



The New Church Newsletter

Hurstville Society December 2019

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Can Herod Win?

by Rev Todd Beiswenger

Well, here we are, and Christmas is right around the corner. With Christmas also comes New Year's and New Year's resolutions. Over the years I've come to be a fan of New Year's resolutions, and I like that they happen right around Christmas. My reason for this is relatively simple: in the New Church we see the birth of Jesus not just as an historical event, but one that happens in our lives. We each can have the Lord born into our life. In my mind, I often think of New Year's resolutions as being the Lord being born into our life because the resolutions are always about some sort of change or self-improvement. The Lord's advent into our life isn't necessarily something that happens just once. We can grow, and through the process of growth come to a place where we are inspired to become a better version of ourselves... so the Lord is born yet again into our lives.

Now, when I think of New Year's resolutions, I'm not just thinking of the "I'd like to lose some weight" kind of goal, but something more... spiritual. Something like, "In 2020, when I'm feeling jealous about somebody else's life, I'm going to refocus on the fact that God only cares whether or not I'm a good person. That's the only thing that matters." Or "I'm not going to say bad things about my spouse in public." Maybe "I'm going to maintain a positive attitude about life, other people and the world, even when the politics of the day aren't going the way I think they should." Of course there are plenty of other things, but you get the idea, a resolution to actually *be* better, not just *look* better.

That really is the fundamental difference between the two kings of the Christmas story. Jesus is about us *being* better. Herod is really about *looking* better. In the story, the people were anxious for a new king to replace Herod and his enslavement, but our enslavement comes from a desire to compete on appearances... who has the best job, biggest house, most Facebook likes, and the list goes on and on. Herod actually wanted the people to like him. To achieve this he had a magnificent temple built for Jehovah, even though he was not a believer. It sure looked good though! Herod of course had his angle too because the temple was used as a means of getting the respect of the people so that He might dominate them. It was from this same motive that he had had built not only the temple at Jerusalem, but also one in Samaria that was similarly magnificent. This contribution to the embellishment of these temples was an image of his taste for grandeur rather than his faith in the Lord; and he knew that by honouring the clergy he could better dominate the people.

Like Herod, we can be susceptible to creating magnificent appearances in the hopes of bending people's will to our own, or even just simply to feel more like part of the group... to feel like we belong. Are we setting a fitness goal so that we can look better in hopes that others will like our appearance better, or are we hitting the treadmill so that our body is healthy and of good service to the Lord in his kingdom? Another kind of Herodian temple we can build these days is jumping on the bandwagon of the latest outrage on social media. It can be easy to support a cause simply due to the social pressure of doing so... why do we cave to the social pressure? Because the appearance makes us feel part

of the group, even though the appearance is actually enslavement to the will of others. This is Herod's kingdom.

So what's the one thing that Herod really fears the most? Change. There's nothing more terrifying for him than that. Which makes me wonder, is it possible, that in our lives, that Herod can actually win? The birth of the Lord is about the desire to be a better person manifesting in our life. The first step is nothing more than wanting to be good. Herod of course, quickly tries to kill that off. It is only through Divine intervention that Mary, Joseph and Jesus head off to Egypt.

For us this sequence gives us something to reflect on when it comes to New Year's resolutions. Like Herod we probably have little appetite for massive change. The idea of changing out who is our king is probably an uncomfortable prospect. Likewise, any thoughts of implementing any real change can be met with a desire to annihilate those thoughts. Imagine this... you're considering that a change you should make in your life is to let go of your ego. Releasing the ego's grip has many benefits... when people disagree with you, you can still be friends with them! When people don't want to do the same things as you, that's okay too! However, this can be real and substantial change, and if we currently believe that it is our superior intellectual abilities that make us who we are, then this change would be very unwelcome. Like Herod, we can justify putting this idea of releasing the ego to death.

So what happens if we do not change? Does Herod win? If we follow the Biblical story though, it seems that these desires for change don't get put to death at the outset, they just get sent off into exile. Eventually though, Jesus does get put to death. For some people that is their reality. The Lord shows up in their life, and they send Him out. Nothing really changes and Herod maintains his power.

Hopefully you're in a place in life where Herod isn't the king, and that Jesus has been born into your life and the struggle you're fighting isn't as weighty as this one. Yet I know that many people carry struggles that they rarely, if ever, let others see, and these spiritual battles are quite real. We've got just over a month until the calendar turns to 2020, which gives us some time to stop and reflect on some change that we feel inspired to make in our life. Herod is going to try to entice you with the idea of looking better, but the Lord is going to challenge you to actually be better. He's calling you to let go of that fear of change, and to be a better version of yourself. Embrace the change, embrace the challenge, have a great 2020 and don't let Herod win.

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New Century Edition Update

On Tuesday, September 17, 2019, the [New Century Edition](#) (NCE) team hit the most significant milestone they have ever achieved. Latin translator Lisa Hyatt Cooper finished translating all 15 volumes of *Secrets of Heaven*!

And with her completion of that long task, the team has now completed translations of all of Swedenborg's published theological works.

There are three main tasks involved in creating an NCE volume: translation, editing and annotating, and production. The first of these three is now complete for all volumes! There is much work still to be done to finish the other two processes, but this is the most gratifying milestone the team has reached in the project so far. Of the fifteen volumes in Swedenborg's magnum opus *Secrets of Heaven*, only [Secrets of Heaven volume 1](#) and [volume 2](#) have made it through all three steps to date.

Gratitude and congratulations are also owed to Chara Cooper Daum, who is Lisa's Latin consultant. Ever since she committed to the task many years ago, Chara has been with Lisa every step of the way. This duo has done amazing things for the New Century Edition—and we cannot thank them enough!

NCE Series Editor Dr Jonathan Rose commented, “This is an accomplishment that really beggars description. I believe that no one who has not translated something as large and complex as *Secrets of Heaven* can quite imagine what it must have taken to keep going, largely alone, day after day in that herculean task.”

In fact, very few people ever have translated *Secrets of Heaven* into English or any other language. John Clowes, a brilliant Swedenborg scholar of the late 1700s and early 1800s, was the first to achieve [a full English translation of the work](#). Over the years, various scholars have revised Clowes's translations and put their own names on the title page, but no one completed a new and fresh translation of *Secrets of Heaven* until later in the 1800s, when a man named George Harrison composed an unfortunately too idiosyncratic version. In recent times, the distinguished British Swedenborgian John Elliott became the third to join this restricted club.

Jonathan adds, “Lisa is the only woman we know of who has had the calling and the intellectual and spiritual chops to get the job done. She brought many unique abilities and perspectives to her work—discipline, an astounding attention to detail, and a deep reverence for the Lord. These abilities led her to deeply love the work she was doing, despite its difficulty; and her love and the Lord's guidance led her to excel at the task the Lord gave her.

“Her hope and prayer is something we all share—that the glory of the Lord will come down and fill the text that she has now finished,” he concludes.

FINIS!

Calendar Items

I just want to bring your attention to a few items on the December calendar. For one, I'll be heading to **Perth** late on the 5th of December, and returning Monday morning on the 9th. Normally I go out on Friday, return Sunday, but there was a substantial reduction in the airfare to move it to Thursday/Monday, so that's what we did. This means there will be a **lay service** here on the **8th of December**.

The following Sunday, the **15th** we'll have a **"pre-Christmas" service** that will look at some aspects leading up to the Lord's advent, and then on the **22nd** we will have an **evening service (7pm)** that will be just a selection of readings combined with singing some Christmas songs.

On **Christmas Day, Wednesday the 25th**, we will have a family service, 10 am, and a **Holy Supper** service on the **29th**. There will be **NO CHURCH** on **January 5th or 12th** due to the annual family retreat in Adelaide.

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Christmas Carolling Options 2019

As noted above, our evening worship service on Sunday Dec 22nd will feature readings from the Word as well as carols and hymns for all to sing. In years past many have gathered during the Christmas season at our sister church in Roseville to join in singing carols by candlelight with Rev. Julian Duckworth. With them retiring up the coast, the question arises as to whether folks might enjoy going together to a *different* Christmas carolling event, somewhere in the greater Sydney area, this year? There are too many to list here, but there is a plethora of options available, from large-scale (Carols in the Domain, Carols Under the Bridge) to smaller-scale (Carols on the Lawn in Marrickville or Monterey), from full-on family activities (rides, Santa visits & food stalls) to simpler, mostly-just-carolling, events. Please check out the '*Christmas Carolling event - options*' event on our Facebook page for more info, and let us know if/what you'd like to do! Feel free to suggest another that we may not have thought of!

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Kogarah Storehouse Christmas Collection

Christmas is a great time for us to count our blessings and to share them with others. We'll be collecting non-perishable food and toiletry items to benefit those less fortunate in our community -- starting immediately! You are invited to bring a few items to church with you every Sunday, to share your blessings with others via the Kogarah Storehouse. Let's show them how much love there is to go around! *Donation details and deadline yet to be determined; please keep an eye on our Facebook page and weekly email updates for more information.*

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Women's Weekend – March 2020 edition

Last August a group of New Church women gathered in the outskirts of Sydney for a weekend of sharing, insights, service and fellowship. It was such a hit that we're considering doing it again! We're thinking about a weekend in March 2020. There's a core group of women expressing interest, so far..... Are you another woman who'd like to participate? Please let Jenn know so that she can include you in the conversation! (jenn@beiswenger.net)

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Church Gardens

by Margaret Heldon



On November 3rd the Society Meeting approved the quote from **Reality Escapes Landscaping** with work beginning on November 12th. The transformation is now complete. All gardens have been cleared of weeds and have new sandstone edges including any paths within. As well as reusing some of the existing Bromeliads, Clivias and Amaryllis, Garden for Life designer **Narelle Happ**'s suggestions from her Walk and Talk nearly twelve months ago have been incorporated throughout. These will provide a wonderful array of natives to form a colourful understory for our rainforest canopy, bringing birds and insects to enhance its beauty.

All the gardens have been heavily mulched. In addition the old brick path to the tennis court has been removed and remade to a more direct route with a strip drain at the entrance from the driveway.

Next year it is hoped that new informative plaques can be introduced to replace the worn out wooden ones made for our 100th Anniversary celebrations in 2005. These had been a vision of **Norman Heldon** whose wish it was for people to be able to walk around the garden and connect with the spiritual through its correspondence in nature.

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Birthdays

Happy Birthday to **Gai Kennedy** (2nd), **Beryl Laidley** (14th), **Ken Horner** (16th), **Patricia Walsh** (19th), **Kristen Johnson** (29th)

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