

The New Church Newsletter

Hurstville Society December 2022



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God's Christmas Message to Elijah

by Rev Todd Beiswenger

When we're at our darkest moments, where does God show up in our life? You have to look at the Christmas story, and you'll find the answer. Simply, God shows up in a small way, announcing Himself only to a select few, operating in the background during our darkest moments. Lately though, I've been thinking about a parallel story in the first book of Kings. Maybe you remember it ... after Elijah's victory at Mt Carmel, Jezebel threatens Elijah's life and he flees to Mount Horeb. He's confused, he's afraid, and God calls him out of the cave. The Lord asks him a simple question: "What are you doing here Elijah?" He doesn't get a pat on the back for his recent victory, nor a little pep talk to wash the internal demons over with sunshine and rainbows. After Elijah rants to the Lord about how things aren't working out, the Lord says:

"Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by." Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a still, small voice." (1 Kings 19:11-12)

The meaning of this story is actually very simple. The wind, earthquake and fire are all external events, and the Lord was telling Elijah – and us – that his salvation and happiness don't come from external events. True happiness comes from within. It's that still, small voice of God.

Recently, I came across a story of a person who sounds to me like they need to hear that still small voice. Matthew Perry, famous for his role of Chandler Bing in the sitcom "Friends," wrote a memoir that one reviewer said "is less a tale of a glittering showbiz career than a fitfully gruesome account of his efforts to keep the show on the road." He reckons to have attended 6,000 AA meetings, detoxed 65 times, and spent in the region of \$7m to get sober. Wow. Personally, I find the numbers just staggering. That's a lot of money to spend on getting sober, which does show the difficulty of the task. I also see that on one hand that is a lot of failure, but I also see that he had a lot of personal perseverance to keep trying despite all the failure.

What comes to my mind is the basic teaching that without God we cannot be saved, which makes sense when we consider the teaching that without God we can do nothing. It's not that without God we can do some things, or without God we can get by... it's without God, we can do *nothing*. As you're likely aware, one of the big components to AA's program is giving yourself over to a higher power. Why? Because God isn't in the wind, the earthquake or the fire.

“What are those things?” you might be wondering. The wind in the story breaks rocks, which is about changing foundational teachings/truths in our lives. The earthquake is about shaking things up... changing your job, getting a new spouse, maybe moving. Finally, the fire is some new love... maybe it’s a hobby, or a new business, but something we can put our effort into. God is saying that you won’t find Him, that is, you won’t find salvation or true happiness there. Those are really part of Herod’s kingdom, or in this case, Jezebel’s.

The problem is that those are usually the places we look for salvation and happiness first, after all, they’re the ones who are in charge! Perry’s is clear he had a “relentless quest for fame,” which he believed would solve his problems. “I think you actually have to have all of your dreams come true to realise they are the wrong dreams,” he writes. The problem is no matter where we go, no matter how well the external events may go for us, the same God-less us is still there. Maybe we’re not actually completely God-less since Elijah wasn’t, but Elijah was clearly not thinking the way God is asking us to, which is to be happy with living the life of an angel like God tells us, regardless of the results. We’ve got to listen for that still, small voice.

I think this story of Elijah is also a picture of the Christmas story. Jesus didn’t show up and change the situation in which the Israelites lived. He didn’t give them new external circumstances, and He didn’t arrive in a flashy way. Instead He showed up as a baby in a manger... now my experience is babies don’t usually arrive quietly, so maybe not a “still” voice, but certainly a small one. The Writings tell us He had to be born here, otherwise the earth would have perished. More than that though, He was born as a Man because we are so bodily minded that the Lord needed to unite our bodily orientation with spiritual interiors. There’s nothing wrong with having a good set of external events, but salvation isn’t there because Herod is in charge. For the people of this world it seems that a special effort has to be made to unite our higher self to our worldly body, and that process requires the Lord to be born into our lives. Matthew Perry seems to be waking up to the fact that he needs a personal Christmas story as he looks around at his life at age 53 and noticing that he’s, “sitting in a huge house, overlooking the ocean, with no one to share it with, save a sober companion, a nurse, and a gardener twice a week.”

I think for us, as we approach Christmas, we have to remember this lesson well. Whatever we’re frustrated with, know that Jesus showed up to give us hope for a better tomorrow, and that hope won’t be found in the wind, in an earthquake or the fire. Instead, this Christmas, listen for that still small voice. That’s where you’ll find God. That’s where you’ll find peace, and good tidings for all mankind.

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Centenary Recap



Celebrating 101 years since this church was built and dedicated

You know that exhausted, relieved feeling, late on Christmas Day, when all the gifts have been given, the food has been eaten, and everything that has been planned has happened... well, I think that's what we're feeling like here after the Centenary celebrations. For weeks leading up to it, people were on the property every day doing something... weeding, painting, cleaning, organizing, tidying, preparing, planning, and then we had people who were working off site as well! It was a tremendous group effort.

Baringa Gardens
from the Richard
Morse Room



What did that effort bring? Well, the feedback was very universal that everybody had a good time, and people were impressed with how well the property looked. Baringa was tidy and clean, the Richard Morse Room was classy, and gardens drew praise for their beauty and signage. I don't think the property has ever looked this good during my time here!

Beyond the property the weekend also provided a good time to catch up with friends, some of whom hadn't been around in a while. It was impressive to see people stick around for hours on both Saturday and Sunday, and as good and plentiful as the food was, they weren't staying *just* for the food!

After the weekend was all said and done, I was talking with **Bishop David Lindrooth** and his wife **Aven**, and they were both very impressed with how the whole weekend went. They travelled a long way to get here, but he said, "It was totally worth it." They had a greaopportunity to connect with the Hurstville community, which I think is a valuable way of reminding the episcopal office that there is life outside of Bryn Athyn.



Aneira and Evie gathering fallen flower petals



Rev Todd and
Jenn Beiswenger
with Bishop
David Lindrooth
and wife Aven

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After the Event The Debrief

The three Revs, Todd Beiswenger, David Lindrooth, and Howard Thompson debriefing in the southern highlands.



Centenary Thank You

When you've got a small church community, an event like our Centenary celebrations require everybody to pitch in, so I'm reluctant to single anybody out because everybody pitched in one way or another.

But I will say a special thanks to **Jenn Beiswenger** as she came up with the idea, and persisted for the better part of two years(!) to see it happen. It took two years because it was supposed to go down in 2021, but then, you know, COVID, so things got delayed. Despite the delays, and the fact that the pastor wasn't convinced the whole thing was a good idea in the first place, she persisted and the pastor had to concede that she was right all along.

The Little White Church



For the postlude to the Centenary worship service, a song played titled, “The Little White Church.” The tune is from “The Little Brown Church in the Vale,” but the lyrics were re-written for our church. People seemed to really like it, so I thought I’d publish the lyrics here. You can find the video of the tune with lyrics on the Hurstville New Church YouTube channel.

There’s a little white church I love so much
Where friends have become my family
It is where I feel so close to the Lord
It is my home spiritually

Chorus:

Oh come, come, come, come - Come to the church on Dudley Street,
Oh, come to the church on the hill;
I hold this place so dear to my heart,
Our little white church on the hill.

How peaceful on a Sunday morning
To forget the worries that are near
And hear the Word speaking to me
Which reminds me I shall have no fear

Oh, come to the church on Dudley Street,
To gardens where the Aussie flowers bloom;
Where the New Church teachings will all be taught
We hope the pastor is done before noon

I’ve loved so much at our little white church
When my life here comes to an end,
I will remember this place of love and light
And find the little white church up in heaven

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Kogarah Storehouse Collection

Once again, this Christmas, we will be holding a collection of non-perishable food items and toiletries for members in the wider community, c/o Kogarah Storehouse! This collection will span the Christmas season, which means that you can drop off items at all our December worship services, including the Carols by Candlelight service on the 18th and the Christmas Day family service on the 25th.

Christmas is a time of hope, and for people who are in need nothing else gives hope like receiving a hamper full of desperately-needed items. Please note that we request regular old-fashioned non-perishable food & toiletry items, NOT Christmas- or holiday-specific. We took a very impressive boot-full of donations to the Storehouse last time; let's do it again, and then some.

[....Do you do advent calendars, leading up to Christmas? You could try a reverse advent calendar, this year: set aside an item per day for donation! e.g.: Dec 1: a box of cereal; Dec 2: a jar of peanut butter; etc. - then bring it all in on Christmas morning!] Thanks so much for your gifts; they'll really help someone out!

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Secrets of the Star – A Christmas Class 8th December 11am

Have you heard the theory, the one that postulates that the star the wise men followed to Bethlehem wasn't actually a star, but the planet Jupiter? Another theory suggests a supernova in the Andromeda galaxy as the cause. Or perhaps they weren't actually following a star at all, rather following astrological signs in the sky. Well, believe it or not, the Writings do have something to say about this.

In our December class we'll look at what the Writings have to say about the star itself, as well as the prophecy about the star that leaves us some clues about the Ancient Word. From there we'll take a verse by verse look through the first part of Matthew chapter 1 and hopefully pick up some lessons about the world back then that can be applied to how we see the world today. As usual, I will offer this class via Zoom and YouTube live stream so you can watch from a distance and/or watch at a time convenient for you.

After the class we will also have a BYO lunch/social time. We hope you can join us!

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Christmas Events

Thursday 8th December, 11am
Christmas Class, bring your own lunch.

Sunday 18th December, 7pm
Carols and Readings Service (NO morning service)

Wednesday 21st December, 7pm
Christmas Movie Night (details in weekly update)

Sunday 25th December, 10am
Family Christmas Day Service

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Virtual Camp – January 2023

While we won't be having an in-person family camp this year, **Rev Howard Thompson** is in the process of organizing a virtual camp that will be running 20-22 January 2023. Unlike Family Camp, the commitment of time is substantially less, and there is no financial commitment! So after you've spent all of your money on Christmas presents, maybe this will be a good, free activity. And, since it is virtual, you can attend while sitting at the beach, while walking through a national park, or even just sitting in your pyjamas drinking a coffee. The plan is to have an opening worship Friday morning, 2 sessions Friday and Saturday concluding with a closing worship Sunday morning.

At this point we have a couple of presentations lined up. One will be given by Rev Martin Pennington titled,

“Things I really like about Heaven,” including how,

- We become powerful angels heaven.
- There is marriage and sex in heaven.
- We don't have to suffer fools in heaven.
- We have dream homes in heaven.
- And dream jobs in heaven.
- All our favourite pets are with us in heaven.
- The internet in heaven is out of this world.

Also discussed will be tips for convincing non New Church Christians that the bible also does promise these things.

Another presentation, one that I will be offering, is,

“A Trip into the Twilight Zone: Swedenborg and Aliens.”

Among the revelations that the Lord gave through Swedenborg we find the descriptions of Swedenborg's interactions with spirits that once lived on other planets. These accounts turn up in the Spiritual Experiences from #519 and up. They have consequently been edited and inserted as inter-chapter material in the latter part of Arcana Coelestia. Finally, which for us may emphasize the point that Swedenborg really was serious about these accounts, he published them once more separately in 1758 in the book Earths In The Universe.

I am highlighting this to argue that the topic of aliens matters: it mattered to Swedenborg, it matters to us. The question I will attempt to answer in the presentation, is why? Why does it matter?

As you can see, there will be some diversity in content! Hope you can find a session or two or four to enjoy. If you're interested in joining in, please contact myself or Howard so we can email you the link/s.

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Future of Family Camp

When last we were able to gather for an NCIA Church Retreat it was January 2020 in Adelaide. Life, shall we say, has become quite 'complicated' since then hasn't it? Well, I thought I would update you on efforts to re-establish a New Church Camp/Retreat.

2023 - Unfortunately, with pent-up demand for venues, and more than a few not surviving, we were shutout of camp venues for 2023.

2024 – Howard is currently in discussion with venues over an actual retreat running 15-20 January 2024. In his discussions this far out he is pleased to report that he does not believe we will be shut-out this time. Location for this retreat will likely be within a 90 minute drive from Sydney. More details to follow once finalised.

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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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