? In the reading from Mark's Gospel Jesus asked, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" He then goes on to say to his disciples, "Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother." Here Jesus is clear that true kinship is not solely a matter of flesh and blood. As with Ruth and Naomi, it is possible to be nearer to someone who is no blood relation but who has a close relationship with the Lord. In Mark's Gospel Jesus tells us that the Lord's real family are the ones who not only hear the Lord's words but also put them into practice. He is therefore telling each one of us that we are the Church and it is up to us to do the Lord's work here on earth today.

As Teresa of Avila reminds us in her famous prayer:

*Christ has no body now but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours.
Your eyes are the eyes through which Christ's compassion must look out on the world. Yours are the feet with which He is to go about doing good. Yours are the hands with which He is to bless us now.*

So, on this Mothering Sunday let us not only think of and remember our earthly mothers but let us not forget that today is a special day to remember and give thanks for our Mother Church who administers the spiritual sustenance that our Heavenly Father has provided.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us, as we honour what motherhood means, to recognise in you the same devotion, care and love. Teach us, as a part of your family, to show our love for you in return by living a life of love and service to others. Make us, indeed, true representatives of you on earth today. Amen



HOME *Worship*

March 2026

22nd March 2026

Jan Millar

Read John 11: 1-44, John 14: 1-14, Apocalypse Explained 899 [11]

The story of the raising of Lazarus is one of the most significant miracles performed by Jesus and recounted in the Gospels. Jesus brings Lazarus back to life after he has been dead for four days. This miracle not only shows the Lord's power over physical death, but it also serves as a powerful sign of His divine authority and foreshadows His own resurrection. Here, as then, a body is laid in a tomb amidst sorrow in the presence of death. Here, as then, it looks like the end of everything, but there is a new beginning as the tomb is opened and Lazarus is raised to life, as subsequently, we celebrate the empty tomb and the resurrection of Jesus on Easter morning.

So, what does this miracle have to say to us today? Swedenborg tells us that the raising of Lazarus, like all the Lord's miracles, contains a deeper spiritual meaning as it not only shows the Lord's power over physical death, but it contains profound truths about our own regeneration and spiritual development. He says that the raising of Lazarus, specifically, represents spiritual resurrection. It is the process by which people who are spiritually "dead", that is those who are separated from the Lord because they lack goodness and truth in their hearts and minds, are then brought to spiritual life through the power of the Lord.

When Jesus commands Lazarus to come out of the tomb, in the same way He calls upon each of us to come out of our spiritual 'death' and rise into a life of faith, hope and love. As the grave clothes are cast away, so we too can remove whatever our own habits and limitations are that prevent us from living the spiritual life that the Lord wants us to follow. But, as always, the Lord leaves us in complete freedom to accept or reject His teachings.

Jesus says, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die" This tells us that we can only be regenerated and rise from spiritual 'death' by allowing the Lord's life to flow into us. It also teaches us that true life is not merely being a living, breathing man or woman, but it comes through living in union with the Lord and making our lives a living testament to His love and truth. All hope, renewal and eternal happiness come from Him alone.

So don't despair over your faults, weaknesses or spiritual struggles, because the Lord can give new life to us even though we may think that change seems impossible. Remember that with the Lord all things are possible. The Lord calls us all out of our own tombs where we may be buried in darkness and despair, and He calls us to live anew a spiritual life in communion with Him. He tells us that we will rise again, not only after our bodily death, but spiritually here and now, granting eternal life in heaven to all who accept His love and truth.

Prayer: Dear Lord, teach us to look beyond the darkness and despair that we sometimes experience in our natural world to the new life that you give to all who follow you.

May we truly believe that nothing can finally separate us from your love. Help us to trust in your power to bring us from spiritual death into spiritual life with you – both now and forever. Amen

HOME *Worship*



March 2026

29th March 2026 Palm Sunday

Jan Millar

Read Psalm 24, Matthew 21: 1-11

Today is Palm Sunday, the day when we remember the Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem as recorded in all four Gospels. It is a scene of great joy and celebration as Jesus is hailed as their King and the crowds throw their garments and palm branches on the road before Him. Yet the same crowd who were crying "Hosanna to the Son of David"; a few days later were shouting "Crucify him!" So, what had brought about that rapid change?

Well, it was all about expectations – the sort of King the Jewish people wanted and expected. Look at the words of Psalm 24: 8, "Who is the King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle." Hosanna means 'save now' and it was a cry from people in distress. The Jews wanted a King who would take up arms and lead them into battle to overthrow the tyranny of the hated Romans. They wanted a warrior King not a Prince of Peace. He was welcomed as an earthly king, rather than a Servant King, a Messiah; as one who had come to rule, not to serve, to conquer, not to die.

Instead of leading an uprising Jesus entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey symbolizing humility and peace. He made it clear that He was not seeking an earthly throne but rather offering to reign in the hearts and minds of all who welcome Him and strive to follow in His ways. This was not what the Jews wanted or expected, and they immediately turned against Him.

But Palm Sunday is not just about what happened in Jerusalem nearly 2000 years ago. It is a powerful message that has deep significance for us today. It is a celebration of the Lord as the Divine King and an acknowledgment of His Truth. It is also an invitation for each one of us to welcome Him into our lives by living according to His Word.

If we open our hearts to the Lord, learn to love and follow the truth in his Word, we too can open a path for the Lord to enter into our lives. Swedenborg tells us that the palms symbolize the joy in welcoming the Lord and acknowledging Him as the giver of truth and life. It is as though we too are spreading those palm branches before Him as if, by acting from love and faith, we are creating a path for the Lord to enter and rule in our hearts and minds.

So, as we commemorate Palm Sunday let us remember what it really means to welcome the Lord into our lives. It is a living partnership, an ongoing opening of our hearts and minds to the Lord's presence, guidance and love. We receive Him, not as an earthly king but as our Creator, Saviour, Redeemer and Friend. The more we love what is good and true, and act from that love, the more closely we are united with the Lord and the greater our awareness of the countless blessings He gives to all His children.

Let each of us say from the heart "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord". Then may we open a path for the Lord to enter our lives each and every day, so that His peace and joy may reign us and He becomes our King of Glory and of Peace.

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, we remember how You were welcomed into Jerusalem and how quickly the crowd turned against You. We know all too well that our commitment to You is often self-centred or short-lived. Help us to welcome You into our lives with true gladness and joy, and to go on serving you come whatever may befall us, now and always. Amen