



The New Church Newsletter

Hurstville Society November 2020

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Stress Has Always Been a Part of Christmas

By Rev Todd Beiswenger

I was talking to a friend the other day, and he was lamenting the approach of Christmas. His essential complaint was that it is just so stressful. I get it. It certainly can be. He said that his shopping list wasn't complete because well, he hadn't even figured out what people wanted. I thought I'd be helpful, and offered a list of things that *I* wanted for Christmas. To my surprise it turns out he was more concerned with what to get his wife and kids than me but buying for them was stressing him out.

I understand the problem with shopping for women. In fact, I have a strict policy of not buying clothing for my wife. As a kid, my Dad warned me against buying clothes for my Mom since he would never get it right. I should have listened as I'm got the same problem with my wife. It's too big, too tight, not warm enough, sleeves too short, not the right style, has elastic in the wrong spot, and yet, every few years I examine all these failures and try again. I feel like finding the perfect clothing is like trying to crack a combination lock to a safe. One of these days I'll get all the variables just right and be rewarded with a great treasure of spousal happiness, aka "conjugal love." However, I'm more like an amateur safe cracker than a master, so there is no successful heist, but a setting off of the security alarm that alerts the authorities. The wife is stressed because she has to pretend to be grateful, and I tell myself once again that I won't buy her clothes.

Of course, shopping stress is only part of the Christmas stress. What if somebody got you something, and you didn't get them something? What if you did get them something, but theirs was far more expensive than yours? My friend tells me that it's not just that, but there's stress of trying to be with family... his family, her family, where are they going to meet, when are they going to meet with who and how are they going to fit it all in one day... the whole day is just stressful. He says, "Isn't Christmas supposed to be about joyful tidings?"

I said, "Well, yeah, that's part of it, but if you think about the Christmas story, there's an awful lot of stress going on throughout it." He didn't seem to quite follow me. He says, "What are you talking about? 'Peace on Earth, good will to man' and all that!" Sure, we do have that moment of tranquillity when the angels appear to the shepherds. Plus we've got a romanticized picture of the shepherds and wise men visiting Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus in the stable with the star hovering overhead, which just seems as peaceful as you can get. But is that really the reality of the Christmas story? Do you think Mary and Joseph would describe that year of their lives as "peaceful?" If they had to describe what it was like to carry that pregnancy, while they wouldn't complain about the stress of buying gifts, I bet their story would be filled with tales of distress, trauma and pressure.

It would have started with Mary being told that she's pregnant. I don't really know what the culture of 2000 years ago was actually like, but if a young woman claimed to be impregnated by God, my bet is that more than a few of the people would have done their best Trump impersonation crying out "Fraud!" In a natural sense, this is why she's sent off to visit Elizabeth. Despite the exile, you know the gossip mill would have been churning

out all sorts of stories about Mary which would have stressed her family. The trip itself would have been stressful, and just being out of her normal routine would have been stressful too. And while things eventually came good in regards to Joseph and him believing in the immaculate conception, there was no doubt a great deal of stress for him and Mary around this initial announcement.

But wait, there's more! There's no shortage of stress in the story. There's the stress of new tax laws, and the travel to Bethlehem. There's the stress of travelling with a pregnant woman who is due to give birth, and she had no health cover! No travel insurance either! Oh, and let's not forget that infant and mother mortality was a much bigger concern back then too. Not to mention there's the stress of there being no room in any of the inns. So they're on a forced journey to forcibly pay the government taxes, probably worried about their physical safety, wondering if Mary and the baby will survive, and we're "stressed" about whether the kitchen gizmo will be appreciated by our spouse?

Eventually the child is born, and there is some peace as everything seems to be okay. The shepherds visit, and that's a nice visit because they actually believe everything Mary and Joseph tell them. They've seen some angels too. But that peace was fleeting for Mary and Joseph. They then had the stress of having the king decide to slaughter all the young boys because he's after YOUR child. So off they go on an unexpected trip to Egypt, probably wondering how they're going to afford to do it – maybe those gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh just amounted to travelling money – and more importantly how you're going to avoid the authorities. I feel quite confident that the whole ordeal felt a lot more like a life and death kind of stress, and not so much, "peace on Earth" because they really weren't feeling the whole "goodwill towards man" thing.

Thinking like this sure puts the whole stress around, "I don't know what I'm going to buy my spouse/child/friend/etc for Christmas" into a whole new perspective, doesn't it? Oh, you're stressed because the checkout line at the store is going to cost you an extra ten minutes? Or because the parcel may not arrive quick enough? Try telling that to Mary, and she'll tell you about the stress of running for her life because the king wants to kill her baby. No matter what you think of Scott Morrison, nobody is sitting around on Christmas day worried about him in those kind of terms.

So is Christmas really about peace and joy? Sure, there is a lot of joy in celebrating Christmas, from the joy of giving to the joy in spending time with loved ones, there is joy to be had with Christmas. We have our moments of peace too, after the kids and grandkids have opened the presents and we've indulged in the Christmas feast... there is peace. But the prevailing emotion in the Christmas story is probably neither peace nor joy, but stress. I think that's just part of what the real story of Christmas has always been: a stressful mad dash to perform a miracle. For some the miracle has been to bring the Lord into the world, but for people like me and my friend our Christmas miracle would just be finding that piece of clothing that our wives would actually like.

Phillip Island Camp Reminder

It's true, at the time of this writing, the borders of NSW, Queensland and Victoria are all open for the first time in months. You know what that means? It means that our July 2-8 camp at Phillip Island Adventure Resort could actually happen! There's also promising developments on the vaccine front, so it may be that the only thing holding you back is your desire to come.

And really, why wouldn't you want to come? If you're at camp, you don't have to cook. If you're at camp, you're not at work having to deal with a boss or annoying customers. If you're at camp, you're actually having a good time. We need 55 people to make this camp happen, and we're about half way there right now with 27 having expressed interest or booked. Thank you very much if you're one of the 27, and if you're not, take a look at your July 2021 calendar and see if you can make Phillip Island work. You won't regret it.

For booking, expressing interest or more details check out www.newchurch.net.au

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Calendar Stuff

You can figure out most of this by looking at the calendar, but I think it is worth drawing your attention to some things for December and January. Here's a quick rundown

- December 20 – no service in the morning, instead a 7pm Christmas readings and music service.
- December 25 – Friday morning, 10 am family service.
- December 27 – No service
- January 3 – Holy Supper Service

I'm also figuring that the remainder of the January services will be family services, and now that we've had a successful trial of live streaming from the garden, I may try to put as many as I can out there.

Street Library Completion

Have you ever encountered a street library? If you haven't, you're missing out on a little bit of cultural quirkiness. Essentially people have decided to create fun, ornate little boxes that they house some books in under the idea of "take a book, leave a book." Returning a book is completely optional, and the whole thing runs on the honour system.

Well, this year our Sunday School boys undertook the task of building a street library to be set up on the church property. We hope that it will be of value to the local community, but it was also done in order to give these boys something more physical to do. They got to learn some carpentry skills, but also got to infuse some of their own design ideas into it, including a "Minecraft" themed paint job.

Now that our street library has officially been launched, we have the option to register it with the Street Library folks to get it on the map, etc. They want us to name it, describe and promote it. Have a look, if you're curious:

<https://streetlibrary.org.au/register/> (copy and paste this into your browser)

The easy option is to just simply call it the 'Hurstville New Church Street Library', but their prompt to 'be creative' has me wondering! Any bright ideas? Booky McBookface Library? Library for Extraordinary People? Hakuna Matata Library? Let's hear what suggestions you have!

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Kogarah Storehouse Christmas collection

Christmas is in the air.... and with that comes our annual **Kogarah Storehouse Christmas collection!** We had a similar - albeit short-notice - collection in September, which really helped a lot during this topsy-turvy, virus-tainted year. We hope that you'll reach deep again, share your blessings and give what you can for those in need. In the spirit of Christmas, we'll make our sharing extra-special by collecting **Christmassy foods and gifts** (e.g. toys, books, trinkets & gadgets for all ages; no clothes), as well as the usual non-perishable food and toiletry items, to benefit those less fortunate in our community. As they must be received by Kogarah Storehouse in time to deliver before Christmas, we need all donations by the end of **Sunday, December 13th**, please. [*Please do NOT gift-wrap items.] Thanks in advance for your kind generosity. *Let's show them that they aren't in this alone!*

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New Books from the Swedenborg Foundation

My friend **Julian Duckworth** used to run a section in the Roseville Newsletter titled, "Synchronicity," which documented some seemingly random event that was in fact not random at all. Well, just as we completed our library we got not one, but two new books sent to us from the Swedenborg Foundation in the US. It's as if they knew we needed something to go in the new Baringa Library (how's that for a name?).

The first one is the latest volume of the New Century Edition titled, "The Shorter Works of 1763." I'm not sure that it is the most intriguing title ever given to a book, but it is nonetheless accurate. Basically it is a compilation of five books: *The Lord, Sacred Scripture, Life, Faith and Supplements*. The first four of these have been previously compiled in a single book titled, *The Four Doctrines*, and they've also been available as *Doctrine of the Lord, Doctrine of Sacred Scripture*, etc.

However, to those who have an attraction to reading more about Swedenborg's experiences, you would probably enjoy *Supplements* the most. In that section Swedenborg describes the condition of the British, Dutch, the popes, Catholic saints, Muslims, Africans, Jews, Quakers and more... basically every non-Christian that he was aware of. The unstated premise of these portraits is the folly of any religion's claim to be in sole possession of absolute truth. It's interesting!

The other book they sent is *Swedenborg's Principles of Usefulness*. Here's how they describe the book: "It highlights Swedenborg's widespread influence on an impressive host of historical figures, from poets and artists to philosophers and statesmen. His idea that our purpose in life is both to love others and to find practical ways to improve their lives led many to take on social reforms that vitalized the American landscape during the 19th and early 20th centuries.

If you're interested in either of these, let me know and I'll hold it aside for you.

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Understanding Your Value

A father said to his daughter "You have graduated with honours, here is a car I bought many years ago.

It is a bit older now but before I give it to you, take it to the used car lot downtown and tell them you want to sell it and see how much they offer you for it.

The daughter went to the used car lot, returned to her father and said, "They offered me \$1,000 because they said it looks pretty worn out."

The father said, "Now take it to the pawn shop." The daughter went to the pawn shop, returned to her father and said, "The pawn shop offered only \$100 because it is an old car."

The father asked his daughter to go to a car club now and show them the car. The daughter then took the car to the club, returned and told her father," Some people in the club offered \$100,000 for it because it's a Holden Torana and it's an iconic car and sought by many collectors."

Now the father said this to his daughter, "The right place values you the right way," If you are not valued, do not be angry, it means you are in the wrong place. Those who know your value are those who appreciate you.....Never stay in a place where no one sees your value.

Never!

Birthdays

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

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