

The Story of Christmas: The Birth of Genuine Love in Human Hearts

Introduction

This year's Christmas readings are focused on the birth of genuine, unselfish love in human hearts, minds, and lives.

Imagine a little baby that has been born—six pounds, eight ounces, and just eighteen inches long. And yet wrapped up in that little bundle of sweetness and innocence is terrific potential—potential for growing, learning, living, and loving; latent talents and abilities for reaching out, serving others in wise and loving ways, and impacting human lives for good—both in this world and forever in heaven.

Jesus said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.” “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and your neighbour as yourself.” “Love your enemies,” He said, teaching us that we have the ability to benefit human lives, even of people who make themselves our enemies—supporting what is good and true in them, helping them (as much as possible) to make changes in their lives for the better, and encouraging them on a journey up gently sloping pathways toward heaven.

The message of the Lord in the Judeo-Christian scriptures is clear—at the heart of all human potential is the God-given ability to love. The birth of genuine love—in our lives and in relationships—is actually prefigured in the story of the Lord's birth on earth. His birth was the birth of divine love into the world; and in a symbolic way it pictures the birth of unselfish love into our own hearts, minds, and lives. Each story or prophecy leading up to His birth, each character we meet in the divine narrative, every word that is spoken and every action that is taken, mirrors a part of our own growth and development, as genuine love, compassion, wisdom, and usefulness are gradually born in us. The story of Christmas, on a personal level, is about the potential for love and genuine humanness being realised in us, as we walk the road toward heaven, cooperating with the Lord in the process we call salvation.

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. At the end of the readings for each day is a set of reflections together with some questions for consideration. There are twenty-six readings in all, designed to carry you from December 1st through Christmas day, with one extra for the day after, looking forward into the new year. 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 on the pathway toward genuine love.

Reflection: The word “Shiloh” means “Peace-maker” or simply “Peace”. Peace on earth was one of the Lord’s main goals in being born into the world. It’s also one of His main hopes for every person He creates—that we would enjoy states of peace that reach clear through to our souls. And surprising as it may seem, our readings today suggest that states of inner peace are actually a platform on which joy and gladness can be built. What are one or two things about the Christmas season that touch your heart with a sense of the Lord’s presence, joy, peace, or gladness? What are a few of the things you look forward to this Christmas?

Notes:

12 2

A Star Shall Come out of Jacob: Knowledge of the Lord and His Qualities

December 2

I shall see Him, but not now;
I shall behold Him, but not near;
A Star shall come out of Jacob,
And a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel,
And batter the brow of Moab,
And destroy all the sons of tumult. (Numbers 24:17)

In the Word “a star” symbolises some matter of knowledge from heaven—knowledge of inner goodness and truth that come from the Lord. In the deepest sense it symbolises knowledge respecting the Lord Himself. (Secrets of Heaven 9293.3, 4262, Apocalypse Explained 422.20)

In the spiritual world, no one knows another from his or her name only, but from the idea of his quality. This idea causes the other to become present and known. In this way parents are known by their children. From this it can be seen that none of us have the Lord present with us unless we know His quality. This quality the truths of the Word make manifest. For as many truths as there are in the Word, there are just so many mirrors and ideas of the Lord; for He is the Word itself and He is the truth itself, as He Himself says. (Invitation to the New Church 41)

For all those who have formed the state of their mind from God, Sacred Scripture is like a mirror in which they see God, although each in a different way. The mirror is made of truths that we learn from the Word, and which we become steeped in through living a life according to them. (True Christianity 6.2)

Reflection: “I shall see Him, but not now; I shall behold Him, but not near.” Isn’t that the way it can sometimes feel—times when we dearly wish to see the Lord and feel His closer presence, and yet these things may seem to evade us—they may feel far away and distant, like a distant star in the night sky. And yet, the prophecy in today’s reading is full of promise—“I *shall* see him...”; “I *shall* behold Him...”; “I can *know* the Lord more intimately than before”; “I can *discover* Him in a new way this Christmas season”; “His presence within me can take away *anything* that causes hurt and pain and show me the next step forward in my life.” What are one or two things you’ve known and loved about the Lord over the years that have been like stars in the night sky—shedding rays of light on the pathway that lies before you? In addition, what is one thing you’ve just started to learn about the Lord—or one thing you’ve started to see, appreciate, or experience about Him—that makes Him feel more closely present than before? This Christmas, follow that star—until your actual life is “steeped” in His presence and in the warmth of His love.

Notes:

Reflection: One of the main ways we can experience genuine love and wisdom in life is so simple—by refusing to do what is harmful to others (or to ourselves) and by choosing to do what is good instead, inspired by the Lord from within. This was a code that the Lord Himself followed while He was alive on earth, and it's a code that we can follow too—allowing the Lord's truth and goodness to course through us, especially in the ways we live our lives. Looking back, what is one hurtful tendency or harmful life pattern that you've worked to overcome in the last year? What is one form of goodness that has started to replace it? How have these things impacted your faith in the Lord and your desire for His presence in your life? And how have these things been like butter and honey to your soul—spiritual food and heavenly nourishment for going forward in your life?

Notes:

12

4

Out of Darkness, Into the Light

December 4

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)

The words of Scripture “seeing a great light” symbolically mean receiving and believing the truths of faith. It is over those who have faith that heavenly “light” is said to “shine out”. (Secrets of Heaven 3863)

“Darkness” in Isaiah 9:2 symbolically means falsities such as existed at that time, and which still exist at this day among upright Gentiles—because of their ignorance of truth.* These falsities have goodness stored up within them because they have goodness as an end in view. Those, therefore, who are in these falsities are able to be instructed in truths—if not in the world then in the next life—and when instructed they also receive truths in their hearts. The reason for this is that goodness loves truth, and also joins itself to truth when it is heard. Another way to say this is that these people have not set themselves firmly against the truths of faith. Consequently, their inner self is not closed but is as it is with young children—open and receptive of truth. Their inner self can be opened above, that is, in the direction of heaven and the Lord. At the same time, all the earthly and worldly ideas they have brought with them from their life in the world are raised up, in order that they may all look upward together. (Apocalypse Explained 526.15, Secrets of Heaven 9256.2,4)

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)

*Written in the mid 1700’s

Reflection: What would it be like to walk in complete darkness—in a crowded room, for example, when the lights have suddenly gone out; or finding your way out of a cave when your flashlight batteries have lost all power? Don’t we all have areas of darkness in our lives—things we don’t see about ourselves or how to best go forward in life? That darkness isn’t our fault. Maybe we just don’t yet know a better way. That’s one reason why the Lord came on earth—so that new light could shine into the minds of people who were eager to know and learn—people who dearly wanted what is good in life, but who didn’t yet know how to achieve it. What is one “new light”, new insight, or new way of seeing that has recently shown in your mind? What is the “darkness” that it has led you out of? And what is the better place it has led you to in your life? What more can you say about these things?

Notes:

12

5

The Zeal of the Lord of Hosts

December 5

For unto us a Child is born,
Unto us a Son is given....
Of the increase of His government and peace
There will be no end,...
To order it and establish it with judgment and justice
From that time forward, even forever.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.
(Isaiah 9:6-7)

The words of Scripture “the increase of His government and peace” refer to the Lord, His kingdom, and goodness from the Lord therein. An increase of these things in our lives causes joy and happiness from our inmost being. It follows, therefore, that “peace” has to do with goodwill, spiritual security, and inner rest; for when we are in the Lord, we are in peace with our neighbour (which relates to goodwill); we are also in protection against the hells (which is spiritual security); and when we are in these, we experience inner rest from evils and falsities. Of these things it is said, “there shall be no end”. (*Secrets of Heaven* 3780.2,5, *Apocalypse Explained* 365.17, *Apocalypse Revealed* 306)

The Lord, from divine love and thence from divine zeal, calls together all who have a spiritual desire for truth, and who also think about heaven, to become new, spiritual creatures, also to union with Himself, and thus to eternal life. (*Apocalypse Revealed* 831, modified)

With any church that begins from worship of the Lord, zeal prevails for extending and perfecting the church by means of the holy forms of goodness and truth that belong to heaven. (*Apocalypse Explained* 650.33)

Heavenly zeal looks to the salvation of all, for salvation is in the purpose of those who are in goodness and who are zealous. (*Apocalypse Explained* 693.2)

Reflection: Christmas is a time when, among other things, we remember the Lord's love for us and for all people throughout the world. His love for every human being burns hotter and brighter than the sun. His zeal and passion for us, and for our lives going forward, is so great that it can't be measured. He wants to perfect our lives, inspire goodwill in us, and give us a sense of peace and security as we grow closer and closer to Him. What is one way in which the Lord has perfected your life over the past year? What are one or two effects that this has had on you? In what way could you extend what you've personally gained to others in the new year—as a support to their sense of peace, security, and closeness to the Lord?

Notes:

12

6

Holy Fear: Part of Christmas

December 6

There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse,
And a Branch shall grow out of his roots.
The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him—
The Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
The Spirit of counsel and might,
The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.
(Isaiah 11:1-2)

The spirit of God is all the life which people possess from divine truth; also the heavenly life of those who receive that divine truth in faith and life. For all wisdom of life and all understanding are from divine truth. (*Apocalypse Explained* 183.8, 696.17)

There are, in general, two kinds of fear—fear in what is not sacred, and fear in what is sacred. Fear in what is sacred is the kind of fear in which good people are. This fear is called reverential fear, and it is the result of a person's wonder at and longing for what is divine; also the result of that person's love. The fear that belongs to genuine love is 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. Consequently, it is a fear of injuring love and faith, and also the resulting worship. Generally speaking, the greater the amount of love of goodness and truth that we have, the greater the fear of doing harm to them. (*Secrets of Heaven* 3718)

Reflection: The prophecy in Isaiah 11:1-2 says that the “Spirit” that would rest upon Jesus Christ would be that of wisdom and understanding, counsel and might, knowledge and fear of the Lord. Something of that same spirit can rest on each one of us, as we cooperate with the Lord toward divine ends that are taught in His Word. Look especially at the last item in the list from Isaiah—“fear of the Lord”. Fear, in this context, doesn’t mean being afraid of Him. Instead, it’s referring to a holy kind of fear that can come over us—a fear of doing harm to the Lord or to others who we love. Who is someone that you care about, and what is one way in which you wouldn’t want to see him or her harmed? What is one way that you wouldn’t want to harm the Lord Himself? And what is one goal, ideal, or value in your life that you hold dear, that you wouldn’t want to see damaged either—especially at Christmastime? (Please explain.) These are what genuine “fear of the Lord” is all about.

Notes:

12

7

Your Light Has Come!

December 7

Arise, shine;

For your light has come!

And the glory of the Lord is risen upon you.

...The Lord will arise over you,

And His glory will be seen upon you.

The Gentiles shall come to your light,

And kings to the brightness of your rising.

(Isaiah 60:1-3)

Light is mentioned many times in the Word, and in the inner meaning of the Word, it refers to truth that arises from goodness. In the deepest sense, “light” symbolically means the Lord Himself, since He is divine goodness itself and divine truth itself—the source of all light. In actual fact, He is the light in heaven. Spirits and angels behold one another in that light, and by means of it all the glory that exists in heaven is clearly visible. Such light holds wisdom within itself, so much so that it is nothing else but wisdom that shines in this manner before the eyes of angels. Because such light was unable any longer to influence the human race, the Lord was therefore willing to be born and assume the Human itself. Indeed, in so doing He was able to bring light not only to people’s rational concepts but also to their earthly ideas. For the Lord made divine within Himself both the rational and earthly parts of His being, so that people who were in gross darkness could have light. (*Secrets of Heaven* 3195.2,3)

The Lord is “the light”, that is, He is divine goodness itself and divine truth itself. Therefore, He is the source of all intelligence and wisdom, and consequently all salvation.

(*Secrets of Heaven* 3195.4)

Reflection: The “light” that was to come into the world was the Lord Himself. His presence in our minds helps us think, see things clearly, and understand one another better than was possible before His coming. It is said that angels “behold one another” in His light. In other words, when they look at each other, they do so through the Lord’s eyes. Think, for a minute, of someone who you know and care about. How would you describe that person from your own perspective—the perspective that you personally have on him or her. Now think of that same person from the Lord’s perspective—how do you think the Lord sees him/her? What is the difference between these two perspectives? This Christmas, see if you can continue seeing this person as the Lord sees him/her.

Notes:

The Promise of John's Birth: Change for the Better is Possible. December 8

There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias.... His wife's name was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. So it was, that while he was serving as priest before God in the order of his division,...an angel of the Lord appeared to him...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. He will...be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also... 'turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,' and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." (Luke 1:5-17)

It is said that when Zacharias saw the angel he was troubled, and that fear fell upon him. "Terror" and "alarm" in the Word symbolically mean various disturbances of mind arising from an influx of such things as cause amazement connected also with joy. (*Apocalypse Explained* 677.8)

The words of Scripture "to declare good tidings" symbolically mean the Lord's coming and His kingdom at that time. (*Apocalypse Revealed* 478)

The angel said to Zacharias, "Do not be afraid". By these words are meant resuscitation, and then adoration from deepest humility. (*Apocalypse Revealed* 56)

The words “turning the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to the fathers” symbolically mean spiritual rebirth (or regeneration) by the Lord, by means of the Word. For it is the Lord who regenerates us, and it is the Word that teaches. (*Apocalypse Explained* 724.8)

Reflection: John the Baptist was forerunner to the Lord. His message to people was that of repentance. He would teach people the value of making changes in their lives for the better, as a way of preparing for the Lord’s coming. John’s message was one that held great promise for all people who came to his baptism, and also for millions of others in future generations. What is one life choice that you’ve recently been making, or one change in your life that you would like to make, need to make, or feel called upon to make, which, if you were to make it, would bring joy and gladness this Christmas season? What is the next step toward making that choice today?

Notes:

12 9

Zacharias' Doubt: Doubt that Change for the Better is Possible.

December 9

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, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and was sent to speak to you and bring you these glad tidings. And the people waited for Zacharias.... But when he came out of the temple he could not speak to them; and they perceived that he had seen a vision,...for he beckoned to them and remained speechless. So it was, as soon as the days of his service were completed, that he departed to his own house. Now after those days his wife Elizabeth conceived; and she hid herself five months, saying, "Thus the Lord has dealt with me, in the days when He looked on me, to take away my reproach among people." (Luke 1:18-26)

All spiritual conflict includes feelings of doubt regarding the Lord's presence and mercy, regarding salvation, and other such things. (Secrets of Heaven 2334.1)

We may know that in which we are, but we cannot know that in which we are not. If from description, or from thinking about it, we know something in which we are not, we nevertheless know of it merely as of something in the dark, and there remains some doubt about it, so that we do not see anything in the light and free from doubt until we are actually in it. This latter state of mind, therefore, is to know, whereas the former state is both to know and not to know. (Doctrine of Life 76, emphasis added)

12

10

Mary the Mother of Jesus: Desire for Truth in Life

December 10

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. And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favoured one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!" 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 the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end." (Luke 1:26-33)

The virgin of whom the Lord was born symbolises the church as to an affection or desire for truth in life. (God the Saviour 37, modified)

A spiritual affection for truth consists in loving the truth itself, and esteeming it above every form of goodness in the world, because through it we have eternal life. (Apocalypse Explained 444.10)

A genuine affection for truth consists in desiring to know, and also willing, the real truths of faith, and this with a view to putting them to good use in life. Those who have a genuine desire for truth examine the Scriptures and pray to the Lord for enlightenment; and when they receive it, their hearts rejoice.

(Secrets of Heaven 8993.3,4)

The Lord leads our minds so that we may be affected by truth, and so that when we discover it, we immediately hear it and are gladdened, and it is implanted in our lives. This is the way we are led by the Lord.

(Spiritual Diary 5796)

A spiritual affection or desire for truth is the very life of heaven in us. (Apocalypse Explained 483)

Reflection: Mary was highly favoured by God. And why not? She is said to symbolise the human desire or longing for truth that can lead us to the next good outcome in our lives. She represents the desire we feel for ideas or solutions that really work in life; and when we discover one such idea or solution, our hearts rejoice, and we put it to work immediately. What is one idea, concept, or solution that you've discovered over the past year that has really worked for you? Maybe it's been something at work or at home. Maybe it's been something in relationships with others. Maybe it's been something in your daily relationship and interaction with the Lord. In what way(s) has that idea or solution "worked" in your life? Where will you go from here?

Notes:

12

11

With God Nothing Will Be Impossible.

December 11

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.” Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible.” (Luke 1:34-37)

The question is, “What is the first step toward faith in the Lord God our Saviour Jesus Christ?” The answer is acknowledging that He is the Son of God. This was the first step toward faith which the Lord revealed and proclaimed when He came into the world. (True Christianity 342)

When the Lord was on earth He healed people, and He often did so according to their faith. The reason is that the first and main thing of the church then to be established was to believe that the Lord is God Almighty, and that He has power to heal and save. Without that faith no church can be established—either collectively or within an individual. This faith constitutes the beginning of life from God with us. (Apocalypse Explained 815.3, Secrets of Heaven 10083.6)

To the extent that we believe the Lord to be a mere human being, and not at the same time God, the Lord cannot be present with divine power. For faith is what makes the Lord to be present in us, and this according to the way we see Him. (Apocalypse Explained 815.7,8)

Reflection: It has been said that the Lord's birth into the world symbolises the birth of genuine, unselfish love into our lives. If this is true, then Mary's question to the angel is spiritually apropos. How can such a love be born into our lives—how can we personally create it, achieve it, or make it happen? The answer is that we can't. Genuine love is a gift from the Lord—as we daily cooperate with Him along the pathway of salvation. The birth of genuine love into the world, and also into our lives, is caused, not by us, but by a divine spark from the Lord. “With human-kind this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26). The Holy Spirit would come upon Mary; the power of the highest would overshadow her; therefore, that holy love that is to be born in us will be of God's design and making, not our own. What is one change that you've been making recently in your life that has opened you up to a new sense of love, care, or compassion for others? When that new experience happened, what was it like, and where did it come from? (“...So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”) (John 3:8)

Notes:

12

12

Mary's Innocence: Cooperating with the Lord toward Divine Goals

December 12

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)

In the Word a "betrothed virgin" symbolically means spiritual truth that is to be linked to goodness in life. (Secrets of Heaven 3164.2, modified)

I have talked much with angels about innocence, and I have been told that innocence lies at the core of everything good; also that goodness is therefore good to the degree that it has innocence within it; consequently, that wisdom is wisdom to the degree that it is characterised by innocence. The same is true of love, goodwill, and faith.

(Heaven and Hell 281)

Innocence can be defined as a willingness to be led by the Lord. In fact, it consists in being led by Him. It also loves to be led by Him.

(Heaven and Hell 281, 280, 278.3, emphasis added)

The Lord alone generates or creates us anew, provided we cooperate; He uses both goodwill and faith as means.

(True Christianity 576, section heading)

Peace holds within itself trust in the Lord—the trust that He governs all things and provides all things, and that He leads toward an end that is good. When we believe these things about Him, we are at peace, since we then fear nothing, and no anxiety about things to come disturbs us.

(Secrets of Heaven 8455.1)

Reflection: The readings for today suggest that innocence lies at the heart of everything good in life. Innocence is often thought of as related to physical purity; but more deeply, it is defined as a willingness to be led by the Lord. It even includes a love of being led by Him. Mary embodied this kind of innocence when she said to the angel, “Let it be to me according to your word.” What does the idea of being “led by the Lord” mean to you? What is one way that you normally invite that leadership into your life? How can you invite it this Christmas season, and in the new year?

Notes:

12

13

The Babe Leaped in Her Womb: Joy that Genuine Love Has Been Conceived

December 13

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. And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. 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)

It is said of John the Baptist that he was filled with the Holy Spirit in his mother's womb, and later that the babe leaped in the womb at the salutation of Mary. This symbolically means that John was to represent the Lord in relation to the Word; for in the Word there is everywhere a marriage of divine goodness and truth, which is divinity going forth from the Lord and is called the Holy Spirit. The leaping in the womb at the salutation of Mary symbolises joy arising from a love of linking goodness and truth in life, thus joy over heavenly married love.

(Apocalypse Explained 710.31)

It is said that the Holy Spirit filled Elizabeth. This is because of the Lord who was already in the world.
(True Christianity 158)

Reflection: In the scriptural reading for today, the Lord has been conceived in Mary's womb, and the babe inside Elizabeth leaps for joy at Mary's greeting. These things picture times when we sense the Lord's life stirring within us—spurring us on, and giving us the energy to move forward and make changes in our lives for the better (ref. Dec. 8 reflection). There are many things we may pray for in our lives. One of them is the energy, willingness, and ability to accomplish things we wish to accomplish. What are one or two things you'd dearly like to accomplish in your spiritual life or in relationships this Christmas? What is your experience of the Lord's life moving within you—spurring you on toward this goal? This Christmas season, how might you access this life force?

Notes:

12

14

Gratitude for the Lord's Mercy

December 14

And Mary said:

"My soul magnifies the Lord,
And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Saviour.
For He has regarded the lowly state of His
maidservant;

For behold, henceforth all generations will call me
blessed.

...He who is mighty has done great things for me,
And holy is His name.

And His mercy is on those who fear Him

From generation to generation.

He has shown strength with His arm;

He has scattered the proud in the imagination of
their hearts.

He has put down the mighty from their thrones,
And exalted the lowly.

He has filled the hungry with good things,

And the rich He has sent away empty.

He has helped His servant Israel,

In remembrance of His mercy,

As He spoke to our fathers,

To Abraham and to his seed forever." (Luke 1:46-
55)

Divine mercy is pure mercy towards the whole
human race, to save it. It is also unending toward
every person—it is never withdrawn from anyone—
so that everyone is saved from selfishness and
greed who can be saved. The entire act of
regeneration is the mercy of the Lord. (*Heaven and
Hell* 522, *Secrets of Heaven* 9336)

You shall rejoice in every good thing that the Lord
your God has given to you. (Deuteronomy 26:11)

Reflection: Any personal experience of the Lord's presence with us can have a profound impact on both our outward lives and our inner world. Like Mary, we're able to see (in a new way, perhaps) how the Lord has had regard for us and cared for us. We see great things that He's accomplished in our lives, newfound strength and determination that He's giving us, unpleasant states of mind that He's put down or even banished, humble states of mind that He's raised up and crowned with goodness, hunger in our souls that He's filled, and so on. At such times we experience His divine love caring for us, providing for us, and reaching out to help us in whatever ways that it can. What are one or two things listed in this reflection, or in the reading from Scripture, that the Lord has done for you since this time last year—things for which you are truly grateful?

Notes:

12

15

The Birth of John: Beginning of a New and Better Life

December 15

Now Elizabeth's full time came for her to be delivered, and she brought forth a son. When her neighbours and relatives heard how the Lord had shown great mercy to her, they rejoiced with her. So it was, on the eighth day, that they came to circumcise the child; and they would have called him by the name of his father, Zacharias. His mother answered and said, "No; he shall be called John." So they made signs to his father—what he would have him called. And he asked for a writing tablet, and wrote, saying, "His name is John." So they all marvelled. Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, praising God. And all those who heard these sayings kept them in their hearts, saying, "What kind of child will this be?" And the hand of the Lord was with him. (Luke 1:57-66)

Repentance becomes effective if we practice it regularly—that is, every time we prepare ourselves to take the Communion of the Holy Supper. Afterward, if we abstain from one sin or another that we've discovered in ourselves, this is enough to make our repentance real. When we reach this point, we are on the pathway to heaven, because we then begin to turn from an earthly person into a spiritual person and to be born anew with the help of the Lord. (True Christianity 530)

The words of Scripture "a son eight days old" symbolically mean any new beginning whatever toward purification. "The eighth day" symbolically means that spiritual purification ought to go on all the time, and that it always ought to be taking place as if from a new beginning. (Secrets of Heaven 2044)

Our reformation is from the Lord and not at all from ourselves. (Apocalypse Explained 721.17)

Reflection: The birth and circumcision of John is said to symbolise any new beginning that we make toward a new and better life. Within the scriptural account, the time of Zacharias' doubt is now past, and he and his wife Elizabeth go forward with clarity and determination—naming the child, not after Zacharias or any one of their relatives, but by the name that had been given by the angel. In a very real way, Zacharias and Elizabeth were following the Lord's leadership in their lives and subordinating themselves to His authority. We ourselves do the same thing any time we actively repent of some harmful habit or destructive pattern because it's against God's Word. What is one new beginning that you've recently made in your life? What part did the Lord play in that new beginning, and what part did you play? What are one or two effects that this change has had on you for good?

Notes:

12

16

Zacharias' Prophecy: Know the Pathway to Heaven...and Walk It.

December 16

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,...
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.

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest;

For you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways,

To give knowledge of salvation to His people

By the remission of their sins,

Through the tender mercy of our God,...

To give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death,

To guide our feet into the way of peace.”

(Luke 1:67-79)

So the child grew and became strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his manifestation to Israel. (Luke 1:80)

Heaven is granted to people who know the path to it and who follow that path. (*Divine Providence* 60)

Reflection: Zacharias' tongue was loosed, and he was filled with the Holy Spirit. He spoke words of blessing to the Lord on account of His tender mercy. Each new beginning that we make strengthens us on the pathway to heaven. We see the way before us more clearly, and we take the next few steps along that pathway toward genuine peace. The final quotation in today's reading is particularly striking: "Heaven is granted to people who know the path to it and who follow that path." How does that quotation strike you? What meaning does it hold for you? What is one way in which you personally have "known the path" to heaven and "followed that path"? How has this been a blessing in your life?

Notes:

12

17

**Joseph:
A Just Man for All That is Good
December 17**

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)

The Lord was a carpenter’s son because “a worker in wood” symbolically means goodness in life from teachings of truth. (Regarding the Athanasian Creed 99)

The Lord’s presence within us is in goodness, and therefore in what is just and fair, and further in what is honourable and becoming. These are the foundations on which conscience, intelligence, and wisdom are built by the Lord. (Secrets of Heaven 2915)

Heavenly love consists in loving what is good, honest, and just, because it is good, honest, and just; and in doing this from love. Those who have this love also have a life of goodness, honesty, and justice. This is the heavenly life. (Heaven and Hell 481.1)

Those who do anything good for the sake of what is good, and anything just for the sake of what is just, love their neighbour and exercise goodwill toward him or her. For they act from a love of what is good and a love of what is just, and thus from a love of all people in whom these things exist. (Secrets of Heaven 8123)

“He or she who loves Me will live My word; and My Father will love him or her, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. (John 14:23)

Reflection: John the Baptist was forerunner to Jesus Christ. Likewise, the practice of repentance is forerunner to the birth of genuine love in our hearts, minds, and lives. Any time we stop a harmful behaviour or leave a destructive pattern behind, it opens the way for a new pattern to take its place—justice, honesty, fairness, a life of integrity. And these things in turn serve as a foundation on which genuine love of others can be built. Joseph was a just man, and his presence in the story symbolises that part in us that serves and protects the new love that is being born—an understanding of truth in life. What does the idea of being an honest, just, or fair person mean to you? What is one way in which you personally work to be these things—at home, at work, or in relationships? What part do honesty, justice, and fairness play in giving or receiving love? This is your personal “Joseph”—the servant, protector, and guardian of love.

Notes:

12

18

**The Birth of Genuine Love:
No Other Father than the Divine
December 18**

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)

For the outer self to be brought into true order, it must become subordinate to what is internal; and it is subordinate when it obeys. To the extent that this happens, the outer self too is wise. This is what is meant when it is said that we become new creatures. (Secrets of Heaven 9708)

The Lord desires our total submission so that He can make us blissful and happy. In other words, He does not want us to be partly our own person and partly His. (Secrets of Heaven 6138.2)

The Lord is not the son of Joseph. In fact, there was no other Father from whom the Lord was conceived than the very Divine itself. (True Christianity 683, Regarding the Athanasian Creed 30)

There are two things that make the life of heaven with us—goodness that is a product of love, and truth that relates to faith. We have this life from God, and nothing of it is from ourselves. Therefore the first (or primary) principle of the church is to acknowledge God, to believe in God, and to love Him. (New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrine 281)

The Lord alone generates or creates us anew, provided we cooperate; He uses both goodwill and faith as means.

(True Christianity 576, section heading)

Reflection: Cooperating with the Lord on the pathway of salvation is a work in progress. It requires learning, thinking, decision-making, clarity of purpose, determined effort, and action. In fact, the part that the Lord allows us to play in our own regeneration is where a lot of joy and delight in life come from—joy and delight in accomplishing things, serving others around us, and making a difference in the world for good. However, at certain points along the way, it is good to remember where all of it originates—in Him. All of the goodness, and all of our ability to think, decide, make determined efforts, and take action come from Him. Another way to say this is that in our personal relationship with the Lord, there is a fine balance to strike between personal accomplishment and acknowledging the beginning point of that accomplishment. What is your experience of living life to the fullest—being a useful, hardworking person, and at appropriate times, remembering and acknowledging that it all comes from the Lord? What would your life be like if you did each of these things in full measure? How can you accomplish this today—on the eighteenth day of Christmas?

Notes:

12

19

And She Brought Forth Her First-born Son: New Experiences of Heavenly Motivation

December 19

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)

“Bethlehem” symbolically means the Word as to its inner meaning. It was there that the Lord chose to be born. A “manger” in a stable symbolises spiritual instruction for the intellect. This is because a horse symbolises the intellect, and a manger its nourishment. An “inn” symbolises a place of instruction. “No place in the inn” refers to the presence of false ideas in our minds. “Swaddling cloths” symbolically mean first truths, which are truths of innocence, and which are also truths of divine love. (Apocalypse Explained 700.9, Regarding the Word 1, Apocalypse Explained 706.12)

When a life of goodwill and faith are breathed into us by the Lord, we are made alive. We become spiritual and heavenly, and we are called “new creatures” from being created anew. (Secrets of Heaven 780, modified)

To the degree that we receive new life from the Lord, to the same degree we receive a human form, and at length, a very beautiful angelic form. (Spiritual Diary 4837)

Reflection: Our readings today take us beyond the birth and naming of John, beyond our initial experience of Joseph—a “just man” who was betrothed to Mary—to the birth of the Lord Himself. Any shift that we make away from a harmful behaviour or pattern in our lives, ...toward a life of integrity, ...motivated by a desire for truth in life (symbolised by the presence of John, Joseph, and Mary in the Christmas story) allows elements of true love to be born in us. We begin to experience a genuine inclination and desire to do what is good in life; new motivations sprout in us and start to grow; goodwill toward others takes root; and all of these things are inspired by the Lord from within. As it says in the Scriptures, “Then I will take the stony heart of your flesh, and give you a heart of flesh” (Ezekiel 11:19, modified). Think of a time when you may have made one of these shifts in your own life, and experienced elements of true love being born in you—perhaps for the very first time. How did one or more of these elements show up in you? What impact did it have on you? What can you do to experience more of it this Christmas?

Notes:

12
20

**Good Tidings of Great Joy:
Peace on Earth, Goodwill Toward All**
December 20

Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Then the angel said to them, “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 this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.” 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 all!” (Luke 2:8-14)

In the Word “a shepherd” or one who pastures a flock symbolically means one who teaches and leads to a good life flowing from goodwill. (Secrets of Heaven 4713)

To “proclaim good tidings” symbolically means to announce the Lord’s coming and the salvation of the faithful. For the Gospel is a glad messenger. (Apocalypse Explained 612.8, Apocalypse Revealed 478)

The words of Scripture “Praise our God, all you His servants, and you who fear Him” symbolically mean influx from the Lord into heaven, and thus the unanimity of the angels, that all who are in the truths of faith and the goodness of love should worship the Lord.... The words “all His servants” refer to all who are in the truths of faith, and the words “all who fear Him” refer to those who are in the goodness of love. These things which are said in this verse have reference to the new person in each of us that is to be created by the Lord. (Apocalypse Revealed 809.1, modified)

Reflection: The shepherds cared for their flock through the nighttime hours. At the same time, something wonderful had happened in Bethlehem—the Lord had been born. The same can be true for us. As the story of Christmas plays itself out in our own lives, we faithfully tend to our areas of responsibility and useful service. But now, having experienced the dawning of genuine love for others, we realise that the promise of Christmas is coming true in us. At the same time, we can see that the buildup of that love will be the beginning of “peace” on our personal “earth” and “goodwill toward all”. Can you think of one or another time when you’ve shown love to someone unselfishly? (Please describe.) In addition, what is one thing that you enjoy doing for others that feels spontaneous and without any need to be noticed, appreciated, rewarded, or paid? In what ways have these things been blessings in your life?

Notes:

12 21

They Made Widely Known the Saying Which Was Told Them: Supporting One Another

December 21

And so it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, "Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us." 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. And all those who heard it marvelled at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart. Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them. (Luke 2:15-20)

In the Scriptures, "Bethlehem" symbolically means the Word as to its inner meaning. This is where the Lord chose to be born. (Apocalypse Explained 700.9)

The shepherds who made known the birth of the Lord were able to receive, believe, and also, from goodness belonging to faith, make it known. (Spiritual Diary 4734m)

When we acknowledge in heart that there is nothing of goodness in us, and that we can do nothing of ourselves; and on the other hand, that all goodness is from the Lord, and that the Lord can do all things, this opens up everything in our minds, and in this way makes room for the Divine to flow in with goodness and power. This is why it is necessary for us to be in humility before the Lord. Reception of the Lord takes place by means of this humility. (Apocalypse Explained 1210.1)

The words of Scripture “praising God” have to do with joy, gladness, and worship of God. (Apocalypse Explained 1210.1)

Reflection: The shepherds weren’t aware that the Lord had been born—not at first. But once they knew, they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. Likewise, the birth of genuine love in our hearts begins ever so quietly—as a mere inclination or tender desire to reach out and do what is good. And yet it is something that we’re able to notice, recognise, and rejoice in. When we do, it can be a heart-felt and humbling experience—in the best sense of these words. Can you remember a time when you felt genuine love, compassion, understanding, or goodwill toward others touch your heart and steal into your spirit? (Please explain.) When it did, what impact did it have on you for good? What would you like to tell other people about that experience? What would you like to say to the Lord on account of it?

Notes:

12

22

**When They Saw the Star
They Rejoiced:
Guided by the Lord in Life.
December 22**

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. (Matthew 2:1-2,9-10)

The words of Scripture “the land of the sons of the east” symbolically mean truths related to love, and so concepts of truth leading the way to goodness. The wise men who came to Jesus when He was born belonged to the “sons of the east”. In the Word “a star” symbolises knowledge of inner goodness and truth that come from the Lord. In the deepest sense it symbolises knowledge respecting the Lord Himself. The star appeared and went before the wise men first to Jerusalem, which represented the church of that time in respect to doctrine and in respect to the Word. From there it guided them to Bethlehem—the place where the infant Lord lay. “Bethlehem” symbolises the Word as to its inner meaning. (*Secrets of Heaven* 3792.3,5, 9293.3, *Apocalypse Explained* 422.20, 700.9)

Truths concerning goodwill toward the neighbour and love of the Lord must first be learned before we can be regenerated; and they must also be acknowledged and believed. To the extent that these truths are acknowledged, believed, and become part of our lives, we are also created anew. These truths are first implanted in us through instruction received from parents and teachers, then from the Word of the Lord, and after that from personal reflection on them. But still, they are not acknowledged, believed, and received until our lives are led in accordance with them. In this case we develop an affection for them. And to the extent that we develop an affection for them—because our lives accord with them—these truths become planted in us. (Secrets of Heaven 3792.2,3,5)

Reflection: One of the intriguing things about the Christmas story is to see how unselfish love is birthed in us over time, and how the Lord carefully leads us through the process of that birth. For just a moment, think about how the Lord has guided you—throughout your lifetime—to where you are today. No doubt, there have been challenges along the way—the wise men did encounter Herod en route to the Lord. But still the Lord has led you onward. What is one “star” that has risen in the night sky that has kept you on course to genuine, unselfish love? What is one state of mind, stage in life, or personal challenge that it has invited you to experience and even work through along the way? What has been the resulting outcome in your life (or the outcome thus far)? What feelings and thoughts are you left with as you look back over all of it?

Notes:

12

23

Gifts for the King: Tangible Expressions of Love

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. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. (Matthew 2:11)

In ancient times gifts were presented to kings when people went to them. This was a customary and holy practice related to introduction. So too, the wise men from the east brought gifts to the Lord just born. These outward gifts symbolised inward or spiritual gifts, namely, such as go forth from the heart, which relate to love and faith. By these inner gifts, union with God is effected. (Secrets of Heaven 4262.3, Apocalypse Explained 661)

In the Word “gifts” symbolically mean the kinds of things that are offered to the Lord by us from the heart and which are accepted by Him. The situation with such gifts is the same as with all of our deeds. Deeds are merely actions performed by the body. But deeds regarded together with our will are outward expressions of that will displayed before the eyes. Therefore, deeds are nothing else than witness-bearers to such things as compose our will. So it is that by “gifts” offered to the Lord, such things as are present in our will or heart are symbolised. (Secrets of Heaven 9293.1)

The wise men from the east who came to Jesus soon after His birth brought gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. “Gold” symbolically means love of the Lord, “frankincense” love of the neighbour, and “myrrh” means these loves as they exist in outward life. These three together form the source of all worship. (Secrets of Heaven 4262.3, Apocalypse Revealed 277, True Christianity 205)

Reflection: When the wise men came into the house and saw the young Child, how did they worship Him? Certainly in the way they postured themselves before Him. But there was more to it than that. They also presented Him with tangible, valuable gifts—gifts from the heart. The Lord loves all people who He creates, and He wants them to experience happiness in their lives. Then what better way to worship the Lord, than to take the new love, new motivations, and goodwill that have begun to grow in your heart, and extend them to others in acts of kindness and love? With Christmas just around the corner, what are one or two ways that you can reach out to others, serve them, and be a blessing in their lives—worshiping the Lord as you do so?

Notes:

12

24

He Took Him up in His Arms: Strength and Hope for the Future

December 24

And they brought Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord.... 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. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. So he came by the Spirit into the temple. And when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the law, he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said: "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word;

For my eyes have seen Your salvation

Which You have prepared before the face of all peoples,

A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles,

And the glory of Your people Israel." (Luke 2:22-32)

Simeon of Judaic Scripture received his name from the phrase "Jehovah has heard". In the Word "hearing the Lord" stands for possessing faith in Him, obeying His commandments, and so possessing a will of faith—a will which is received from Him. In other words, "hearing the Lord" stands for possessing faith in the Lord's words and willing them. People who possess faith that is part of this God-given will receive life from the Lord. (Secrets of Heaven 3869.1,4)

"To bless God" symbolically means to glorify and give thanks because the Lord was to come into the world to save all who receive Him. Those are called "His people" who are in truths from goodness, thus who by means of truths receive Him in the way they live their lives. (Apocalypse Explained 340.3)

After redemption the Lord grants peace to those who believe in Him. In much the same way, after we have undergone any crisis of the spirit He allows us to feel peace, that is, gladness of mind and consolation. (True Christianity 599)

Reflection: It was a dark and obscure time in the world before the Lord's coming on earth. Simeon waited patiently to witness that coming; and once he had seen the Lord, he knew that all would be well. He could now depart this world in peace. Something similar happens within each one of us. Once we've started to experience new love and heavenly motivations from the Lord, and once we've begun to act on these things, we're able to have real hope for the future. Simeon seems to symbolise the new heart or new will that is born in us as part of Christmas, and which the Lord builds up in us over time. More fully, Simeon symbolises a spirit of obedience to God's Word, new willingness and will power in our lives, and ultimately, a new, emerging will for what is good. As this new will grows in us, it is the foundation on which genuine belief in the Lord, consolation in life, and inner peace can be built. With just one day to go till Christmas, what is one significant change that you've made in your life for the better which has started to become a settled part of who you are—something that you genuinely want, desire, will, and do? What impact has this had on your overall sense of peace and wellbeing? If you—like Simeon—could take the Lord up in your arms and “bless God” on account of these things, what words would you use?

Notes:

12

25

**Anna, a Prophetess:
Every Part of Our Lives is Satisfied by
the Divine Birth.**

December 25

Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity; and this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years, who 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)

In the Word “Asher” symbolically means blessedness, also the delight that is wrapped up in a desire for truth and goodness. This delight corresponds to the happiness of eternal life. When we perceive this delight within ourselves, we are starting to become new creatures. (Secrets of Heaven 3939.1, emphasis added, modified)

Reference is made, in the Lord’s Word, to upright Gentiles in the world. These are people who are under the influence of false ideas because they lack certain elements of truth for their lives. It is said of them that their false concepts “have goodness stored up within them, and this, because they have goodness as an end in view. Consequently, their inner self is open and receptive of truth. That inner self can be opened above, that is, in the direction of heaven and the Lord. At the same time all their earthly and worldly ideas can be raised up, in order that they may all look upward together.” (Apocalypse Explained 526.15, Secrets of Heaven 9256.2,4)

I will hope continually, and will praise You yet more and more. My mouth shall tell of Your righteousness and Your salvation all the day, for I do not know their limits. I will go in the strength of the Lord God; I will make mention of Your righteousness—of Yours only. (Psalm 71:14-16)

Reflection: There was something that Anna the prophetess longed for—to see the Lord and feel His presence on earth. Like Simeon, she had waited patiently; and while she waited, she served God with fastings and prayers night and day. When she finally saw the Lord, she was filled with a sense of blessedness, happiness, and satisfaction; and she went to work immediately—telling everyone who looked for redemption in Jerusalem about the Lord. The Lord’s birth within us is something that can invite these same feelings—blessedness, happiness, and satisfaction. It’s also something that can spill over and affect other parts of our lives that long for the same experience. Over the past year, what is one part of your spiritual walk that has brought you happiness and satisfaction? (Please explain.) What is the next part of your life in which you’d like to experience these same things? On this Christmas day, what can you do to experience them in that part of your life? And finally, how can you share what you’ve been given with others around you?

Notes:

12

26

New Beginnings

December 26

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.* In Him was life, and the life was the light of all people. That was the true Light which gives light to everyone coming into the world. 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 humankind, 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 1:1,3,4,9,13-14)

The Lord's Word is like a case that has precious stones, pearls, and gems laid out in a pattern inside. When we regard the Word as holy, and read it in order to have a useful life, our minds have thoughts like a jewel case that we hold in our hands.... (*True Christianity* 238)

The Lord is life itself, and that which comes from life itself (i.e., His Word) is alive. (*Apocalypse Explained* 483)

Without the Lord's Word no one has spiritual intelligence, which consists in a knowledge of God, of heaven and hell, and a life after death. Nor do we have any knowledge at all of the Lord, faith, or love of Him, and consequently of redemption. Such knowledge is the means of salvation. In fact, without the Lord's Word there would not be a heaven, nor would there be a church on earth. Thus there would be no union with the Lord. (*Doctrine of the Sacred Scripture* 114, *Regarding the Word* 14)

Reflection:

This year's Christmas readings have been about the birth of genuine, unselfish love in human hearts, minds, and lives. And now, as a new year is about to dawn, you are invited to reflect on how the Lord leads and guides you, so that that love can be born in you—not just once, but over and over again. If you were to narrow it down to one or two ways in which the Lord most effectively leads you forward in your life, what would those one or two ways be? In addition, what is the next good thing that the Lord wants for you in your life—what is the next step that He wants you to take, or the next change for the better that He wants you to make, so that the next level of love can be born in you? And finally, what will you need to do in the new year, so that this next divine birth can be a reality?

Good wishes in this next year of your spiritual journey.

Notes:

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 us for some of the many activities are two societies have planned for December.

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We must acknowledge the good work of our friend and colleague, Rev. Mark Pendleton, Associate 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 'tweaking' to permit it to fit our formats in the UK.