

A SONG FOR SWEDENBORG

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Miriam was a little girl in heaven. She had come to heaven a long time ago when she was just a baby, but an angel mother was taking care of her, and she was growing up nicely. Now she was even going to school with other children in heaven.

What little children in heaven do in school is a very long story which can't be told all at once, but one thing they do is sing in choirs. That means they sing together.

Miriam loved to sing. She sang to the flowers, and she sang to the clouds, and when she went to church she sang to the Lord. Miriam wanted to sing in school, too, but she was afraid to try. Since she was the youngest child in her class, she couldn't sing as well as the others. Miriam was always afraid of going off tune or singing a sour note. Of course the flowers didn't mind if she sang a bad note, and the clouds didn't mind. And certainly the Lord didn't mind, but when she was at school and the other children were singing, Miriam was always afraid of spoiling their songs. So, when the other children all sang, she would just open her mouth and move her lips and pretend to sing because she didn't want to make a bad noise.

One day the angel teacher said that a visitor from earth was coming to see the children.

"Let's sing him a song when he comes," cried the children.

"Yes, yes," said Miriam clapping her hands. But then she remembered that she would spoil the song if she sang.

The children quickly gathered around their angel teacher, and she began to teach them a new song for their visitor. But Miriam did not join the other children. She sat in a corner and began to cry. None of the children noticed that Miriam was not singing because she never sang anyhow. Even the teacher was too busy to notice Miriam. She was all alone.

"Why are you sad?" said a voice.

Miriam dried her eyes and looked up to see who had spoken. It was a kindly-looking man who wore a white wig. He had a book in his hand. "Are you the Lord?" asked Miriam.

"No," said the man. "The Lord is in the Sun. He asked me to visit you. But why aren't you singing with the other children?"

"I can't sing," said Miriam.

"I heard you singing to the flowers yesterday," said the man.

"I sing to the flowers because they don't mind a sour note," said Miriam. "But I don't know how to sing well enough yet to sing in school."

"How can you ever learn if you don't try?" asked the man.

"I don't know," said Miriam. "That's why I was crying. Our angel teacher says that today a special visitor is coming from earth. We are all going to sing him a song. I wish I could sing too."

"Why don't you sing with the others when he comes?" asked the man.

"I would spoil the song," said Miriam.

"Do you like to sing?" asked the man.

"It is my favorite thing to do," said Miriam. "But I'm afraid."

"You must not be afraid to do what you love to do," said the man. "The Lord will help you. I think your visitor will be disappointed, if you don't sing too. What is your name?"

"My name is Miriam" she said.

"I am going to read you a story," said the man. "It is about a woman whose name also was Miriam." He opened the book in his hand. Miriam saw that it was the Word. "Do you remember the Children of Israel?" asked the man. "When they were captive in the land of Egypt they were afraid to sing, too," he said. "But then the Lord freed them from Pharaoh and took them across the Red Sea." Then the man began to read:

And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took the timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances. And Miriam answered them: "Sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea!" (Exodus 15:20,21).

Then the man closed the book.

"Do you think the Lord will help me sing?" asked Miriam.

"If you love to sing, the Lord will make you a great singer, even like Miriam the prophetess," said the man. "But first you must practice with the others and not be afraid of bad notes. The Lord doesn't expect you to do any more than you are able to do."

"Do you think the visitor will mind?" asked Miriam.

"I'm sure he wants to hear you," said the man. "Now you must go practice."

Miriam ran over to the group and began to practice with the other children. Her voice was high and pure. Even when she sang a wrong note, it didn't sound very bad, and soon she would be in tune again. Miriam was as happy as a bird. It was fun to sing alone, but it was more fun to sing in a choir with the other children.

Just then the angel teacher ended the song. "I see our visitor is here," she said. The children all turned excitedly to see. Miriam looked behind her to see him too.

There stood the kindly man with the book. It was the same man that Miriam had been talking to.

"This is Emanuel Swedenborg," said the angel teacher. "He is a servant of the Lord."

Then Swedenborg spoke, "The Lord has let me visit you so I can tell all the children on earth what heaven is like and what the children do here. Your angel teacher tells me that you have a song to sing." Swedenborg looked directly at Miriam and said, "I want to hear every one of you."

The children then sang their song, but Miriam sang the hardest of all. Swedenborg thanked all the children and went away to visit other parts of heaven.

The other children soon forgot their kindly visitor, but Miriam remembered him. From then on she always sang with the other children. And soon she became the most beautiful singer in the school.

And perhaps Swedenborg remembered his visit too, for in the Heavenly Doctrine for the New Church he wrote about children that he heard singing together in heaven.

Several times when a number of children that were in a purely infantile state have been with me in choirs, they were heard as a tender unarranged mass, that is, as not yet acting as one, as they do later when they have become more mature (Heaven and Hell 343).