

An open book with text on its pages is the central focus. It is surrounded by festive decorations: large red leaves at the top, a gold star on the right page, and several pinecones at the bottom. The entire scene is framed by a green border.

Christmas Readings 2010

*From the Old Testament, the New Testament,
and the Writings of the New Church*

Walking With the Lord

An Introduction

This year's Christmas readings are gathered around a theme of "Walking with the Lord". This theme is expressed in the book of Micah, where we read: "He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8); also in the book of Isaiah: "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths." (Isaiah 2:3)

One of the things we see throughout the Christmas story is movement and forward progression—either figuratively or in actual fact. Zacharias and Elizabeth walked in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless; Mary went to see Elizabeth; Joseph and Mary went to be registered; the shepherds traveled to Bethlehem; and the wise men followed a star to worship the Savior.

All of these movements in the Christmas story (and more besides) picture our own walk with the Lord, as He gently leads us from one state of mind to the next, and from one stage in life to the next. Walking symbolically means living, and in this context it means "living from the Lord" (*Apocalypse Explained* 768); or more specifically, it means "acknowledging, obeying, acting, and living from Him and with Him" (*Apocalypse Explained* 864:1). In other words, the Lord sets out a "path of truth" before us, and He invites us to walk that path (*Arcana Coelestia* 519:2). In one sense, we could say that the very reason He came on earth was to show us this pathway and to invite us—and help us—to walk it with Him.

Where have *you* come from spiritually on this walk? In what way(s) has the Lord been present with you along the way? What states of heart and mind, and what stages of life has He led you through, to get you where you are today? And where does the Lord want to lead you from here? These are questions that are invited by the different movements in the Christmas story.

Each daily reading in this booklet features a part of the Christmas story, followed by readings from the Writings given for the New Church. Each doctrinal piece from these Writings touches on some aspect of our walk with the Lord. At the end of each reading a reflection is offered, along with a few questions or a simple task. There are 25 readings—one for each day of December up through Christmas day—plus one additional reading for the 26th, as a way of looking forward into the new year.

We hope you will enjoy these Christmas readings. May they support you on your walk with the Lord, and may you gain from them a sense of comfort, strength, and hope this Christmas season.

Merry Christmas, from the New Church.

“The People Who Walked In Darkness...”

December 1

The people who walked in darkness

Have seen a great light:

*Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death,
Upon them a light has shined. (Isaiah 9:2)*

The words of Scripture, “seeing a great light” stand for receiving and believing the truths of faith. It is over those who have faith that heavenly “light” is said “to shine out”. (*Arcana Coelestia* 3863)

Jesus said, “I am the light of the world: he who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12). In this scripture, the phrase, “I am the Light of the world” means that He is divine truth itself; “he who follows Me” means he who acknowledges His Divine and does His precepts; “shall not walk in darkness” means that he shall not be in falsities; “but shall have the light of life” means that he shall be in divine truths, which teach a person eternal life and lead him or her to heaven. By following the Lord is here meant to acknowledge His Divine and obey Him. (*Apocalypse Explained* 864:3)

It is written, “You have delivered my feet from stumbling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living” (Psalm 56:13). Here, “walking before God” is walking in the truth of faith, which is “the light of the living”. Similarly in Isaiah, “The people walking in darkness see a great light”. (*Arcana Coelestia* 519:2)

Those who are in a life according to knowledge of truth and good go forward and do not fail; but those who are as yet in knowledge alone, go forward as far as they can, but they do not yet have the light of life, from which is vigor. (*Apocalypse Explained* 103)

Yet a little while the light is with you; walk while you have the light. (John 12:35)

Teach me Your way, O LORD; I will walk in Your truth. (Psalm 86:11)

Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. (Genesis 1:3)

Reflection: We know how important light is in our lives. It is especially evident when the power goes out. Maybe you have experienced the inconvenience of living in darkness for a couple of days in such circumstances, and can recall the relief when the lights finally came back on. Imagine, now, the symbolic level of “walking in darkness” vs. “walking in the light”. Imagine not knowing anything about the Lord, life after death, or the commands of the Word. What are some of the “great lights” in your life—the very basic, foundational beliefs that are lights in your spiritual house? When you reflect on these beliefs, consider what life would be like if you didn’t have them.

“Walking Before God Blameless”

December 2

There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah. His wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. (Luke 1:5-17)

The words of Scripture, “a righteous and blameless person” mean one who can be endowed with charity. This is clear from the Word, as in Psalm 15 where it is written, “Who will sojourn in Your tent? Who will dwell on Your holy mountain? He who walks blameless, and does righteousness, and speaks truth in his heart.” A “blameless” person is one who speaks and does what is true from a spirit of charity. This is clear from the fact that so many times the words “walking” and also “upright”—words used in connection with truth—are applied to someone who is blameless, as in the following: “He who walks in the way of the blameless will serve Me” (Psalm 101:6). “Blessed are the blameless in the way, walking in the law of Jehovah” (Psalm 119:1). “Blamelessness and uprightness will protect me” (Psalm 25:21). “Mark the blameless man, and behold the upright, for the latter end of that person is peace” (Psalm 37:37). (*Arcana Coelestia* 612)

It is written, “If you walk in My statutes, and keep My commandments and do them, I will give peace in the land, so that you may lie down securely, and none shall make afraid” (Lev. 26:3,6). This describes the source of peace. Peace viewed in itself is not heaven and heavenly joy, but these things are within peace and from peace; for peace is like the dawn or like springtime in the world, which dispose human minds to receive in the heart delights and pleasures from the objects that appear before the eyes. And since a person has heaven from living according to the Lord’s commandments, therefore it is said, “If you walk in My statutes, and keep My commandments, and do them, I will give peace in the land.” (*Apocalypse Explained* 365:14)

Reflection: Today’s reading from Scripture sets a context in which the Christmas story unfolds. Herod is king in Judea. He symbolize the more selfish and greedy parts of us that we need to be on guard against in our walk with the Lord. But Zacharias and Elizabeth are there too. They represent a good part in us, gifted to us by the Lord. It’s a part of us that wants to walk close beside Him—it wants to walk in all His commandments blameless. This part of the story is a promise that love and good will can be born in our hearts, and that we can be blessed, protected, and at peace in the Lord. What is one effort that you have you made over the years to “walk in the commandments of the Lord blameless”? What fruit has this borne in your life? What is one way that you can walk blameless today?

“Do Not Be Afraid...”

December 3

Then an angel of the Lord appeared to Zacharias, standing on the right side of the altar of incense. The angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth.” (Luke 1:15-17)

“Fear” is of two kinds—fear in what is not sacred, and fear in what is sacred. Fear in what is sacred is the fear in which are the good. This fear is called reverential fear, and it is the result of a person’s wonder at and longing for what is divine; also the result of his or her love. The fear that belongs to love is a fear of injuring the Lord in any way, or of injuring the neighbor in any way, thus of injuring what is good and true in any way, and consequently of injuring the sacred things of love and faith and the consequent worship. (*Arcana Coelestia* 3718)

In many places in the Word the expression “to fear Jehovah God” is used, by which worship is meant. Therefore, it shall be explained in a few words what kind of worship is meant by fearing God. All worship of Jehovah God must be from the good of love by means of truths. Worship from the good of love alone is not worship. Worship which is from truths alone without the good of love is also not worship. Both are necessary. For the essential of worship is the good of love, but good exists and is formed by means of truths, and therefore all worship must be by means of truths from good. Because this is so, therefore in many passages in the Word, where it is said “to fear Jehovah God,” it is also said “to keep” and “do His words and commandments”. It is consequently evident that so far as a person is in the good of love there is the fear of God; and that in proportion as dread and terror pass away, and become a holy fear attended with reverence, so far a person is in the good of love and in truths therefrom, that is, so far there is good in his truths. (*Apocalypse Explained* 696:6)

The Lord leads all who will follow Him to heaven by means of fear of God and by means of affections for good and truth. (*Apocalypse Explained* 1189:4)

Reflection: There are many sources of fear and many things we can be afraid of. Some of these things can be fairly earthly, temporal, or even self-centered in nature; and at times our fear for these things can run our lives. As part of our walk with the Lord, we are encouraged to rise above this kind of fear into a more useful kind—fear of doing injury to others, or to the Lord Himself, or to the things of His Word. What is one form of injury that you genuinely fear doing to one of your loved ones, or to the Lord? What steps can you take to act on that healthy, spiritual fear this Christmas season?

“How Shall I Know This?”

December 4

And Zacharias said to the angel, “How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years.” And the angel answered and said to him, “I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and was sent to speak to you and bring you these glad tidings. But behold, you will be mute and not able to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their own time.” Now after those days his wife Elizabeth conceived... (Luke 1:15-17)

One teaching given for the New Church talks about doubt that people can experience as to whether they will be able to possess good that flows from charity, that is, whether they will be able to think and act from that good. Nevertheless they perform the good works of charity, not to merit anything by doing so, but from a sense of obedience. There is interiorly present with them an affection for good by means of which the Lord leads them to do those things. Within that good the angels are present with them. (*Arcana Coelestia* 2425:2)

In the Word it is here and there said of angels and of the people of the church that “they stand before God,” also that “they walk before Him.” In the spiritual sense “to stand before God” means *life* from Him, and “to walk before God” means to live according to *life* from Him. For all the life of heaven and the world proceeds from the Lord. (*Apocalypse Explained* 639:2)

Conceptions and births in the Word mean spiritual conceptions and births, which are receptions of truth from good. These occur when a person is born anew. (*Arcana Coelestia* 3919, 3856)

There are two essentials of the Church—goodness and truth. In the Word, “opening the womb” means the ability to receive the truths and goods of the Church. (*Arcana Coelestia* 4918)

Reflection: Look at the back-and-forth messaging in the scripture for today: “How shall I know this?”... “I am Gabriel!”... “You did not believe”... “Elizabeth conceived”. It’s the same kind of vacillation we can experience in our own walk with the Lord. Sometimes we doubt the Lord’s presence and power in our lives. At other times we feel strength and clarity of vision, as we experience the next spiritual stage in our lives. What has this year been like for you in terms of this vacillation? What are one or two of the high points you’ve experienced in your walk with the Lord? What are one or two of the low points? How have these things helped you become a better you?

“The Virgin’s Name Was Mary”

December 5

Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. And having come in, the angel said to her, “Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!” Then the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name JESUS. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.” (Luke 1:26-33)

When the word “name” is used in the Word it means “the nature of,” that is, what a person’s nature is. And since “names” means “the nature of,” a name includes everything in its entirety within that person. (Arcana Coelestia 2009)

The virgin of whom the Lord was born symbolizes the church as to the affection for truth. A genuine affection for truth consists in willing and desiring to know the real truths of faith, with a view to putting them to good use, and for the sake of the life one should lead. (God the Savior 37, Arcana Coelestia 8993:3-4)

The Lord leads a person’s understanding so that he or she may be affected with truth, and so that he immediately hears it and is gladdened, and it is implanted in his life. By this means the person is led by the Lord. (Spiritual Diary 5796)

The spiritual person, while being regenerated, first learns matters of doctrine concerning truth; next he or she is stirred by an affection for them; after that, he is stirred by an affection for the truths which they hold within them; and at length he desires to live according to them. Thus while undergoing regeneration, the spiritual person advances from the doctrine of truth towards the good of life. (Arcana Coelestia 3332:2)

Reflection: Mary’s name is one that is central to the Christmas story. There are a number of things we know about Mary and her name. Mary’s name means “exalted of God”. Mary herself was “highly favored,” “blessed,” and she was one who would conceive and bring forth a Son. On a personal level, she symbolizes a longing that we feel to know the real truth about things in our spiritual lives and in our walk with the Lord. She is that part of us that willingly accepts the Lord’s messages when we hear them, and puts them to use in our lives. What is one true thing that you discovered over the past year? What did you do with that truth once you found it? How did it impact your life for good? What is one truth that you currently wish to know? How will you discover that truth?

“With God Nothing Will Be Impossible”

December 6

Then Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I do not know a man?” And the angel answered and said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God. Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible.” (Luke 1:26-33)

The question arises, “What is the first principle of faith in the Lord?” The answer is, “The acknowledgment that He is the Son of God.” This is faith in its origin. (*True Christian Religion* 342)

When the Lord was on earth He healed people, and He often did so according to their faith. The reason is that the first and primary thing of the church then to be established was to believe that the Lord is God Almighty and that He has power to heal and save. Without that faith no church can be established within an individual. This faith constitutes the beginning of the life from God with a person. (*Apocalypse Explained* 815:3, *Arcana Coelestia* 10083:6)

So far as a person believes the Lord to be a mere human being and not at the same time God, the Lord cannot be present with divine power, for faith makes the Lord to be present in a person according to the way he or she perceives Him. (*Apocalypse Explained* 815:7-8)

While the Lord was on earth, He inquired of those with whom He did miracles whether they had faith, and He said that it was done according to their faith. He did this in order that it might be acknowledged that He was the Son of God, and that He had power over all things, and thus that He was God descending out of heaven. This is the first and primary thing in the conjunction of God with a person. (*Concerning the Athanasian Creed* 64)

Reflection: The message of the angel to Mary was one of strength: The One who was to be born would be the Son of God. With Him, nothing would be impossible. These two beliefs—that the Lord is God, and that He has the power to heal and save—are the foundation of our walk with the Lord. They are the beginning of life from God, and they allow the Lord’s divine power to impact our lives for good. Consider the statement: “The Lord is with me.” What impact would it have if you remembered it every day? What about the phrase, “With God nothing is impossible”? In what ways could that belief help in trying times? What part of your life could these two beliefs support and bolster?

“Let It Be to Me According to Your Word”

December 7

Then Mary said, “Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her. (Luke 1:38)

I have talked much with angels about innocence, and have been told that innocence is the being of all good, and that good is therefore so far good as it has innocence in it, consequently that wisdom is so far wisdom as it partakes of innocence. The same is true of love, charity, and faith. Innocence is a willingness to be led by the Lord. (*Heaven and Hell* 281)

No union or conjunction between two persons is possible unless each in turn approaches the other. All conjunction has its source in the reciprocal approach of one to another, each then willing in oneness with the other. From this comes homogeneity and sympathy, also unanimity and concord, in every particular of each. (*True Christian Religion* 99:3)

The varying states in the other life are according to the perception of good and truth with those who are there, thus according to their perception of the Lord’s presence. According to this perception they have tranquility; for they who are in the perception of the Lord’s presence are in the perception that each and all things which befall them tend to their good, and that evils do not reach them; hence they are in tranquility. Without such faith or confidence in the Lord no one can possibly come into the tranquility of peace, thus neither to the bliss in joy, because this bliss dwells in the tranquility of peace. (*Arcana Coelestia* 5963)

Jesus said, “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” (John 14:27)

Reflection: Our scripture today is one of the greatest statements of calm assurance in all of the Lord’s Word. Mary’s life and will were fully aligned with God’s life and will for her. She was willing to be led by God. She trusted His leadership in her life, she was confident that things would turn out well, and she was at peace. How do you think a willingness—and even a will—to be led by the Lord could translate into a sense of trust and confidence in Him, also into a sense of peace in your spiritual walk? What is one time in your life when you “willed” to be led by the Lord, and what good resulted from it? What is one important part of your life in which you could exercise such a will in the coming year?

“Blessed Are You Among Women”

December 8

Now Mary arose in those days and went into the hill country with haste, to a city of Judah, and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfillment of those things which were told her from the Lord.” (Luke 1:39-45)

Those who lead a good life, and who believe that the Lord governs the universe, and that He alone is the source of everything good and true, trust solely in the Lord and have no anxious cares about anything else. They are quite sure that all things work for their good, blessedness, and happiness forever. (*Arcana Caelestia* 2892)

In the spiritual world, if people think about others and want to talk with them, they are immediately present. This is taken for granted there and never fails. The reason is that there is no distance in the spiritual world the way there is in this physical world, but only an appearance of distance. Then too, just as thinking about others, together with some awareness of them, causes presence, so a feeling of love for them causes union. This is what makes people accompany each other and converse amiably along the way, live in the same houses or in the same community, meet with each other often, and work on tasks together. (*Divine Providence* 326)

The essence of love is that what is ours should belong to someone else. Feeling the joy of someone else as joy within ourselves--that is loving. Feeling our joy in others, though, and not theirs in ourselves, is not loving. That is loving ourselves, while the former is loving our neighbor. (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 47)

Reflection: One of the things we enjoy on our spiritual walk is the different people who the Lord places in our lives—people we love and care about; people we think about, talk with, and work with; people we share our joys, our sorrows, and our spiritual journey with. All of these things bring goodness to our lives and to theirs. Who are one or two people who have influenced your life for good over the past year? What is one way that you can return that kindness to them, or be of similar use in someone else’s life?

“He Has Done Great Things for Me”

December 9

And Mary said:

“My soul magnifies the Lord,

And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.

For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant. . . .

He who is mighty has done great things for me. . . .

He has shown strength with His arm;

He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

He has put down the mighty from their thrones,

And exalted the lowly.

He has filled the hungry with good things. . . .” (Luke 1:46-55)

The essential element in all adoration and all worship is humility. Without humility there can be no worship or adoration of the Lord, because what is divine and the Lord's cannot flow into a proud heart, that is, into a heart full of self-love, for such a heart is hard and in the Word is called 'a heart of stone'. It can flow only into a humble heart, since this is soft and in the Word is called 'a heart of flesh', and so is receptive of good flowing in from the Lord, that is, receptive of the inflow of the Lord. (*Arcana Caelestia* 9377)

In heaven people who know, acknowledge, and believe from the heart—that is, from affection—that they have no power from themselves, but that all the power they have is from the Lord, are said to be the least, and yet they are the greatest, because they have power from the Lord. (*Arcana Caelestia* 4459)

The words of Scripture, “God blessed” means the Lord’s presence and grace. This is clear from the meaning of “blessing”. In the external sense of the Word “blessing” means being enriched with all earthly and bodily good. But in the internal sense “blessing” means being enriched with all spiritual and celestial good, a blessing which neither does nor can possibly exist unless it comes from the Lord. The Lord’s presence and grace carry such blessing within them. (*Arcana Caelestia* 981:1)

Reflection: Mary’s life had been blessed by the Lord in a number of ways, and she humbly gave testimony to that fact. What are one or two ways in which the Lord has blessed your life in the past year? What are one or two challenges that He’s helped you meet, or that He is currently helping you overcome? What are one or two good things that He has placed (or that He is placing) in your life instead? If your heart and soul could speak, what would they say to Him for these things?

“The Hand of the Lord Was With Him”

December 10

Now Elizabeth’s full time came for her to be delivered, and she brought forth a son. So it was, on the eighth day, that they came to circumcise the child. His mother said, “He shall be called John.” And his father asked for a writing tablet, and wrote, saying, “His name is John.” So they all marveled. And all those who heard these sayings kept them in their hearts, saying, “What kind of child will this be?” And the hand of the Lord was with him. (Luke 1:57-66)

In the Word, “to give birth” means acknowledgment in faith and action. (*Arcana Caelestia* 4919)

In the Word, “to bring forth” means to make truths fruitful by doing them, from which comes reformation. (*Arcana Caelestia* 3856, 3919, *Apocalypse Explained* 721:16-17)

In the Word, “going out of the womb” means being born again or being regenerated, that is, becoming the Church. (*Arcana Caelestia* 4918)

The words of Scripture, “a son eight days old” mean any beginning whatever toward purification; and “the eighth day” means that spiritual purification ought to go on all the time, and so always, as from a new beginning. (*Arcana Caelestia* 2044)

If, at recurring seasons, there is actual repentance—as often, for instance, as a person prepares for the Communion of the Holy Supper—and if afterwards, he or she abstains from one or another sin which he then discovers in himself, this is sufficient to initiate him into the actuality of repentance; and when he is in this actuality, he is on the way to heaven. For he then, from being natural, begins to become spiritual, and to be born anew from the Lord. (*True Christian Religion* 530)

Reflection: Our scripture today is about new beginnings that we make in our lives; also about the wonder, amazement, and power that we can experience as part of each new beginning. Any time we acknowledge the Lord “in faith and action,” or any time we “make truths fruitful by doing them,” we can be spiritually renewed, revitalized, and transformed. One small part of our lives becomes re-shaped and re-formed; we take the next step forward in “becoming the Church;” and we “begin to become spiritual” and to be “born anew”. Over the past year, what is one time when you experienced a significant new beginning in your life? When you did, was there any of that amazed sense of “what kind of child will this be,” or was there a sense that “the hand of the Lord” was with you? If so, in what way(s) were these things true? What is one such new beginning that you can make today, or this Christmas season, in your spiritual walk with the Lord?

“He Has Raised Up a Horn of Salvation”

December 11

Now Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying:

“Blessed is the Lord God of Israel,

For He has visited and redeemed His people,

And has raised up a horn of salvation for us

That we should be saved from our enemies

And from the hand of all who hate us,

To grant us that we,

Being delivered from the hand of our enemies,

Might serve Him without fear...all the days of our life.” (Luke 1:67-79)

Every religious person thinks about heaven and wants to go there.

Heaven, though, is granted only to people who know the path to it and follow that path. We can know the path to heaven to some extent simply by considering what the people who make up heaven are like, realizing that no one can become an angel or get to heaven unless we arrive bringing along some angelic quality from the world. Inherent in that angelic quality is a knowing of the path from having walked it, and a walking in the path from having known it. (*Divine Providence* 60)

Those who by repentance have removed some evils which are sins, reach the position of believing in the Lord and loving the neighbor. The Lord keeps them determined to abstain from further sinning. (*True Christian Religion* 523)

Present within all worship there is holy fear. Holy fear is not so much a fear of hell and of damnation, as a fear lest anything whatever be done or thought that is contrary to the Lord and contrary to the neighbor. And since it is not a fear of hell and damnation, it exists with those who abide in the good of faith, less so with those who abide in the good of love, that is, who abide in the Lord. (*Arcana Coelestia* 2826:13)

Reflection: One of the great realizations we can have about the Lord is that by His coming on earth, and by His life on earth, He reopened the pathway to salvation for us. He also gave to us the ability to walk that pathway by shunning what is sinful and loving our neighbor instead. What principle of life or quality of interacting with others do you know, from having lived it, is part of the path to heaven? What is one way that you have been striving to stop doing something wrong, as a part of your walk with the Lord? What is one thing you'd like to address in the coming year?

“...Being a Just Man”

December 12

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. (Matthew 1:18-23)

The Lord was a carpenter’s son, was because “a worker in wood” means the good of life from the doctrine of truth. (*Concerning the Athanasian Creed* 99)

The Lord’s presence with a person is in good, and therefore in what is just and equitable, and further in what is honorable and becoming, for these are the planes in a person on which conscience is founded by the Lord, and consequently intelligence and wisdom. (*Arcana Coelestia* 2915)

Heavenly love consists in loving what is good, honest, and just, because it is good, honest and just, and in doing this from that love. (*Heaven and Hell* 481:1)

The good of love is heavenly, and thence mild and patient. (*Apocalypse Explained* 427:9)

Rational good is mild and gentle, patient and yielding; for its character is that of love and mercy. It is safe of itself. (*Arcana Coelestia* 1950:2)

The laws of heaven are eternal truths, every one of which is based on the incomparable law that people are to love the Lord supremely and the neighbor as themselves. Indeed if they wish to be as the angels, they must now go beyond that and love the neighbor more than themselves. In the next life all goods increase without limit, whereas life in the body is such that they cannot progress beyond the point of loving their neighbor as themselves, because they are engrossed in bodily interests. Once the latter have been removed however, love becomes purer, and at length angelic. And this is loving the neighbor more than themselves. (*Arcana Coelestia* 548:1-2)

Reflection: Joseph wasn’t the father of the Lord, but he did play an important part in His birth. Joseph’s actions reveal a good man: he appeared to be honest and just; he conducted himself in honorable and becoming ways; he showed himself to be mild, gentle, and patient—not prone to rash outbursts or reactive behavior. These things formed a context in which he could love Mary, and put her needs before his own. What is one area in your life in which you’ve tried to be like Joseph—honest and just, honorable and becoming, gentle, patient, and kind? In what way has this effort helped make it possible for you to love your spouse, family members, or others around you?

“He Will Save His People”

December 13

But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins.” (Matthew 1:18-23)

To believe in the Lord is to have confidence that He will save, and as no one can have this confidence except one who lives rightly, therefore this also is meant by believing in Him. (*Doctrine of Faith 36*)

By faith in the Lord is meant confidence that He will save, and they have this confidence who immediately approach Him and shun evils as sins. (*Apocalypse Revealed 949:2*)

All who are in heavenly love have confidence that they will be saved by the Lord; for they believe that the Lord came into the world in order to give eternal life to those who believe and live according to the commandments which He taught; and that He regenerates these, and so makes them fit for heaven; and that He does this Himself alone, from pure mercy, without the aid of a person. This is meant by “believing in the Lord”. (*Arcana Caelestia 9244*)

No love can ever become pure in human beings, nor in angels. So neither can conjugal love (i.e., married love). But because the Lord primarily regards the intention that is in the will, therefore to the extent that a person has the intention and perseveres in it, to that extent he or she is introduced into the purity and holiness of this love, and gradually makes progress in it. (*Conjugal Love 71:1-2*)

Reflection: The visit of the angel to Joseph served to restore his confidence that all was well, and that in fact amazing things were happening. Sometimes we doubt or question the actions of others, even those who are close to us. Sometimes we may even wonder what the Lord is up to—why things are the way they are. There can be tremendous relief when our relationships are shown to be strong—when people’s goodness (what we love about them) comes to the fore. It’s the same in our relationship with the Lord: the more we learn about Him, the more we can feel our confidence in Him rise. We have to do our part though. Confidence comes when we look for the good in others, or when we open ourselves up to the Lord’s goodness. In what way(s) could your confidence in your relationships, and also your confidence in the Lord, be enhanced this Christmas season? What part do you have to play in receiving that confidence?

“Then Joseph Did As the Angel Commanded Him”

December 14

Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name JESUS. (Matthew 1:24-25)

All that have lived a good life in the world and have acted from conscience, who are such as have acknowledged the Divine and have loved divine truths, especially such as have applied those truths to life, seem to themselves, when let into the state of their interiors, like one aroused from sleep into full wakefulness, or like one passing from darkness into light. They then think from the light of heaven, thus from an interior wisdom, and they act from good, thus from an interior affection. Heaven flows into their thoughts and affections with an interior blessedness and delight that they had had no knowledge of before; for they have communication with the angels of heaven. Thus, too, they withdraw from external sanctity and come into that internal sanctity in which worship itself truly consists. Such is the state of those that have lived a Christian life in accordance with the commandments in the Word. (*Heaven and Hell* 506)

For the external person to be brought into true order it must become subordinate to the internal; and it is subordinate when it obeys. To the extent that this happens, the external person too is wise. This is what is meant when it is said that a person becomes a new creature. (*Arcana Caelestia* 9708)

A spirit of obedience is the genuine good of faith and charity. In fact we all receive heaven and its joy in the measure of our affection for truth and good, and in the measure of our obedience. (*Arcana Caelestia* 7161:1, *Apocalypse Explained* 695:8)

Reflection: Wakefulness, or being active, alert, and on task, is something that is highly valued and sought after in our culture and world today. The readings for today talk about “spiritual wakefulness,” which seems to be connected with happiness, peace, and joy in life. How do we—like Joseph—achieve spiritual wakefulness in our walk with the Lord? One answer is to strive to be more consciously aware of living as the Lord teaches—by tapping into a genuine desire for truth and goodness in life, and then by doing what the Lord advises and commands in His Word. This is one sure way to become more spiritually awake, and to become more closely connected with angels and the Lord. What is one thing that you love, long for, and truly believe the Lord wants for you in your life; and what would it mean to subordinate yourself to that belief? How can you do that today?

“Joseph Also Went Up With Mary”

December 15

And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. So all went to be registered, every-one to his own city. Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child. So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. And she brought forth her first-born Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. (Luke 2:1-7)

Whenever “traveling,” “sojourning,” and “passing from place to place” occur in the Word, nothing else is suggested to the angels than changes of state as exist with them. (*Arcana Caelestia* 1463)

When the life of charity and faith is breathed into a person by the Lord, he or she is made alive. He becomes spiritual and celestial, and is called a “new creature” from having been created anew. (*Arcana Caelestia* 780)

When a person is being regenerated, he or she is then becoming altogether another, and is being made new; therefore also, when he has been regenerated, he is called “born again,” and “created anew”. Then, although he or she has a similar face and a similar speech, yet his mind is not similar; his mind, when he is regenerate, is open toward heaven, and there dwells therein love to the Lord and charity toward his neighbor, together with faith. It is the mind that makes a person another, and a new person. (*Arcana Caelestia* 3212)

Just as we receive from the Lord a new life, so we receive the human form and, at length, a very beautiful angelic form, which is the likeness of the Lord. Hence it is that a regenerated person is a new creature. (*Spiritual Diary* 4837)

Reflection: Joseph’s and Mary’s travel to Bethlehem clearly marked a new stage in their lives. So with us, the Lord leads us through new states of mind and new stages of life, all with the goal of causing us to be “created anew” or “born again.” He breathes these things into us, and when He does, He refashions us into completely new beings. What has been your experience of being made into a new person—a new creature? Can you remember a moment or two in your life when the Lord helped you “get out of yourself” in such a way that you felt a genuine and spontaneous love for others around you? What was that like, and what would your life be like if every moment was like that? What is the next step you can take along your spiritual path toward that goal?

“A Multitude of the Heavenly Host”

December 16

Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them. Then the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!” (Luke 2:8-14)

Heaven consists of tens of thousands of angelic communities, and yet the Lord leads them as one complete angel or person. This is so because mutual love springing from the Lord’s love exists among them all, and when that love exists among them all, and within them all, they can all be arranged into the heavenly form. (*Arcana Coelestia* 9613)

A person as to his spirit is within communities in the spiritual world, and to them he is attached as it were with extended cords, which determine the space where he can walk. Through these communities a person’s mind, although bound, walks free. But he is led by the Lord, and he takes no step into which and from which the Lord does not lead. (*Apocalypse Explained* 1174:2)

When spirits have been prepared for heaven, they are clothed with angelic garments, and they are brought to the way that leads upwards towards heaven; and they are received by angels and introduced into communities and into many blessings there. After this, each one is led by the Lord into his own community, which is also effected by various ways, sometimes by winding paths. The ways by which they are led are not known to any angel, but are known to the Lord alone. When they come to their own community then their interiors are opened; and as these are in conformity with the interiors of the angels who are in that community, they are immediately recognized and received with joy. (*Heaven and Hell* 519)

Reflection: Our readings today transport us from the world into heaven. We hear angels glorifying and praising God. We learn about how people there are led and guided by the Lord toward their eternal home. The Lord inspires feelings, thoughts, and a conscience for what is good. He leads people gradually upward, sometimes by winding pathways. In all of it, He knows exactly what He’s doing, and He guides people every step of the way. It’s not just in heaven though, for this is how He leads us in His providence all the time. Looking back over the past year, how has the Lord led you? What feelings, thoughts, and dictates of conscience have you experienced, as your spiritual path has meandered back

and forth? In what way(s) has it been an upward pathway; and what is one moment of joy that you've experienced along the way?

“Let Us Now Go to Bethlehem”

December 17

And so it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, “Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us.” And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. (Luke 2:15-20)

Life from the Lord flows only into a humble heart, because it is fitted to receive. (*Arcana Caelestia* 8873)

The Lord does not compel a person to receive what flows in from Himself, but rather, He leads in freedom; and so far as a person allows, He leads through freedom to good. (*Arcana Caelestia* 6472:2)

In the Scriptures, “Bethlehem” means the Word in respect to its spiritual sense. (*Apocalypse Explained* 700:9)

A person who is being regenerated is gradually led away from a more remote or morally correct life to life that comes closer to matters of doctrine that are divine, that is, closer to spiritual life. When he or she enters into this state he is then led by the Lord into a state more interior still, that is to say, into a state in which he thinks that deeper things lie within the Word which he does not as yet know. And when he reads the Word in this state he discovers that every one of the Lord's precepts contains within it things more heavenly still. (*Arcana Caelestia* 3690:4)

While a person is being regenerated, he or she has an affection for truth because he is intent on becoming intelligent, but once he has become regenerated he is intent on becoming wise; or what amounts to the same, in the former state he has an affection for truth out of concern for doctrine, but in the subsequent state out of concern for life. (*Arcana Caelestia* 6247)

Reflection: The visit of the shepherds is one of the central parts of the Christmas story—not just because of their enthusiastic response to the angelic message they received, but also because of what their visit depicts. The readings talk about “a humble heart,” a free response, and an affection for truth for the sake of living a good life. If we cultivate these things, we will “hear” from the Lord, by and by, what He wants us to do next in our spiritual lives. What do you believe the Lord is trying to make known to you, and how can you “go to Bethlehem”, or respond to that message, this Christmas?

“They Made Widely Known the Saying”

December 18

Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. And all those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart. Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them. (Luke 2:15-20)

The Lord from the divine love and thence from divine zeal calls together all who are in the spiritual affection for truth, and who think about heaven, to the New Church, and to union with Himself, and thus to eternal life. (*Apocalypse Revealed* 831)

In the Word, “rejoicing” means the salvation and consequent joy of those who become spiritual by the reception of divine truth. (*Apocalypse Explained* 751)

With a church that begins from the worship of the Lord, and from love towards Him, zeal to extend and perfect the church by means of the holy goods and truths of heaven prevails. (*Apocalypse Explained* 650:33)

Evangelization is annunciation about the Lord, His coming, and the things that are from Him which belong to salvation and eternal life. (*Arcana Caelestia* 9925:2)

Reflection: Our readings today emphasize the fact that the Lord wants each one of us to embody elements of love and faithfulness that are part of His New Church. These elements are not static, stationary, lethargic, or lazy. They are full of energy to extend themselves to others—to help people improve their spiritual lives, and to help make the world a better place. What is one way that you’ve experienced this in your walk with the Lord over the past year? What is one way that you’ve enjoyed sharing who you are and what you know with others, as a way of helping “extend and perfect” the Lord’s spiritual church on earth? What is one way you can continue to do this work in the coming year?

“My Eyes Have Seen Your Salvation”

December 19

Now when the days of her purification were completed, they brought Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord, and to offer a sacrifice. And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel. And when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said: “Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel.” (Luke 2:22-35)

Simeon of the Old Testament received his name from the phrase “Jehovah has heard”. In the Word, “hearing the Lord” stands for possessing faith in Him, obeying His commandments, and so possessing a will of faith, a will which is received from the Lord. People who possess faith that is part of the will receive life. (*Arcana Coelestia* 3869:1,4)

The Lord fashions a new will in people, and this exists as a will to act in accord with the truth they have absorbed from the teachings of their Church. And when they will and to that truth, it becomes good residing with them. (*Arcana Coelestia* 8521:2)

People are not in heaven until they have come into that state in which the Lord leads them by means of good. By good is meant the good of life; and the good of life consists in the performance of what is good because there is a will for what is good. (*Arcana Coelestia* 9832)

Teach me, O LORD, the way of Your statutes, and I shall keep it to the end. (Psalm 119:33)

Reflection: Simeon was just and devout, and we know that he symbolizes a “will of faith” in us, which is a will to put truth into action. It’s the beginning of genuine integrity in our lives and in our spiritual walk with the Lord. What has been your experience of a “will of faith” in your life—beginning, say, in your late teenage years? What are one or two parts of your life in which you’ve consciously exercised that will of faith or tried to be a person of integrity? How has this impacted your life for good? What is one part of your life in which you could re-double your effort to exercise a will of faith in the new year?

“A Sword Will Pierce...”

December 20

And Joseph and His mother marveled at those things which were spoken of Him. Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, “Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.” (Luke 2:22-35)

People uninformed about human regeneration suppose that a person can be regenerated without spiritual conflict, and some that he or she has been regenerated after he has undergone a single conflict. But let it be known that no one can be regenerated without spiritual conflict. The reason for this is that regeneration takes place to the end that the life of the old person may die, and a new, heavenly life may be instilled. From this one may recognize that conflict is altogether inevitable; for the life of the old person stands its ground and refuses to be snuffed out, and the life of the new person cannot enter except where the life of the old has been snuffed out. From this it is evident that fierce conflict takes place between mutually hostile sides, since each is fighting for its life. (*Arcana Caelestia* 8403)

Before a person can know what is true and be affected with what is good, there must be a removal of such things as hinder and resist their admission; thus the old person must die before the new person can be conceived. (*Arcana Caelestia* 18)

A person first starts to live when that which in the world he or she believes to constitute the whole of life perishes. What’s more, the life which he now receives, in comparison with the life he previously had, is beyond words and boundless. (*Arcana Caelestia* 3175:4)

Reflection: “Spiritual conflict.” “Temptation.” “Falling.” “Death.” Are these things part of our spiritual walk with the Lord? Of course they are. Do these things have to exist and be experienced by us? Of course they do. They are part of what spiritual choice and spiritual improvement are all about. The truth of today’s readings is that there are parts of our lives that must be removed and even “snuffed out” so that new and better things can take their place. What has been your experience of this over the past year? What is one spiritual conflict you’ve experienced, or one fall that you’ve taken, or one death (of something negative) that you’ve either experienced or are in the middle of experiencing? And how has this one thing helped make you a better person? How has it helped you on your walk with the Lord?

“She Gave Thanks to the Lord”

December 21

Now there was one, Anna, of the tribe of Asher, who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem. (Luke 2:36-38)

In the Word, “Asher” means blessedness, also the delight that belongs to the affections for truth and good. This delight corresponds to the happiness of eternal life. When anyone perceives this delight within him- or herself he is starting to become the Church. (*Arcana Caelestia* 3939:1)

True confession of the Lord from the heart is genuine confession. The person with whom it exists acknowledges that everything good comes from Him. When that acknowledgement exists with a person it is a state of humility, for in this case he or she acknowledges the Lord to be everything in him, and he himself in comparison to be nothing. (*Arcana Caelestia* 3880:7)

To redeem means to free from damnation, to reclaim from everlasting death, to snatch from hell, and to release the captives and those in bondage from the hands of the devil. The Lord performed this by conquering the hells and founding a new heaven. (*True Christian Religion* 118)

There is no nation in the whole world which cannot be saved, if it acknowledges God and lives a good life. For the Lord has redeemed all of these, and a person is by birth spiritual, a fact which gives him or her the ability to receive the gift of redemption. Those who receive the Lord, that is, who have faith in Him and do not lead wicked lives, are called “sons of God” and “born of God” (John 1:12-13). (*True Christian Religion* 729)

Reflection: Having faith in the Lord and refusing to do harm to others are two things that help us immensely in our spiritual walk. Our faith in the Lord is strengthened when we see that the Lord’s ways lead to blessings in our lives. They open us up to feelings of freedom and moments of genuine happiness and delight in our lives—just as Anna experienced these things in her life. What does faith in the Lord mean to you? How does that faith align itself with a refusal to do what is hurtful to others? In what ways have you experienced blessings from the Lord, that can cause you to give thanks to Him this Christmas season?

“We Have Seen His Star In the East”

December 22

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him.” (Matthew 2:1-10)

The words of Scripture, “to follow the Lord,” have a similar meaning as “to go after Him” or “to walk after Him”. “To go or walk after the Lord” means to acknowledge, to obey, and to act and live from Him and with Him. No one can follow the Lord from self, but only from the Lord Himself. For the Lord draws after Him the person who from freedom wills to follow, but He can draw no one who does not want to follow Him. For the Lord so operates with people that they may follow Him as if of themselves. In this way the Lord flows into their freedom; and this He does for the sake of the reception and implantation of truth and good with them and consequent reformation and regeneration. For unless it appeared to people that they followed the Lord as if of themselves, that is, acknowledged His Divine and did His commandments as if of themselves, there would be no appropriation and conjunction, and thus no reformation and regeneration. (*Apocalypse Explained* 864:1-2)

In the Word, “a star” means knowledge of internal goodness and truth which comes from the Lord. “Travels” mean further development of spiritual life. The life of heaven consists in being led by the Lord through good; and if a person is to attain that life, good must be implanted through truth. As long as this is being done a person is on the road to heaven. (*Arcana Coelestia* 9293:3, 8559)

Reflection: One of the things that’s striking about the wise men is their sense of purpose and mission, and their drive and determination to carry it out. They symbolize a God-given part of us that wants to do the very same thing—to worship the Lord in the way we live our lives. The Lord places this purpose deep within us, beginning when we are tiny infants, and then He works throughout our lifetimes to bring that purpose into reality. What is your experience of this purpose in your own life—the purpose of worshiping the Lord and becoming a good and wise person? What are one or two of the main ways you’ve tried to carry out this purpose in your life? What is one way you can carry it out today—just a few days before Christmas?

“Go and Search Carefully...”

December 23

Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found Him, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also.” (Matthew 2:1-10)

The Lord by His Divine Providence continually leads a person in freedom. It is like what happens to a person in the company of an enemy whose intention he is not aware of; and a friend leads him away by unknown paths and afterwards discloses to him his enemy's intention. (Divine Providence 211)

Conjunction of a person with the Lord is a reciprocal conjunction, that is, the Lord is in a person and a person in the Lord. And because it is reciprocal, it necessarily follows that a person ought to conjoin himself to the Lord, in order that the Lord may conjoin himself to the person. In order that such reciprocal conjunction may exist, there is granted to a person freedom of choice, giving him or her the ability to walk in the way to heaven or in the way to hell. From this freedom that is given to a person flows his ability to reciprocate, which enables him to conjoin himself with the Lord. (True Christian Religion 371)

Without free will a person cannot approach the Lord and acknowledge Him to be the Redeemer and Savior, and the God of heaven and earth, as He Himself teaches (Matt. 28:18). Without free will no one can believe, that is, from faith look to and worship Him, and apply himself to receive the means and benefits of salvation from Him, and from Him co-operate in their reception. Without free will no one can do anything that is good to the neighbor, exercise charity, and further, bring into his or her thought and will much that has relation to faith and charity, and give expression to this and carry it into effect. (True Christian Religion 615)

Reflection: Herod called the wise men secretly. His plot was subtle and deceptive. The same thing can happen to us. At times, hurtful thoughts and intentions toward others, or materialistic impulses or cravings, can subtly call to us—so subtly, in fact, that we may not even see or perceive anything wrong with them. Only the Lord can help us see their true nature. Only the Lord can give us the power to want, will, and choose something different for our lives. What is your experience of this kind of subtlety in evil, and what is one way that you guard against it in your spiritual walk with the Lord?

“When They Heard the King, They Departed...”

December 24

When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. (Matthew 2:1-10)

The life of heaven consists in being led by the Lord through good; and if a person is to attain that life, good must be implanted through truth. As long as this is being done a person is on the road to heaven, but is not as yet in heaven. In order that the truths of faith may be corroborated and also linked to good, a person is pitched into temptations, for these serve as the means by which goodness and truth are joined together. When therefore a person is governed by good, that is, by an affection for doing good for its own sake, and so for his neighbor's sake, he is raised into heaven, since the order of heaven governs him and he is being led by the Lord through good. (*Arcana Coelestia* 8559)

When evils are shunned because they are infernal, the Lord enters with truths and goods from heaven, and leads a person. Consequently, it follows that a person's love or affection can be reformed only by spiritually shunning and turning away from evils because they are infernal. From these things it is evident what it is to follow the Lord wherever He goes. (*Apocalypse Explained* 864:6)

Spirits suppose that they could have been led differently, and so become better than they are. I perceived, in spiritual idea, that they can never be led better than they are, and that all things tend to their ultimate end, which is that they may be parts in the Lord's kingdom. (*Spiritual Diary* 3114)

Reflection: Our readings today are a perfect follow-up to yesterday's readings: “when they heard the king, they departed”...end of story! What a powerful and profound way to conduct themselves in the face of Herod's evil plot! Each time we depart from something hurtful and sinful in life—because we know it is wrong and against God's will for our lives—the Lord is able to reach into our lives and lead us that much further along our spiritual path. What is your experience of saying “no” to a sin in your life and fully departing from it—even if for just a moment? Can you think of a time when you did this? What happened when you did—what effect(s) did it have on you? How can you do it one more time—today—the day before Christmas?

“They Fell Down and Worshiped Him”

December 25

And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. (Matthew 2:1-12)

When real humility is present in a person, he or she surrenders all power to think or do anything by himself and abandons himself completely to the Divine, and in this condition he draws near to the Divine. (*Arcana Caelestia* 6866)

Humility before a person produces a bowing down, according to the estimation of him or her; but in presence of the *Divine* it produces total prostration, especially when a person thinks that the Divine in respect to power and wisdom is everything, and that he or she in comparison is nothing. When a person is in this acknowledgment from the heart, he comes as it were out of himself, and thence falls on his face; and when he is thus out of himself, he is also removed from the self. When self is removed the Divine fills him and raises him up. (*Apocalypse Explained* 77)

The angel of the Lord said to Hagar, “Return yourself to your mistress and humble yourself beneath her hands” (Gen. 16:9). In the original language “humbling oneself” is expressed by means of a word which means to fling down. “Flinging oneself down” in the internal sense is compelling oneself to do good, to obey what the Lord has commanded, and to utter truths, that is, to submit oneself beneath the controlling power of divine good and truth. The secret lying within this is that in so doing a person has a heavenly self bestowed on him or her from the Lord. (*Arcana Caelestia* 1937:1,3,6)

In the Word, “gifts” mean the kinds of things that are offered to the Lord by people from the heart, and which are accepted by the Lord. (*Arcana Caelestia* 9293:1)

Reflection: The wise men reached the end of their journey. They fell down and worshiped the infant Lord, and they presented gifts to Him. Isn't this what our spiritual walk is (ultimately) all about? The more we achieve this goal—the more we “abandon ourselves” to the Lord, “prostrate” ourselves before Him, and “submit ourselves under the controlling power of His goodness and truth”—the more the Lord can raise us up and gift us with a heavenly self—a new self that shows genuine commitment and love to other people and to Him. This Christmas morning, take a moment to reflect on this goal as it has been present in your heart and mind throughout your life. Recommit yourself to following the Lord's star and reaching for that goal in the coming year. What is one way that you can do these things?

“The True Light”

December 26

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.

That was the true Light which gives light to everyone coming into the world. And as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:1-14)

Let us consider what the divine mercy is. The divine mercy is pure mercy towards the whole human race, to save it; and it is also unceasing towards every person, and it is never withdrawn from anyone; so that everyone is saved who can be saved. And yet no one can be saved except by divine means, which means the Lord reveals in the Word. The divine means are what are called divine truths, which teach how a person must live in order to be saved. By these truths the Lord leads a person to heaven, and by them He implants in a person the life of heaven. (*Heaven and Hell* 522)

All instruction regarding the truths and goods of faith and love, which compose the Church and constitute worship, is obtained from the Word; for the Word has the Lord present within it. (*Arcana Caelestia* 10548:2)

Reflection: Our readings today—the day after Christmas—are a reminder to us of what it is that creates the spiritual pathway in our lives, and what makes it possible for us to walk that pathway with the Lord. It is His Word. One of the great hopes that the Lord has for all of us on our spiritual journey, is that we would let His Word be the main guide-book for our lives. He wants us to trust the truth and goodness that are there, enough to put these things into practice in life. This is the way in which He can bring us to good conclusions along the pathway to salvation. What has been your recent experience of putting something from the Lord’s Word into practice in your life? What will be your experience of it in the coming year?



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