



# **ROSEVILLE NEW CHURCH NEWSLETTER**

**DECEMBER 2019  
JANUARY 2020**

## Directory

Society Minister

Rev. Howard Thompson

### Officers

Secretary

Graham Hall

Treasurer

Joel Duckworth

Church Officer

Debra Barratt Thompson

### Sunday School

Sunday School is held at the same time as the 10 am service each Sunday (children meet in the church to begin with).

### Sunday Social Hour

After every service we have tea and coffee in the hall and the opportunity to meet socially, sometimes more formally.

### The Angel Service

The Angel Service is an informal service that invites participants to reflect on the active role the spiritual world plays in our physical lives. The service involves reflection, discussion, sometimes a brief talk and always concludes with prayer. It is held by the participants as an invitation to healing.

The Angel Service is held each month on the 2nd and 4th Saturdays at 5 p.m.

Different **classes on New Church teachings** are held midweek. These are generally held fortnightly, but vary. Consult the coloured calendar insert inside the Newsletter.

**The Swedenborg Centre** can be visited at 4 Shirley Road, Roseville NSW 2069. You are welcome to drop in and look around. The Centre is generously supported by the Sydney Society of the New Church and provides an independent and relaxing place to meet and discuss a personal approach to finding spiritual meaning. The Centre has a wide range of study materials, Swedenborg's works, and books by supporting authors. The Centre and its director Joe Vandermeer can be reached on phone (02) 9416 2812 or email [info@swedenborg.com.au](mailto:info@swedenborg.com.au) Opening hours are Monday to Friday 9.30am to 4.30pm. More events details at [www.swedenborg.com.au](http://www.swedenborg.com.au) The Centre can also be used to answer enquiries about the New Church, its literature and its teachings.

# Roseville New Church Newsletter

Issued by the Sydney Society of the New Church Established in 1875  
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On Facebook – Roseville New Church

## December 2019/January 2020

The Faith of the New Church is summarised 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.

\* \* \* \* \*

### “Our Part”



Human history, at least for the last several thousand years, has seen many, many Churches come and go. The general idea found in Swedenborg's Writings is that each of these Churches have some right essentials of Divine Truth. But, Swedenborg notes, each of these Churches also tend to falsify the truth, to twist its understanding of truth until it becomes falsity.

Swedenborg addresses this very topic in *True Christianity* (753):

A church comes to an end when there is no divine truth left in it that has not been either falsified or rejected; and where there is no genuine truth, there can be no genuine goodness either, since every quality of goodness is shaped

by truths. Goodness is the essence of truth; truth is the form of goodness. What has no form can have no quality. Goodness and truth are no more separable than the will and the intellect, or (to say the same thing in another way) than a feeling that relates to some love and the thinking that goes with that feeling. Therefore when the truth in a church comes to an end, the goodness in that church also comes to an end; and when this happens, that church itself draws to a close and comes to an end.

Several examples of this come to mind. First, the Lord was speaking to the issue of the leaders of the Jewish Church who made their own laws more important than the laws of God when He said:

“What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are careful to tithe even the tiniest income from your herb gardens, but you ignore the more important aspects of the law—justice, mercy, and faith. You should tithe, yes, but do not neglect the more important things. Blind guides! You strain your water so you won’t accidentally swallow a gnat, but you swallow a camel!” (Matthew 23:23-24)

Often it is noted that the Church to rise in response to a fallen Church’s falsities can be such an extreme reaction as to be a falsity itself. I think we see this in the fall of the Catholic Church, around the time of the rise of the Lutheran Church. The Catholic Church, with its “heaven is for sale at the right price” approach to salvation, had grossly perverted the Lord’s teaching on both salvation and worldly love. In response the Lutheran Church rose on the belief that a person could do nothing towards their own salvation, from which came the spiritually-



destructive belief that all one needs do is declare one's faith in the Lord and you will be saved. No repentance, no change of heart, no change in our outer life, just declare it and you are good.

Well, several hundred years after the rise of the Lutheran Church we have the rise of the New Church with the Second Coming (1757). With the rise of the New Church we have a clearer understanding of the important role of the "as of self," that salvation is about cooperating with the Lord in His efforts to lead us to heaven and to a union with Him. We understand now that the only way the Lord can change our hearts is for us to genuinely seek change within our own lives. It has always struck me that both positions; that I can buy my way in with good deeds and I can do nothing that contributes to my own salvation both missed the point of this cooperation and missed the point of a true union with the Lord.

It is the idea of "Our Part" that this year's Christmas Readings focus on. This year's Christmas readings are gathered around a theme titled, "Our Part". It's a theme which acknowledges the role that each one of us plays in our eternal destiny. The Lord our God is the Saviour of all, but He can't prepare us for heaven without our cooperation. He has given us hearts that can love, minds that can think wisely and creatively, and bodies that can do many useful things. His hope and even expectation is that we will take these gifts and use them to orient ourselves toward Him and toward others around us. He wants us to consider the role we can best play in any given situation, and then pour our energy in that direction.

If you are receiving a physical copy of this Newsletter you should find enclosed a copy of these readings. I do hope that you find each daily reading to further unpack the Christmas Story in a way that allows the Lord to once again be born in your heart in a powerful and transformative way.

May the Lord fill you and your loved ones with joy and peace this coming season.

Rev. Howard A. Thompson

### **News from the Swedenborg Centre and the Swedenborg Association**

Here follows a list of activities and news for the Swedenborg Centre that covers the end of November, all December and all of January. More details about the events below can be found on the website at [www.swedenborg.com.au](http://www.swedenborg.com.au)

On **Saturday, December 7th, at 7pm** there will be a talk at the Roseville New Church in Roseville by psychologist Roshanak Vadhani. The topic and flier will be posted on the SAA website at [www.swedenborg.com.au](http://www.swedenborg.com.au) as soon as the details become available.

The last Open Discussion Tuesday for this year will be held at the Centre on **Tuesday, 10th of December at 2pm and 6pm**. Come and join us for an end of year chat.

On **Saturday, 14th December** a brand-new SAA event is being launched called "Swedenborg Saturdays". From **10am until noon** we'll have the doors open at the Swedenborg Centre for anyone who wishes to come and celebrate and share their appreciation for Swedenborg and his writings over plenty of free coffee and biscuits. Bring your ideas, questions, observations, or something to read with us. These monthly Saturday morning SAA gatherings will take place on the second Saturday of each month, except in January. The website contains further info and fliers.



## HOLIDAY HOURS

The Centre will be **CLOSED from Saturday 21st December** for Christmas and New Year and until the end of the Family Retreat in South Australia. We **OPEN again on Wednesday, 15th January 2020**. If you are interested in attending the retreat, see further details at <http://newchurch.net.au/nunyara-new-church-retreat-2020>

On behalf of the staff of the Swedenborg Centre and the directors of the SAA we wish all our visitors, friends and supporters a very happy and meaningful holiday, and we look forward to seeing you again for exciting activities starting in February 2020.

Joe



## Quirinius

“And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius (Quirinius) was governor of Syria...”



The Census of Quirinius was a census of Judea taken by Publius Sulpicius Quirinius, Roman governor of Syria, upon the imposition of direct Roman rule in Judea in 6 AD. The Gospel of Luke uses the census as the narrative means to establish the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. Publius Sulpicius Quirinius was

historically a Roman aristocrat. Born: 45 BC, in Lanuvium, Italy. Died in 21 AD.

Let's start out boldly. This Quirinius was a historical person who actually lived. He organised the census which features at the heart of the Christmas birth story in Luke's gospel, bringing Joseph and Mary from Nazareth to Bethlehem and the birth there of Jesus, God incarnate. I might wonder if Quirinius ever knew anything about his part in the Christmas story and I can only reflect about God bringing about a count-up of everybody and 'getting' Quirinius to organise this.

I guess every Christmas, if you go to a church service, you hear the name Quirinius being mentioned and we don't give it – or him – much thought. The only thing I would like to do is to emphasise that he actually lived and that he's not some fabrication shoved into the Christmas story. I'll come back to this in a moment.

We rightly believe that the Bible text has deeper meaning throughout everything that it says and that this deeper



meaning is really to do with our spiritual practice and our regeneration. If we pushed that point too far we could begin to say that the actual history of the Bible doesn't really matter because it's what the text says that helps us. Push that even further and we could begin to conclude that Jesus never lived or he's an ingenious made-up character used to give us ideas about perfect living. Some people go that far. I don't.

There are several places in the gospels where actual historical figures are talked about. Herod, Pontius Pilate and of course Caesar Augustus. Why? But let's first look at a very historical few verses from Luke chapter 3 verses 1 and 2:

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness.

Well, it is not very easy reading nor is it that interesting to us but what it is is a particularly historical outline of how things were – a kind of “Who's Who” – at roughly the start of Jesus' ministry. Why bother putting it all in? Does everything in these two verses have some deeper and personal spiritual meaning? I can only say it must. I have always felt that the inclusion of real history alongside the story of Jesus in the gospels is deliberate.

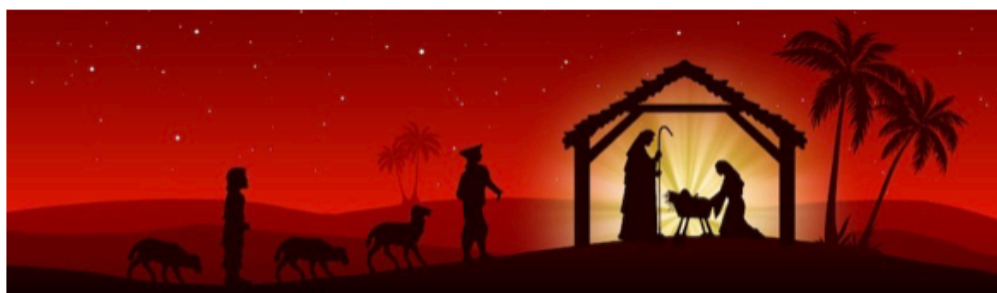
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Including real history is done to keep bringing out that Jesus too is real, is historical and his life here was always on that basis. We are not dealing with a legend or myth; we're dealing with divine activity for the sake of our souls. And let's add too that our spiritual life (good, truth, love, thought, intention etc) has got to 'sit' on something solid which is the life we live and the choices we make. We are not being spiritual musing in an armchair!

Listen out for Quirinius at Christmas and by the way his Roman name means "interior rule", "spearman".

Julian Duckworth

## **ROSEVILLE CHRISTMAS SERVICES**



### **2019 SCHEDULE**

**Sunday December 1<sup>st</sup>** - Rev. Todd Beiswenger  
Guest Minister - Holy Supper

**Sunday December 8<sup>th</sup>** - LEGO Nativity Story  
Church Christmas Party after  
Salvation Army Gift Collection

**Sunday December 15<sup>th</sup>** - 3rd Sunday in Advent

**Sunday December 22<sup>nd</sup>** - Lessons and Carols

**Wednesday December 25<sup>th</sup>** - Christmas Day

**Sunday December 29<sup>th</sup>** - New Year Service



## **SALVATION ARMY GIFT APPEAL**

For Christians fortunate enough to live in much of the western world we are living through a time of unprecedented material wealth. Thanks in no small part to the Christmas onslaught of advertising on television, buses, billboards, trains and online we can sometimes forget that not everyone living in the western world enjoys the same good fortune. I am thankful for the good work of the Salvation Army who, among their many other good works throughout the year, do their level best to make certain that all children experience the magic of gift giving and receiving at this time of year. As in years past we will be accepting donations of new, unwrapped toys and gifts for children at our December 9<sup>th</sup> service. The following week the donated gifts will be delivered to the Salvation Army where they will be provided for children who might not otherwise receive a Christmas present.

It may seem a small, insignificant and material gesture, but for the children who receive them these gifts often bring great joy. Receiving gifts as a child also lays the foundation for an understanding of the importance of giving to others later in life.

Rev. Howard A. Thompson



## No Tableaux But “LEGEAUX”



Over the years we have endeavoured to bring the Christmas Story alive by dedicating one service each Christmas season to simply telling of the story. In many years this “telling” has been accompanied by live actors, adults, children and (in some very large productions) even animals. Sometimes these types of services are referred to as tableaux services. A tableaux being a group of models or motionless figures representing a scene or multiple scenes from a story.

Having taught religion to 4th grade students (nine-year-olds) I realised that one of the best ways to engage them in Bible stories was to tell the story with LEGO figures. To engage them even further I often had them recreate the stories themselves using LEGO figures. A dear friend, Kathy, from our years of Service in Colchester even coined the term “LEGeaux” to describe this.

Join us **Sunday December 9th at 10:00am for the Roseville New Church 2019 Christmas LEGeaux.** And, join us afterwards for our annual Christmas party in the Social Hall.



## **A Reflection for the New Year** **On Thought, Rationality and Freedom**

Over the course of 8 Sundays in October and November the Roseville New Church took an in-depth look at the days of creation. Yes, I know, there are seven days and 8 Sundays over those two months. We took a one Sunday break between days four and five. I won't recount the entire series for you here but I did want to share with you a New Year Reflection based on one key concept from Day Two.

We are told that Day Two, distinguishing the waters above from the waters below, represents our developing awareness that there is a distinction between our inner self and our outer self, between what is the Lord's and what is our's and between what is really important and what isn't very important at all.

In his work *Secrets of Heaven* (8), Swedenborg goes on to say that "rarely [does this happen] without trouble, misfortune, and grief." Further in *Secrets of Heaven* (847), when treating of the subject of temptations, Swedenborg notes that a sign that a person is undergoing temptations is their experience of "distress and anxiety over things that conflict with what we love."

"Conflict with what we love." Meditate on that idea.

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There seems to be this underlying theme in spiritual growth that our spiritual journey is one of, not so much constant temptation but of constant challenging. Our spiritual progress, you see, is propelled forward by a constant and ongoing process of testing both our beliefs against what is true (from the Lord) and our beliefs against who we are being. In the end the Lord wishes each of us would have an inner-self aligned with Him and an outer-self aligned with our inner-self.

And here is where my Reflection for the new Year comes into play. It strikes me that there is a very powerful force at play that is, today, threatening to derail each of us and to do so entirely unwittingly. That force is what I am calling the “social media algorithm” or SMA.

But first, a few words on how the Lord leads us. It is a uniquely human trait to have a capacity for disciplined thought and a certain latitude, or rationality and freedom, and these two abilities are in us as gifts from the Lord. Though, whatever we do from our freedom, whether we have thought it through rationally or not, seems to be ours as long as it is in accord with our reason. Since in our early stages of becoming truly human we are entirely self-centred, the Lord allows us to feel that this rationality is our own. Simply put, we nurture, care for and protect that which we feel is our own, more than we would something we do not feel a certain ownership for.

It is by means of these two abilities (freedom and rationality) that the Lord reforms and regenerates us; without them we could not be reformed and regenerated. Consequently the Lord leads us by means of things that really are our own — both the illusions of our senses and our cravings — but diverts us toward things that are true and good.

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So every single moment of regeneration carries us forward from evening to morning, just as it takes us from the outer self to the inner, or from earth to heaven. This is why the expanse spoken of in the Creation Story (the inner self) is now called heaven” (Secrets of Heaven 24).

In short, the Lord uses our own freedom to think what we wish and to understand it in our own way to lead us to truths that are in line with Divine Truth that we may freely come to desire to live these truths into our lives. This is an imperceptible leading the Lord does, all the while allowing us to believe that it is us who is progressing in our understanding of the true nature of our spiritual lives, of the Lord and of heaven.

Here, now, is where the introduction of the “social media algorithms” (SMA) comes into play. It strikes me that the Lord has created a perfect mechanism for disrupting our thinking, introducing us to truth that contradicts our current understanding and creating within us a sense that, not only have we “found” this truth on our own, but we desire to follow this truth from ourselves. However, today, we have another force at work seeking to lead us to greater knowledge (little-t truth) by appealing to our affections, all the while making us feel that we are progressing in knowledge and rationality (and doing so in freedom). This other force is the SMA. Whether you use Google to seek information about the your world, FaceBook to stay connected with your friends, YouTube to learn more about your favourite topics or one of many news-feed services to keep up with the events of the day, you are being led by unseen forces that are very much in contrast to the Lord’s leading.

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You see, the Lord leads you to believe things that often are in contrast to the things you would like to believe. SMAs, on the other hand, seek to feed you a never-ending stream of things you already believe, or are likely to believe, based on your often less than heavenly affections.

I conclude with a thought contrary to the premise of my own thoughts. Maybe, the operation of the SMAs themselves are in Divine Providence and, of course, this is the case as Divine Providence is in the smallest of details. But I suspect not and would invite you (the reader) to consider that a constant flow of information that is intended to get you to “buy” something, “click” something or “like” something is far from a heavenly leading and for more akin to a hellish leading.

I leave you with this passage from Divine Providence (296):

The basic reason evil people lead themselves deeper into evil is that they are making their way farther and farther into hellish communities, getting in deeper and deeper as they intend and do what is evil. This increases their pleasure in evil as well, and it takes possession of their thoughts to the point that nothing feels more gratifying. Furthermore, when we have made our way farther and deeper into hellish communities, we are wrapped up in chains, so to speak, though as long as we are living in this world, we do not feel them as chains. They feel like soft linen or slender threads of silk that we like because they caress us. After death, though, the softness of the chains turns hard, and the caresses start to chafe.

It strikes me that the goal of the social media algorithm is just this; “to take possession of [our] thoughts to the point that nothing feels more gratifying.”

## **Minister's Contact Information and Office Hours**

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