

"All religion has relation to life and the life of religion is to do good".

Swedenborg

# The New Church In Victoria Newsletter

December 2018 / January 2019

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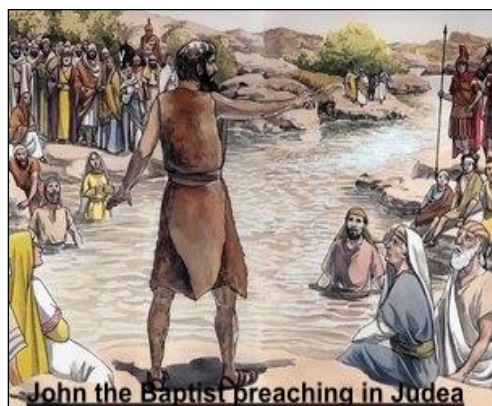
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## *Preparing for Christmas*

The Advent & Christmas stories are about pretty ordinary people: Jesus had a very typical family background, perhaps centred around Joseph's livelihood as a craftsman; while Mary's relative, Elizabeth, was married to Zacharias, a pretty 'run-of-the-mill' Jewish priest engaged in routine tasks at the temple.

The social and spiritual climate of the time was pretty grim, with the Jewish church at its low, and the nation under the thumb of Rome. It was a dark time, but the prophets had intimated the change that was to come: "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light".

But Luke's gospel tells us of a few who were ready and waiting for a new dawn, when prophesy would begin to be fulfilled. There were Elizabeth and Zacharias, Mary and Joseph. There were shepherds near Bethlehem, and later there would be fishermen and a tax collector - quite ordinary, unpretentious people, all going about their affairs in a quiet, humble manner.



John the Baptist preaching in Judea

And there was John the Baptist, a strange, monk-like character, whose birth and ministry preceded those of Jesus by a short head. Mathew's gospel (3: 1 to 17) describes a special role for John the Baptist ~ "The voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him'".

What does 'preparing the way' really mean? Well, John the Baptist comes over as a very straightforward person; perhaps we can picture him in the desert in his clothes of camel's hair. We are told in our Church teachings that John the Baptist represents the most outward, straight-forward, way of understanding the Word (*Secrets of Heaven* paragraph 5247<sup>7</sup> and 5620<sup>12</sup>),

I believe we can 'prepare the way' by letting the Christmas message reach us through all sorts of simple means: through a carol concert . . . children's nativity plays . . . cards & presents . . . charity collections in shopping centres. What beauty there can be in these straightforward illustrations of the Christmas message of peace and goodwill!

Let us consciously stop, look & listen for the simple messages in all the symbols of Christmas ~ not just in the bible stories, although these may be the richest form through which the Lord can reach us. But we can also look at our cards, and bring those who sent them into our affections. We can listen to the children's voices of innocence and trust as they sing their carols. In other words we can seek out the good and the truth during these weeks of preparation, and we can let the Lord reach our hearts and our minds through all these means.

So the way is prepared, and John the Baptist can fade out of our seasonal thinking, just as he himself prophesied ~ "I" he said: "I baptise you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire".

May you richly enjoy this Christmas season. May you act as a channel for the Lord's spirit of goodwill to spread out to those around you. May you enjoy the simplicity of the Christmas message, and may the Lord move your heart and your mind with the true spirit of Christmas.

**Rev John Presland**, a British New Church Minister now living and working in the higher life.

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## A Christmas Reading Program

Below are suggested sections covering prophecies for the coming of the Messiah and the birth of the Lord in The Word for daily reading and reflecting upon in the lead up to the celebration of Christmas Day.

Saturday Dec. 1	Genesis 3: 1 – 15	Friday Dec. 14	Isaiah 61: 1 – 3
Sunday Dec. 2	Genesis 22: 15 – 19	Saturday Dec. 15	Daniel 7: 9 – 14
Monday Dec. 3	Genesis 49: 1 & 2; 8 – 12	Sunday Dec. 16	Micah 5: 2 – 5
Tuesday Dec. 4	Numbers 24: 15 – 19	Monday Dec. 17	Malachi 3: 1 - 5
Wednesday Dec. 5	2 Samuel 7: 8 – 17	Tuesday Dec. 18	Luke 1: 5 - 25
Thursday Dec. 6	Isaiah 7: 10 – 17	Wednesday Dec. 19	Luke 1: 26 - 38
Friday Dec. 7	Isaiah 8: 11 – 18	Thursday Dec. 20	Luke 1: 39 - 45
Saturday Dec. 8	Isaiah 9: 2 – 7	Friday Dec. 21	Luke 1: 46 - 58
Sunday Dec. 9	Isaiah 11: 1 - 10	Saturday Dec. 22	Matthew 1: 18 - 25
Monday Dec. 10	Isaiah 35: 1 - 10	Sunday Dec. 23	Matthew 2: 8 - 20
Tuesday Dec. 11	Isaiah 40: 1 – 11	Monday Dec. 24	Matthew 2: 1 - 12
Wednesday Dec. 12	Isaiah 42: 1 – 9	Tuesday Dec. 25	John 1: 1 – 14
Thursday Dec. 13	Isaiah 53: 1 - 6		



***The Virgin Birth*** has been a significant problem for Christians and non-Christians alike over the centuries. Despite the Angel Gabriel having told Mary (Luke 1:37) that "Nothing is impossible with God", human beings seem to so easily dismiss this or at least remain really skeptical.

Emanuel Swedenborg, in *Secrets of Heaven*, paragraph 1414, tells us:

*Although he (Jesus) was conceived by Jehovah, he was otherwise like any other person. He was born to a woman, a virgin, and by birth to her he acquired weaknesses like those of any ordinary person . . . There are two heredities that we acquire by birth, one from our father and the other from our mother. The Lord's heredity from his Father was divinity, but his heredity from his mother was human frailty . . . The Lord's humanity also became divine. In him alone, everything belonging to his body corresponded to something divine . . . So he is the complete and perfect human, and the only human.*

The reading of the early part of Luke's Gospel is a beautiful experience when it is read with a simple willingness to believe in what is expressed in the text providing great enrichment as Christmas draws near.

## *The New Church in Victoria and the Future*

Members of the congregational were invited to stay on after the morning service on Sunday 18 November to hear and contribute to a report from the Board on matters related to the future of the Church in Victoria. With the Mt. Waverley property having been sold, everything is now on track for the final settlement on 21 March 2019. A Finance Subcommittee has been appointed with the particular brief to recommend the investment of funds received. A firm of Accountants will need to be appointed to assume responsibility for processing transactions and dealing with government instrumentalities.

It is planned to hold a special final service and gathering in our current building on Sunday 3 March 2019 providing two weeks for the clearance of furniture and equipment before we have to vacate.

A temporary home has been secured for the time after leaving High Street Road. It is



at a community centre (Wadham House, 52 Wadham Street) in Mt. Waverley just five minutes drive away from our present location. The building is two-story and we will use two adjacent rooms on the ground floor for services and children's activities and upstairs meeting room on other occasions e.g. Board meetings. The rooms are

air-conditioned and heated. There is also a well-appointed kitchen on the ground floor adjacent to the main meeting room and twelve allocated parking spots and plenty of parking nearby on Sundays.



Ground Floor Main Room  
Holds 35 comfortably conference style

The matter of what objects and items of furniture to retain for future use has exercised the minds of Board members for quite some time too. The Board is fully aware of the attachment congregation members have for some furniture pieces but at the same time is conscious of the fact that future permanent premises would most likely be in a modern setting not suitable for much of the currently owned items. A listing showing the items which the Board considered should be retained and those which it felt could be earmarked for disposal was provided to everyone at the meeting for thoughts. Discussion took place on particular although no alterations to the Board's recommendations were proposed. Further input regarding the furniture is welcome over the next two months by contacting the Church Secretary (see details on front page).

Future spiritual leadership has been on the Board's agenda for some considerable time although the need to wait until funds for the engagement of a leader has been a constraint. The pursuit of a more proactive approach has been undertaken in more recent times, confidentiality having to be a priority at present.

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## **Christmas 2018 Arrangements**

Please note the following:

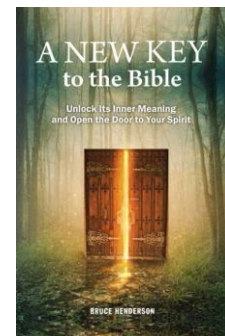
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|---------------------|--|
| Sunday 2 December   | This will be a <b>Christmas Family and Toy Service</b> .<br>All new and secondhand toys which congregation members may wish to bring will be received at the beginning of the service and afterwards given to a charity for distribution to the disadvantaged. |
| Sunday 16 December  | A traditional <b>Lessons and Carols Service</b> with members of the congregation being invited to read the lessons.  |
| Tuesday 25 December | The <b>Christmas Morning Service</b> will commence at 9.30 am.   |



## ***A NEW KEY to the Bible*** by **Bruce Henderson**

Paperback or e-book, 168 pages

Another new publication from the Swedenborg Foundation



The teachings of The New Church, found in the spiritual writings of Emanuel Swedenborg, have so much to offer the world especially at a time when secularism has taken over the thinking of so many; even the term 'God' is prohibited from use in some Christian schools! Today, the Bible remains the most culturally influential book in the world's history; the Judeo-Christian scriptures exist by far in more translations, editions, and printings than any other text. There are also comparatively more interpretive theories in play about the Bible than there are for all other sacred text traditions - taking the Bible literally, figuratively or with a grain of salt, since it was written so long ago and the stories themselves often confusing and contradictory.

Certainly some early biblical scholars up to the time of the Renaissance and Reformation took an allegorical approach to scripture interpretation. However, by the time Swedenborg began to publish an exposition of the Bible using the divine science of correspondences (see *Sacred Scripture* paragraph 38) as revealed to him, the "inner sense tradition" had largely disappeared. In his major works such as *Secrets of Heaven (Arcana Coelestia)* and *Revelation Unveiled (Apocalypse Revealed)*, presents a bold revealing about the contents of the Bible which had not occurred before, nor since. In essence, these works show that sacred scripture is divinely designed with inner meanings within the literal words and sentences. Far from being a text tied to the historically bound thoughts of its authors, or fixed to the plain meaning of its literal sense, or limited by the ideas and spirituality of the creative contemporary reader, every verse of scripture provides knowledge and information about God's self and intimate relationship with humanity, about the spiritual history of humanity, and about the reader's personal soul journey.

Over the past 250 years since Swedenborg published his biblical exegesis, many useful books, pamphlets and articles have been issued by The New Church and Swedenborg organisations to explain this deeper meaning within the Bible text. These have usually provided a straightforward and certainly more succinct presentation than the original works. Now we have another offering which takes the approach of guiding the reader through Swedenborg's interpretation of the Bible.

Following useful introductory material, author Bruce Henderson provides a thought-provoking, yet digestible way to understand the familiar stories of the Creation, Adam and Eve, Noah's Ark, Abraham and Sarah, Moses, the life of Jesus, and the apocalyptic imagery of Revelation, all in 125 pages. In each chapter, Bruce Henderson shows how these Scripture stories written thousands of years ago reflect in a modern context our own spiritual paths and give meaning to the challenges we face along our journey in the present day ~ hence the sub-title to the book being *Unlock its Inner Meaning and Open the Door to Your Spirit*.

For readers new to Swedenborg, *A New Key to the Bible* serves as an overview of the thousands of pages Swedenborg wrote about the inner meaning of the Bible. For spiritual seekers who feel a connection to the Bible but are sometimes troubled by its contents, Swedenborg reassures with a transcendent level of understanding about how God wants to inspire us through sacred text. Yet it is a good read for those quite familiar with Swedenborg's use of correspondences to unlock the true meaning underlying the literal text as a reminder of a remarkable revelation by the Lord.

The name Bruce Henderson may be familiar to New Church readers, the author having authored two well-appreciated books: *Window to Eternity* and *Why Does God Let It Happen?*

*Note: A copy of the book is in the Lending Library at 426 High Street Road, Mt. Waverley. Should you wish to borrow it, please do take it and record your details in the register, or phone Neville Jarvis who will mail it to you. Speak to Neville if you wish to buy your own copy - \$15.*

## News of People

Regrettably two operations involving a carpal tunnel have prevented Sandra Misson from coming along to Sunday worship for a good number of weeks. Sandra spent time with her son and then her daughter to be well looked after while somewhat incapacitated. Thankfully things are well on the mend and Sandra expects to be back at Church in the very near future.

Margaret Parker is currently in hospital again following a further outbreak of ulcers on her legs. Mercifully it is not as severe as earlier in the year and the specialist is arranging treatment before a spell in rehab.

On a brighter note, congratulations to Rose & Karl Robinson who became proud great grandparents again on 19 November with the birth of Ella Grace Wallace, their second great granddaughter and fourth great grandchild.

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## Diary of Events in December 2018 / January 2019

Activities at Mt. Waverley unless otherwise stated

<b>December 2018</b>	
Sunday 2 10.30am	<b>Christmas Family and Toy Service</b> led by Neville Jarvis There will be <b>Bible story time</b> and related activities for the children
Sunday 9	No service <b>Ballarat</b> – 318 Fussell Street. Devotional worship led by Judy Robinson commencing 3pm
Sunday 16 10.30am	<b>Service of Lessons and Carols</b> led by Karl Robinson and Neville Jarvis with congregational participation
Sunday 23	No service
<b>Tuesday 25 9.30am</b>	<b>Christmas Morning Service</b> led by Karl Robinson
<b>January 2019</b>	
<b>There will be no services at Mt. Waverley or Ballarat during the month</b>	

### ADVANCE NOTICE – FEBRUARY 2019

Sunday 3 10.30am	<b>Family service</b> led by <b>Neville Jarvis</b> There will be <b>Bible story time</b> and related activities for the children
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### Duty Roster – Mt. Waverley

<i>December 2018:</i>	Sunday 2	Karl & Rose Robinson
	Sunday 16	Norma Whelan / John Cook
	Tuesday 25	Marika Sivak

<i>February 2019:</i>	Sunday 3	Elke & Klaus Drevermann
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Note: If you are unavailable on the Sunday allocated, please contact a member of the Duty Roster to swap.