

Christmas Readings *2025*



*From the Judeo - Christian Scriptures
and the Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg*

Merry Christmas

from your friends in the New Church.

These Christmas Readings are gathered around
a different theme each year.

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Our Part

Introduction

This year's Christmas readings are gathered around a theme titled, "Our Part". It's a theme that acknowledges the role each one of us plays in our eternal destiny. The Lord our God is the Saviour of all, but He can't prepare us for heaven without our cooperation. He has given us hearts that can love, minds that can think wisely and creatively, and bodies that can do many useful things. His hope and even expectation is that we will take these gifts and use them to orient ourselves toward Him and toward others around us. He wants us to consider the role we can best play in any given situation, and then pour our energy in that direction.

This theme shows itself throughout the Christmas story. There, each person or group of people has a part to play in the divine narrative: Zacharias and Elizabeth walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless; Mary and Joseph trust the Lord's leadership, and they devoutly do what is required of them; the shepherds come with haste to see the newborn babe, then they make widely known the saying which has been told them concerning the Child; the wise men follow a star to find the newborn King, and when they find Him, they present gifts to Him, then they fall down and worship Him; Simeon waits patiently for the Lord's coming; and Anna the prophetess speaks of Him to all who seek redemption. Each of these characters symbolises a different part of each one of us, and a different role that each one of us has to play, in the birth of the Lord's love and wisdom in our lives.

This year as we read Christmas story anew, what can we learn from the different characters that are there? In what way can their lives, and the examples they set, help us do our part in making loving and wise choices, doing useful things, and contributing to the goodness of any situation that we find ourselves in? How will all of these things carry over into the new year?

Format: Each daily reading in this booklet features part of the Christmas story, followed by commentary from the 18th Century theologian, Emanuel Swedenborg. Each reading and commentary touch on one part of the divine birth in us. Underlining has been used in some of the scriptural quotations to help link them to the theological points. At the end of the readings for each day is a set of reflections, some questions for your consideration, and a space for writing a personal prayer. There are twenty-five readings in all, designed to carry you from December 1st through Christmas day, plus two extra blank pages for additional notes and prayers. Our hope is that these readings, together with worship services and church events available throughout the world, will provide a sense of uplift and spiritual renewal in your life this Christmas season, as you continue to do your part on the pathway to heaven.

1

Seek Peace

December 1

The sceptre shall not depart from Judah,
Nor a lawgiver from between his feet,
Until Shiloh comes;
And to Him shall be the obedience of the people.
(Genesis 49:10)

The words of Scripture, “until Shiloh comes” refer to the Lord’s coming, and the peaceful tranquility at that time. “Shiloh” means “Peace-Maker”.

(Secrets of Heaven 6362)

It is written, “The chariots of God are myriads of thousands of peacemakers; the Lord is within them” (Psalm 68:17). “Chariots of God” in Scripture symbolise things that belong to the Word of God and to doctrine drawn from it. The words, “thousands of thousands” refer to infinite things that are present there.

(Secrets of Heaven 3186.2, 5321.7)

Peace is perceived by angels through a heartfelt delight when they’re involved in the good of their life, a pleasure when they hear something true that agrees with that goodness, and a gladness of mind when they perceive the union of the two. It also flows into all the actions and thoughts of their life and makes itself known as joy, even in outward form. This peace is like the morning time or dawn in spring, when, once the night has passed, all things of the earth begin to take new life from the rising of the sun; the dew that falls from heaven spreads a leafy fragrance far and wide; and springtime's gentle warmth makes meadows fertile and instills its charm in human minds. (Heaven and Hell 286-289)

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. (Matthew 5:9)



Reflection: *We read that the Lord is the Peacemaker. He brings that elusive, wonderful feeling of peace to our lives. It comes, as these readings indicate, when we're doing things He wants us to be doing—when we're “involved in the goodness of our lives”. Many of us **want** to feel a deep sense of peace as we go through the Christmas season, but at times our experience of Christmastime may be far from peaceful. How can you capture a sense of inner peace this season? What is the part that you have to play in receiving this feeling from the Lord? The readings indicate that meditating on the Lord, and also reading His Word, can help bring states of peace to our awareness. What is one additional, spiritual practice that you can engage in to this end? Further, within the realm of your relationships and sphere of influence, what are one or two ways that you can be like the Lord—a peacemaker?*

Notes:

Prayer:

2

Turn on the Light

December 2

The people who walked in darkness
Have seen a great light;
Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death,
Upon them a light has shined. (Isaiah 9:2)

“Darkness” in this scripture symbolises falsities such as existed, and as exist at this day, among upright Gentiles because of their not knowing what is true. These falsities have goodness stored up in them because they have what is good as a goal. Those, therefore, who are in these falsities can be instructed in what is true—if not in the world then in the next life—and when instructed they also receive truths in their hearts. Their inner self is not closed but is as it is with young children—open to and receptive of what is true. (Apocalypse Explained 526.15, Secrets of Heaven 9256.2, 4)

The words of Scripture, “seeing a great light” have to do with receiving and believing truths of faith.
(Secrets of Heaven 3863)

The divine mercy is pure mercy toward the whole human race, to save it. It’s also unceasing toward every person. It is never withdrawn from anyone, so that everyone is saved who can be saved. And yet no one can be saved except by divine means, which the Lord reveals in His Word. These divine means are what are called divine truths (symbolised by light in the Word) which teach how we must live in order to be saved. By means of these truths the Lord leads us to heaven, and implants the life of heaven in us. The Lord does this for all people.
(Heaven and Hell 522)

And seeing the multitudes, He went up on a mountain, and when He was seated His disciples came to Him. Then He opened His mouth and taught them, saying,...
“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”
(Matthew 5:1-2, 5)

Reflection: *Our reading today speaks of Gentiles—people who have goodness stored up in them, who are open to hearing what is true, and who are ready to receive it, believe it, and shape their lives by it. In the past year, what are one or two things you’ve learned from the Lord that are true, and that have helped mould your life, shape it, and “implant the life of heaven” in you? How have these truths done so, and how much has this meant to you? Please explain. What hope or promise does all of this hold out to you for the coming year?*

Notes:

Prayer:

3

The Lord's Way

December 3

There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah. His wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. Then an angel of the Lord appeared to Zacharias, standing on the right side of the altar of incense. The angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth." (Luke 1:5-17)

The words of Scripture, **"to walk in the law of Jehovah" refer to living a life of truth and goodness according to doctrine.**

(Secrets of Heaven 8420)

Within each person there is an inner self that ought to command and an outer self that ought to obey. The latter is obedient when it does not have the world but heaven, not self but the neighbour, as its goal, consequently, when bodily and worldly matters are thought of as means to an end and not as an ends in themselves. Such are thought of as means and not ends when people love their neighbour more than themselves, and the things of heaven more than those of the world. When this is so the outer self is obedient. (Secrets of Heaven 5368.1-2)

Human beings are nothing else than forms receiving life from the Lord. Yet the nature of those forms is such, owing to people's spiritual heredity and their own actions, that they refuse spiritual life coming from the Lord. But once these receptacles have been renounced so completely that they no longer



claim any freedom of their own, there is total submission. The Lord desires our total submission so that He can make us blissful and happy. In other words, He doesn't want us to be partly our own person and partly His, for then there are two masters whom we cannot serve simultaneously (Matthew 6:24). The need for total submission is perfectly clear from the Church's first commandment, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your **heart**, with all your **soul**, with all your **mind**, and with all your strength. This is the first commandment" (Mark 12:30). (Secrets of Heaven 6138)

Reflection: *Zacharias and Elizabeth were exemplary in their walk of life. They obeyed God's commandments, and for that reason they're hailed as good human beings. Each of us has "Zacharias and Elizabeth" people in our lives—people who are great examples of spiritual devotion. Who are one or two of these people in your life? What is it about their way of living that is particularly inspiring to you? What are one or two ways that you could follow their example a little more in your own life? One of the readings for today talked about "total submission" to the Lord. Total submission means that we wholeheartedly embrace His teachings, and resist the urge to make up our own rules. What are one or two ways that you can commit yourself to such a path this Christmas season?*

Notes:

Prayer:

4

Have Faith

December 4

And Zacharias said to the angel, “How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years.” And the angel answered and said to him, “... Behold, **you will be mute** and not able to speak until the day these things take place, **because you did not believe my words** which will be fulfilled in their own time.” (Luke 1:18-20)

(Note: Zacharias doubted that what Gabriel said could come true. It was a kind of doubt that rendered him mute —unable to give expression to divine realities in life. Today’s additional readings bridge away from that kind of doubt, and they focus our attention on some other ideas around the subjects of doubt and genuine faith. Here are those readings:)

There are two basic attitudes of mind. The first occurs when we deny everything, that is, when we say in our heart that we are unable to believe those things until we’re convinced by things that we can grasp in our mind and perceive with our senses. This is an attitude that leads to utter stupidity and insanity, and must be termed the negative attitude. The second attitude occurs when we regard affirmatively the things which comprise doctrine drawn from the Word, that is, when we think and believe that those things are true because the Lord has said them. This is an attitude that leads to perfect intelligence and wisdom, and must be called the affirmative [or positive] attitude.

(Secrets of Heaven 2568.4)

Real faith is nothing else than an acknowledgment that a thing is so because it is true. For those who are in real faith think and say, “This is true, and therefore I believe it.” If such people do not see the truth of a thing, they say, “I do not know whether this is true, and therefore as yet I do not believe it. How can I believe what I do not intellectually comprehend? Maybe it’s false.”

(Doctrine of Faith 2)



Spirits in the other world are clearly distinguished from one another as to whether or not they possess faith that is part and parcel of goodwill. Those who possess such faith do not reason about the truths of faith. Instead they immediately declare them to be true, and also confirm them by means of sensory evidence, factual knowledge, and analytical arguments. But as soon as something obscure comes up which they do not perceive, they lay it aside and do not allow it to lead them into doubt. They say that to think that something is not true because they themselves do not grasp it would be madness.
(Secrets of Heaven 1072.2)

Reflection: Which of the readings for today stands out to you the most and why? In what way(s) do these readings help you in your own emerging faith? What additional thoughts or insights do you have?

Notes:

Prayer:

5

Do What is Good

December 5

Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary.

Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest;...and of His kingdom there will be no end." (Luke 1:26-33)

The words of Scripture "to bring forth" have to do with the following:

The birth of what is spiritual in us...Procreation of such things as pertain to the Lord's Church...

Goodness and truth coming into existence...Making truths fruitful by doing them, from which comes reformation.

(Secrets of Heaven 4586, 3298, 4070,
Apocalypse Explained 721.16-17)

When goodness is present in the will, it is in its own womb and is first brought **forth**. But when it is present in our actions—that is, when the will leads us to **bring forth** what is good—that goodness leaves the womb and is born. The expressions "being born again" and "being regenerated" are also used with the same meaning. (Secrets of Heaven 4904)

The words of Scripture "bring forth abundantly in the earth, and be multiplied therein" refer to an increase of goodness and truth in the outer self, which is "the earth". With regard to this scripture the case is this: Nothing is multiplied with a regenerate person in his or her outer self except as the effect of goodwill. Goodwill is like heat in the time of spring or



summer which causes grass, plants, and trees to grow. Without that spiritual heat nothing grows. For this reason it is here said, “Bring forth abundantly in the earth” which has to do with good deeds that are part and parcel of goodwill. Goodness and truth multiply as a result of this type of deed. (Secrets of Heaven 1016)

Reflection: *Sometimes the simplest things are the most profound. The readings for today direct us to do what is good—that’s our part. It does so through the imagery of Mary giving birth—“bringing forth a Son”. There is something telling in this image. Each time we do what is good, something living and beautiful is born—in us, in others, and in the Lord’s kingdom. We do an action, and the Lord brings life—a connection, a feeling of joy, a feeling of gratitude, or love between people. He also makes us more spiritually alive. As you think back on the past few days, what good, kind, or loving actions have you witnessed, or what good, kind, or loving actions have you yourself done, that have had a positive impact and led to a feeling of “new life”? In what way(s) does doing what is good align itself with the birth of a beautiful baby?*

Notes:

Prayer:

6

Trust the Lord

December 6

Then Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I do not know a man?” And the angel answered and said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.” (Luke 1:34-37)

Humankind can never be led better than it is. In fact, all things down to the very least tend toward the final purpose that they may be parts in the Lord’s Kingdom. In addition, it should be known that the Lord’s infinite power can arrange all things in the best way. (Spiritual Experiences 3114)

Those who lead a good life, and who believe that the Lord governs the universe, and that He alone is the source of everything good and true, indeed that He is the source of all life, trust solely in the Lord and have no anxious cares about anything else. They are quite sure that all things work for their good, their blessedness, and their happiness forever. (Secrets of Heaven 2892)

Those who trust in the Lord are constantly receiving what is good from Him. For whatever happens to them, whether it seems to be advantageous or not, is nevertheless good, for it serves as a means contributing to their eternal happiness. (Secrets of Heaven 8480.2)

The words of Scripture, “and God will be with you” refer to the Lord’s Divine Providence. When the Lord is with us, He leads us, and He makes provision so that everything that happens, whether sad or joyful, may bring us what is good. This is Divine Providence. (Secrets of Heaven 6303)

Those who perceive the Lord's presence also perceive that each and all things that happen to them tend to their good, and that evils do not reach them. Hence they are at peace.

(Secrets of Heaven 5963)

Reflection: *The words that Gabriel spoke to Mary were powerful: Mary would be fully in the Lord's hands—fully at His disposal. In addition, the outcome would be miraculous: the Lord Himself would be born on earth. What is one area in your life in which you trust the Lord's leadership? What is one way that the Lord is arranging things "in the best way" in this part of your life? What evidence do you have for this? What would it mean to give yourself fully over to the Lord in this one part of your life? What would this part of your life look like if you did give it fully over to Him—how would it change for the better and be transformed? How would you feel if this change/transformation actually took place?*

Notes:

Prayer:

7

Trust the Lord

December 7

Then Mary said, “Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her. (Luke 1:38)

Those who are willing to be led by the Lord attribute nothing of good to themselves; instead, they regard all things as received and ascribe them to Him. They wish to be led by the Lord and not by themselves. They love everything that is good and find delight in everything true, because they know and perceive that loving what is good, that is, willing and doing it, is loving the Lord, and that loving truth is loving the neighbour. They live content with what is their own, whether it be little or much, because they know that they receive just as much as is good for them—those receiving little for whom a little is useful, and those receiving much for whom much is useful. In addition, they do not themselves know what is good for them, the Lord alone knowing this, who looks in all things that He provides to what is eternal. (Heaven and Hell 278.1)

A longing to know the future is innate with most people; but this longing derives its origin from a love of evil. It is therefore taken away from those who believe in Divine Providence. In place of it there is given a trust that the Lord is taking care of them. Consequently, they do not desire to know things beforehand lest they should in any way set themselves against Divine Providence. (Divine Providence 179.1)

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When people newly arrived in the other world have been prepared for heaven, they're brought to the way that leads upward toward it. After this, each one is led by the Lord into his or her own heavenly community, which is also effected by various ways, sometimes by winding paths. The ways by which they are led are not known to any angel, but only to the Lord. (Heaven and Hell 519)

Reflection: *Worries are an annoying part of life for many of us: worries about our own abilities, worries about people who are close to us, worries about the future, etc. The opposite of worry is trust. Another word for trust is innocence, which can be defined as being led by the Lord. Mary was willing to walk the path that the Lord laid before her. Her words can be a mantra for us: "Let it be to me according to your word." What are one or two things that you hear the Lord calling you to do this Christmas season? in the coming year? How can you innocently, trustingly orient yourself in each of those directions?*

Notes:

Prayer:

8

Look to a Bright Future

December 8

Now Mary arose in those days and went into the hill country with haste, to a city of Judah, and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. Then Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she spoke out with a loud voice saying,...“Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfilment of those things which were told her from the Lord.”
(Luke 1:39-45)

When we [want something to happen in the future], we often envision it as though it's a present reality. From this comes a feeling of delight similar to what we'd experience if it was a present reality.
(Secrets of Heaven 7017)

Reason's essential delight is to envision from love the [outcome we desire] in thought—not at the present time, but in a time to come. It is this that gives us what we call hope, which grows or dwindles in our reasoning faculty as it envisions or anticipates the outcome. (Divine Providence 178)

It is said in Scripture that two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and that Lot urged the them strongly to turn aside into his house and spend the night. Lot's urging them strongly pictures a state of spiritual conflict when we overcome. Spiritual conflicts involve feelings of doubt regarding the Lord's presence and mercy, and also regarding His salvation. The infernal spirits who are present with us at such times, and who are the cause of conflict, do all they can to infuse a negative outlook. But good spirits and angels from the Lord in every way disperse that doubting attitude, all the time preserving a feeling of hope, and in the end strengthening an affirmative [or positive] outlook. Consequently, when we are undergoing spiritual conflict we hang between a



negative outlook and a positive one. Anyone who overcomes in spiritual conflict still experiences feelings of doubt; yet those who allow themselves to be filled with hope remain steadfastly in a positive outlook. (Secrets of Heaven 2338)

Reflection: *Elizabeth was sure of something, and that was that Gabriel's promise to Mary would come true. It can be the same for us. One part that we can play in our own growth and development is to allow ourselves (perhaps even train ourselves) to envision good things that we want for our lives as though they're current realities. Doing this can give us a sense of hope for our future, and it can strengthen us in a positive attitude for achieving our goals. What is one thing that you really want to accomplish, either in your spiritual life or your earthly life, in the coming year? Visualise yourself actually accomplishing that thing; see it as actually happening; then describe what you see in the space below. What effect(s) does this have on you?*

Notes:

Prayer:

9

Give the Credit to the Lord

December 9

And Mary said: “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Saviour. For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name. (Luke 1:46-55)

Inner confession of the Lord belongs to the heart. It manifests itself in humility and at the same time in a desire for what is good.

(Secrets of Heaven 2329)

True confession of the heart, because it flows from heavenly love, is genuine confession. Those with whom it exists acknowledge that everything good comes from the Lord. When that acknowledgement exists with them it is a state of humility, for in that case they acknowledge the Lord to be everything in them, and they themselves to be nothing in comparison.

(Secrets of Heaven 3880.1, 7)

Angels have no wisdom or intelligence at all originating in themselves. They openly confess this. Indeed, they are also quite upset if anyone attributes to them any wisdom or intelligence at all. For they know and perceive that it would be taking away from the Divine that which is His, and it would be claiming for themselves that which is not theirs, and so they would be engaging in the crime of spiritual theft. (Secrets of Heaven 4295)

Let it be known that all true worship consists in adoration of the Lord in a state of humility, and humility within an acknowledgment that in ourselves there is nothing living and nothing good, but that everything within us [apart from the Lord's presence and existence in us] is dead. Also humility in an acknowledgment that everything living and everything good is from the Lord.



The more that people acknowledge these things, not with the mouth, but with the heart, the more they are in a state of humility, and consequently the more they are in adoration, that is, in true worship, and the more they are in love and goodwill, and the more they are happy. (Secrets of Heaven 1153.2)

Reflection: *Getting credit for the things we do can be a big deal for some people. Some of us may inherently incline toward taking credit for the things we do, or wanting others to notice and appreciate what we do. But the readings for today lead in a different direction. They ask us to recognise that all credit belongs to the Lord. He is the author and instigator of everything good that we do. To the extent that we “get” that, to the same extent we can turn to Him in true humility for good things in life. The result is more good things done by us—genuinely good things that we need not take credit for, but again ascribe to the Lord. In what way(s) can you catch yourself taking credit for the things that you do today? What effect(s) might it have to consciously give the credit to the Lord instead? Try it and see.*

Notes:

Prayer:

10

Make Spiritual Commitments

December 10

Now Elizabeth's full time came for her to be delivered, and she brought forth a son. So it was, on the eighth day, that they came to circumcise the child.... (Luke 1:57-66)

Circumcision was the main characteristic that distinguished the Israelite church from the others in Asia, and later from the Christian church. And since everything in the Israelite church prefigured everything in the Christian church, the main sign of the Israelite church was inwardly similar to the sign of the Christian church. For **circumcision** meant the rejection of the lusts of the flesh, and so purification from what is evil. The meaning of baptismal washing is similar. Hence it is said in Jeremiah: Wash your heart free from wickedness so that you may be saved (Jeremiah 4:14). It's obvious from this that **baptism** was commanded in place of **circumcision**, in order that what is internal should be more clearly known. This results from the three uses of **baptism**, which are as follows:

Introduction into **the** Christian church, and at **the** same time insertion among Christians in **the** spiritual world.

That the Christian may know and acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ, the Redeemer and Saviour, and follow Him.

That the person may be regenerated (or spiritually reborn). (True Christian Religion 674-675, 677, 681, 684)

Baptism was instituted for a sign that people are part of the Lord's Church, and for a memorial that they are to be regenerated. For the washing of baptism is a spiritual washing, which is regeneration.



Since everyone who is regenerated also undergoes temptations, which are spiritual combats against evils and falsities, these also are symbolised by the waters of baptism. Since baptism is for a sign and memorial of these things, people may be baptised as infants, and if not in their infancy, they may be baptised as adults. Let those, therefore, who are baptised know that baptism confers neither faith nor salvation, but that it testifies that they may receive faith and be saved if they are regenerated. (Heavenly Doctrine 202-207)

Reflection: *Baptism is a sign of spiritual washing. It's a reminder to have our hearts, minds, and lives cleansed of harmful actions, intentions, and thoughts. It's also a reminder to do our part—"whatever it takes"—in order for this to happen. What is one way that you've been doing these things recently? What is one way that you could come to know the Lord better in the coming year? What is one way that you could follow more closely in His footsteps? What is one goal that you could set for the coming year that would help you along your spiritual path? Doing these things will help you be spiritually washed, reborn, and regenerated.*

Notes:

Prayer:

11

“He Has Exalted the Lowly”

Lifting our Spirits

December 11

Now his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying: “Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited and redeemed His people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us, to grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life.” (Luke 1:67-79)

The words of Scripture, “to **serve** Jehovah” mean worshipping the Lord according to the truths of faith. For there are two things that constitute worship, namely, faith and life. Faith without life does not constitute it, neither does life without faith. (Apocalypse Explained 696.10)

The essential ingredient in worship is good works based in love. But good works exist and are formed by means of truths. Therefore, all worship must be by means of truths that lead us to what is good. Because this is so, in many places in the Word of God where we’re told to “fear Jehovah **God**,” we’re also told to “keep” and “do” His words and commandments. Therefore, it is evident that to the extent that we do what is good based in love, to the same extent we have a fear of **God (that is, a fear of doing harm to God)**; also that to the extent that we have this holy fear, to the same extent there is goodness within our truths. (Apocalypse Explained 696.6)

Present within all worship there is **fear**, but this **fear** is holy **fear**. Holy **fear** is not so much a **fear** of hell and of damnation, as a **fear** lest we do or think anything that is contrary to the Lord and contrary to the neighbour, thus anything whatever that is contrary to the good of love and the truth of faith. (SoH 2826.13)



Reflection: *For many of us the word “worship” implies going to church and participating in worship services. But worship is more than attending services. “Worship” also refers to an attitude of mind that is with us all the time—a devotion to the Lord in the way(s) we conduct our lives. This is where “holy fear” comes in. Holy fear is fear lest we do anything in the course of our daily lives that is in conflict with the Lord and harmful to people. What are one or two ways that you can keep this facet of worship in the front of your mind as you go about your life and work this Christmas season?*

Notes:

Prayer:

12

Follow Your Conscience

December 12

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. (Matt. 1:18-23)

All those who have conscience do what is good from goodwill. They are unwilling to depart in any way from **what is just** and fair, good and true; and this for the very sake of **what is just** and fair, good and true. They think well of their neighbour and desire his or her welfare, even if he or she is an enemy; and this without any recompense.

(Secrets of Heaven 2380.2)

The Lord's presence **with us is proportionate** to the quality of goodness that is in us from Him. The quality of that goodness is, in turn, according to the state of innocence in us (innocence being a willingness to be led by Him), also according to the quality of love and goodwill that are in us, in which the truths of faith either have been or can be implanted. (Secrets of Heaven 2915)

All who are in love of the Lord and goodwill toward the neighbour, and who do what is good to the neighbour from the heart, and who have a conscience of **what is just** and fair, are in the Lord. Consequently they are in heaven. The Divine that flows in can lead them.

(Secrets of Heaven 4225.1, 5145)

They who do their duty from a sense of duty, and **what is just** from a sense of justice, are practicing goodwill. (Secrets of Heaven 8122)



The actions that arise out of goodwill consist in doing **what is just** and fair in our employment, doing so from a love of **what is just** and fair, also from a love of **what is good** and true. (Secrets of Heaven 4783.5)

Reflection: *Joseph was a just man. His life is a reminder to us of the way we can be too: just, fair, thinking well of others, desiring their welfare, being led by the Lord into deepening states of faith and love, doing what is good to our neighbour from the heart, functioning in our daily work from a love of what is good and true, etc. Which of these qualities have you most striven for in the past year? What are one or two ways in which you've done so? What is one thing that you can you do in the coming year to take the next step forward in this, and be like Joseph?*

Notes:

Prayer:

13

Treat Others with Consideration

December 13

(Note: Today's reading from the Christmas story begins with a repeat of yesterday's reading; then it continues.) Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins." (Matthew 1:18-23)

Fear is of two kinds—fear in what is not sacred, and fear in what is sacred. Fear in what is sacred is a kind of fear that good people have, and it is the result of love. It's a fear of injuring the Lord in any way, or of injuring the neighbour in any way, thus of injuring what is good and true in any way, and consequently of injuring love and faith.

(Secrets of Heaven 3718)

When we perceive within ourselves that we have thoughts regarding the Lord that are good, and thoughts regarding the neighbour that are good, and we wish to perform acts of kindness for them, but not for the sake of any gain or for the sake of our own position; and when we feel pity for anyone who suffers misfortune, and more so for those who may be mistaken in regard to the teachings of true faith; we may then know that there are with us things of an internal nature by means of which the Lord is working. (Secrets of Heaven 1102)



Those who have faith that inheres in goodwill notice the good things in other people, and if they see evils and falsities they excuse them, and if possible endeavour with those people to correct them.
(Secrets of Heaven 1079)

Reflection: *One of the trickiest things in relationships is dealing with the flaws and faults of others. We're asked by the Lord not to judge according to the appearance, but to judge with righteous judgment" (John 7:24). This means recognising that we could be mistaken in our assessment of things (as Joseph was mistaken in relation to Mary), and it means treating others as we would hope to be treated if situations were reversed. Joseph is a wonderful example of this. In your experience, what is the hardest part about giving other people the benefit of the doubt? When do you tend to be gentle with others, and under what circumstances do you tend to be a bit harsh? What can you do this Christmas season to treat people with the same kind of consideration that you hope for from them?*

Notes:

Prayer:

14

Be Obedient

December 14

Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name JESUS. (Matthew 1:24-25)

Truth which is the truth of faith, in order to be living, must be introduced into the will so as to receive life there. For truth which is merely a matter of knowledge is not living, only truth that has become a matter of our will. Life flows in from the Lord through a “new will” that He creates in us. The life which comes first manifests itself as obedience. This is the first degree of the will. The life which comes second manifests itself as a desire to do what is true. This is a more advanced degree of the will. It is experienced when delight and blessing are felt in doing what is true. Unless faith advances in this way, truth does not become truth but something separated from life. (Secrets of Heaven 3870.1)

The outer or earthly self ought to serve the inner or spiritual self. In fact, the outer or earthly self in us is nothing unless it's a servant to the inner or spiritual self, and to the extent that it does serve the inner self it is something. To be a servant is to be obedient. The outer self is obedient when it complies with reason and the teachings of the Church, which dictate that what is good and true ought to be done—not for selfish and worldly reasons, but for goodness and truth's own sake. When all of this is so, the Lord—acting through our inner self—is the doer of those things. For all goodness and truth spring from the Lord, so much so that what is good and true in anyone is the Lord Himself in them. (Secrets of Heaven 9776)

Reflection: *Joseph was a servant of the Lord. He was obedient: he did what he was told at every turn. Obeying what is true is one of the baseline parts that we have to play in our own spiritual growth and development. One of today's readings says that obedience happens whenever something that we know to be true is "introduced into our will" and becomes "living". What do you think it means to have a truth "introduced into your will" and become "living"—how does that actually happen? Can you describe one experience you've had of it recently? In addition, what is one truth that you've obeyed for an extended period of time—long enough that you now **enjoy** living it? Our final reading for today says that any time we do what is true, the Lord is the "doer" of it, in the sense that He is the source of it in us, and He is the one who inspires it into our will. "Our part" is to choose to let it pass from ourselves to others. What impact do these ideas have on your sense of togetherness with the Lord (working together with Him) also your sense of need for and even dependence on Him? How will you put all of these things to work in the new year?*

Notes:

Prayer:

15

Live a Good Life

December 15

And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city. Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child. So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. (Luke 2:1-7)

It has often been said that faith is **the “firstborn” of the Lord’s Church**, and **the right of priority** and superiority over goodwill has often been attributed to it. **Yet goodwill** is actually prior and superior, and **the truth of faith** is only apparently so. (Secrets of Heaven 5351.3)

Goodwill is the essential ingredient in a Church. **It is the “firstborn”**. But goodness as it exists among those belonging to the spiritual Church is essentially truth. For when spiritual people act in accordance with the truth they’ve been taught, that truth is called good; for it has then passed from their understanding into their will, and from their will into their actions. And what is done from the will is called good. (Secrets of Heaven 8042)

Love and the faith thence derived are what are meant in the Word by the “firstborn”. And since all love is from the Lord, and not one bit of it is from us, therefore the Lord alone is the “firstborn”. (SoH 352)



Reflection: *All of us strive to be good and decent human beings: We avoid doing harm; we give of our time and energy in different ways; we try to be helpful. This is a good starting point, but it's not the full state of goodness that the Lord has in store for us. A higher level of goodness is achieved when we act according to the Lord's teachings, that is, according to what we know to be true. This is the "firstborn" spoken of in the readings for today. What are one or two true ideas that the Lord teaches, which you have tried to put to work in your life? What is one that has become habitual with you? Which of these would you like to further solidify as part of who you are this Christmas season? How will you do that?*

Notes:

Prayer:

16

Be Vigilant

December 16

Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. (Luke 2:8-14)

“A shepherd” in Scripture, or one who pastures a flock, symbolises one who teaches and leads others to goodness in life flowing from a spirit of goodwill; “**a watchman with God**” symbolises an understanding of the Word of God; and “night” symbolises obscurity—a time when there is no longer any spiritual truth—also the final period of the “old Church” [collectively also within an individual] and the first period of the new. (Secrets of Heaven 4713, 6000.1,4,6, 2353; Apocalypse Explained 624.12)

It is written: “**Watchman**, what of the night? What of the night? The watchman said, ‘The morning comes, and also the night’” (Isaiah 21:11-12). A “**watchman**” symbolises one who observes the states of the church and its changes, thus every prophet; “night” symbolises the last state of the Church; and “morning” symbolises its first state. (Secrets of Heaven 10134.11)

“**Jehovah's keeping watch**” in Scripture refers to the Lord's presence and consequent protection. For through the Lord's presence, those governed by what is good and therefore guided by what is true are given light. Also through the Lord's presence, those who are to be raised into heaven are held back from what is evil and maintained in what is good by the Lord, and this with great force. (Secrets of Heaven 7989.1)

It is important for civil officers to **keep watch**, and to see to it that order exists and is preserved in collective society. It's also important for married...



partners to do the same thing in their individual community.
(Married Love 283)

Reflection: *There's a lot packed into today's readings, spiritually speaking. Shepherds keeping watch, also spiritual watchmen, have to do with the Lord's presence in each one of our lives—guiding us by His truth; giving us light, clarity, and greater understanding; helping us spot things in our lives and relationships that need to change for the better; and holding us back from doing or saying hurtful things, maintaining us in what is good, and protecting us—so that what is “old” and no longer working in our lives can be left behind, and what is new and better can take its place. What is one way in which the Lord has helped you with any one of these things over the past year? What is one area in your life in which you could be a “shepherd” and “keep watch” over your “flock” in the coming year? What promise do all of these things hold for you this Christmas?*

Notes:

Prayer:

17

Prepare for Heaven

December 17

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!" (Luke 2:8-14)

Peace in the heavens is the divine nature intimately affecting everything good that is there with blessedness. This peace registers with the angels as a heartfelt delight when they're involved in the goodness of their lives, a pleasure when they hear something true that is in harmony with that goodness, and a gladness of mind when they sense the union of the two. It flows into all the actions and thoughts of their lives and makes itself known as joy, even in outward form. (Heaven and Hell 286, 288)

There are two states that we must enter and pass through, when we are becoming spiritual from being earthly. The first state is called reformation and the second regeneration. The first state is formed by means of truths, which must be truths of faith, and through these we look to a life of goodwill. The second state is formed by means of good deeds that are manifestations of goodwill, and by these we enter the truths of faith. Or what is the same, the first state is one of thought from understanding, and the second is a state of love from the will. When this latter state begins and is progressing, a change takes place in our minds. Our minds undergo a reversal, and as a consequence (to the extent that the good of love comes to act the first part and the truths of faith the second) we become spiritual and are new creatures. We then act from goodwill and speak from faith; we are then in the Lord and in peace; and thus we are regenerate. (True Christian Religion 571)



The most all-embracing reality is that the Lord has united His Humanity to the Divine itself. As a result of this, people can dwell in peace and safety. It's also an all-embracing reality that people should be joined to the Lord, which is effected through regeneration bringing them that peace and safety. (Secrets of Heaven 10730.3)

The words of Scripture, "Peace be to you, do not be afraid" mean that all is well. (Secrets of Heaven 5662)

Reflection: *The presence of angels in the Christmas story speaks volumes to what Christmas is all about. It's about rejoicing in what is truly good and useful. It's about a collective devotion to the Lord by those in heaven and all of us on earth. It's about following the Lord from earth to heaven so that we may become angels ourselves. We know, when we view things from this perspective, that heaven is our goal, and that life on this earth is about cooperating with the Lord in getting there. What does "preparing for heaven" mean to you? How has this gone in your life so far? Please explain. Who are one or two of the "angels" in your life who have helped you stay on track for reaching this goal? How have your daily decision-making and choices been part of this?*

Notes:

Prayer:

18

Share Good Things with Others

December 18

The angel said to the shepherds, “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. (Luke 2:8-20)

Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them. And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All power has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:16-20)

We’re told that the Lord “appointed seventy others also, and sent them two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go. And He said to them, ‘The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few; therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into His harvest.’” (Luke 10:1-17)

Emanuel Swedenborg writes, “After the work True Christianity was finished, the Lord called together His twelve disciples who followed Him in the world; and the next day He sent them all forth throughout the whole spiritual world to preach the Gospel that the Lord God Jesus Christ reigns, whose kingdom shall be for ages and ages, according to the prediction in Daniel and in Revelation; also that blessed are those

who come to the marriage supper of the Lamb. This took place on the nineteenth day of June, 1770. This is what is meant by these words of the Lord: ‘He shall send His angels, and they shall gather together His elect from one end of the heavens to the other’”
(ref. Matt. 24:31, Dan. 7:13-14, Rev. 11:15; 19:9). (True Christianity 791)
Freely you have received, freely give. (Matthew 10:8)

Reflection: *The shepherds made widely known that the Saviour had been born, who is Christ the Lord. Thirty-three years later, and again in 1770, the Lord Himself sent His disciples out with a similar message and similar work to do. Their work was to discipline themselves, and also to support others around them, along the road to love, wisdom, and a life of useful service. These are the three essential elements of the Lord Himself. They are also the three parts of human wholeness. Freely they had received, freely they were to give. It’s the same for us. The Lord wants us to use all of the love, truth, and life habits that we’ve acquired from Him freely to support the lives of others around us for good. What is one way that you can uniquely do this between now and Christmas day? What is one way you can do it in the coming year? Please describe.*

Notes:

Prayer:

19

Be Patient

December 19

Now when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord and to offer a sacrifice. And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. (Luke 2:22-35)

It is written: “Here is the patience and the faith of the saints”. The phrase “the patience of the saints” in this scripture refers to the temptations of the faithful, or of those who are made spiritual by the Lord, because “patience” means spiritual patience, which is patience in sustaining temptations. (Apocalypse Explained 813)

The words of Scripture “because you have kept the word of My endurance” refer to the fact that they have fought against what is harmful (evil), and then have rejected what is false. Spiritual combat is called “the word of the Lord's endurance” or patience, because the Lord fights for us in times of temptation, and He does so by means of truth from His Word. (Apocalypse Revealed 185)

As to temptations (which are meant in the Word by “patience”), they are spiritual temptations, which people undergo who receive genuine goodwill from the Lord. (Apocalypse Explained 893.3)

Any time we enter a state of love or heavenly desire, we enter an angelic state. At such a time it's as though time doesn't exist, provided the desire holds no impatience. Impatience is a bodily feeling and urge. To the extent that we're subject to it time exists for us. But to the extent that we're not subject to it time does not exist. Indeed, it is reflecting on things that are not the objects of genuine desire or love, and so on things that are tedious, that gives rise to an apparent sense of time. (SoH 3827)



Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart. Wait, I say, on the Lord! (Psalm 27:14)

In your patience possess your souls. (Luke 21:19)

Reflection: *I Patience is something many of us strive for. We try to be patient with others around us who may not do things according to our schedule or the way we'd like them to be done. We try not to expect too much of ourselves either, and we try to be content with our lot in life. In this regard patience seems to connect with respect for others, trust in the Lord's providence, calm endurance, and peacefulness, while impatience seems to align with anxiety, impulsiveness, and an urge to be in control. What are one or two ways that you work to be patient with others and/or yourself? Patience also extends beyond our time-bound thinking to an attitude of cooperation with the Lord in the process of life change—a kind of endurance as we work through spiritual issues that face us. What is your experience of **this** kind of patience?*

Notes:

Prayer:

20

Be Faithful

December 20

Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess. She was of a great age, and she did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem. (Luke 2:36-38)

(The theme for today's readings is Anna's faithfulness. We read:) The words of Scripture, "those who are with Him are called, and chosen, and **faithful**" refer to those who are in love of **the** Lord, love of **the** neighbour, and in faith **that is part and parcel of goodwill**. Such people possess **the** truth respecting **the** Lord's divine authority and **the** divine holiness **of His** Word. This is evident from **the** meaning **of the** "called" as being those who are in love of **the** Lord; also from **the** meaning **of the** "chosen" as being those who are in love of **the** neighbour; also from **the** meaning **of the** "**faithful**" as being those who are in faith **that is part and parcel of goodwill**.

(Apocalypse Explained 1074.1)

The word "fasting" in Scripture refers to a state of mourning on account of a lack of truth and goodness; also a desire to learn what is true and good.

(Secrets of Heaven 9954.19, 9182.10, 9050.7;
Apocalypse Explained 1189.2)

The words of Scripture, "be faithful until death" have to do with reception and acknowledgment of what is true, until falsities are removed and as it were abolished.

"Be **faithful** until death" means, in the literal sense of Scripture, that they must not depart from fidelity even to the end of life. In the spiritual sense it means that they must receive and acknowledge what is true. (AR 102)

Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.
(Revelation 2:10)

Reflection: *One of the compelling things about Anna the prophetess was her faithfulness—faithfulness to what she knew and believed to be true and good. She was over a hundred years old, and she didn’t depart from the temple, but served the Lord with fasting and prayers. This can remind us of remaining faithful to what the Lord teaches—through good times and challenging ones. What is one thing that you truly care about in life—something you’ve worked to achieve for many years? What are some of the states of mind or stages in life that you’ve passed through to get to where you are today in this one part of your life? What is one truth that has been most helpful to you, and one form of goodness that you’ve been blessed with, along the way? In what way has the Lord “redeemed” or “regained” you from a lesser or worse place in your life to a richer, fuller, and better one? If your soul—the best part of you—could speak, what would it say to the Lord for all that He’s done for you along the way, and for where he’s brought you?*

Notes:

Prayer:

21

Persevere on Your Spiritual Journey

December 21

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him.” When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. (Matt. 2:1-10)

Because [our own self] is of a [fallen] nature, therefore the Lord, from His divine mercy, has provided the means by which we may be withdrawn from what is our own. These means are furnished in the Word, and when we act in accordance with them, that is, when the things we think, speak, will, and do align themselves with the divine Word, then we’re kept by the Lord in divine things, and we’re withheld from our own self. And as we **persevere** in this course, a new self—which is altogether separated from our old self—is formed in us by the Lord. Thus we become as it were created anew. This is called our reformation and regeneration by truths from the Word and by a life according to them. (Apocalypse Explained 585.2-3)

The words of Scripture, “They who overcome and keep My works to the end” refer to perseverance in love and faithfulness after combat against selfishness and greed, and the removal of selfishness and greed as far as possible. This is evident from the meaning of “overcoming” as being to fight against the delights of selfishness and greed and remove them. It is evident also from the meaning of “keeping to the end” as being...

*perseverance even to the end of life. For those who **persevere** in love and faithfulness even to death are saved. It is evident also from the meaning of “works” as being the things of love and faithfulness, both in inward and outward life. (Apocalypse Explained 174, 197)*

*No love can ever become pure in human beings, nor in angels. But because the Lord primarily regards the intention that is in the will, therefore, to the extent that we have the intention and **persevere** in it, to that extent we are introduced into the purity and holiness of love, and gradually make progress in it. (Married Love 71.1-2)*

Reflection: *The journey of the wise men is captivating in many ways. How many of us would have done what they did? Talk about “going the extra mile”! Because of the long journey they made, the wise men portray a kind of dogged determination that can be a help to our spiritual lives. What is a somewhat distant goal that you would like to accomplish in your spiritual life? How can you begin to make progress in that direction? What will it take to persevere in this process?*

Notes:

Prayer:

The Lord Protects Us from What is Harmful and Bad

December 22

When Herod the king heard the wise men, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found Him, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also. When they heard the king, they departed.... (Matthew 2:1-18)

The words of Old Testament scripture, “You thought evil against me, but God thought to turn it into good, to bestow life on a great people” are words that contain a secret of heaven. The secret is this: The Lord allows the hells to lead good people into temptation, consequently to introduce falsities and evils into their minds and hearts. But at the same time He Himself is present and offers resistance by refuting the falsities of these spirits and dispersing their evil. From this come renewal, hope, and victory. For spirits from hell intend nothing but what is evil. But they are not allowed by the Lord to do anything at all except that good may come of it, that is, so that truth and goodness may be made firmer and stronger with us when we undergo temptation.

(Secrets of Heaven 6574.2-3)

When we’re being reformed, good and evil are brought into opposition, and a conflict and struggle arise, which are like the fermentation of wine. If good wins out, then evil with its falsity is moved to the sides, comparatively as sediment falls to the bottom of a container, and what is good becomes like vintage wine after fermentation. (Divine Providence 284)

O Lord, how great are Your works! Your thoughts are very deep. When the wicked spring up like grass, and when all the workers of iniquity flourish, it is so that they may be destroyed forever. (Psalm 92:5, 7)

Reflection: *Herod's presence in Jerusalem was a potential roadblock to the wise men on their journey. In fact, his presence in the Christmas story was a threat to the Lord's own life and mission on earth. In a similar way, the presence of hell in our own inner experience is something that can threaten our spiritual lives. But the Lord is with us every moment along the way. He allows bad spirits to challenge and tempt us only so that we can make choices against them, and so that we can be rid of them forever. By our choices the Lord strengthens us in what is true and good, and over time our lives and characters become like finely aged wine. What is one particular challenge that you've recently needed to face and move past—like the wise men encountering and then departing from Herod? What have you **needed** to do, what have you **done**, and what do you **still** need to do, in order to move through this challenge and stay on course to worship the Lord? What is one thing that you can use from the Lord to help you stay on course?*

Notes:

Prayer:

Be Humble

December 23

And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. (Matthew 2:1-12)

Every inward impulse of a person's love and desire has corresponding actions and gestures of the body. Holy fear that leads to humility, and from this to reverence, likewise has corresponding actions or gestures: bending the knees, falling forward on the knees, and also **prostrating** the body flat on the ground. (Secrets of Heaven 5323.1)

Humility before a person produces a bowing down, according to the estimation of him or her; but in presence of the Divine it produces total **prostration**, especially when we think that the Divine in respect to power and wisdom is everything, and our own self in comparison is nothing. When we're in this acknowledgment from the heart we come as it were out of ourselves, and thence fall on our face, and when we're thus out of ourselves, we're also removed from our own self, which in itself is completely destructive. When this is removed, the Divine fills us and raises us up. (Apocalypse Explained 77.1)

True adoration or humility of heart carries with it **prostration** to the ground on one's face before the Lord, as a gesture naturally flowing from it. For in humility of heart there is an acknowledgment of self as being nothing but filthiness, and of the Lord's infinite mercy toward that which is such. When the mind is kept in these two forms of acknowledgment, the very mind droops in lowliness and prostrates the body. Nor does it lift itself up until it's lifted by the Lord. This takes place in all true humility. It includes a feeling of being lifted up by the Lord's mercy. (Secrets of Heaven 1999)



Reflection: *Throughout these readings we've focused on the many things that constitute "our part" in choosing our own eternal destiny, and in cooperating with the Lord in the process of salvation. Today we focus on the fact that our part is to humble ourselves before our God, and acknowledge Him as our Saviour and the Source of every good thing in our lives. The wise men, highly esteemed in their own realm, bowed before the infant Jesus. It's a beautiful picture of an attitude the Lord calls us to adopt. What are one or two of the life experiences that have kept you humble? Can you think of one or another time when you've turned to the Lord in humility, and then felt Him lift you up? Please describe. What are one or two activities that you associate with humility? How can you make this/these part of your regular spiritual practice?*

Notes:

Prayer:

24

Gift Giving: Beginnings of Togetherness

December 24

And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. (Matthew 2:1-12)

In ancient times gifts were presented to kings when people went to them. This was a customary and holy practice symbolising introduction. So too, the wise men from the east brought gifts to the Lord just born. These external gifts symbolised internal or spiritual gifts, namely, love and faithfulness that are offered to the Lord from the heart, and that are accepted by Him. Such things bring about togetherness with the Lord. (Secrets of Heaven 4262.3, 9293.1; Apocalypse Explained 661)

The wise men from the east who came to Jesus soon after His birth brought gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. “Gold” symbolised love of the Lord, “frankincense” love of the neighbour, and “myrrh” these types of love as they exist in outward life. All true worship proceeds from these three things. (Secrets of Heaven 4262.3, Apocalypse Revealed 277, True Christian Religion 205)

The “gifts” or “offerings” that the Israelite and Jewish nation made to the Lord in Scripture were called “gifts and offerings made to Jehovah,” even though Jehovah, that is, the Lord, does not accept any gifts or offerings, but gives to everyone freely.

Nevertheless, He wants these things to come from us as if from ourselves. For the Lord imparts the desire to do what is good from love, and the desire to speak what is true from faith, and it appears as if these things are from us. From this it is evident that what are called “gifts and offerings made to the Lord” by us are essentially gifts and offerings made to us by the Lord. (Secrets of Heaven 9938.2)



Reflection: *On this day before Christmas, we're reminded of one of the main parts that we have to play in our own spiritual growth and development, also the final goal of the entire Christmas story. The whole reason why the Lord was born on earth, the whole reason why He wants to be born repeatedly into our lives, and the entire goal that He has for each one of us, is that we would experience His love and goodness in our hearts and minds, and that this love and goodness would, by our choosing, extend themselves through us to others, touching their lives in tangible ways. In this way each "gift" that we give to others circles back to the Lord. This is where the real joy and delight in life are finally and fully experienced—in giving tangible "gifts" to others from the heart, under the auspices of the Lord. On this day before Christmas, what are one or a few of the most meaningful gifts that the Lord has given you in your lifetime? What meaning has each one held for you? In what way(s) have you been able to give any one of these gifts back to Him? What are one or two ways that you can do so in the coming year?*

Notes:

Prayer:

Summary of Our Part: Invest in Lifelong Spiritual Learning

December 25

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. And as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:1-14)

It's important to know how we can be in such enlightenment as to learn the truths that must constitute our faith, and in such desire as to do the good deeds that must constitute our love. These things are possible as follows: (1) Read the Word every day—one or two chapters—and learn from a master and from preaching the teachings of your religion. Learn especially that God is one, that the Lord is the God of heaven and earth, that the Word is holy, that there is a heaven and a hell, and that there is a life after death. (2) Learn from the Word, from a master, and from preaching, what works are sins. Learn all of these things from childhood to youth. (3) When you begin to think for yourself, it must be the first and chief thing to refrain from doing what is harmful (evil) for the reason that it is a sin against the Word, thus against God. Afterward, as you grow up and become old, you must turn away from what is harmful [not only in action, but also] in intention and thought. But in order to so refrain from them and shun and turn away from them, you must

pray to the Lord for help. (4) To the extent that we detest these evils, because they are opposed to the Word and thence opposed to God, to the same extent there is granted us communication with the Lord, and togetherness is effected with heaven. (5) To the extent, then, that we detest these sins, so far good desires enter. (6) To the extent that we are in these good desires, we are led by the Lord and not by ourselves. (7) The desires that are granted are a desire for knowing and understanding the truths and goods of heaven and the Church, together with a desire for willing and doing them; also a desire to combat with zeal against falsities and evils and dispersing them—both within ourselves and others. (8) Thus and in no other way are we reformed; and to the extent that we know and believe what is true, and also will and do it, to the same extent we are regenerated, and from being earthly we become spiritual. (Apocalypse Explained 803)

Reflection: *Our reading for today—Christmas day—offers a condensed summary of the part that each one of us has to play in our own spiritual destiny. What is one part of this summary that stands out to you, and how can you make it living in the coming year? In addition, and having completed twenty-five days of reading in this collection, what would it be like for you to continue this habit into the new year? You might find value in reading through the Bible, or reading one of the books by Emanuel Swedenborg, some of which are referenced in this collection. You might await the next collection of Christmas readings produced by the New Church. Or you might take a topical approach. Whatever it is, the Lord calls us to be lifelong learners from His Word. How can this happen for you in the coming year?*

Notes:

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**Merry Christmas, everyone,
from your friends in the New Church.**

Additional Notes

Additional Prayers

We hope that you enjoy this year's Christmas Readings and that they add a new depth to the coming season for you.

We also hope that you are able to join some of our in-person or online events planned for December.

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Pastor of the Glenview New Church.

For many years Mark has been preparing Christmas readings
and making them available across the New Church.

This pamphlet is his work,
with only minor adjustments for our British readers & formats,
for which we have Rev. Howard Thompson to thank.