

Sydney Society Newsletter

Issued by the Sydney Society of the New Church Established in 1875

4 Shirley Road, Roseville, N.S.W. 2069

Church Office phone: (02) 9416 7026

Minister's e-mail : julian@duckworth.me

On Facebook – Sydney Society of the New Church - Roseville

December 2017 ~ January 2018

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, while believing that they are from the Lord working in him and through him.



*“And when they had opened their treasures,
they presented gifts to him: gold, frankincense
and myrrh.” (Matthew 2.11)*

.....
Our Nativity and Gift Service is on Sunday December 10th
.....

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

THE CHRISTMAS STORY

Every Christmas, especially when I watch the Nativity play, I have the same recurring thought, that the whole of religion is contained right there in the story of Christmas. The birth of Jesus, the visit of the shepherds and the journey of the wise men, between them, make a wonderful summary of everything.

We shouldn't be surprised because spiritual truths are all looking towards each other and they make a unity between them. This is in contrast to physical things which are often separate from each other. If you take up gardening, you will need several things – a spade, a fork, a trowel, a watering can; but if you look at the things of God, they are all aspects of the same truth because God is one and in them all.

The birth of Jesus gives us the truth that God was born in this world, at a time when the world most needed him. But it also gives us the truth that God can be born into our own personal 'world' – yours and mine – and work with us in it. That is a big teaching in religion and spiritual life, that we are not on our own, and God is now Immanuel 'God with us'.

Then there are the shepherds looking after their sheep at night, witnessing the message about the Lord's birth given to them by an angel who tells them not to be afraid about it. The shepherds stand for the part of us which cares about life, people, values, and which wants the best for everyone – they looked after sheep – and this too is a major part of

religion and its life, where we become involved in caring and pastoral (which literally means ‘shepherd’) work, visiting, keeping in touch, and feeling loving. So the words of the host of angels goes well with this, “Glory to God in the highest and on earth, peace and goodwill to all men.”

Then there are the wise men who travelled ever such a long way, knowing from their studies of deep and meaningful things that a king is about to be born. So they set out and follow a star which is a point of light which goes before them. This is all part of religion too which is about the nature of God, the purpose of life, the hows and whys of everything, and what has been revealed to help us understand it and ourselves.

And that is the whole of it, in this Christmas story. No wonder it can move us so much. Of course, we can add things on, like Herod and his pack of lies (and Herod stands for everything and anything – even in us – which doesn’t want anything to change from the way it is).

But it’s that trio which matters the most – God born, shepherds and wise men. Taken any one of the three away and the Christmas story isn’t what it should be. Put them all in and it’s complete. We could not come up with anything simpler or better to explain the presence of the Lord in our life.

I hope that you will come into contact with the story of Christmas this year – see a Nativity play at church or school, see a Nativity scene which can often be come across in December’s packed shopping malls, in a carol, or just read it for yourself. If you do, be affected by it because this is telling you everything which, if you tried to put it into your own words, you couldn’t. So think of it as a gift to you.

Behind the story, behind the gatherings and the giving, is the truth that God came into the world and comes into our personal world to help us live our lives, both in this life and the next. So have a blessed Christmas in celebrating that.

Julian

OUR ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

We shall have the AGM in the church hall on Sunday February 25th starting at 11.30 a.m. and going for roughly one hour. It's the time when we go through reports of things and the financial accounts during the last year and make plans about the coming year which for us will be an important one.

Reports need to be with Julian and Ruth by February 10th for distribution.

Everyone is welcome to be present at the meeting, and we hope that you will come and take part. Should some vote be required, only formal members have the right to vote.

FRIENDSHIP GROUP

Our Christmas Meeting and Lunch is on the changed date **Thursday 7th December** beginning with coffee and shortbread at 10.45 a.m.

Julian will give us a talk about "Behold, I bring you good tidings" and then we'll enjoy singing some carols, and lunch will follow.

Please bring a Santa gift around \$10 for us to share.

We warmly welcome anyone who would like to join us and hope to see you with us.

Glen Hart

THE JANUARY 2018 CAMP

This is now well underway in its preparation and there are 70+ people attending. There are 5 Ministers on staff, including Rev Glenn Alden, along with his wife Mary, now on their way to Australia.

Our thanks to the Brisbane people for hosting this Camp which involves a host of detail. And thanks also to Carolyn Heldon and Chris Kendrick who between them have taken on a major part of the administration that is always needed to run a good gathering for a whole week.

We wish everyone there a very enjoyable week and we look forward to hearing about it all, along with photos.

ADVENT READINGS FOR DECEMBER

It is a good thing during December with all its busyness to make some time each day to connect with the Bible and therefore with the Lord who is the reason for our celebrations at this time of the year.

Here are readings for each day in December, up to Christmas Day, which are each linked with a part of the Christmas story, directly or indirectly. Each one has a heading and a reference.



December 1st “NIGHT” Exodus 13.21-22; December 2nd “FIELDS” Matthew 6.25-34; December 3rd “BETHLEHEM” Micah 5.2
 December 4th “SHEPHERDS” John 10.1-4; December 5th “STAFF” Psalm 23; December 6th “SHEEP” Luke 15.3-7; December 7th “LAMBS” Isaiah 40.10-11; December 8th “ANGEL” Luke 2.8-10;
 December 9th “MULTITUDE OF ANGELS” Luke 2.13-15; December 10th “THE EAST” Psalm 103.11-14; December 11th “THE STAR” Numbers 24.17; December 12th “THE WISE MEN” Matthew 2.1-2;
 December 13th “GOLD” Exodus 25.1-3; December 14th “FRANKINCENSE” Leviticus 2.1-2; December 15th “MYRRH” Exodus 30.22-25; December 16th “THE INN” Luke 10.33-35;
 December 17th “ANIMAL SHELTER” Isaiah 1.2-3; December 18th “OX AND ASS” Psalm 8; December 19th “MARY” Luke 1.26-31
 December 20th “JOSEPH” Matthew 1.18-21; December 21st “LIGHT” John 1.1-5; December 22nd “MANGER” Luke 2.1-7; December 23rd “STRAW” Isaiah 65.24-25; December 24th “JESUS” Isaiah 9.1-7; and
 December 25th “BIRTH” Isaiah 9.6-7

SNIPPETS FROM THE SCRAPBOOK

At Christmas I am always struck by how the spirit of togetherness also lies at the heart of the Christmas story. *Queen Elizabeth II*

I thank you God for this amazing day, for the greenly leaping spirit of the trees, for the blue dream of the sky, for everything which is natural which is infinite which is yes. e. e. cummings

All I ask is just to be able to help it all. Constance Lambert

Respect for ourselves guides our morals, respect for others guides our manners. Laurence Sterne

The road to success is always under construction *Church board*

Kindness is the language that the deaf can hear and the blind can see. Mark Twain

DETAILS ABOUT OUR CHRISTMAS

The dates of services and other events were given in the November Newsletter so they are not repeated here. But you can also check on the green calendar with this Newsletter.

Nativity

I am feeling a bit emotional as I prepare my last Nativity Play in Roseville, I hope that you can come and watch on 10th December as it is going to be an interesting production with a cast of 12. It is set in Heaven so there are going to be lots of angels this year.

Church Party

Our party will follow the Nativity Service and we will follow the usual format of providing chicken and asking you to bring either a salad or dessert towards the meal. I will need to know the numbers for catering and setting up so please either email me, text me on 0408 101 250 or

sign on the sheet at church. Maybe say what food you are bringing too so we don't get too much of one thing. There will be soft drinks provided but if you would like some wine feel free to bring some. There will be a small cost for this meal.

Charities

We are collecting for the same groups again this year.

Exodus Foundation

Please bring tins and packets on non-perishable food, preferable healthy. They do not like to accept lollies. By 17th December please.

Salvation Army

Please will you all buy a toy, they sell them everywhere at this time of year. Preferably not a soft toy but something to do, construct or play with. Do not wrap these and please bring them by 10th December.

Ashley House

Please bring in some soft jellies or chocolates to go in gift bags for the elderly people in Ashley House where we go singing each month. By 17th December.

Christmas Offertories

This year we have decided to give our Christmas Carol Service (24th December) and Christmas morning service offertories to help the disaster unfolding in Bangladesh as they are trying to cope with all the refugees from Myanmar. If you can't make either of these services and would still like to donate you can either let Ruth have some money in an envelope or you can use the donor box to make a one-off donation towards it. Here is a link. <https://donorbox.org/ssnc-christmas-2017>

Ruth Duckworth

Stamps after Christmas

We still welcome your used stamps which go to the Leprosy Mission. After Christmas we hope you will have more than the usual number of stamps, so drop them in the box on the cupboard in the vestibule please. If you have time, cut round the stamps a bit away from those perforated edges to keep the stamps in good condition. Thank you.

page 8

SWEDENBORG ASSOCIATION

Next year, we already have a few interesting topics and speakers lined up, commencing with our first speaker in February ~

Friday February 23rd at 7.45 p.m. at Roseville: *The Circle of Life* presented by Rosalind Bradley. (See the flier on page 9 of Newsletter)

Friday March 23rd at 7.45 p.m. at Roseville: *Consciousness and the power of meditation* presented by Dr Michael Popplewell.

The latest issue of the Swedenborg Association's journal "*Candela*" has just appeared, looks good and contains a selection of interesting articles. There are several copies of this in the bookstand at the church.

We wish all our members and everybody a merry and meaningful Christmas and a safe carriage through 2018.

Joe Vandermeer

Swedenborg Centre Director.

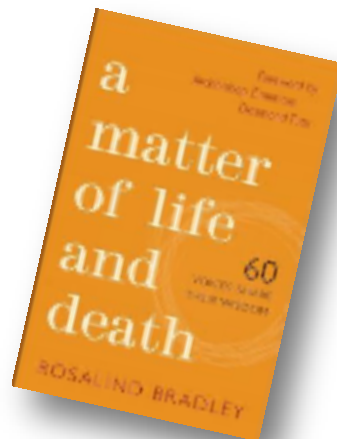


In Australia's remote north-eastern Arnhem Land, Christmas is a time to remember those who have died, to evoke ancestral spirits (birrimbirr) and to renew and revitalise relationships among the living.

Yolngu Christmas (Yolngu is the local clan) is celebrated with a set of sculptures which are then exhibited in Darwin, several hundreds of kilometres west. This draws from a wide range of Christmas traditions, as Yolngu have a special liking for drawing from other traditions than their own. Yolngu also believe that while it is fair to include a broad range of Christmas celebrations – the Ancestral, Jesus Christ and even Santa Claus – they have the conviction that non-indigenous audiences can greatly benefit from their Yolngu culture.



Swedenborg Association of Australia
Friday 7:45pm, 23rd February 2018
at the New Church, 4 Shirley Road, Roseville
\$5 members, \$7 non-members/concession



Presented by author Rosalind Bradley

Ros talks about her latest book for which she collected 60 amazing stories from a fascinating range of people from all walks of life. Sharing their unique insights and wisdom about death and dying using a chosen image or passage which best expresses death for them, they reveal that beyond the heartache and mystery of death lay invaluable lessons on how we live our lives.

About Rosalind

After life in the UK, Ros had an eclectic career from teaching in remote Papua New Guinea to freelance marketing in Sydney. She worked for charities including The Fred Hollows Foundation, was Board Member of The Asylum Seekers Centre of NSW, and Eremos, a forum for exploring Australian spirituality. Her interfaith interest was triggered while in London during the 2005 bombings, resulting in her book **Mosaic: Favourite prayers and reflections**. Her mother's death sparked a curiosity into death leading her to compile **A Matter of Life and Death**. A volunteer biographer at Sacred Heart Hospice in Sydney, Ros also worked with Palliative Care NSW and their Volunteer Program.

More SAA events info at www.swedenborg.com.au

MANNA



Manna was the food of the Israelites during almost all of their 40 year journey through the wilderness. It sustained them as they went. It was given to them by God as the result of their complaint that they had left the fleshpots of Egypt and come into this wilderness where they would no doubt perish.

The word ‘manna’ is a question, “What is it?” They couldn’t understand what it was but they could see that it was small, round, like frost, like white coriander seed, and with a taste like wafers made with honey.

They collected it each morning when it appeared on the ground and were told to collect only what the family needed, and nobody had too much or too little. They were warned not to leave it uneaten until the next morning and when they did, it bred worms and stank. They were also told to collect twice as much the day before the Sabbath.

Daily sustaining food. We can all relate to that, both physically and spiritually. Manna is “our daily bread” which enables us to keep going and not give in to whatever hardships we are facing. We are like the Jews, we can’t really explain what this daily food is but we know that it is given to us.

It is food from God. So it could be our faith that the Lord is always there with us leading us on, or it might be our finding help in some familiar words of the Bible, or just our hope and trust that things do generally turn out right. And we are meant to use this, but only take what we need.

I’ve read enough fantasy novels, fairy tales and mythology to have seen that this provision during a journey or an undertaking or a quest is always there in some way or other. Or as the Bible calls it at another difficult moment, Jehovah Jireh “The Lord will Provide.”

THE PILLARS OF NEW CHURCH BELIEFS



With it being Christmas and the Lord's birth we're going to look at **GOD AND JESUS**.

When Jesus went off by himself and prayed, he prayed to his Father, to God. That seems to suggest two people, Jesus praying, and God. When Jesus spoke about 'My Father has given me everything that I have given to you' that again suggests two, Jesus, and God.

But Jesus himself was God. At the beginning of the Christmas story, when Gabriel came to Mary and told her she would bear a son, Mary understandably said, "How can this be, as I do not know a man?" And Gabriel said that this child would be conceived in her by the Holy Spirit. In other words, there would be no natural father.

Jesus was definitely a man, a human being. That was absolutely necessary so that he was like us. However, we are not God and we have two parents. Jesus had one, Mary, and at the deepest level possible, the other was God.

There were times when Jesus did not feel that he was God but merely a man. And there were times when Jesus felt and knew that he was not just a man but God. And he moved between these two realizations. When you read the gospel you find both of them coming to the fore. Jesus said, "I and the Father are one" and he also said, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Jesus had to be without a sense of being God most of the time so that he fought against evil using his own humanity and not supernatural powers. Jesus had to have a sense of actually being God some of the time so that he understood what was at stake – the salvation of all people – and that this was all with him.

Of course this is deep theology and hard for us, but important get right.

THE SUN IN HEAVEN



Welcome to summer and the sun! One of the things our church says is that there is the sun in heaven like there is the sun in this world, but the one in heaven is the Lord God and the one here is a ball of fire.

But there are quite a few similarities. Here are several things about the sun that we have which are also true of the sun in heaven and the Lord.

1. The sun gives out heat and light. God gives out love and wisdom.
2. The sun radiates out in every possible direction. So does God.
3. We can't see the sun itself; we can only see its rays. We can't know the Divine itself (God), we can only know what comes from God, or revelation.
4. Each of us receives from where we are a life-giving amount of sun. Each of us receives God's truth to the extent that we can cope with it and use it.
5. Sunlight brings out the glory of colours in the colours. God brings out the best qualities in each of us so that we feel blessed by God.

...you might be able to think of some more.

FINAL FABLE

There was once a boy who loved banging a drum all day long. People began to complain and some suggested that he should be told he must only play it once a day. Others suggested telling him that only sacred teachers are entitled to play the sacred drum. Others decided that he should either be smacked or go without any treats.

They went to speak to the wise man in the village and explained their problem. "Why," the wise man said, "there is no problem. Give him a hammer and some nails and tell him to find out what is there in his drum that makes such a big and beautiful sound."