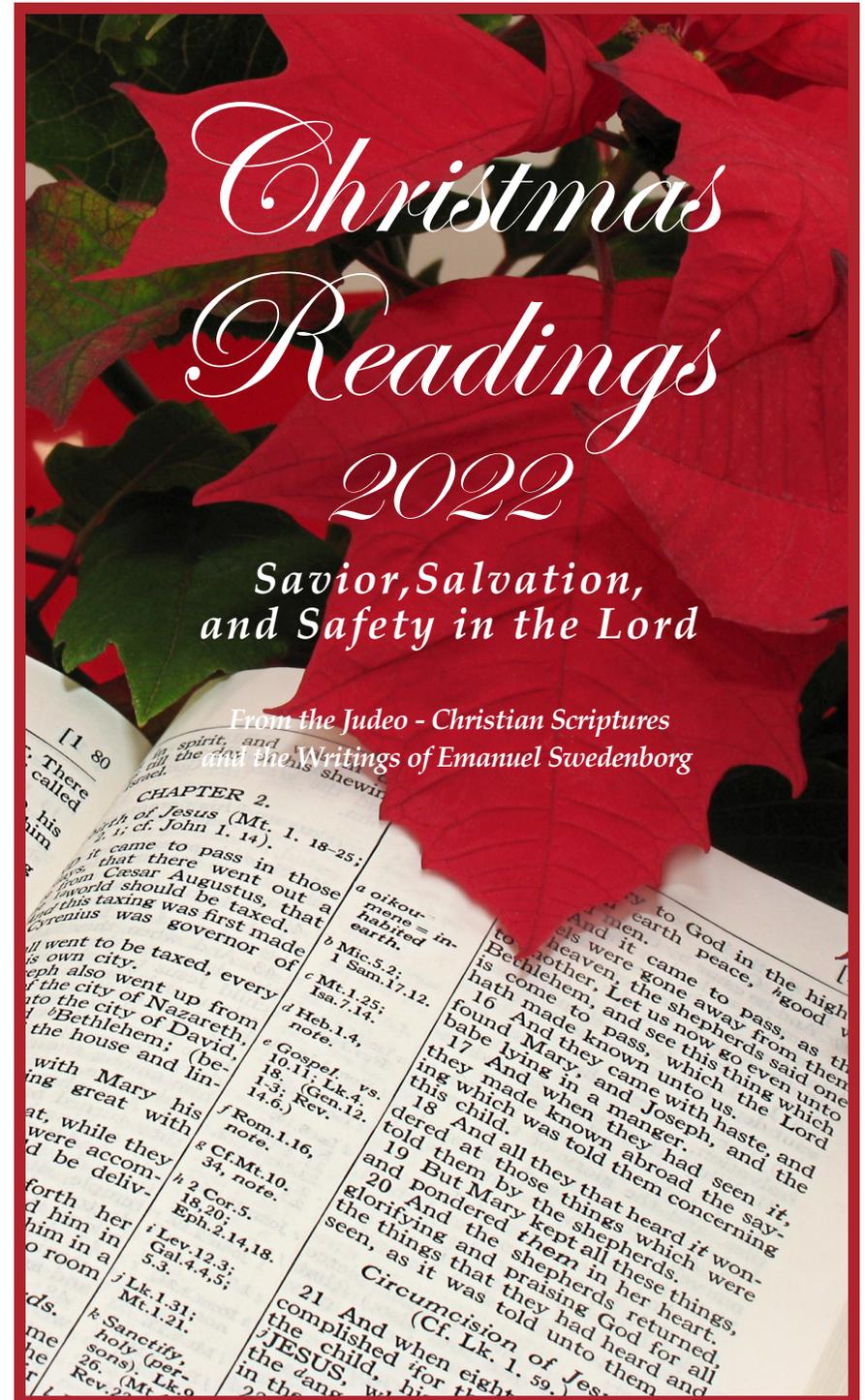




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*These readings are collected and formatted by
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*These Christmas readings are gathered around a different
theme each year. To receive the readings via daily e-mail, sign up at:*

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Reflection: Today's readings offer some insights into what the Lord accomplished during His lifetime on earth. Some of the things He accomplished include introducing us to the reality of spiritual life, guiding us along the pathway of regeneration, and welcoming us into the comfort, peace, and safety that He has to offer. The Lord is always working to unite us to Himself, and He hopes for our daily, living acceptance of truth and goodness from Him so that He may accomplish this. As this set of readings comes to an end, and as this Christmas season fades into your memory, what are one or two ways in which you can accept truth and goodness into your life in the coming year?

Notes:

The Word Made Flesh

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 humankind. 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, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but 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)

True faith is that Jehovah God is love itself and wisdom itself, or goodness itself and truth itself; and in respect to divine truth, which is the Word, that Jehovah came down and took on the Divine Humanity for the purpose of reducing to order all things that were in heaven, all things in hell, and all things in the church. (*True Christian Religion* 3.1)

Everyone may be spiritually reborn (or regenerated) and thus saved, because the Lord with His divine goodness and truth is present with everyone. This is the source of our life and our ability to understand and will, together with freedom of choice in spiritual matters. No one lacks these things. The avenues to them are also provided—for Christians in the Word, and for Gentiles in their religions, which teach that there is a God, and which furnish precepts regarding good and evil. (*True Christian Religion* 580.3)

The most all-embracing reality is that the Lord has united His humanity to the Divine itself, as a result of which people can dwell in peace and safety. It is also an all-embracing reality that people ought to be joined to the Lord, which is effected through regeneration bringing them that peace and safety. (*Secrets of Heaven* 10730.3)

Savior, Salvation, and Safety in the Lord

Introduction

Christmas is a time when we often focus on the Lord more than at other times of the year. Amidst all the preparations and festivities, we're invited to reflect on the powerful reality of the Lord's birth into our world. It is our hope that this set of Christmas readings will assist you in this process.

It is said that the Word of God holds within it countless truths of heaven and earth. Each time we read the Word, we can see something new in it. The "something new" this year is gathered around the theme of the Lord as Savior, also the process of salvation that He lays before us, and safety in Him. There are so many qualities that the Lord displays in His Word, and so many things that He does for us each day. Seen through this lens, all kinds of things jump out at us from our readings this year—ideas about the Lord Himself and how He leads us, things He calls us to consider and do in our lives, and ways in which He raises us up into new experiences of spiritual life.

Format: Each daily reading in this booklet features part of the Christmas story, followed by commentary from the 18th Century theologian, Emanuel Swedenborg. Each reading and commentary touch on some aspect of the Savior, salvation, or safety in the Lord. Underlining has been used in some of the scriptural quotations to help link them to the theological points. At the end of the readings for each day is a set of reflections together with some questions for consideration. Their purpose is to help tie the readings together and connect them to daily life. There are twenty-six readings in all, designed to carry you from December 1st through Christmas day, with one extra reading for the day after, looking forward into the new year. Our hope is that these readings, together with worship services and church events available throughout our world, will provide a sense of uplift and spiritual renewal in your life this Christmas season, as you continue on the pathway toward the Savior, salvation, and safety in the Lord.

Conviction, Trust, and Confidence

December 1

So Balaam took up his oracle and said:

"The utterance of Balaam the son of Beor...

I see Him, but not now;

I behold Him, but not near;

A Star shall come out of Jacob;

A Scepter shall rise out of Israel,

And batter the brow of Moab,

And destroy all the sons of tumult." (Numbers 24:15,17)

"A star" in Scripture symbolizes truth. The power of the Lord's divine truth is directed especially against falsities and evils, thus against hell. These things must be resisted by means of truths from the Word. What's more, by means of truths that we know, the Lord has power to save us. By means of them we are reformed and regenerated, or what is the same, taken out of hell and introduced into heaven. The Lord Himself assumed this power as to His divine humanity after He had fulfilled all things of His Word. (*Sacred Scripture* 49.1)

Then an angel from heaven said, "Our faith is, was, and forever will be, a faith in the Lord God the Savior, whose humanity is divine and whose Divine is Human. The truths of which our faith consists are like stars which, by their light, make that faith manifest and give it form. People acquire this faith from the Word of God by means of knowledge, thought, and belief; but the Lord causes it, in those who believe in Him, to become conviction, trust, and confidence. In this way faith becomes spiritual-natural, and by means of goodwill and good action it becomes living." (*True Christian Religion* 137.4)

on one part of your life, or one part of your spiritual work, that you have cared deeply about for a long time. Looking back, what are one or two of the earliest things you learned from parents or teachers that first inspired you in this part of your life? What is one thing that you learned later in life, directly from the Word of God, that helped you make progress? What are one or two insights you've had, or conclusions you've come to, along the way? And finally, what are one or two strides that you've made in this part of your life that have felt good, wholesome, and true? For all of that time, this has been the Lord's doing. It has been one of His regular Christmas gifts to you. Today, and on into the new year, continue forward in this part of your life with courage, conviction, and hope. In this way, and like the wise men, see if you can offer this part of your life back to the Lord as a Christmas gift to Him.

Notes:

*Merry Christmas
from your friends at Bryn Athyn Church.*

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. Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way. (Matthew 2:11-12)

“The land of the east” in Scripture symbolizes nothing else than goodwill toward our neighbor; and when acted on, it is nothing else than a life according to the Lord's commandments. Therefore, in ancient times, people who had a knowledge of such goodness were called “sons of the east.” (*Secrets of Heaven* 3249)

Truths concerning goodwill toward our neighbor and concerning love of the Lord must be learned before we can be spiritually reborn (or regenerated). They must also be acknowledged and believed. And to the extent that those truths are acknowledged, believed, and endowed with life, we are regenerated. These truths are first planted in us through instruction received from parents and teachers, then from the Word of the Lord, and after that from personal reflection on them. But truths are still not acknowledged, believed, and received unless we live according to them, in which case we develop an affection for them. And to the extent that we develop an affection for them, because our lives accord with them, those truths become rooted in us. (*Secrets of Heaven* 3762.2)

Reflection: On this Christmas day, you are invited to reflect

Reflection: This first reading in our series introduces the theme of Savior, salvation, and safety. It does so by reminding us of two powerful concepts: First, the Lord saves us by means of true ideas from His Word. And second, these true ideas can shine like stars in our minds. The brightest star—the star of Bethlehem—symbolizes concepts about the Lord Himself. As the Christmas season gets under way, what are one or two well-loved, comforting concepts about the Lord that you hope will shine brightly in your mind? What else would you like to know about the Lord that might help you on your spiritual path? What are one or two ways in which these things can impact your life for good today?

Notes:

Defend What is Good.

December 2

Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel. Butter and honey He shall eat, that He may know to refuse the evil and choose the good.

(Isaiah 7:14-15)

The Lord engaged in spiritual conflicts from His own divine love while He was in the world, and He was victorious. What's more, it is from divine power in His Humanity, acquired through that victory that, on behalf of the entire human race, He alone fights on our behalf, conquers, and so brings salvation. This is righteousness. For the work of righteousness consists in keeping hell in check as it tries to destroy the human race, and in protecting and saving those who are in goodness and truth. (*Secrets of Heaven* 9715.7)

In all of His spiritual trials the Lord never looked for any prize of victory for Himself. His prize of victory was the salvation of the whole human race. It was out of love toward the whole human race that He fought. When anyone fights out of that love, he or she demands no prize for him—or herself. The reason is that that love wishes to give away and impart to others all that is its own, and to have nothing for itself. (*Secrets of Heaven* 1789)

In all of His spiritual trials the Lord never fought from love for Himself, but for all people throughout the universe. Consequently, He didn't do it so that He might become the greatest in heaven, and scarcely even that He might be the least. He did it only so that everyone else might become something and be saved. (*Secrets of Heaven* 1812)

Reflection: The Babe who was born in Bethlehem was des-

He represents selfish impulses that we experience—impulses which seek to destroy what is good, true, and useful in us. These impulses inspire us to place ourselves before others, and to amass wealth and possessions from a sense of greed. They are two of the main influences that the Lord tries to lead us away from—the very starting points of everything hurtful and destructive in human relationships. Can you think of one such impulse that you personally feel, which you could usefully depart from today? What is one “star” (one truth) that can guide you away from this “wicked king” in your life—so that you can see the Savior, so that the true meaning of Christmas can shine through, and so that it can shine out from you to others?

(Note: The readings for today provide answers to questions posed on December 13th.)

Notes:

Gifts for the Lord

Self-Serving. **December 24**

When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. So they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet...." 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 2:3-10)

There are two types of love that have long been rooted in the human race—a love of ruling over everyone, and a love of possessing the goods of everyone. The former love, if free rein is given to it, rushes on even to the point of wishing to be God of heaven. The latter love, if free rein is given to it, rushes on to the point of wishing to be God of the world. (*True Christian Religion* 533.1)

There are many modes by which we are prepared for the church and introduced into it. But the modes whereby the church is actually established in us are acts of repentance. Acts of repentance are all such things as cause us not to will and consequently not to do what is evil, which is to sin against God. (*True Christian Religion* 510)

The question is, "How should we repent?" The answer is, "Actively," that is to say, we must examine ourselves, recognize and acknowledge our sins, pray to the Lord, and begin a new life. If at recurring seasons there is active repentance, as often, for instance, as we prepare for the communion of the Holy Supper, and if we afterward abstain from one or another sin which we then discover in ourselves, this is sufficient to initiate us into the actuality of repentance. And when we are in that practice, we are on the way to heaven. For then from being earthly we begin to be spiritual, and to be born anew from the Lord. (*True Christian Religion* 530)

Reflection: Herod is a familiar figure in the Christmas story.

tinged to make choices, throughout His lifetime, to "refuse the evil and choose the good." The fact that He accomplished this allows us to do the same thing in our own lives today. The Lord was also destined to fight and conquer hell all by Himself. This means that He is the one who fights and conquers for each one of us in every spiritual victory we experience. He did this for one simple reason—so that each one of us might "become something and be saved." What do these ideas about salvation inspire in you this Christmas season? What are one or two ways in which you can mirror the Lord's example, albeit on a lesser scale, of doing something for someone else so that he or she can "become something" and experience greater happiness in life?

Notes:

People of All Faiths and Cultures

Can Be Saved.

December 3

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)

Before spiritual rebirth occurs we are called the "earth void and empty," and also the "ground" in which nothing of goodness and truth has been sown. The word "void" means where there is nothing of goodness, and "empty" where there is nothing of truth. Hence comes "thick darkness" with regard to faith in the Lord, and consequently with regard to spiritual and heavenly life. (*Secrets of Heaven* 17)

In heaven, those who are in a state of wisdom and intelligence are in light. Those who are in the highest wisdom and intelligence are in the greatest light. The wisdom there is that of love and goodwill. The intelligence is that of faith in the Lord. (*Secrets of Heaven* 1458)

Divine mercy is pure mercy toward the whole human race, to save it. It is also never-ending toward everyone. 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 His Word. The divine means are what are called divine truths (symbolized by "light" in Scripture) which teach how we must live in order to be saved. By these truths the Lord leads us to heaven, and by means of them He plants the life of heaven in us. The Lord does this for all people. (*Heaven and Hell* 522)

Reflection: The image of people walking in darkness and

them; it's another to learn them so that we can understand what is good, and so that we can live a good life. The Lord uses the truths that we know as tools by which He moves us forward in the process of salvation. And so the Lord wants us, like the wise men, to search for Him—by raising our thoughts into the light of heaven, discovering what it means to be a more loving and useful human being, then following through in the way(s) that we live. What does the word "wisdom" mean to you? Think about one person in your life who you consider to be wise. What are one or two things that you honor about him or her? How could you emulate these things in your own life today—just two days before Christmas?

Notes:

Distance Yourself from What is

December 23

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 2:1-2)

The words of Scripture, "sons of the east" refer to those who have a knowledge of truth and goodness, and who are consequently in the truths of love. (*Secrets of Heaven* 3762)

Truth teaches us what is good and how we ought to live. When we know these things, a love for what is good can start to take root in us; and by means of that love we can be spiritually reborn (or regenerated). For knowledge must be received before we can possess faith and live a good life. In fact, all purification from evils and falsities, and consequently all regeneration, is accomplished by means of the truths of faith. (*Secrets of Heaven* 10026.1)

Each one of us has been given the ability to elevate our understanding almost into the light in which angels of heaven are. The purpose of this is that we may see what we must will and do, so that we may be prosperous in the world, and so that we may be blessed to eternity after death. We become prosperous and blessed when we acquire wisdom for ourselves and keep our will in obedience to it. (*True Christian Religion* 588)

Reflection: It's one thing to learn truths simply to know

seeing a great light is a powerful reminder of the change that each one of us goes through as we move from spiritual void and emptiness into the beauty and fullness of spiritual life. The "great light" of the Lord's coming would usher His truths into the world in a new way, so that we could learn and understand the miracle of His birth here on earth, and also the miracle of His birth in each one of our lives. This great light shines on the pathway to salvation—a pathway that is available to all people. What are one or two ways in which you've experienced spiritual "darkness" in your life? What are one or two ways in which the Lord's Word has been a "great light" to you at those times? What is one point of spiritual clarity that you are enjoying at the beginning of this Christmas season?

Notes:

Your Potential

December 4

Unto us a Child is born,
 Unto us a Son is given;
 And the government will be upon His shoulder.
 And His name will be called
 Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God,
 Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
 Of the increase of His government and peace
 There will be no end,
 Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom,
 To order it and establish it with judgment and justice
 From that time forward, even forever.
 The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this. (Isaiah 9:6-7)

The Lord was born like anyone else.... The purpose of this was that through spiritual trials and victories He might restore all things to order. Yet there was this difference: the Divine, or Jehovah, and so the life belonging to love toward the whole human race, resided in every single thing that was His, deep within Him. (*Secrets of Heaven* 3138)

We must first of all be reborn as little children, and we must learn what is evil and false, and also what is good and true. For without knowledge we cannot be filled with anything good. (*Secrets of Heaven* 3701)

We are indeed born of our parents as a person, but we do not truly become a person until we are reborn of the Lord. Spiritual and heavenly life is what makes us to be people. It is what distinguishes us from animals. It is this spiritual conception and birth that is meant by conceptions and births that are mentioned in Scripture. (*Secrets of Heaven* 3860)
Reflection: The Lord was born as a little child, and He grew

of a string of events that happens in each one of us over and over again as part of the process of salvation: The Lord fights and conquers on our behalf during times of spiritual conflict; He arranges things in our hearts and minds into good and perfect order; He carries us to the next level of spiritual relationship with others; and He touches our hearts and minds with new experiences of peace. What is one thing you can do in the remaining days before Christmas to experience this kind of peace?

Notes:

Search for Wisdom.

December 22

Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity; and this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years, 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)

The words of Scripture, “I will redeem you with a stretched out arm” mean leading forth from hell by means of divine power. This is evident from the meaning of “redeeming” as being to bring forth from hell. “Redemption” is said in reference to bondage, evil, and death—that people are released from these things. Thus it is said in reference to hell. What’s more, the Lord as to His Divine Humanity is called the “Redeemer.” (*Secrets of Heaven* 7205)

The Lord accomplishes a specific redemption in each one of us by means of spiritual struggles (or temptations) just as He wrought a universal redemption when He was in the world. By means of spiritual conflicts in the world, the Lord glorified His humanity, that is, made it divine; similarly with us, when we experience temptations, the Lord fights for us, conquers the evil spirits who are assailing us, and afterward glorifies us, that is, renders us spiritual. After His universal redemption, the Lord reduced all things in heaven and hell to order; similarly with us, after temptation, He reduces everything of heaven and the world in us to order. After His universal redemption, the Lord established a new church on earth; similarly He establishes what pertains to the church in each one of us and makes us into a specific church. After His universal redemption, the Lord bestowed peace on those who believed in Him; similarly with us, after temptation, He gives us a sense of peace, that is, gladness of mind and consolation. (*True Christian Religion* 599)

Reflection: As Christmas day approaches, we’re reminded

to become the glorified King of all creation. He did this so that He could lead us from birth to our own small version of His great accomplishments. In the process of salvation, the Lord transforms us into wonderful, capable, loving and wise human beings who can find our home in His kingdom. What are one or two things that you think the Lord sees in your future? What do you believe He most wants you to focus on today? What are one or two ways in which you can live up to the potential He sees in you?

Notes:

Become Wise in the Lord.

December 5

There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse,
 And a Branch shall grow out of his roots.
 The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him,
The Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
 The Spirit of counsel and might,
 The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.
 (Isaiah 11:1-2)

By the capacity to be wise is not meant the capacity to reason about what is true and good from facts in our memory, nor the capacity to confirm whatever we please; but the capacity to discern what is true and good, to choose what is suitable, and to apply it to the uses of life. Those who ascribe all things to the Lord do thus discern, choose, and apply. (*Secrets of Heaven* 10227.3)

All people have the capacity to understand and to be wise; but the reason why one person is wiser than another is that they do not, in the same way, ascribe all things of intelligence and wisdom, which are all things of truth and goodness, to the Lord. Those who ascribe everything to the Lord are wiser than the rest. The reason is that ascribing everything to the Lord opens our inner parts toward heaven. In this way we acknowledge that nothing of truth and goodness is from ourselves. And to the extent that we acknowledge this, selfish love departs, and with it the thick darkness from falsities and evils. To the same extent we also come into innocence, and into love of and faith in the Lord. And from this comes union (or togetherness) with the Divine, influx from Him, and enlightenment. (*Secrets of Heaven* 10227.2)

Reflection: Wisdom of life is something that many of us

ways there, causing good things to happen and leading us forward each day. There may be times when we're more keenly aware of this than at other times. Often this happens when we look back and see how things have evolved in our lives over time—in friendships, in marriage, in our family life, etc. Looking back, what are one or two ways that the Lord has been at work causing good things to happen in your life? What is one way that this has been true for you this Christmas season? What is one way that you imagine it being true in the coming year?

Notes:

Experience Peace.

December 21

Now when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord. 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 the Holy Spirit was upon him. And when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the law, 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 2:22-32)

The words of Scripture, "salvation to Him" mean that salvation is from the Lord. For all the good of love and all the truth of faith are the Lord's with us and not our own, and salvation and eternal life come from these things. Therefore everything of salvation and eternal life is from Him. (*Apocalypse Explained* 460.1, 2)

The words of Scripture, "to bless God" mean to glorify and give thanks because the Lord was to come into the world to save all who receive Him. Consequently, Simeon calls the Lord "the salvation" which his eyes had seen, and which the Lord prepares for all people. We are called "His people" when we are in truths from goodness, that is, when we receive Him by means of truths. (*Apocalypse Explained* 340.3)

The word "peace" in Scripture stands for heavenly blessedness, happiness, and delight. These things are granted to us when we love to do the Lord's commandments. Therefore it is said, "Much peace have they who love Your law" (Psalm 119:165). (*Apocalypse Explained* 365.19)

Reflection: The Lord is at work in all of our lives. He is al-

hope will grow in us day by day. This wisdom involves discernment, choosing wisely, and applying the truth that we know to a life of useful service. In addition, these abilities become real and lasting the more we acknowledge that the Lord is the source of everything true and worthwhile in us. What wisdom do you pray for this Christmas season? What are one or two ways in which the Lord is answering that prayer?

Notes:

A New Phase Dawns.

December 6

Arise, shine; for your light has come!
 And the glory of the Lord is risen upon you.
 For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth,
 And deep darkness the people;
 But the Lord will arise over you,
 And His glory will be seen upon you.
 The Gentiles shall come to your light,
 And kings to the brightness of your rising. (Isaiah 60:1-3)

The word “morning” in Scripture refers to a state of light, or of truth and matters of faith. (*Secrets of Heaven* 22)

People who are being reformed don’t know what is true at first, and this, even to the point of grief and despair; and then for the first time they have comfort and help from the Lord. People who are such that they can be reformed experience this state, if not in the life of the body, nevertheless in the other life, where this state is well known. They who are in such a state are at length taken away into heaven, where they are instructed among the angels as it were anew in the goods and truths of faith. (*Secrets of Heaven* 2694.2)

There are two states that we pass through when we are becoming spiritual. The first state is called *Reformation*, and the second *Regeneration*. The first state is formed by true ideas, by means of which we look to what is good. The second state is formed by means of good actions born of goodwill. Another way to say this is that the first state is one of thought from our understanding; the second is one of love from our will. When this latter state begins and is developing, a change takes place in our minds. Our minds undergo a reversal, and so far as the good of love comes to act the first part and truths of faith the second, we are spiritual and are new creatures. We then act from goodwill and speak from faith. We are then in the Lord and at peace, and thus we are regenerate. (*True Christian Religion* 571)

Reflection: “Arise, shine; for your light has come.” The Lord

God.” This part of the Christmas story reflects a spontaneous reaction that we can have toward the Lord, each time we recognize and acknowledge that He is the source of everything good and true in us. The more that we recognize and acknowledge this, the more humble we may feel, and the more thankful we may be for everything that He gives us. What are one or two ways in which the Lord has sustained you this year—physically, emotionally, and/or spiritually? How has He done this? In your heart of hearts, what would you like to say to the Lord on account of these things?

Notes:

Witness Salvation.

December 20

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. 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 words of Scripture, “to praise God” mean to acknowledge and worship. One of the times that people can feel moved to give praise and glory to the Lord is when they acknowledge in heart that there is nothing of goodness in themselves, and that they can do nothing of themselves, and on the other hand, that all goodness is from the Lord, and that the Lord can do anything. When they are in this acknowledgment, they put aside what is their own and open all things of their minds to Him. In this way they make room for the Divine to flow in with goodness and power. For this reason, it is necessary for people to be in humility before the Lord; and humility can come from no other source than the kind of “self-acknowledgment” and acknowledgment of the Lord mentioned above. (*Apocalypse Explained* 1210)

The word “rejoicing” in Scripture means the salvation and resulting joy of those who become spiritual by the reception of divine truth in life. (*Apocalypse Explained* 751)

Reflection: “The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising

is always calling to us to see and take the next step forward in our spiritual lives. He is always leading us to experience new states of blessing and happiness. This is what the words of our prophecy for today encapsulate—a God who works to shine light into our minds and a will for good into our hearts. What new light do today’s readings shine on your life? What are one or two actions that you can take to live in harmony with that new light? What new stage of spiritual development is the Lord leading you to and trying to awaken in you?

Notes:

Do What the Lord Wants.

December 7

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. 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 1:5-17)

The words of Scripture, "to walk in the law of Jehovah" symbolically mean to live a life of truth and goodness according to the Lord's teachings. (*Secrets of Heaven* 8420)

None of us can become angels or enter heaven unless we arrive there bringing some angelic quality with us. Inherent in that quality is a knowing of the path from having walked it, and a walking in the path from the knowing of it. (*Divine Providence* 60)

Worship with those who live a moral life from a spiritual origin is truly worship of God. Their prayers are raised up to heaven and are heard, for the Lord leads their prayers through heaven to Himself. (*Apocalypse Explained* 182.4)

The process of reformation and regeneration of those who are becoming people of the church is that at first we perceive something of temptation, but when we persist and overcome, the Lord has an abode with us, strengthens us in what is good, introduces us to Himself in His kingdom, and dwells with us; and there He purifies and perfects us. At the same time He assigns good and happy things to us. (*Secrets of Heaven* 2342)

Reflection: Many of us would like to go through life with

wrapped up in the story of Christmas—feelings and emotions that many of us experience. For example, it can feel unsettling and even scary when someone gets emotionally closer to us than we're ready for. This is something that can happen in our relationship with the Lord as well, as pictured in the story of the shepherds. They were initially afraid when they experienced a "closer presence" of the Lord. Yet we know that their fear of the unfamiliar soon turned to excitement. Can you think of a time when the Lord drew closer to you—closer than you might have felt ready for? When He did, what were some of the feelings that you experienced? Was fear one of them? If so, how did you adjust yourself to that "closer presence" so that the fear could melt away and be replaced by a sense of renewal and hope?

Notes:

Praise the Lord.

December 19

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, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. 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 this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger." 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 all!" (Luke 2:8-14)

The word "night" in Scripture means a time and state when there is no longer any light of truth. (*Secrets of Heaven* 2353)

The words of Scripture, "Do not be afraid" mean renewal of life. For all who come suddenly from self-life into any spiritual life are at first afraid, but their life is renewed by the Lord. The Lord is present with everyone in the universe, but more or less closely according to the reception of goodness from Him (and this is accomplished by means of truths). For goodness is that in which the Lord is present with angels, spirits, and people. Therefore, the extent and quality of goodness from the Lord are what determine the extent and quality of His presence with us. If that presence goes beyond this, there is at first fear and tremor; but afterwards there is renewal of life. (*Apocalypse Explained* 80)

Reflection: There are so many feelings and emotions

confidence that we're doing the right things. When we succeed in living according to the Lord's teachings, pangs of conscience aren't felt as often, and we experience moments of genuine peace. What has been your experience of "walking in the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless"? How does it feel, at the end of a day, when you've applied yourself to the tasks at hand, and conscientiously done what you believe the Lord wants? What can you do to have more days like that?

Notes:

Do the Best You Can.

December 8

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." (Luke 1:18-20)

The word "mute" in Scripture refers to people who, on account of not knowing what is true, are unable to give voice to the Lord and the genuine truths of the church. (*Apocalypse Explained* 455.20)

With regard to doubt, people who are governed by an affection for truth possess an affection for goodness within their affection for truth. But that affection for goodness is in so much obscurity that they don't know what genuine goodness is. Nevertheless, they perform good works from a sense of obedience. For they allow the Lord to lead them by means of truth which to them appears to be true. Within that goodness angels are present with them, and they take pleasure in the truth for which those people have an affection. (*Secrets of Heaven* 2425.2)

Reflection: Do you know what the Lord wants you to be

is that the Lord's birth started a monumental and necessary change in the human race. The infant Lord was a beacon of light and goodness in a crippled world. The manger in which He lay pictures the Word of God. That is where we can read the story of Christmas and learn about the Lord. The more we learn about Him, and the more we wrap these truths around us—like swaddling cloths around an infant—the more He can do to protect us from pain and raise us up toward heaven. What are one or two simple truths that can lift you up toward heaven today?

Notes:

Don't Be Afraid.

December 18

So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. (Luke 2:6-7)

The Lord Himself came into the world in a human manifestation so that He could reduce everything that had become disordered into order, namely, everything in hell and also everything in heaven. For at the time just before His coming there was no divine truth with people in the world, and none whatever in the church, that had not been falsified and perverted. As a consequence, there was no foundation in the world on which heaven could rest. But now the Lord is fully manifested, and He has all power. The reason for this is that He is now present in outermost things (especially the truths of His Word) as well as in first principles. Thus the Lord is able to save all who are in divine truths and in a life according to them. (*Apocalypse Explained* 726.7)

The truths of Scripture are not naked truths, but are accommodated and adapted to the capacity of simple thinking people and also of children. At the same time, these truths are receptacles and dwelling places of genuine truth, like swaddling cloths for an infant. They are also like the matters of knowledge that hold within them a perception of and affection for spiritual truth. (*True Christian Religion* 215)

Reflection: One of the profound concepts about Christmas

doing today in your work, in key personal relationships, or in one or another key interaction that you will have? Clarity in how to conduct ourselves in loving and wise ways is something that grows over time. In addition, and like Zacharias, we may have doubts about what to do. What matters, though, is that at any given moment in time we function the best we can from the clearest sight of truth that we have. When we do this, it gives pleasure to the angels who are with us. They're happy that we're using the truth that we know to be a blessing in other people's lives. What is one way in which you, like Zacharias, can be of service to others today, functioning from the clearest sight of truth that you currently have?

Notes:

Heavenly Qualities

December 9

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 phrase "your name will be" is used in Scripture, it means "the nature of," that is, what a person's quality is. And since "names" means "the nature of," a name includes everything in its entirety within a person. For in heaven no attention is paid to our actual name, but when we are referred to by name, or when our name is used, a mental picture of our overall nature or quality comes up. This is why "name" in the Word means "the nature or quality of." (*Secrets of Heaven* 2009)

In the spiritual world no one knows us from our name only, but from the idea of our quality. This idea causes us to become present and known. From this it appears that we can't have the Lord fully present with us unless we know His quality. (*Invitation to the New Church* 41)

The name "Jesus" in Scripture refers to divine goodness. "Christ" refers to divine truth. The reason why "Jesus" refers to divine goodness is that it means "Safety," "Salvation," and "Savior." And as it means these, it means divine goodness. For it is from divine goodness, and so through the reception of that goodness, that all salvation springs. (*Secrets of Heaven* 3005)

Reflection: "Safety, Salvation, and Savior"—these words

patterns of thinking and intending, isn't always easy. But if we knew that we could change sadness to happiness, or hardship into a beautiful life, wouldn't we do all that we could to make those changes? The pathway to having our minds reformed and regenerated by the Lord carries with it a promise of true happiness and beauty in life. What are one or two spiritual transitions that you're making this Christmas season? What is one change for the better that you can make today?

Notes:

New Birth

December 17

And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. So all went to be registered, everyone 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. (Luke 2:1-5)

Whenever traveling, sojourning, and passing from place to place occur in the Word, nothing else is suggested to angels than changes of state such as exist with them. There are changes of state in our thoughts and changes of state in our affections. Changes of state in our thoughts are caused by matters of knowledge and forms of instruction. (*Secrets of Heaven* 1463.1)

A change of state in our inner parts is said to take place when our affections and resulting thoughts undergo change, as when sadness turns to joy, or joy back to sadness, when ungodliness turns to godliness or devotion, and so on. (*Secrets of Heaven* 4850)

If we are being regenerated, we are then becoming altogether another person—we are being made new. Therefore we are called "born again" and "created anew." Then, although we have a similar face and similar speech as before, our mind isn't the same. Our mind, when we are regenerate, is open toward heaven, where love of the Lord and goodwill toward our neighbor dwell together with faith. It is our mind that makes us another person and completely new. (*Secrets of Heaven* 3212)
Reflection: Changing our outward habits, and also our

express the nature or quality of the Lord at the core of His being. They also express the purpose of His birth on earth. He was born so that He might save all people by planting heavenly qualities in them. The Lord's birth on earth is also a reflection of His birth in each one of us, as He leads us to embody some of His wisdom, some of the sense of purpose encapsulated in Gabriel, and some of the goodness encapsulated in Mary. What are one or two heavenly qualities that you wish for this Christmas? What can you do to help these qualities manifest themselves in you today?

Notes:

Your God-Given Talents & Abilities

December 10

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 1:34-37)

People are agents receptive of life from God. As a consequence, they are recipients of goodness to the extent that they abstain from what is evil. The Lord gives everyone the ability to abstain from evil, because He gives us the ability to will and understand as if of ourselves. And whatever we do from our will as if it is our own, according to our understanding as if it is our own, this remains with us. By this the Lord brings us into a state of union (or togetherness) with Himself, and in this state He reforms, regenerates, and saves us. The life which flows in is life going forth from the Lord, which is also called the Spirit of God. In Scripture it is called the Holy Spirit. (*Apocalypse Revealed* 875)

Physical births in Scripture symbolize spiritual births, which are births of goodness and truth; for whatever is mentioned in Scripture involves and symbolizes what is spiritual. (*True Christian Religion* 583)

Angels in heaven get nothing but happiness out of being useful; and they receive that happiness in the measure of their usefulness. This is so true that to them usefulness is what makes heaven. (*Secrets of Heaven* 7038)
Reflection: The Lord has formed us to be fully capable hu-

prized and sought by people of many faiths and cultures. What does the idea of being spiritually awake mean to you? One answer that shows up in today's readings is by acknowledging the Divine, loving what is true, and living well based on that truth. These things allow the light and warmth of heaven to flow into us, causing us to be spiritually awake and alive. Can you remember a time when you felt spiritually asleep? If so, what did it take for you to wake up? What is one truth that you know and love, which, if you put it into practice, would help you be more spiritually awake today?

Notes:

Make Spiritual Transitions.

December 16

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)

People who have lived a good life in the world, and acted from conscience, seem to themselves, when let into their deeper (or “interior”) selves, like someone aroused from sleep into full wakefulness, or like one passing from darkness into light. They think from the light of heaven, thus from interior wisdom, and they act from goodwill, thus from interior affection. Heaven then flows into their thoughts and desires with interior blessedness and delight that they had previously not experienced. For they now have communication with the angels of heaven. They then acknowledge the Lord and worship Him from their very life. Such is the state of those who have acknowledged the Divine and loved divine truths, especially such as have applied those truths to life. (*Heaven and Hell* 506)

It is religion that makes us spiritual and joins us with angels. To live well from religion is to think, will, and do because it is prescribed by the Word of God, and because the Lord has commanded it. (*Apocalypse Explained* 107.3)

Reflection: Being spiritually awake is something that is

man beings. He’s given us minds that think, hearts that love, and bodies that do. Yet we know that we’re far from perfect. In fact, there may be times when we feel insignificant, even incapable. But the Lord reminds us that nothing is impossible for Him. No matter what challenges or personal difficulties we may face, the power of His Spirit can come upon us, and He can lead us forward in the actions and attitudes of our lives. What are one or two talents or abilities that the Lord has given to you? What are one or two ways in which you can put these talents and abilities to use, this Christmas and in the coming year, to help make the world a better place?

Notes:

Have a Positive Attitude.

December 11

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)

There are two basic attitudes of mind called negative and positive. A positive attitude occurs when we regard affirmatively the things which comprise doctrine drawn from the Word, that is, when we think within ourselves and believe that those things are true because the Lord has spoken them. This attitude leads to perfect intelligence and wisdom. It is to be called a positive attitude. (*Secrets of Heaven* 2568.4)

The Word of God teaches that the first and foremost principle is love of the Lord and goodwill toward our neighbor. People with a positive (or affirmative) attitude toward this principle are able to enter into whatever things of a rational, factual, or sensory kind that they please. Indeed, the more they do this, the more they're confirmed in that first and foremost principle. For all of natural order is full of what is confirmatory. (*Secrets of Heaven* 2588.3)

The Lord is the human race's salvation. Once we develop a positive attitude toward this truth, countless things are added to it and filled with goodness. For goodness flows in constantly from the Lord, but where an affirmative attitude does not exist it is not accepted. An affirmative attitude is therefore, so to speak, the first dwelling place of goodness from the Lord. (*Secrets of Heaven* 3913.5)

Reflection: Mary was affirmative to the words that the

urging, even pressing us to receive Him. There are times when we may be spiritually asleep or in states of obscurity. Still, He finds ways to pierce that obscurity, calling us to consider our spiritual lives and the next thing(s) that He wants us to be doing. He hopes that we will hear His call, look up to Him, and then look outward to serve others in useful ways. Joseph's calling was to care for Mary and for the infant Jesus. Likewise, the Lord calls each one of us to consider the care that we can offer other people around us. What is one way that you can show care and support to someone close to you today?

Notes:

Wake Up Spiritually.

December 15

And behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph 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 1:20-21)

The words of Scripture, "and he fell asleep" mean a state of obscurity. "Sleep" has no other meaning than this in the spiritual sense, for spiritual sleep is a time when truth is obscure to us. Spiritual wakefulness is when truth shines brightly in our minds. (*Secrets of Heaven* 5210)

As long as we are merely earthly (or "natural") the inner parts of our minds, which behold things in the light of heaven, are closed, and the more surface (or "external") parts of us, which behold things in the light of the world, are open. At this time we look in a downward direction to the world and toward ourselves. For everything composing our lower will and thought incline in that direction. And the direction in which we look is also that in which our heart (i.e., our will and our love) is turned. But if we become spiritual, our inner parts, which behold things in the light of heaven, are opened, and then we look upward. This is brought about by our being raised up by the Lord, so that we look up to heaven and toward Him. In this direction too, everything that composes our will and our thought, thus our heart or love, is raised. (*Secrets of Heaven* 10156.3)

The Lord is present with all people, urging and pressing them to receive Him. (*True Christian Religion* 766)

Reflection: The Lord is always reaching out to us, wanting,

angel spoke. A positive (or affirmative) attitude toward the Word of God, toward a life of love and goodwill, toward the Lord Himself as the author of salvation, and toward other people around us—this is the primary dwelling place for the Lord's goodness in us. It helps good things happen in our lives. What is one way in which you can carry a positive attitude and affirmative spirit into your life today?

Notes:

Sources of Joy

December 12

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! But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. 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)

An angel was once asked, "What is heavenly joy?" The angel answered briefly, "It is the pleasure of doing something that is of use to oneself and to others. Angels in heaven enjoy delightful associations which stimulate their minds, gladden their spirits, gratify their hearts, and recreate their bodies. But they enjoy these associations after they have performed useful services in their occupations and employments. The life and soul in all their experiences of delight and pleasure comes from the useful services they perform." (*Married Love* 5.3-4)

Angelic happiness is in useful service, from useful service, and proportionate to useful service. (*Secrets of Heaven* 454)

When we lead a good (or useful) life, and believe that the Lord is in charge of the universe, and that He alone is the source of everything good and true, we then trust only in the Lord, and we have no anxious cares about anything else. In that state we are quite sure that all things work for our good, blessedness, and happiness forever. (*Secrets of Heaven* 2892)

Reflection. One of the quests that many of us are on is a

fear of failing to be thoughtful or caring toward them, etc. It is because of holy fear that we pattern our lives by what the Lord teaches us. And it is because of holy fear that we're able to be united to the Lord and saved. The hells attack us and try to destroy any holy fear that is present in us. They love it if we act contrary to the Lord and contrary to our neighbor. But the Lord protects us from their influence. What is one way in which holy fear has guided your thoughts and actions this year? How is it guiding you this Christmas season?

Notes:

Care for Others.

December 14

Now his father 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 perform the mercy promised to our fathers
 And to remember His holy covenant,
To grant us that we,
Being delivered from the hand of our enemies,
Might serve Him without fear,

In holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life." (Luke 1:67-79)

The Lord God the Savior is to be approached because He is the God of heaven and earth, the Redeemer and Savior, to whom omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, mercy itself, and also justice, belong. He Himself came into the world and made Himself visible and accessible, and union (or togetherness) with Him possible. This was done for the sole purpose that people might be saved. (*True Christian Religion* 538)

Holy fear is present in all worship. Holy fear is not so much a fear of hell and of damnation as it is a fear lest anything whatever be done or thought that is contrary to the Lord and contrary to our neighbor. And since it is not a fear of hell and damnation, it exists with us when we abide in the good of faith, less so when we abide in the good of love, that is, when we abide in the Lord. Therefore it is written in Luke, "The oath which He swore to our father Abraham: to grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life." (*Secrets of Heaven* 2826.13)

Reflection: Holy fear is a fear of doing harm to others—a

search for happiness—happiness in family life, happiness at work, and happiness in community with others around us. We know that with angels, true happiness and blessedness are centered in being useful. The more that angels are able to be useful in the things that they do, the happier they are. Another source of happiness for them is bringing joy to others and seeing them made happy. What is one way in which you can be of use this Christmas season? What is one way that you can be an agent of happiness for others today?

Notes:

Closer to Purity

December 13

Now Elizabeth's full time came for her to be delivered, and she brought forth a son. When her neighbors and relatives heard how the Lord had shown great mercy to her, they rejoiced with her. So it was, on the eighth day, that they came to circumcise the child; and they would have called him by the name of his father, Zacharias. His mother answered and said, "No; he shall be called John." So they made signs to his father—what he would have him called. And he wrote, saying, "His name is John." So they all marveled. Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, praising God. Then fear came on all who dwelt around them; and all these sayings were discussed throughout all the hill country of Judea. And all those who heard them 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)

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

Repentance is the first thing of the Lord's church on earth. This is evident from Scripture. John the Baptist was sent ahead of the Lord to prepare people for the church that He was about to establish on earth. When John baptized people He preached repentance at the same time. Therefore his baptism was called a baptism of repentance. It was called a baptism of repentance because that baptism symbolizes spiritual washing, which is a cleansing from sin. The Lord Himself also preached repentance for the forgiveness of sins. By this He taught that repentance is the first thing of the church, and that to the extent that we actively repent, our sins are put away; also that the more they are put away, the more they are forgiven. (*True Christian Religion* 510)

Reflection: John the Baptist is a powerful figure in Scripture.

The message he brought was a message of repentance (or life change). That message was (and is) destined to help many people make new beginnings in their lives, as they work toward spiritual improvement. We know that this is an essential part of salvation. What does the word "repent" mean to you? How do you normally practice it? What are one or two ways that you can improve your walk with the Lord today?

Notes:

Serve the Lord Without Fear.