

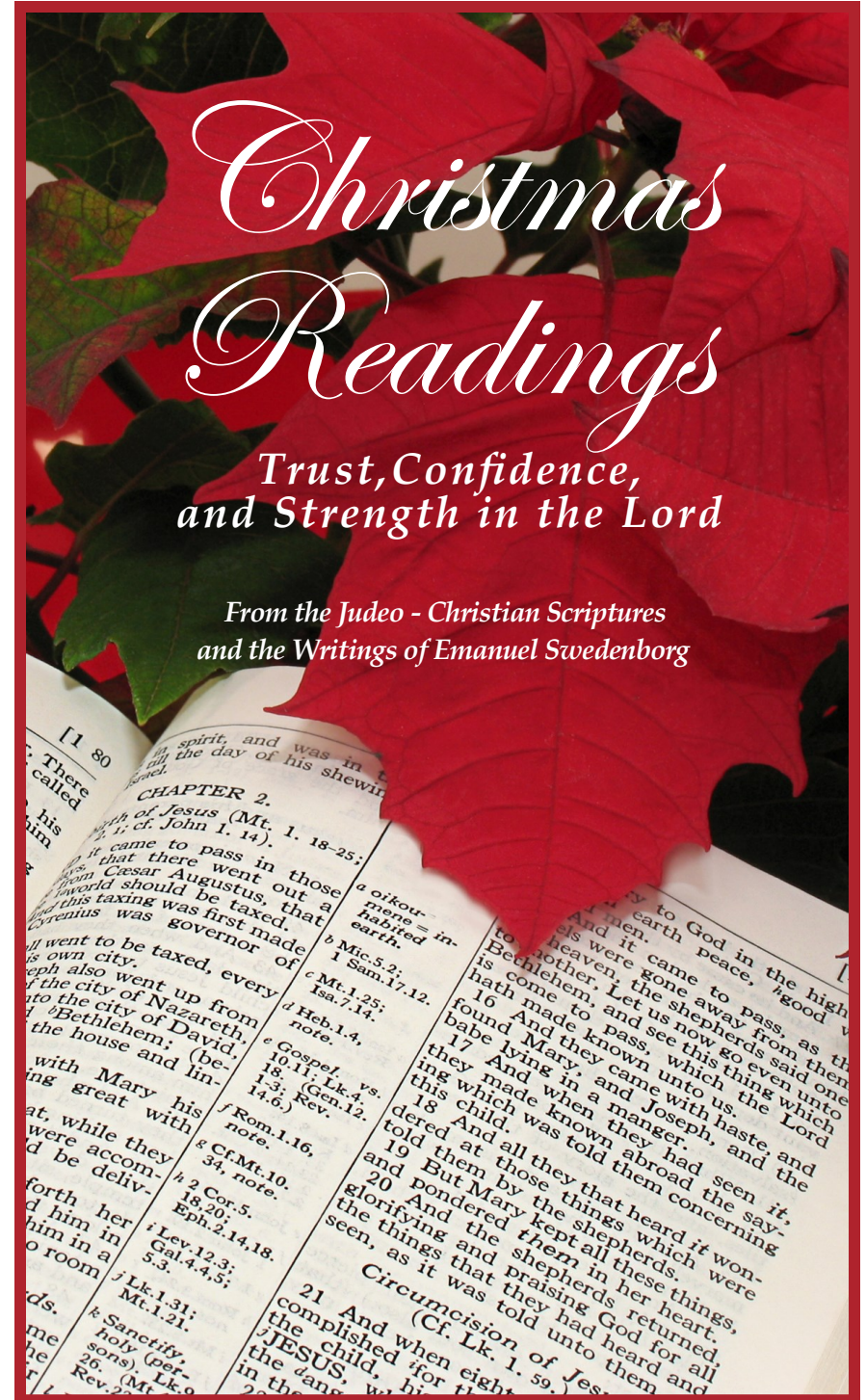
Christmas Readings

Trust, Confidence,
and Strength in the Lord

From the Judeo - Christian Scriptures
and the Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg



GLENVIEW
NEW CHURCH
A NEW CHRISTIANITY



Merry Christmas

from your friends in the Glenview New Church.

These Christmas Readings are gathered around a different theme each year. To receive the readings via daily e-mail, go to: <http://newchurch.org/landing-pages/daily-christmas-readings/> You will be subscribed from year to year. You may unsubscribe at any time.



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Reflection: Our final Christmas reading this year focuses on the Word of God. It is there—in the Lord’s Word—that we find the story of Christmas, and by means of that Word we’re able to experience each new birth of the Lord in our lives. The Lord’s Word is the source of all truth and power for wise and loving action in our world. What is one way that the Lord’s Word has helped you over the past year? What are one or two ways in which it can help you in the coming year?

Notes:

Turn to the Word of God 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 all. 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 humankind, 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 1:1,3,4,9,13-14)

With regard to the trust and confidence which are called faith the case is this: When we are in goodwill toward the neighbor and in love of the Lord, we can have such faith, for our heart is toward the Lord. This the Lord also teaches in John: "As many as received Him, to them he gave the power to be children of God, even to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of bloods, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of humankind, but of God." We are "born of God" are those who are in good works born of goodwill and faith from the Lord. (*Secrets of Heaven* 9241)

There are two things that make up the church, namely, acknowledgment and belief that the Lord has the power to save, and that his Word is divine. The Lord reforms us and gives us faith and love, and the Word teaches the way in which we must go in order to receive these things from him. (*Apocalypse Explained* 1070)

Trust, Confidence, and Strength in the Lord

Introduction

This year's Christmas readings are gathered around the theme of trust, confidence, and strength in the Lord. This theme appears in the book of Psalms where we read, "Blessed are those whose strength is in You.... They go from strength to strength." (Psalm 84:5-6)

The qualities of trust, confidence, and strength in the Lord are evident throughout the Christmas story. We see them, for example, in Zacharias and Elizabeth, who were righteous before God, and who walked in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. We see them in Mary's response to Gabriel when she said, "Let it be to me according to your word;" also in Joseph who was a just man, who did as the angel commanded him, and who took Mary to be his wife. We see them in the shepherds, who went to see the great wonder that had come to pass. We see them in the man Simeon, who waited patiently for the Consolation of Israel, and in Anna the prophetess, who served God with fastings and prayers, and who spoke of the Lord to all in Jerusalem who sought redemption. And finally, we see these qualities in the wise men, who followed a star with determination, who fell down and worshipped the infant Lord, and who followed divine guidance—refusing to return to evil king Herod, and departing for their own country another way.

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 trust, confidence, or strength in the Lord that is reflected in the scriptural account. At the end of the readings for each day is a set of reflections together with some questions for consideration. There are twenty-six readings in all, designed to carry you from December 1st through Christmas day, with a 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 the world, will provide a sense of uplift and spiritual renewal in your life this Christmas season, as you continue to grow in trust, confidence, and strength in the Lord.

Special thanks to the Rev. Coleman Glenn for his extensive research and other help on this year's readings.

New Light Shines 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 phrase of Scripture, “and God remembered,” means the end of spiritual conflict and the start of renewal. In particular it means his being merciful. God’s remembering is mercy, and this is attributed to him especially when spiritual conflict is past, because at that time new light is shining. As long as spiritual conflict lasts, we tend to assume that the Lord is not present, for we are being harassed by demons, so harassed in fact that sometimes we have so great a feeling of hopelessness as scarcely to believe in the existence of any God at all. Yet at such times the Lord is more present than we can possibly believe. But once the conflict subsides we receive comfort, and for the first time we believe that the Lord is present. Consequently, because the Lord appears to “remember,” “God’s remembering” means the end of spiritual conflict and the start of renewal. (*Secrets of Heaven* 840)

As part of the process of waking up in heaven after death, a kind of light appears, though dim, similar to the light which we see through our eyelids when first waking up. At that time we are experiencing a state of calm, for heavenly angels who are present with us are protecting us. At the same time a kind of twilight descends, the color of the sky when one small star is showing. [Note: *This teaching is talking about physical death and resurrection, but there may be a similar, spiritual experience that we have any time there is a letting go, giving up, or “dying unto ourselves” that we do as part of the process of spiritual rebirth.*] (*Secrets of Heaven* 184)

Reflection: We often think of the story of Christmas as focusing only on the Lord, and in fact it does. But it’s a story that includes other people as well, because what the Lord most wants is for each one of us, like him, to become something—to increase in wisdom and stature. We know that true wisdom exists in a life of useful service. What is one talent that you have for serving others and for being a blessing in their lives? What is one way that you can put that talent to use today—on Christmas day? How can you further develop it in the new year?

Notes:

**Merry Christmas, everyone,
from your friends in the Glenview New Church.**

(Continued)

Grow in Wisdom/Grow in Usefulness

December 25

Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them, but His mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and people. (Luke 2:51-52)

When we, as a human race, were first created, we were imbued with wisdom and a love of wisdom—not for our own sake, but for the sake of our having it to share with others. Therefore it was engraved on the wisdom of the wise that we should not be wise and live for ourselves alone, unless we are wise and live at the same time for others. This was the origin of society, which otherwise would not exist. To live for others is to perform useful services. Useful services are the bonds of society, there being as many bonds as there are good and useful services. (*Married Love* 18)

While he lived in the world, the Lord was in continual combats of temptations, and in continual victories. He had a constant, inmost confidence and faith that because he was fighting for the salvation of the whole human race from pure love, he could not but conquer. But in all of his combats, the Lord never fought from a love of himself, or for himself, but for all in the universe. Consequently, he didn't fight so that he might become the greatest in heaven, and scarcely so that he might be the least. The only reason he fought was so that all others might become something and be saved. (*Secrets of Heaven* 1812)

Reflection: The above words of Isaiah brought hope to people of Israel prior to the Lord's birth on earth. The "great light" that would shine refers to a renewed sight of the Lord's love and wisdom after a time of darkness. These words can bring hope to us as well in times of spiritual darkness and conflict. A new light can dawn in our minds—the start of spiritual renewal—and in the end, the Lord can be born in our hearts as a spirit of goodwill. What is one way that you can experience a sense of spiritual renewal this Christmas season?

Notes:

The Lord Has Unlimited Power to Help December 2

Unto us a Child is born,
Unto us a Son is given;
And the government will be upon His shoulder.
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 words of Scripture, “Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder,” are said of the Lord and of his power and might. (*Secrets of Heaven* 1085:4)

The case with the new life in people who are being regenerated is this: At first they are in a state of tranquility; but as they pass into a new life, they also pass at the same time into a troubled state; for the evils and falsities with which they had before become imbued emerge and come forth and disturb them, and this at last to such a degree that they are in spiritual conflicts and vexations inflicted by the diabolical crew, who are continually striving to destroy the state of their new life. Yet on the deepest level they are in a state of peace, for unless this was with them most deeply, they would not combat, for in their battlings they are continually looking to this state as the goal. (*Secrets of Heaven* 3696:2)

The phrase of Scripture, “placing onto the shoulders and carrying on them,” symbolically means preserving forever in a state of goodness and truth through all exertion and power. (*Secrets of Heaven* 9836:6)

The phrase of Scripture, “the zeal of Jehovah will perform this,” means that the Lord will do it from the ardent love of saving the human race. The Lord’s zeal looks to the salvation of humankind. (*Secrets of Heaven* 8875:4, *Apocalypse Explained* 693:2)

Reflection: The care that the Lord took to protect the wise men reflects something that he does for each one of us all the time. He guides us “every least moment,” “withholds us from evil,” “maintains us in what is good,” and shows us the most useful direction forward. He wants to guide us along beautiful pathways to heaven, and he is the only one who knows the course of each particular path. What has been your experience of the Lord’s guidance over the past year? What has it been over the course of your lifetime? What are one or two ways in which the Lord has watched over and protected you along the way?

Notes:

The Lord Protects Us

December 24

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

The angels in heaven perceive quite clearly that everything good and true comes from the Lord. In addition, they perceive that the Lord is the one who withholds them from evil and maintains them in what is good, and therefore in what is true. This he does with great force. (*Secrets of Heaven* 5758)

What else can divine providence have as its goal than the reformation of the human race and its salvation? Yet none of us can be reformed of ourselves through our own prudence, but only by the Lord through his divine providence. It follows, therefore, that unless we're guided by the Lord every moment, even every least moment, we depart from the path of reformation and perish. (*Divine Providence* 202)

The Lord protects us [most notably] when we are in good works born of goodwill. (*Secrets of Heaven* 2379)

When we have entered the other life and been prepared for heaven by instruction, we are brought to the way that leads upward toward heaven. After this we are led by the Lord into our own heavenly community. This is also effected by various ways, sometimes by winding paths. The ways by which we are led are not known to any angel, but only to the Lord. (*Heaven and Hell* 519)

Reflection: The above words of Isaiah are a powerful promise of what the Lord can accomplish in our lives, and of what he is working to accomplish even now. The images of the "government upon His shoulder" and the "zeal of the Lord of hosts" remind us of the Lord's unlimited power. What thoughts come to your mind when you hear the words, "Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end"? Also the words, "The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this"? What are one or two effects that the Lord's unlimited power can have in your life this Christmas season?

Notes:

Have Hope and An Affirmative Outlook

December 3

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)

It is said in the Scriptures that two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and that Lot urged them strongly to turn aside into his house and spend the night. Lot's urging them strongly symbolically means a state of spiritual conflict when we overcome. Spiritual conflicts involve feelings of doubt regarding the Lord's presence and mercy, and also regarding his salvation. The evil spirits who are present with us at such times and who are the cause of conflict do all they can to infuse a negative outlook; but good spirits and angels from the Lord in every way disperse that doubting attitude, all the time preserving a feeling of hope, and in the end strengthening an affirmative outlook. Consequently when we are undergoing spiritual conflict, we hang between a negative outlook and an affirmative outlook. If we give way in spiritual conflict, we remain in a doubting, and sink into a negative, frame of mind; whereas when we overcome, we still experience feelings of doubt; yet if we allow ourselves to be filled with hope, we remain steadfastly in an affirmative outlook. Because we seem during such conflict to urge the Lord, especially through prayers, to be at hand, to take pity, to bring help, and to free from condemnation, this is described at this point where the spiritual conflict of those who are becoming members of the Church is the subject. It is described by the angels first of all saying, No, they would spend the night in the street, but by Lot urging them strongly, so that they turned aside to him and came into his house. (*Secrets of Heaven* 2338)

Reflection: With just two days to go until Christmas, you are invited to reflect on one part of your life, or one part of your spiritual work, that you have cared about deeply over the years. 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? Later, what are one or two things that you learned directly from the Word of God that helped you? And finally, what are one or two good strides that you made in this area of your life, which strengthened you along the way? How have all of these things been like Christmas gifts to you from the Lord? What is one way in which you can offer them back—as Christmas gifts to Him?

Notes:

Gifts December 23

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 2:11)

The "land of the east" in Scripture symbolically means the good of faith. The good of faith is nothing else than goodwill and kind action toward the neighbor; and these in turn are nothing else than a life according to the Lord's commandments. Therefore, people of ancient times who knew about the good of faith were called "sons of the east." (*Secrets of Heaven* 3249)

Truths concerning goodwill toward the neighbor and concerning love of the Lord must first be learned before we can be regenerated. They must also be acknowledged and believed. And to the extent that these truths are acknowledged and believed, and are endowed with life, we are regenerated. In this way, the truths become implanted in our earthly (or "natural") part, where they exist as in their own soil. They are first implanted there 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 until our lives are led in accordance with them, in which case the we develop an affection for them. And to the extent that we develop an affection for them, because our life accords with them, those truths become implanted in our earthly (or "natural") part. (*Secrets of Heaven* 3762:2)

Reflection: As with earlier readings, the above words of Isaiah are words of hope that speak to each one of us here and now. No matter what states of mind we may be experiencing this Christmas season, hope can always be stronger than doubt. In times of doubt, however, we may need to urge the Lord and his angels to come into our minds before we can see things in a better light, and before we can feel a renewal of hope. What is one way that you can gain access to the Lord and his angels today? As you do, what is one hope that dawns in your mind?

Notes:

Do Not Be Afraid

December 4

So it was, that while Zacharias was serving as priest before God in the order of his division, according to the custom of the priesthood, his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. And the whole multitude of the people was praying outside at the hour of incense. Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense. The angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias..." (Luke 1:8-11,13)

There is a kind of fear within all worship called "holy fear." Holy fear is not so much a fear of hell and damnation as it is of doing or thinking anything against the Lord and against the neighbor, and thus against the good of love and truth of faith. (*Secrets of Heaven* 2826:13)

With regard to fear of the Divine, let the following be said: With those who are upright, fear is an internal experience. It is fear for the sake of salvation, namely, lest we should perish as to our souls, and so lest we should do anything against conscience, that is, against the truth and goodness which are of conscience. Consequently, we are fearful of doing anything against what is just and fair, thus against the neighbor. This is holy fear to the extent that it is linked to a desire to do what is good, and still more as it is linked to love of the Lord. Fear then becomes like that of little children toward the parents whom they love. Such is the "fear of God" so frequently spoken of in his Word. (*Secrets of Heaven* 7280)

Reflection: Christmastime can be a time of humility and devotion—as depicted in the story of the wise men prostrating themselves before the holy Child. We know that humility is one of the things that most invites the Lord's presence and birth within us. And what may seem counter-intuitive, an experience of humility is one in which we can feel our greatest sense of selfhood, pleasure, and happiness. Think of a time when you felt humble before the Lord in the presence of other people. What are one or two effects that this experience had on you? on your relationships with others? on your relationship with the Lord?

Notes:

Humility Before the Lord

December 22

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. And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. (Matthew 2:9-11)

It is known that the church comes from the Lord Jesus Christ, and that it exists in us when we go to him and live according to his commandments. It exists in us when we go to him because the Lord's church in the Christian world is founded on the Word, and the Word is from him, and from him in such a way that it is him. The church exists in us when we go to the Lord for the further reason that it exists in those who believe in him. And none of us can believe in him unless we get our belief from the Lord. In other words, none of us can believe in the Lord without going to him, because he is God of heaven and earth. Who else should we go to? Who else can we go to? (*Married Love* 129)

The angel of the Lord said to Hagar, "Return yourself to your mistress and humble yourself beneath her hands" (Gen. 16:9). This symbolically means that we ought by self-compulsion to place ourselves under the controlling power of interior truth. In the original language "humbling ourselves" is expressed by means of a word which means to fling down. "Flinging oneself down" in the internal sense is compelling ourselves to do good, to obey what the Lord has commanded, and to utter truths, that is, to submit ourselves beneath the controlling power of divine goodness and truth. The secret lying within this is that in so doing we have a heavenly self bestowed on us from the Lord. This self which we receive during our lifetime the Lord replenishes in the next life with limitless forms of delight and happiness. (*Secrets of Heaven* 1937:1,3,6)

Reflection: There are several parts of the Christmas story in which an angel says, "Do not be afraid." Holy fear, which is a fear of harming the Lord's love, can leave us feeling a little weak-kneed and off balance. But it is at just those times that the Lord restores us, replacing our sense of our own weakness with his unlimited strength. Zacharias was a good, faithful, and dutiful man. He wouldn't have wanted to do anything that would hurt the Lord or his fellow human beings; he would have wanted just the opposite. Each one of us has a "Zacharias" within us. What is one way in which this "Zacharias" part of you can be active today?

Notes:

The Lord's Teachings are Powerful December 5

The angel of the Lord said to Zacharias, "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. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He will also go before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah, 'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,' and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." (Luke 1:13,15,17)

It was said of John that "he should go before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah," and that he was Elijah. The reason for this is that John, like Elijah, represented the Lord in relation to the Word of God. He thence symbolized the Word. And as divine wisdom and power are in the Word, these are meant by "the spirit and power of Elijah." (*Apocalypse Explained* 724:9)

The power of divine truth is directed especially against falsities and evils, thus against hell. The fight against hell must be waged by means of truths from the literal sense of God's Word. What's more, it is by means of the truths within us that the Lord has power to save us. For we are reformed and regenerated, and are at the same time taken out of hell and introduced into heaven, by means of truths from the literal sense of the Word. (*Doctrine of the Sacred Scripture* 49)

The order of influx is as follows: As we instruct our understanding, we prepare it for the reception of light and hence of wisdom from heaven. As we do good works born of goodwill, we prepare our will for reception of the heat of heaven, or of love. Like one who cuts a diamond, we make preparation for the splendor of light to be diffused from us. (*Additions to True Christianity*, IV:1-3, part of *Posthumous Theological Works*, vol. 1)

Reflection: The wise men had a challenge to face on their way to finding the infant Lord. We have challenges to face as well. But one of the interesting things about the Lord's perfect providence is that no evil is allowed to happen to us, and no evil is allowed to tempt us, that good cannot and even will not come from. In other words, there's nothing we experience—either in our outer or inner lives—that is not an opportunity for new learning and new experiences of what is good. Think, for a minute, of one particular challenge that you've faced over the past year. Is there anything good that has come of that challenge? If so, what is it? And what is one good thing that may yet come of it?

Notes:

Goodness Wins December 21

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." When they heard the king, they departed. (Matthew 2:7-9)

It is a fact beyond doubt that the Lord governs the universe, and this government is called Providence. There is no such thing as chance, that is, evil happening by chance, but all evils are controlled in such a way that not a single one of them is allowed to happen to us on earth or to a soul that does not lead to what is good. What's more, nothing is permitted to happen that has not been foreseen, for otherwise it cannot happen. (*Spiritual Diary* 1088)

It should be recognized that spirits from hell who are allowed to attack us intend nothing but evil. They wish with all their might to drag us down from heaven and cast us into hell; for to destroy anyone's soul, thus to destroy us forever, is the sheer delight of their life. But they are not allowed by the Lord to do anything at all except that good may come of it, in other words, so that truth and goodness may be made firmer and stronger with us when we undergo spiritual conflict. (*Secrets of Heaven* 6574:3)

All evil which the evil in hell intend and do to us the Lord converts into what is good. (*Secrets of Heaven* 4493:6)

Reflection: We know that John the Baptist represents the Word of God, and that the spirit and power that are contained in the Word are things that are directed toward our lives—to help remove obstacles to happiness and productivity, and to introduce us into regular experiences of heaven. What is one thing that you can do to work in harmony with the Lord today—to "cut the diamond" so to speak—so that "the splendor of light is diffused from you" to others?

Notes:

Confidence, Tranquility, Peace, & Joy December 6

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!" (Luke 1:26-28)

The words of Scripture, "God blessed," refer to 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. This is also how all people who keep to the external sense explain the Word. But in the internal sense, "blessing" means being enriched with all spiritual and heavenly goodness, 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. (*Secrets of Heaven* 981:1)

The varying states of mind in the other world are according to the perception of goodness 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 a perception of the Lord's presence are in a perception that each and all things that happen to 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. (*Secrets of Heaven* 5963)

Reflection: Who can miss the faithful determination of the wise men in their search for the infant Lord—"for we have seen His star in the east and have come to worship Him"? Their faithfulness and determination are things that each one of us experiences in our lifetimes as well, beginning in early childhood. We experience them in the desire we feel to be good people, i.e., to do what is good and true. What is one way that you've recently sought the Lord as a help and support for your life? How can you continue in that effort through Christmas day—with all the faithfulness and determination of the wise men?

Notes:

Serve the Lord

December 20

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)

When people who are looking at internal things from external things see the heavens, they do not think of the starry heaven, but of the angelic heaven. When they see the sun, they do not think of the sun, but of the Lord as being the Sun of heaven. So too when they see the moon, and the stars also. And when they see the immensity of the heavens, they do not think of their immensity, but of the immeasurable and unlimited power of the Lord. (*Secrets of Heaven* 1807)

The Lord's constant effort to reform and regenerate us, and so to purify us from evils, is realized when we will and intend it. (*Doctrine of Charity* 203, part of *Posthumous Theological Works*, vol. 1)

Reflection: We know that Mary was troubled by the angel's saying, and that Gabriel told her not to be afraid. What could Mary have been afraid of? She might have been afraid for her future: What would happen to her after the angel's visit and after the Lord was born? Yet the sense that we get, a verse or two later in the story, is that Mary wasn't afraid at all. Quite the opposite: Underlying her momentary state of confusion, she apparently felt the Lord's hand, and she trusted his providence, in what was happening. She was confident that things would turn out well. Things often turn out well in our lives too, even when we think they won't. What is one way that this has been true for you over the past year?

Notes:

Have Peace About Things to Come December 7

The angel said to Mary, "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. 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." (Luke 1:30-31,34-35)

When we live good lives, and believe that the Lord governs the universe, and that he alone is the source of everything good and true, we then trust solely in the Lord and have no anxious cares about anything else. We are then quite sure that all things work for our goodness, blessedness, and happiness forever. (*Secrets of Heaven* 2892)

If we trust in the Divine, we are not anxious, let alone worried, when we give thought to the morrow. We are content with our lot. We know that for those who trust in the Divine all things are moving toward an everlasting state of happiness, and that no matter what happens to us at any time, it contributes to that state. It should be recognized that divine providence is overall, that is, it is present within the smallest details of all, and that when we are in the stream of providence, we are being carried along constantly toward happier things, whatever appearance the means may present. We are in the stream of providence when we trust in the Divine and ascribe everything to him. (*Secrets of Heaven* 8478:3-4)

Reflection: How often do we think of the spirit of thanksgiving in relation to Christmastime? And yet it's a very real part of the Christmas story. A feeling of gratitude to the Lord is something that we can experience at times when the Lord has been born in us, and at times when we're enjoying the blessings of a good and true life. Looking over the past year, what is one thing that you feel genuinely happy about and thankful for? Please describe. What additional thoughts and/or hopes come to mind?

Notes:

“Thank you, Lord”

December 19

Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess...of the tribe of Asher. 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 name “Asher” in scripture means blessedness, also the delight that belongs to affections for truth and goodness. This delight corresponds to the happiness of eternal life. When we perceive this delight within us, we are starting to become the Church. (*Secrets of Heaven* 3939:1)

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. (*Apocalypse Explained* 340:3)

The Divine Providence has for its end nothing else than reformation and consequently salvation. This is its unceasing work with everyone; and salvation can only be effected by an acknowledgment of the divinity of the Lord, and by confidence that it is effected by him when we live according to his commandments. (*Divine Providence* 257:4)

After the general redemption that the Lord wrought during his first advent, he bestowed peace on those who believed in him. Likewise, he gives to us after spiritual conflict a sense of peace, that is, gladness of mind and consolation. (*True Christian Religion* 599)

Reflection: Today’s reading picks up where yesterday’s reading left off. Mary’s question to the angel wasn’t one of doubt. She simply wondered how such a thing could happen since she “did not know a man.” The angel’s answer signaled to her that everything would be alright, and that the conception would be a miraculous one. What is one thing you can remember happening in your life which at first may have troubled or confused you, or even invited fear, but which turned out well in the end? What thoughts or feelings do you have about that experience? What do you conclude from it?

Notes:

With God Nothing Will Be Impossible

December 8

The angel answered and said to Mary, “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 1:35-37)

There are several reasons why faith in the Lord healed people in the New Testament; first, because they acknowledged the Lord’s divine power, and that he was God; and second, because faith is acknowledgment, and acknowledgment brings a sense of the Lord’s presence. So whenever a new church was to be established by the Lord, it was this acknowledgment of the Lord’s divine power from which people were first to look to him. (*Apocalypse Explained* 815:5)

Jesus answered and said to them, “Have faith in God. For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his or her heart, but believes that those things he or she says will come to pass, they will have whatever they say.” (Mark 11:22-24)

With God all things are possible. (Matthew 19:26)

*Reflection: Anna was a person who may have felt a sense of closeness and connection to God as she served him with fastings and prayers. We can experience a similar closeness to the Lord whenever he, in answer to prayer, offers us a new sense of his presence, new and heavenly insights, new ways of perceiving people and situations in our lives, and new feelings of hope, comfort, and deeply felt joy. What are one or two ways that you can experience a closer sense of connection with the Lord this Christmas? In other words, what are one or two things you can do to **be** more connected with Him?*

Notes:

Pray to the Lord

December 18

Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess. 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. (Luke 2:36-37)

Regarded in itself prayer is talking with God, and at the same time some inner view of the things that are being prayed for. Answering to this there is something akin to an influx into the perception or thought of our minds, which effects a certain opening of our internals toward God. But the experience varies according to our state of mind and according to the essence of whatever we're praying for. If our prayer springs from love and faith, and if they are entirely heavenly and spiritual things about which and for which we pray, something like a revelation is present within our prayer which registers in our feelings as hope, comfort, or inward joy. (*Secrets of Heaven* 2535)

In each thing that we utter there is affection, and every person, spirit, and angel is their own affection, for affection is life. It is affection itself that speaks, and not us without it; therefore such as our affection is, such is our praying. Spiritual affection is what is called goodwill toward the neighbor. To be in that affection is true worship. Praying is what proceeds from it. (*Apocalypse Explained* 325:3)

Reflection: The fact that Elizabeth, who was barren, would conceive a son in old age would have seemed impossible. In a similar way, there may be things we hope and long for this Christmas, and it may seem impossible for those things to come to pass. But the Lord is more powerful than that. We're told that the first thing that is needed in order for any "impossible" dream to come true is for us to believe that the Lord has the power to make it happen. What is one thing you that currently wish for in your life that you doubt can happen? Does the Lord have the power to make that dream a reality? Please explain. What thoughts and feelings do you have about this? With God all things are possible.

Notes:

“Let It Be to Me According to Your Word”
December 9

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)

Peace is like the dawn on earth, which fills our minds with overall delight. At the heart of true peace is trust in the Lord, the trust that he governs all things, and provides all things, and that he leads toward an end that is good. When we believe these things about him we are at peace, since we then fear nothing, and no anxiety about things to come disturbs us. (*Secrets of Heaven* 8455:1)

When we trust in the Lord, we are constantly receiving what is good from him; for whatever happens to us, whether it seems to be advantageous or not advantageous, is nevertheless good, for it serves as a means contributing to our eternal happiness. (*Secrets of Heaven* 8480:2)

Reflection: Isn't it interesting to see the idea of falling and rising reflected in the story of Christmas? This tells us that ups and downs are part of the Christmas story as it unfolds and comes true in each of our lives. We also know that the "falls" that we experience in life don't always feel very good, but that each "rising" can be a wonderful experience. Each rising can make the fall that may have preceded it worthwhile. What is one fall and one rising that you've experienced over the past year? In what way did this dual experience open you up to a better you?

Notes:

Ups & Downs in Life

December 17

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 2:33-35)

People uninformed about human regeneration suppose that we can be regenerated without spiritual conflict, and some that we have been regenerated after we've undergone a single conflict. But let it be known that we cannot 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 we can see that conflict is altogether inevitable; for the life of the old self stands its ground and refuses to be snuffed out, and the life of the new self 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. (*Secrets of Heaven* 8403)

Before we can know what is true and be affected by what is good, there must be a removal of such things as hinder and resist their entrance; thus the old self must die before the new self can be conceived. (*Secrets of Heaven* 18)

We first start to live when that which in the world we believe to constitute the whole of life perishes. What's more, the life which we then receive, in comparison with the life we previously had, is beyond words and boundless. (*Secrets of Heaven* 3175:4)

Reflection: Today's Scripture contains one of the most powerful and poetic statements of trust in the Lord that exists in the Bible—"Let it be to me according to your word." A statement like this, when genuinely felt, comes from a heart that is at peace with the Lord's leadership; also from a belief that all things are under the Lord's guidance, that he has our best interests in mind, and that everything that happens to us is an opportunity for something good in our lives. Take a moment to put yourself in Mary's place. What is one promise of goodness that the Lord is making for your life right now? How do you respond to that promise from the heart?

Notes:

Serve Without Fear

December 10

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,
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 1:67-69,74)

This is a prophetic saying of Zacharias concerning the Lord and his advent. The “horn of salvation” symbolically means all power to save by means of divine truth from divine goodness. The enemies from which the Lord saves us are the falsities of evil. These are the enemies from which the Lord saves all who receive him. (*Apocalypse Explained* 316)

A single angel has greater power than thousands of infernal spirits, yet not from him- or herself, but from the Lord; angels have it from the Lord in the proportion that they believe that they have no power from themselves, thus that they are the least; and this they can believe insofar as they are in humility and in a desire to be of service to others, that is, insofar as they are in love of the Lord and goodwill toward the neighbor. (*Secrets of Heaven* 3417)

Reflection: Simeon was a wise and patient man—he waited patiently for the Lord’s coming. Likewise, the promise of spiritual rebirth and the growth of healthy relationships takes understanding and patience, as we wait for each new arrival of the Lord in our lives. What are one or two ways in which the virtue of patience can add itself to your Christmas season this year? In what way(s) will it benefit you and others?

Notes:

Patience: A Sign of Trust
December 16

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 2:25,27-32)

When we are in a state of love or heavenly affection, we're in an angelic state, that is to say, as if not in time, provided there is no impatience. For impatience is a bodily feeling, and insofar as we are in it, so far we are in time; but so far as we are not in it, so far we are not in time. By means of genuine love we are withdrawn from bodily and worldly things. Our minds are then elevated toward heaven, and thus we are withdrawn from the things of time. (*Secrets of Heaven* 3827)

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in His word I do hope. (Psalm 130:5)

In your patience possess your souls. (Luke 21:19)

Reflection: The readings for today focus on the strength that exists in a life of useful service. One of the main goals of the Lord's birth and life on earth was to free us from spiritual chains that bind us, so that our lives could bear fruit for others. What is one way that you enjoy being of use to others during the Christmas season? What are one or two ways in which this is a blessing in your life?

Notes:

Be Confident in the Lord's Providence

December 11

Continuing Zacharias' prophecy from yesterday's reading:
 "Blessed is the Lord God of Israel,
 For He has visited and redeemed His people....
 And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest;
 For you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways,
 To give knowledge of salvation to His people
 By the remission of their sins;
 To give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow
 of death,
 To guide our feet into the way of peace." (Luke 1:67,76)

Humankind can never be led better than it is. It has been foreseen from eternity, and thus provided, that all things down to the very least tend toward the final purpose that they may be parts of the Lord's kingdom. In addition, it should be known that the Lord's unlimited power can arrange all things in the best way. (*Spiritual Diary* 3114)

When the Lord is with us, he leads us, and he makes provision so that everything that happens, whether sad or joyful, may bring us what is good. This is Divine Providence. (*Secrets of Heaven* 6303)

The steps of good people are ordered by the Lord, and he delights in their way. (Psalm 37:23)

Reflection: For many people the angels' words—"on earth peace, good will toward all"—capture the spirit of Christmas. Christmas is a time when the iciness that we can sometimes experience in our hearts can melt away, and we find ourselves enjoying family, friends, and loved ones in an atmosphere of human warmth and goodwill. This is one of the greatest blessings and promises of Christmas. What is one way in which the message of the angels—"on earth peace, goodwill toward all"—can come true for you today?

Notes:

Goodwill is Powerful
December 15

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 2:13-14)

Spiritual power is to will the good of others, and to wish to convey to them as far as possible what is with us. (*Apocalypse Explained* 79)

Heaven consists in desiring from the heart the good of others more than our own, and in serving others with a view to their happiness, not with reward as an end, but from love. (*Heaven and Hell* 408)

Nothing is more pleasing to one who loves anyone, and who believes anyone, than to will and do what the other wills and thinks. It is his or her only desire to know their will and thought, thus their good pleasure. (*Secrets of Heaven* 10143:5)

Love consists in this, that its own should be another's. To feel the joy of another as joy in ourselves, that is loving. (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 47)

Reflection: Our readings for today remind us that the Lord is always working to bring good things out of our life experiences, and to lead us to deepening levels of peace. They also remind us that the way he arranges things in our lives is the best that they can be arranged for our personal growth and development. As you look back over your life, what are one or two experiences you've had that confirm these things?

Notes:

Confidence: Part of a Good Life
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 1:18-19)

To believe in the Lord is to have confidence that he will save, and as none of us can have this confidence unless we live rightly, therefore this is also meant by believing in him. (*Doctrine of Faith* 36)

The faith that saves us is confidence. But this confidence is quite impossible except in a good life. Without a good life there is no active reception of the Lord, and where there is no active reception, there is no confidence...except at times a certain apparent confidence. (*Secrets of Heaven* 2982)

By faith in the Lord is meant confidence that he will save. We have this confidence if we immediately approach him and turn away from evils because they are sinful. (*Apocalypse Revealed* 949:2)

*Reflection: The theology of the New Church suggests that there are always at least two guardian angels with us. This means that there can be **more** than two present with us at any moment in time, even whole squadrons or communities of angels. Each angel that is with us has tremendous power—the power of the Lord’s truth and goodness. This is something that the shepherds experienced in a living way as they kept watch over their flock by night. What is one powerful message (“good tidings of great joy”) that the Lord is trying to get through to you this Christmas season?*

Notes:

Guardian Angels Bring Us Help December 14

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.... (Luke 2:8-13)

With regard to the inflow of heaven into us the case is this: Heaven in general flows into us; specific heavenly communities do so as well; and each community consists of many angels. The more angels there are, the better and stronger is the correspondence that exists between what is spiritual and what is earthly. This accordance of many leads to a more perfect and stronger effort acting into us. (*Secrets of Heaven* 3629)

Scarcely anyone in this world can know the nature of the power that is in truth from goodness. When we are in faith from goodwill, we are in that power. All angels are in that power, and from it they are (in the Word) called “powers.” (*Secrets of Heaven* 6344)

*Reflection: One of the things that the Lord wants us to have is confidence that he **can** save us from spiritual harm, that he **does** save us, and that he **will** save us as we make wise and loving choices in our lives, based in the Word of God. This confidence is something that grows deeper and deeper in us as a good life increases. Perhaps Joseph was a man who had this kind of confidence in his God. How would you describe your own confidence in the Lord and his work in your life? What is that confidence like, especially at times when you’re strong in your faith—when you’re turning away from one or another evil because it is against the Lord, and doing what is good? What is that confidence like when your faith **isn’t** as strong? How do these two experiences of confidence compare? What can you do to increase your confidence in the Lord today?*

Notes:

**“With God’s Help I Will Conquer This”
December 13**

But while Joseph 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 1:20-21)

The divine power of the Lord is the power to save the human race. Power to save the human race is the same as power over heaven and hell. We are saved by this power of the Lord, and not by any other. (*Secrets of Heaven* 10019)

When we are in heavenly love, we have confidence that we will be saved by the Lord; for we believe that the Lord came into the world in order to give eternal life to us when we believe and live according to the commandments that he taught; also that he regenerates us, and so makes us fit for heaven; also that he does this all by himself, from pure mercy, without the aid of anyone. This is meant by “believing in the Lord.” (*Secrets of Heaven* 9244)

The smallest amount of divine power, every time it is called on, tames instantly the entire devil's crew, even if it consisted of millions. (*Secrets of Heaven* 8626)

People who believe in God say to themselves, "With God's help I will conquer this." And they pray for it and obtain it. (*Doctrine of Charity* 203, part of *Posthumous Theological Works*, vol. 1)

Reflection: One of the greatest and most helpful messages at Christmastime is the one delivered to Joseph by the angel: “He will save His people from their sins.” Today we’re reminded that we’re saved from our sins by the Lord’s power, not by our own. The Lord’s power to save us is unlimited. It’s available to us any time we need it, and any time we ask for it. What is your experience of going to the Lord for help and power against sin? What happens—both inside of you and in your outward life—when you ask for that help and power? How do you respond or react to the teaching which says, “People who believe in God say to themselves, “With God’s help, I will conquer this”? What can you do to gain this kind of confidence?

Notes: