

Sydney Society Newsletter

Issued by the Sydney Society of the New Church

Established in 1875

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The Faith of the New Church is summarized as follows:

There is one God in whom is the Divine Trinity. He is the Lord God and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Saving faith is to believe in Him. Evil actions are not to be done because they are from hell and of hell. Good actions are to be done because they are from God and of God. These are to be done by a person as though they are done by himself, yet believing that they are from the Lord working in him and through him.



“For behold, I bring you good news of great joy!” (Luke 2.10)

See details of our Christmas services and events inside

page 2

The Minister of the Sydney Society is Rev. Julian Duckworth and he can be contacted at any time either by telephone (02) 9416 7026/7032 or by a personal visit to 4 Shirley Road, Roseville, for any pastoral help or guidance. Let the Minister know in good time about pastoral concerns with people - including yourself too - so that he can give help where and when it is needed.

FROM THE MINISTER

MAGNIFYING THE LORD

Some of you will know that Elizabeth, when Mary visited her, felt her baby (John) leap for joy in her womb when Mary greeted Elizabeth. Elizabeth was six months pregnant. Mary, newly pregnant, later said “My soul magnifies the Lord...”. This statement of Mary came to be called the Magnificat. It is a beautifully put-together piece of writing, full of humility, gratitude and surrender to the will of God.

These two women – Mary and Elizabeth – were both pregnant at that point, yet neither of them should have been. Elizabeth was well past child-bearing age and Mary of course was a virgin who replied to Gabriel’s announcement, “How shall this be since I do not know a man?” But in both cases, they were each to bear a child. Each pregnancy was an unexpected miracle – a fact of life which would make God’s power feel all the greater.

So Mary’s opening phrase fits this very well. “My soul magnifies the Lord.” If you magnify something it looks bigger than it normally does. The word she used means ‘enlarged’ or even ‘bigger’ and that’s very appropriate for a pregnant woman who physically enlarges until her pregnancy becomes noticeable.

For us – whether we’re a man or a woman, pregnant or not – it seems to be describing our developing feeling that God is growing in us, enlarging – growing more important to us, being more helpful to us, or however we might put it. In that way, we can all echo Mary’s words.

Things become bigger under a magnifying glass but they also become clearer and even truer. I have a double magnifying glass (which is almost as good as a microscope) and I can look at the back of a fern frond and see the spores close up. Helpful in working out what kind of fern it is. I might even be able to tell whether a \$50 note is genuine or counterfeit.

But of course Mary was not into forensic science. She was simply full of praise in her heart. On the plus side, God had chosen her out of all the other women he could have decided on. She felt her uniqueness, but her quiet acceptance of this honour gives us a clue as to why God had chosen her. ‘Let it be to me according to your word.’

You and I have our own unique life and no two of us are the same. God fashions us as we are and works with us so that we become who we’re intended to be. You can’t swap that and you can’t duck out of it. We can only come to terms with it and ‘let it be accordingly’. A good but challenging question is ‘Are you glad you’re you?’

On the minus side, Mary may have faced a huge amount of rumour and speculation. Pregnant? How come! Who with? So in the same way we can be misunderstood and criticised. We can even misunderstand and criticise ourselves. And yet, in all this, Mary magnifies the Lord.

Years ago I read a short book called “The Courage to Be” in which the phrase ‘in spite of’ kept coming up. Being positive in spite of all the reasons why you shouldn’t be. Being outgoing in spite of what people might think (which is their problem, not yours.)

So, over Christmas (and really, always) be gentle on yourself and let God work it with you. Don’t try and be what you’re not, and do try and be who and what you are. Read the Magnificat, in which Mary talks about God scattering the proud, raising the lowly, and filling the hungry with good things. And come through it, magnifying God. Ruth and I wish you a very happy Christmas and safe New Year.

Julian

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

It's a long way ahead but we are required to give formal notice of it.

The Annual Meeting of the Sydney Society of the New Church will be held in the church hall on **Sunday, February 28th** beginning at 11.30 a.m.

This meeting will consider reports from various aspects of the Sydney Society, give approval of the Financial Accounts, elect the Officers and the Committee and other positions, and consider any other items that form part of the agenda of the meeting.

Reports will be sent to members and friends for their consideration in good time before the meeting.

Please note the date. We invite you to be present at the meeting and to take part in the continuing work and use of the Sydney Society.

FRIENDSHIP GROUP NOTES

Please note the date of Wed. 9th December for our Christmas Meeting and Lunch, beginning at 11.45 with coffee and cake.

Julian will talk about "How a baby called Jesus was God" and we'll sing some Carols. A shared lunch will follow and our Santa gifts will be given. Please bring a gift around \$10.

We'd love you to come and join us.

Christmas Blessings to all our friends, especially to those unable to be with us then.

Glen Hart

THE OLDEST KNOWN CHRISTMAS CAROL

While 'O come all ye faithful' goes back to 1751 and in Latin goes back to the 12th century, the oldest known carol is 'Jesus Refulsit Omnium' or 'Jesus Light of all the Nations' which goes back to the 4th century. It was written by Hilary of Poitiers (France) who died in 368 AD. The earliest English carol is from around 850 AD.

STEWARDS AND FLOWERS FOR DECEMBER / JANUARY

Sunday	Steward(s)	Flowers
Dec. 6 th (Nativity)	Wayne Kasmar	No flowers
13 th (Sacr.)	David Curry	Glen Hart
20 th (Lessons/Carols)	Michael Chester	Lynne Twemlow
27 th	John Wilson	Ruth Duckworth
Jan 3 rd (Christening)	David Curry	Glen Hart
Jan 31 st	Graham Hanna	Elizabeth Kemmis

CHRISTMAS READINGS

Rev Todd Beiswenger has very kindly forwarded me an illustrated file of New Church Christmas Readings put together for this Christmas period by his friend Rev. Howard Thompson who's in Colchester, England.

It goes from December 1st to December 26th and each day has a Bible reading, about two passages from the Writings, and ends with a personal reflection.

If you are interested in using this, let me know soon, and I can either print off a copy of it for you and even post it to you, or I can forward the online file by email. As Todd wrote to me – 'Enjoy!'

THE NEW AGE magazine

This is the quarterly periodical of the Australian and New Zealand New Church. The December issue will be quite special, including a substantial and excellent article by Joe Vandermeer about Swedenborg and the Afterlife which was written especially for the widely-distributed magazine 'New Dawn' at their request no less.

The issue will have other things in it too, including reports from most if not all of the Societies in Australia and New Zealand.

It is available in print, but – even better – it is put online in wonderful colour and easy to manage format by going to www.newchurch.net.au and clicking on The New Age. Up around December 10th onwards.

page 6

SNIPPETS FROM THE SCRAPBOOK

When a thing has been said and said well, have no scruple. Take it and copy it.

- Anatole France

The beginning is half of every action.

- Plato

Let me not pray to be sheltered from dangers but to be fearless in facing them. Let me not beg for the stilling of my pain but for the heart to conquer it.

- Rabindranath Tagore

Nations do not have permanent friends.

Nations do not have permanent enemies.

Nations only have permanent interests.

- Gladstone

If you have two loaves, sell one and buy a lily.

- Chinese proverb

May the light of this day shine upon a beautiful tomorrow, in which promise becomes fulfilment, faith becomes assurance and hope becomes reality.

- from a Canadian Christmas card

Stella Green

VISION VALLEY CAMP update

The 2016 camp begins in 35 days on Monday January 4th. There will be around 65 people attending, with some other day visitors. Bookings closed on December 1st.



First, something about the afternoons. We have booked several exciting and different activities – Lilly Pads, Waterslide, Vertical Playpen (!), Canoeing, Rock Climbing and Archery. Lilly Pads is a high aerial balancing!

Staff will be myself, Darren Brunne, Todd Beiswenger, David Millar, David Moffat and Joe Vandermeer. The mornings will follow the normal pattern of all-camp sessions before morning tea, followed by age-group sessions.

Thursday is outing day and we are working on a program of options for people to choose from.

Evenings will be gentler but various different activities are on offer, plus perhaps a visit to the nearby St Benedict's Monastery.



Vision Valley is in a wonderful parkland with a lake somewhere. It is a half hour from Hornsby via Galston Gorge. If you want to visit, you're welcome, but please let us know, and soon.

People will be coming to the camp from around Australia and we will be making them welcome. And of course, we hope for fine weather and we wish everybody a great camp, which is such a big part of the New Church wider community here in Australia.

SOCIETY NEWS

Thanks to Todd Beiswenger for taking the service on Sunday November 22nd, and it was great to run out of service sheets.

Our best wishes to Auntie D (Miss Dorothy Talbot) who had a fall at Woodlands and is currently in hospital with her leg in plaster. When I went to see her, she was feeling comfortable in her air-conditioned ward while it was atrociously hot outside.

page 8

It was very pleasant to have a visit from three local people a few Sundays ago. David, Kathy and their adult daughter, Lydia. They enjoyed talking to various people at morning tea, and felt quite at home.

Ruth and I will be away for the best part of two weeks after the camp, from Monday January 11th to Saturday January 23rd, chilling out.

On Sunday January 3rd we will have the christening of Joel and Eva's son, Linus, during the service. That will be very special, and then we do not have Sunday church again until January 31st.

CHRISTMAS DETAILS TO NOTE

Please refer back to the November Newsletter for dates and times rather than us repeat them here. Or look at the green Calendar in this Newsletter.

Please do bring soft lollies for the Ashley House residents. We will give them their gifts when we go on Wednesday December 16th.

Other things to bring include packets and tins for Exodus Foundation and unwrapped toys and gifts for the Salvation Army Christmas Appeal, which will be taken to Chatswood during the week after the Nativity Service. And as always, your Christmas stamps are still wanted by the Melbourne Leprosy Mission.

The two offertories at the Lessons and Carols and on Christmas Day will be donated to Hope House Fostering in New Zealand.

SWEDENBORG CENTRE

Melbourne Afterlife Conference, January 29th – 31st January (Friday to Sunday) 2016

Based on our experience with the first Afterlife Conference this year, and checking out the program for the second one, we have decided to continue the Swedenborgian presence. Myself, Julian and Joe Vandermeer will be attending. It's one of the best types of conferences/festivals to attend because of interest in the Afterlife.

There are many benefits to share what we have to offer at this event:

- . Many people will be attracted to our display of various books/CDs/DVDs on the Afterlife.
- . We will be giving participants a free book '*Awaken from death*' so that they can appreciate Swedenborg's insights in their own time.
- . Networking with people.
- . Promoting a greater understanding of the Afterlife via their Facebook Page.
- . We have a prominent position on the Exhibitor's Page which is an excellent way of getting known.

For more details about the Conference please go to their website

<http://www.afterlifeexplorers.com.au/>

With best wishes for Christmas and the New Year,

Michael

WHEN WAS JESUS BORN?

Well, we don't actually know, but it may well have been during the Jewish feast called Sukkot, which is in October, the end of harvest.

Sukkot celebrates the 40 years in the wilderness and one of its features



is the construction of temporary shelters or booths (each called a 'sukkah') because the Jews kept moving on. There are several reasons why it might have been then when Jesus was born.

At Sukkot, many Jews went up to Jerusalem and its outlying towns for the celebration, possibly creating 'no room in the

inn'. Jews often took their temporary shelter with them, rolled up or in bundles, but with Mary so pregnant, Joseph would probably not have done this, making them need to find shelter. And another thing, with so many Jews in Jerusalem, it would have been the ideal time for the Romans to order a census to be taken, and to carry it out.



COLOUR IT IN

Apparently, the latest therapy is one we've known for a long time – the beauty and benefit of colouring in. Shops are currently full of them and people are discovering how they can lose themselves in a picture and switch off for half an hour from the stress.

So here's your opportunity. Coloured pencils would be best. Maybe choose and use colours that go well together, or different shades of one or two colours to get the most pleasing harmonious effect. It's really up to you. Turn your church newsletter into a work of art!

“There are three classes of people: those who see, those who see when they are shown, those who do not see.”

- Leonardo da Vinci

THE PILLARS OF NEW CHURCH BELIEFS



Continuing a series about our beliefs in plain English.

This time we're looking at TAKING RESPONSIBILITY

This might seem a strange heading for a religious beliefs page, but it is something which runs right through all our church teachings – the point that ultimately we take responsibility and make our own choices and decisions.

Sometimes religion seems to come across as the need to get it right to be acceptable to God. There is something in that of course – we should try and do what we know is right, and God tells us the things that are right and true.

But the downside of that is that it can leave us wondering if we are ever good enough. It's as though we are striving to please someone else – in this case, God – rather like a school student trying hard to please his teacher.

God is not really that interested in how much good we try to achieve, he is only concerned that we genuinely prefer what is good to what is evil. He looks at our heart while we look on the outside at our record.

Taking responsibility, then, is something that God puts in your court. Rather than trying so hard to live up to some ideal you feel is the pass mark – or which warrants a merit or distinction - we become responsible for what we choose to be and do.

We can and should take responsibility for the good we want to do, and set out to be of some use in this life, to others, to our community, and even to life itself.

And we should do the same thing with whatever bad we find we get caught up in, whatever that may be – usually they're thoughts – and take a stand and say something like 'I will decide what I will think about, not you!' And God will commend us for that.

CHRISTMAS IN SWEDENBORG



“Let it be said simply that the Lord was born like any other human being, except that He was conceived from Jehovah, yet born of a woman who was a virgin, and that by birth from that virgin He took on all the weaknesses that are common to us all.

There are two heredities that are born together in a human being, one from the father and one from the mother. But the Lord’s heredity from Jehovah was Divine and his human also became Divine. In Him alone there was a correspondence of all things of the body with the Divine.

This was a most perfect or infinitely perfect correspondence and from it resulted the union of physical things with Divine things. Thus He became the Perfect Man and the Only Man.” (The Arcana 1414)

FINAL FABLE

A dealer in tea found a superb tea on his travels, and when he came back home, he ordered a supply of it. Soon a tea chest arrived and he hastened to open it and sample his superb blend. He took a sip, “Phwah!” and spat it out. He immediately wrote to the tea company and complained. Some time later he received a letter back, saying that the prize tea had been foil wrapped, and then buried in the tea factory’s floor sweepings for safe transportation and temperature. “Please to dig a little deeper and you will find the truth of what we have done on your behalf.”