

PREPARE THE WAY FOR THE LORD

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The Christmas Story

What does it all mean?

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“The Lord was always there, but it was up to me to reach out to receive Him.”

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Connecting you with a New Christian spirituality for everyday life



Bulldozers. Excavators. Front loaders. With a busy three-year-old in my house, I find myself talking about making roads regularly. With Christmas around the corner, I think of making roads in the context of preparing a way for the Lord, and a couple of different images come to mind.

Initially I picture a tranquil scene (perhaps like the one on the cover) of calmly navigating the way to the Lord. But upon further reflection, the image is more like a construction site where the big diggers make space for the Builder to do His work.

When you picture preparing a way for the Lord, what imagery comes to mind? There is imagery presented in the Bible of wise men, shepherds, and a baby born in a manger. Discover the significance of this imagery on pp.16-17.

I am confident the Lord is ready to flow into my life with peace, joy, and tranquility. And yet, I must first excavate my self-centered habits. You may have questions about God's existence and what His presence looks like in this world and in your life. The Rt. Rev. Peter Buss explores some of these questions on pp.10-11.

If you've ever doubted the necessity of the Lord's presence on earth, you may be reminded of the life-giving power of knowing Him when you hear Ginny's story on pp. 4-9.

Looking for concrete ways to welcome the Lord into your life? Grab a cup of tea and read the collection of quotations and tasks available on pp.12-13. Post these pages on your fridge for a daily reminder.

However you choose to prepare the way, I hope and pray that you feel the Lord's peace, mercy, and tender care in your life this Christmas season.

Bronwen Henry

Bronwen Henry
General Church Outreach

New Church Connection makes the connection between religion and life. Every issue features content that highlights the personal nature of spirituality, providing applicable ideas to support your journey with insights from the New Church (Swedenborgian) faith.

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The Lord is present with every person, urging and pressing to be received; and His first coming, which is called the dawn, is when a person receives Him, which one does when one acknowledges Him as his God, Creator, Redeemer, and Savior.

-True Christian Religion 766

What's next?

Look for these upcoming issues:

- Salvation: An Active Process
- Doubt. Disbelief. Challenges to Faith.
- What is so new about the New Church?

PRODUCTION TEAM

EXECUTIVE EDITOR
David Lindrooth

MANAGING EDITOR AND CREATIVE DIRECTOR
Bronwen Henry

CREATIVE DESIGN
Caroline Kline

ASSOCIATE EDITOR
Taryn Frazier

ASSISTANT EDITORS
Abigail Smith
Chelsea Odhner

COPY EDITORS
Chelsea Odhner
Bruce Henderson

SUBSCRIPTION MANAGER
Heather Allais

General Church Outreach
A department of the General Church of the New Jerusalem

1100 Cathedral Road
PO Box 743
Bryn Athyn, PA 19009

1-877-411-HOPE (4673)

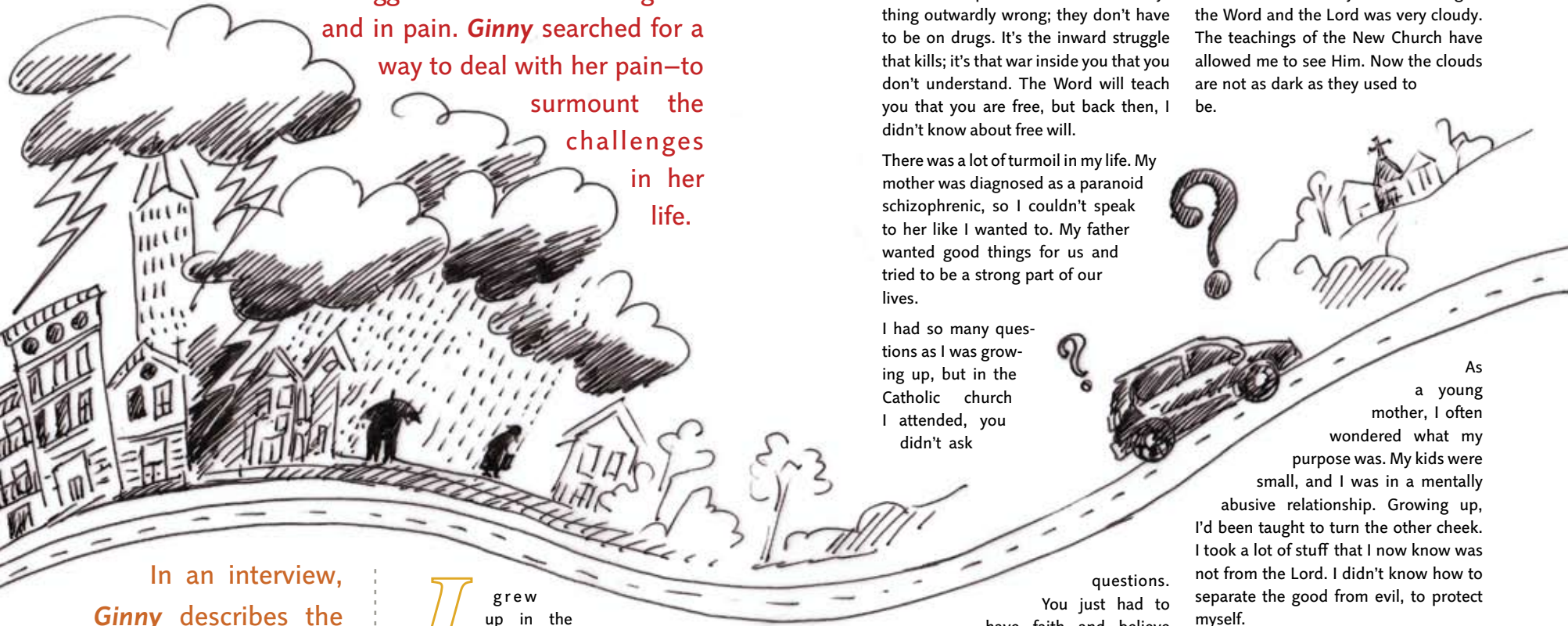
www.newchurch.org
questions@newchurch.org

For general information call 267-502-4911.

To contribute an article or personal story, or to request this magazine for yourself or a friend, please contact the production team at outreach@newchurch.org for more information.

cover photo by:
DAVE KEITH

Life's struggle can leave us feeling lost and in pain. **Ginny** searched for a way to deal with her pain—to surmount the challenges in her life.



In an interview, **Ginny** describes the direction and comfort the teachings of the New Church have given her.

Transcribed by Taryn Frazier from an interview of Ginny by the Rev. David Lindrooth.

I grew up in the inner city. You see such hopelessness in people there—the darkness in people's eyes. You see how children are hurting, without the love they want to feel. You see how women dress, trying to be attractive—to get the love they desire. All the while, people don't know that the love they're seeking is from the Lord.

It's heartbreaking, because I used to be

like that. People don't have to have anything outwardly wrong; they don't have to be on drugs. It's the inward struggle that kills; it's that war inside you that you don't understand. The Word will teach you that you are free, but back then, I didn't know about free will.

There was a lot of turmoil in my life. My mother was diagnosed as a paranoid schizophrenic, so I couldn't speak to her like I wanted to. My father wanted good things for us and tried to be a strong part of our lives.

I had so many questions as I was growing up, but in the Catholic church I attended, you didn't ask

questions. You just had to have faith and believe what the priest teaches.

When I was a child, I would often get to church early, before anybody was there. I would look up at the altar and pray for Jesus to come down so I could see Him. Looking back, I think of the prayers I prayed when I didn't truly know Him—when I thought of Him as three People, not knowing whether to pray to the Father or to the Son or to the Holy Spirit—

and I can see how my understanding of the Word and the Lord was very cloudy. The teachings of the New Church have allowed me to see Him. Now the clouds are not as dark as they used to be.

As a young mother, I often wondered what my purpose was. My kids were small, and I was in a mentally abusive relationship. Growing up, I'd been taught to turn the other cheek. I took a lot of stuff that I now know was not from the Lord. I didn't know how to separate the good from evil, to protect myself.

When people harmed me, I thought I should feel hate for them. My grudges had built up. I didn't think that it hurt anyone outside of myself, because everything I felt was inside. I didn't know how much I was harming myself, how I was harming my children, how I was harming the community, by harboring that rage and that pain. It was an inward hell. Since then, the Heavenly Doctrines have taught me that there is a war that's going on in my



spirit between good and evil. I just didn't know how to fight the war.

I'd always told my kids how important it was to be in church—how important it was to do good things for the Lord. When my youngest child, Marcus, was about to graduate, the church I at-

I didn't know what love was, but now I do. The Lord has blessed me.

tended had a change in priests. Marcus and I went up to the choir loft where we could view the congregation and the priest. Suddenly, it was like I was looking at my past. I started paying more attention to what the priest was saying, and I started feeling discontent. I decided to

look for better answers to my questions. Marcus and I left that church and started seeking the Lord. It was like a journey. We got in the car on Sundays and drove. We would go from church to church, having conversations with the people there. The car became a home because the house we lived in had so much torment. We did this for two years, and all the while there was something missing, but we couldn't put our finger on it.

While on this journey, I woke up one morning with terrible

back pain. The only thing I could do was lay on the floor. The doctor told me I had muscle spasms that would pass and gave me some medicine for the pain.

I propped myself in front of our TV at home, and I watched until I couldn't watch anymore. I turned off the TV and started reading the Word. I couldn't put it down. After that, Marcus used to bring his friends home and we would study the Word, right there on the floor. The Lord was calling me to Him.

One memorable day, I went to McDonalds. A man came in who had done

something to me, and I looked at him, full of hatred. I know I looked like a monster. Two preachers were sitting nearby, and I overheard the things one preacher was saying to the other. It was on the subject of what I was going through.

I went to the preacher as I was leaving, and thanked him for the words he spoke.

He said, "Oh, that's the Lord." That was the first time I was introduced to Brother Miller.

He spoke words about my life, and I asked,

We don't have to accept what hell has chosen for us.

I got in my car, and I couldn't wait to get home and read the Scriptures.

I started going to "The Church of Truth" where Brother Miller served as pastor. I wanted Marcus to accept this so badly because we had traveled so far together on this journey. We were on this path together. After a while, he started coming to church with me.

I was introduced to the teachings of the New Church, and it was like I was in a foreign land. I tried to read the books, and it was difficult. I would read them over and over and over again.

I used to think that a blessing is when



"How do you know these things about me?"

"It's the Lord," he said. He gave me homework—to go read from the Word. I walked out of McDonalds baffled, wondering what in the world had happened.

you get a car or a house—when there's something that happens in the physical world. The Lord says that His kingdom was not of this world. I'd never understood that. All that time, Marcus and I were seeking

the Lord in the world, not inwardly. The Lord brought me out of that materialistic way of thinking. He showed me that the more I repent—the more I lay down that love of self and the love of the world—the more He can reveal Himself to me and bless me. I see now that the best blessing is a connection with the Lord, with heaven as the end in view. This not only blesses you, but it blesses each and every individual you come into contact with. We don't have to accept what hell has chosen for us. Hell will come at you in so many different ways, and if you allow yourself, you could be overwhelmed. But

My kingdom is not of this world.
—John 18:36

the evils, and pressing toward a higher calling. It's not being submissive to evil, and it's not becoming complacent. I'd never thought the Lord loved me much. I thought that there was so much that I had done in my life, even as a child, that He couldn't love someone like me. Suddenly, it was as if He was telling me, "I've loved you all along. I haven't been upset with you. I've kept you from the very depths of hell. I have so much for you." I realized that He was always there. That's so

important for people to understand: He is always there, but it's up to us to reach out to receive Him.

the Lord says He gives us power to overcome. He will deliver us just like He delivered the children of Israel. The choice was mine. So I fought to come up out of sin, because I wanted to be a conqueror. It's a long process, not something that happens instantly. Repentance is not just saying you're sorry. It's much more. It's examining the cause, turning away from

When I started on the path the Lord had for me, it was quite different than the one I'd planned. It's changed my life. These teachings have freed me from pain and allowed me to feel joy. I know now that there are answers to the questions I have—that there's something in the Word for me that's going to change my life. These teachings are not to be covered up and buried. They are to go forth and



Heaven is union with the Lord.
—Divine Providence 28

free the world. Some people in this world don't know that they have a choice. So I leave with you a message: to press to get the teachings out. I didn't know what love was, but now I do. The Lord has blessed me. Amen. ●

Ginny is part of the Church of Truth in Louisville, Kentucky.

What Is Your Story?
How has your life been impacted by living New Christian spirituality?
Send us your story.
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Life is full of QUESTIONS

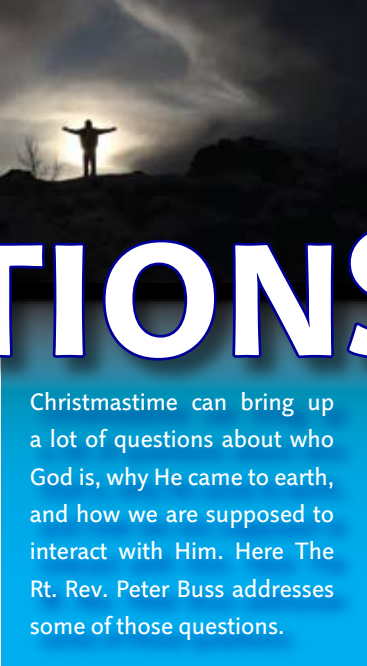


Photo by CALEB KEIR

Christmastime can bring up a lot of questions about who God is, why He came to earth, and how we are supposed to interact with Him. Here The Rt. Rev. Peter Buss addresses some of those questions.

Q DOES GOD LOVE ME?

a Infinitely. The New Church teaches that the Lord cannot even frown at us, for He loves us with an infinite love. We can withdraw from Him, because we have the precious gift of freedom. He won't withdraw from us. As one person said, "If you feel distant from God, who moved?"

Q WHY DID THE LORD COME TO EARTH?

a Humankind had lost its way. People had turned from God for centuries, and the awareness of what true love and kindness are had faded from the earth. The Lord came to do two things. First, He fought all the hells which were so powerful that they were overwhelming people. Second, He fought them with the very truth He taught us, thereby giving that truth almighty power. Today, when we use that truth, His power is with us, and our victory is certain. That is why He said, "All power is given to Me in heaven and on earth."

Q DID THE CHRISTMAS STORY ACTUALLY HAPPEN?

a Yes indeed it did. Many people who don't believe in Jesus Christ have tried to deny it, but the incredible weight of history supports it, as well as the only known written testimonies—the gospels. And the beautiful stories themselves contain a deeper meaning, speaking of how the Lord Jesus Christ may be born in our hearts and minds. Every single word and event is fulfilled millions of times over in human hearts.

Q HOW DO YOU EXPLAIN THE TRINITY?

a The Trinity is three aspects of one God. We have a soul, a mind, and

an influence on people. In God, what is called "the Father" is His soul, His infinite love. "The Son" is His mind, or truth as He showed it to us, a truth which springs from love. "The Holy Spirit" is the Lord's energy, reaching out to us and saving us, and lifting us up to heaven. They are all part of one Person, Jesus Christ.

Q HOW DO I SHOW LOVE TO THE LORD?

a By doing what He says. We might feel that we love other people more than we love the Lord, and in some ways that might be true. But if we say, "I will obey the Lord, even if a loved one wants me to do something the Lord doesn't want," then we are loving Him above everyone else. We do this because He is totally to be trusted, and His ways are perfectly good. And as He blesses us, we come to feel our love for Him more and more clearly. People who truly love each other would not ask the other to do something that was against that person's conscience.

Q DOES THE LORD NEED MY LOVE?

a Well, the answer is "yes," and "no." Yes, He needs your love because He loves you so much, and it is the essence of all love to want to be close to and loved by someone we love. No, He doesn't need our love in the sense of being a "needy" person. He certainly wants our love because then He can make us happier and happier to all eternity.

SHARE YOUR QUESTIONS ABOUT LIFE.
Email questions@newchurch.org.
Mention "New Church Connection".

Q IS THERE AN UNFORGIVABLE SIN?

a Well, yes, there is. Jesus said on earth that "the sin against the Holy Spirit" could not be forgiven. But what does that mean? When we allow the Lord's energy to reach out and touch us, and then deliberately turn from it, we make it impossible for Him to reach us. I think that this "unforgivable sin" is "determined self-justification." If someone knows what's true and good, and absolutely rejects it, he or she makes it impossible for the Lord to reach him or her. But never, never, does He stop trying. It is the person who has built the wall. We are taught that He forgives all sins, for He says, "They know not what they do," even as He said these words on the cross. Sometimes people refuse forgiveness.

Q WHO IS GOD?

a Simply, He is the Lord God Jesus Christ. Before He was born on earth, God was perfect and as He is now—all loving, all wise. But when people fell into disorder, He was born as a Man, and showed us in the most present of ways who He is, what His laws are, and how we can be led. He Himself lived all the truths He had always revealed, and showed us the way—in Human terms. Today we worship Jesus Christ as our God.



The Rt. Rev. Peter Buss is a retired bishop of the General Church. He served eleven years in South Africa and as pastor of the Glenview New Church in Illinois. He lives with his wife Lisa in Colorado.

Daily Readings for CHRISTMAS



Reflect on the reason we celebrate Christmas: the Lord's birth in the world. May these daily messages bring a sense of peace at this special time of year.

Sign up for daily emails with readings and reflections for each day of the Christmas season at www.newchurch.org/materials/programs/holiday-readings.

1
Trust that the Lord will come into your life.
(see Numbers 24:15-17)

2 "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel."
-Isaiah 7:14

3
Seek the Source of light and truth.
(see Isaiah 9:2)

4 "Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."
-Isaiah 9:6

5
Learn wisdom from the Lord.
(see SH 10227:2-3)

6
A new day is dawning.
(see Isaiah 60:1-3)

7 "You will have joy and gladness...."
-Luke 1:14

8
Strive to do the best you can.
(see SH 2425:2)

9 "Of His kingdom there will be no end."
-Luke 1:33

10
"With God, nothing will be impossible."
-Luke 1:37

11
Adopt an affirmative attitude.
(see SH 2568:4)

12
"To feel the joy of another as joy in oneself, that is loving."
-DLW 47

13
Make room for God in your life.
(see TC 510)

14
Do not fear.
(see Luke 1:67-79)

15
"The Lord is present with all people...."
-TC 766

16 "To live well from religion is to think, will, and do because... the Lord has commanded it."
-AE 107:3

17
Seek a heavenly state of mind.
(see SH 4850)

18 "And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger...."
-Luke 2:7

19
"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"
-Luke 2:14

20
Consider the meaning of His coming.
(see Luke 2:15-20)

21
Receive His peace.
(see AE 365:19)

22
Trust in His power.
(see SH 7205)

23
Seek knowledge of the Lord.
(see Matthew 2:1-2 and SH 10026:1)

24
Reject selfishness.
(see TC 530)
Christmas Eve

25
Offer your gifts to the Lord.
(see Matthew 2:11-12)
Christmas Day



These messages are adapted from a collection of readings organized by the Glenview New Church. Find the full collection online at newchurchconnection.org. The readings focus on the theme of the Lord as Savior and the process of salvation.

Compiled by the Rev. Mark Allais with the Revs. Peter Buss Jr. and Mark Pendleton.

REFERENCES KEY:
AE = *Apocalypse Explained*
DLW = *Divine Love and Wisdom*
SH = *Secrets of Heaven*
TC = *True Christianity*

Wrapped In SWADDLING CLOTHES

Can the Lord really be born into our lives? If so, where is His place of birth and how do we find Him? Rev. Matthew Genzlinger tackles these questions, and the answers may surprise you!

Sometimes we find ourselves in a state very much like that in the Christmas story. Spiritually, it is night time. Pressure and stress are taxing us just as Caesar Augustus called all the world to be registered. There doesn't seem to be any room for the Lord in our lives, just as there was no room in the inn for Mary and Joseph.

The good news is that no matter how bad things seem, there is always a place the Lord can be born. Even though the world was a dark place at the time of the Lord's advent, there were many good people who were willing to listen: shepherds, wise men, Mary, and others. If we are willing to cooperate with Him, He will always reveal Himself. If we're willing to listen, the Lord is always ready to meet us, as the angels told the shepherds in the field two thousand years ago, to tell us of a Savior who is Christ the Lord.

When the Lord came into the world, He chose to be born in a manger where horses are fed. A manger represents His Word: the place we go to find the Lord and to be fed by Him ourselves. The light the Lord's advent brought allows everyone to be fed and strengthened through a deeper understanding of the Word. By coming into this world, the Lord gave us the ability to know Him and approach Him more directly. The Lord continues to tell us who He is and what He's like in the Word. The Word is the fountain of life and doorway to our God.

If you're feeling lost, wondering how to find the Lord in Bethlehem, go to the Word. Though we may find many excuses for not doing it, as soon as we pick up a copy and start reading, the Lord can be born into our lives.

Besides being born in a manger, the other sign of the Lord's birth is that He would be wrapped in swaddling clothes.

Swaddling clothes remind us not only of the innocence we need in approaching the Lord, but also the love for the neighbor.

The manger represents the spiritual nourishment the Lord gives us in His Word. We can go to it and feed off of all the good things He teaches.

Swaddling clothes "signify first truths, which are truths of innocence, and which are also truths of the Divine love" (*Apocalypse Explained* 706). Part of the reason that the Lord was wrapped in swaddling clothes was to remind us of the innocence with which we need to approach Him. Imagine if the shepherds didn't have the innocence to listen to the angels and go quickly to Bethlehem. Imagine if the wise men decided to stay home, unwilling to search for the Messiah. Thankfully, these people were willing to listen and to be affected by the good news of the Lord's advent. We must try to have this innocence when we approach the Lord in His Word if we genuinely want to find Him there.

And she brought forth her firstborn Son, wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger.

-Luke 2:7

The swaddling clothes also represent truths of Divine Love. Simply put, these are teachings about loving the neighbor. We cannot have innocence in our lives without love toward the neighbor. The whole Word teaches us how to be more loving people. The Lord, Who is love itself, wants to share what is His own with others and make them happy. We can connect with the Lord by learning to love as He loves.

The image of a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger illustrates where we can find the Lord. The manger represents the spiritual nourishment the Lord gives us in His Word—the good things He teaches. Swaddling clothes remind us of the innocence we need in approaching the Lord and the love for the neighbor. This Christmas, make room for the Lord in your life by seeking Him in His Word and sharing His love with others.



Rev. Matthew Genzlinger is the pastor of the New Church of Concord in Massachusetts. For more information, visit www.newchurchconcord.org.





HE WAS IN THE WORLD,
and the world was made
through Him, and the world
did not know Him. He came to
His own, and His own did not
receive Him.

-John 1:10-11

THE STAR which went
before them [the wise men]
meant knowledge coming
from heaven, since stars in
the Word mean pieces of
knowledge.

-De Verbo 7

GOLD meant the heavenly
goodness; frankincense, the
spiritual goodness; and
myrrh, the earthly goodness
that together form the source
of all worship.

-True Christianity 205

THE INN where there was
no room [meant] there was
no spiritual nourishment at
that time, because every-
thing of the Word, and so
everything of worship with
them, had by then been
adulterated and perverted.

-De Verbo 7

A 'VIRGIN' IN THE
WORD means those
who are in the Lord's
kingdom.

-Secrets of Heaven 3081

SWADDLING CLOTHES
signify first truths, which
are truths of innocence,
and which are also truths
of the Divine love.

-Apocalypse Explained 706

THE MANGER where the
shepherds found the infant
Lord symbolized spiritual
nourishment.

-De Verbo 7

"TO SHEPHERD"
means, symbolically,
to teach and instruct.

-Apocalypse Revealed 544

The Christmas Story

What does it mean?

Every detail of the story of the Lord's advent is true, and every word has meaning. The events represented the purpose of His coming and the fulfillment of the ancient prophecies. The story still has power today. The Lord's birth can take place in every person, and His work of salvation goes on continually. The insights above are drawn from the Heavenly Doctrines for the New Church.

Thanks to the Bryn Athyn Cathedral staff for sharing the Christmas pamphlets.
For more information, visit www.brynathyncathedral.org and www.brynathynchurch.org

Why was the Lord Born *on Earth*?



photo by ISTOCK

The Lord was born on earth to save the human race and everyone in it.



Photo by LEOPOLD KLINE

For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth
-John 18:37

Many people believe that He was born so that He might die (why else would an immortal being become mortal?) and this to appease His angry Father. But the idea of a bloodthirsty Father and a sacrificial Son just doesn't fit with the New Church perspective of a single loving God, that God is love itself, and that Jesus and Jehovah are the same Person.

The Lord Himself explains why He was born when He says to Pilate: "You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth" (John 18:37). The Lord was born into the world not to die, but to live and to do this in a way that showed people that He truly is the king of heaven

and earth—to show Himself as God.

The Lord's birth and life in this world allows us to see God as a human being. Before this, Jehovah could only be seen as an angel (the Angel of the Lord who spoke to Joshua, for example) or an inhuman, disembodied voice in clouds and fire (in the burning bush and atop Mount Sinai, for example).

Jesus showed Himself—that is, God—to be human not only in shape but in character, too. The people around Him could see Him, talk with Him, travel with Him, and get to know Him. As He said, "If you really knew me, you would know My Father as well. From now on, you do know Him and have seen Him" (John 14:7). For the first time, Jehovah showed Himself directly to people in a way they could understand—that is, in a way they could see Him for who He really is.

What about us today, who have never seen Jesus? True, we have never seen His body, but a person is not his or her body. When we first meet people, we might describe them by their height, hair color, or clothing. But when we get to know them, we are more likely to describe them by the things they love and the way they live life.

The same is true for the Lord. He was born in this world and lived among people not so that they could see the color of His eyes, but so that people both then

and now can come to know Him as a human being, a Divine Human.

His birth also allowed others to see God not as a powerful king, but as a powerless infant. This appearance allowed the forces of hell to attack Him the way they attack us, as is illustrated by His temptations in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1). The Lord in His glory is a refining fire, consuming all evil and completely unapproachable by an evil spirit (Malachi 3:2). But when the Lord was born as all of us are, with all of our weakness and corruptibility, evil spirits saw an opportunity to destroy the Lord.

His victory in battle with the forces of hell, a conflict commencing at His birth and continuing daily until His death, is the way the Lord saves people, even us today. By overcoming all temptations, He gained total dominion over evil and put the hells back into their place. Now, not only is the influence of evil kept in check, but He can remove any evil from any of us, if we but permit Him to do so.

The Lord was born on earth to save the human race and everyone in it. By showing Himself visibly as a Divine Human, He allows us to know Him and relate to Him. And by restoring the balance between the influences of good and evil, He makes it possible for us to use that knowledge and relationship to ask for and accept His power, His mercy, and His love. ●



Rev. Amos Glenn delivers New Church doctrinal classes online at NotFridayClass.com and hosts online reading groups at ReadSwedenborg.com. Amos is the Executive Director of NewChurchLearning.net.

Rev. Malcolm Smith suggests ways to connect with the Lord that work all year round.

realchallenges

How do I have a relationship with Someone I can't see?

He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me.

—John 14:21

realsupport

One of the joys of Christmastime is the chance to reconnect with friends and family. It feels great to reconnect with a friend in person—to give him a hug, to look him in the eyes, to talk to him for hours.

As we reconnect with people at Christmastime we might also think about reconnecting with the Lord—the Person that Christmas is all about. But how do we connect with Someone whom we can't see, can't hug, can't even talk with on the phone? Here are four approaches to try:

1 Picture Him as a Human Being

The New Church teaches that, though we can't see God with our physical eyes, He's not just a shapeless Force: He's a human being and that's how we can picture Him. *True Christianity* 787 describes picturing Him as "a man in the air or on the sea spreading forth his hands and inviting to his arms."

One of the reasons He was born into the world was so that people could know that their God is human and visible.

We can't have a relationship with a Force, but we can have a relationship with a human being. The Lord doesn't just have a human form; He is also the source of all good human qualities—kindness, understanding, compassion—in short, He is "Divine love in human form" (*Secrets of Heaven* 4735).

2 Spend Time with the Lord

In any relationship it's important to have a good understanding of who the other person is, but that's not what's going to really develop the relationship. If you really want to

The Lord our Savior is Jehovah the Father Himself in human form. Jehovah came down and became human so that He could come close to us and we could come close to Him, and a partnership could be forged, through which we could have salvation and eternal life.

—*True Christianity* 370:3

get to know someone, you need to spend time with him or her and do the sorts of things he or she love to do. The same goes for our relationship with the Lord.

Two ways of spending time with the Lord are reading His Word and praying. Especially during a busy time of year it's easy to say, "Yeah, I know I should pray and read the Word," and never get around to it. And yet, if you commit to trying to remember to pray every morning and evening or to reading something from the Word every day for the month of December, you will notice a difference in your relationship with the Lord.

The New Church teaches that the Lord "is continually speaking with a person" through the good things that she feels inspired to do and the true thoughts that she has (*Secrets of Heaven* 904). If we are in the habit of praying and reading the Word, we'll be more likely to hear what our God is saying to us.

3 Keep His Commandments

The best way of connecting with the Lord, though, is even better than praying and reading the Word. It is through doing what the Lord loves to do by keeping His commandments. The Lord explained this

to His disciples while He was still visible in this world. He said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments. ...A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also. At that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him" (John 14:15, 19-21).

It's as simple as that: if we want to have a relationship with the Lord and see Him in our lives, then we need to obey His commandments. We're not expected to be perfect, but the more we're able to reject selfish desires, the more we will be able to see the Lord working in our lives with His unselfish Divine love (the Father) and the stronger our relationship with Him will become.

4 Look for Him in Other People

Just as we can come to see the Lord working in our lives we also can see Him working in other people's lives. When we see someone being generous or forgiving or patient we are seeing the Lord.

So, as we reconnect with friends and family at Christmastime, we can reconnect with the Lord at the same time through other people and through trying to live His love for other people. ●

We can't have a relationship with a Force, but we can have a relationship with a human being.



Rev. Malcolm Smith serves as assistant to the pastor of New Church Westville in South Africa. Visit www.newchurchwestville.co.za or his blog, www.newchurchthought.org.



Congregations around the world

The New Church is a new Christianity that provides a clear path to eternal happiness and addresses your questions about God, love, and life after death. The teachings are immediately practical and deeply spiritual. The New Church is based on the teachings of the Bible as illuminated in the Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg.

The New Church (General Church of the New Jerusalem) has congregations around the world. All people are welcome to join in worship and participate in the life and community of the church.



photo by NORA WOOFENDEN

FOCUS ON THE NEW CHURCH IN KEMPTON, PENNSYLVANIA, USA

Kempton New Church is a congregation and school in Pennsylvania farm country. The congregation believes strongly in protecting the innocence of childhood and preparing for adult innocence, based on a love of the Lord's Word.

The church offers weekly worship services and doctrinal classes, as well as festival services and community gatherings throughout the year.



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New Church TEACHINGS

About Swedenborg and Works Cited

Emanuel Swedenborg was an 18th-century scientist and philosopher who continually studied the Word. Late in Swedenborg's life, the Lord called him to receive revelation for a new church. The New Church teaches that these works are divinely inspired revelation for the modern age: heavenly doctrines touching on many aspects of religion with a rational and merciful approach.

In this issue the following works of Swedenborg are referenced: *Apocalypse Explained*, *Apocalypse Revealed*, *De Verbo*, *Divine Love and Wisdom*, *Divine Providence*, *Secrets of Heaven* and *True Christianity*.

The perspectives in this magazine are based on the teachings of the New Church found in the Old and New Testaments and the Theological Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg.

Core teachings of the New Church:

- There is one loving, personal God, and He is the Lord Jesus Christ. His providence is powerful and unending. God guides each person's spiritual path, from the smallest things up to the biggest things, and His angels are with us every moment.
- The Old and New Testaments have a deeper meaning, revealed in the Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg, which help people lead happy and useful lives to eternity.
- Spiritual growth is a process. Through recognizing our sins, praying, shunning evils, and living a new life, we are transformed and united more closely with God.
- All religions have goodness in them. People of every faith are saved if they live sincerely according to their religion.
- Each of us continues life as a complete person immediately after the death of the body.
- While people are free to choose to live in hell, God wants everyone to live with Him in heaven to eternity.
- Marriage can last forever, for God blesses people with a special love in marriage that goes on after death, even to eternity.

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PO BOX 743
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The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of Jehovah; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill brought low; the crooked places shall be made straight and the rough places smooth; the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together...."

-Isaiah 40:3-5

