

A NEW SPIRITUALITY

No. 50 December 2015

Light in Our Darkness



Heaven has revealed to the world through the Writings of Christian mystic, Emanuel Swedenborg, that the Divine Presence became human and was born as a babe on our earth to become a light in our darkness. Jesus called Himself “the light of the world.” At that time the human race was living under a dense cloud of spiritual apathy, ignorance and depravity. He came to show us the way back to enlightenment and took on the power of the hells that were overshadowing the world. He drove these evil influences back and cleared the way for us to follow Him on the path to heaven. Had He not come there would have been no hope for us spiritually and eternally. Today we have a far greater spiritual freedom than we have ever had and are able to choose our own destiny by the life that we live. So the angels rejoiced at the birth of Jesus and so might we, saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to all people of goodwill.” May the Christ Light shine in your hearts and minds this Christmas and touch others too, as you share the joy.

I have often seen spiritual light, which immensely exceeds natural light in clearness and splendor. As light is Wisdom, the Lord calls Himself the Light which lightens every person, and says in other places that He is the Light, that is, that He is Divine Truth.

EMANUEL SWEDENBORG

The Star

Brian and Gretchen Keith



The dramatic image of the star in the Christmas story has long been appealing and fascinating. Appearing in the east, it signaled that the Lord had been born. After the wise men inquired at Jerusalem, the star then led them from Jerusalem to Bethlehem so that they might find the infant Lord Jesus. And then it stood over Him that they might worship Him.

Spiritually, this depicts a fundamental truth of His Advent—the Lord came to earth to shine new light on the world. To rescue it from the darkness of confusion and ignorance. To point to a new direction for our lives, that we might worship the Lord in spirit and in truth.

It's not surprising that the star represents the Lord and all that flows from Him. He came so that people might have a new vision of who He is—a loving and wise God who cares so much for people that He would come among us, teach us, tolerate our failings and evils, and eventually rise above all of it that He might be our God and Saviour, fully Divine and fully Human.

Let us then rejoice this Christmas season in the Lord's coming on earth. Let us look to His light and life as the star that can guide our ways also. As we see the Lord, or His truths, let us be stirred to seek Him out, as the wise men did. Let us inquire where He can be found. Let us explore His Word that it might lead us step by step to His innocence and love embodied in the young babe. Let us worship our Lord and Saviour as the light of lives and walk in the ways that He has provided us. And let us rejoice with exceedingly great joy.

THE LOST MAGI

by Brian Kingslake.

Oh, how shall we find the One we seek?
We've journeyed long, we've wandered far,
The world is wide, our flesh is weak,
We know not where we are.

"Look up, and follow the star!"

We've studied ancient maps and charts,
We've read the prophecies with care,
Enquired at a hundred inns and marts,
And sought Him everywhere.

"The star will guide you there!"

The star? What star? We gaze on high,
scanning the vault, before, behind.
Clouds and thick darkness veil the sky,
No light of any kind!

"Brothers, the Star is in the mind!
Turn inward first, then you will find!"



Once Upon a Time

John Sutton

Once upon a time there was a golden age on earth when everyone lived in complete harmony and contentment within their extended family. No one was ruled by self love or worldliness. There was no desire to have what others had, or to control them, no greed, no adultery, no cruelty. They were pleased that other people enjoyed their possessions and life. No laws were needed because everyone was ruled by an inner conscience. They were also very aware of the Divine Being, heaven, the angels and life after death. Throughout their world there was peace, joy and eternal happiness. It was paradise.

This might sound like the beginning of a fairy story but it isn't. The first human beings lived like this. However, as with many stories, it did not last. People were born with a freedom of choice, so possessiveness and the desire to control others slowly grew with each generation. Laws governing peoples' behaviour had to be written and policed to prevent anarchy. Sadly, as they became more self-centred and worldly people, they were less aware of heaven and the angels, until few knew and less believed in them. This gradual spiritual decline of the human race continued to the point where the Lord, through the angels of heaven, was in danger of being unable to help people find the happiness they were created for. This spiritual decline is recorded in the inner sense of the books of the Prophets.

Amongst all the warnings there about the effects of self-love and worldliness, there is the promise of hope and new life—the promise that the Lord is still 'Emmanuel' God with us, offering us new life; hope replacing despair, joy instead of mourning, the peace of forgiving instead of hatred. May you find something of this new life at Christmas and may the apparent fantasy of it become a reality for you.

	<p>The Lord <i>Emanuel Swedenborg</i> Draws on his visionary experiences of the spiritual world to address questions about the life and nature of Jesus. \$21 + p. & p.</p>		<p>Light in My Darkness <i>Helen Keller</i> Her spiritual autobiography which reveals the source of her inspiration to overcome her disabilities. \$12 + p.& p.</p>
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The New Christian Church

Christmas Festival of readings and carols Sunday, 20 December 10 a.m.
Bring a gift of non perishable Christmas fare for the Pakuranga Women's Refuge

Christmas Day Service 10 a.m.

5 Ballarat Street, Ellerslie, Auckland.
Ph: 09 579 6819

THE LIGHT OF CHRIST

Kit Billings

Light . . . it's just plain gorgeous isn't it? Are you a "light lover" like me? Have you ever given much thought to light? What does it mean? On both the natural and spiritual levels of life, it dispels darkness—and in so doing can dispel fear of many kinds. Wow, what a blessing light is! And when we start to talk about the light that shines from the Divine Being the conversation gets a whole lot more interesting and vital.

The word "light" occurs in the Gospel of John over twenty times. Jesus referred to Himself as the light of all people. John the Baptist's mission was to point people to the light that was in Christ. Twice Jesus calls Himself the light of the world (*John 8:12; 9:5*). The Lord taught that this light can be within us (*John 11:9, 10*), so that we can become children of the light (*John 12:36*). "I have come," said Jesus, "as light into the world" (*John 12:46*). Let us see if we can understand something of this idea of the light that Jesus brings into the world. I'm going to address Christ's life as *light*—a divine light in fact that shines into the darkness and illuminates not only Christian lives but *all lives!*

Christ's light shines into the darkness and illuminates not only Christian lives but *all lives!*

The older I get, the more I deeply love and appreciate light, and what it does to darkness. Lately I find myself marvelling at what a string of lights wrapped around a bush or tree can do to a very dark night. Or what one little candle lit in a darkened room at night can do to my heart, my mind, and my life.

The other night, when I was all by myself in my house, an old spiritual nemesis entered the room: a basic yet powerful fear of being alone. Do you ever feel this fear within you—a fear of being alone in life?

The darkness that the Apostle John wrote about in his awesome opening chapter is the enveloping and destructive falsity that the spirits of hell relish. This falsity, when accepted by us, blocks out God's light of truth, creating darkness in the mind. The hells want to convince us that certain dark false notions are true—such as that we are truly alone, or that chaos is stronger than the Lord, and stronger than all that is orderly and good in life.

Contrary to the overly simplistic theology of the New Age movement, *there truly are evil spirits*, and they want to destroy and consume true life, love, and faith in God. This is their aim: to create fear, anxiety, worry,

selfishness, and hatred. They are lost in a world of fantasy, falsity, and spiritual perversions and lusts. And on that night, that one seemingly dark and lonely night of mine, their darkness was around me. But you see, I know their game; I know what they want. And I know some very effective tools for beating them at their game. *God's light dispels the darkness!* The wisdom and light of God has been entering this chaotic world of ours for a very, very long time! As God spoke through Isaiah, "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them has the light shined" (*Isaiah 9:2*). And later, after the Advent of the Lord, John wrote: "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness could not overpower it."

Long before I was born, the Word of God has been shining into life as spiritual light. And it has been shining into my mind and spirit for many years now. I knew what the truth was in the midst of that delicate yet oh, so real and frightening temptation that night. I recalled these powerful words, this powerful truth, given to us by the Lord through His apostle John, telling us that before there was any darkness there was the Word, which was God. Before there was darkness there was light that shone from the divine life force itself. John revealed with poetic strength unequalled by any religious mind in history that Jesus Christ is this divine Word and light because He is the divine truth of God the Father who shines into life! Divine truth shines and illuminates our minds. As Swedenborg learned, the Word that John speaks of in his opening verses is, put simply, divine truth that shines brilliantly and gloriously into life! Life itself was the very soul of Jesus Christ—and so we read that in Him was life, and His life was the light of all people.

God's Word is our light that lightens our paths in life. And when we read the earthly level of God's Word of truth, the Holy Bible, we feel and receive the light of Christ, and it illuminates what lies in front of us. As I took the time early this past week to read and pray and meditate on these words from God written in John's opening chapter, knowing and believing that these words belong to the Lord, and reveal His mind and truth to everyone in the world, the power of their divine light began to dispel the darkness I had fallen prey to that night. It wasn't long, and then I was at peace—a very strong and lovely peace.

Our Gospel writer said, "In the beginning was the Word," which we know means: in the beginning was divine truth, divine reason, divine light that shines forth

from *life itself!* The Greeks latched onto this essential truth thousands of years before Christ was born through the thoughts of a great Ephesian philosopher named Heraclitus, who lived in the sixth century B.C. He knew that God is the *Logos*, the reason and the *order* that makes the ever-changing, constantly in flux universe, and the often chaotic elements in it, assume beauty and orderliness. Interestingly, Heraclitus then brought the matter even closer to home. What in us individually told us the difference between right and wrong? What made us able to think and to reason? What enabled us to choose right from wrong and to recognise the truth when we saw it? Once again Heraclitus gave the same answer—it was the *Logos* of God dwelling within us. Heraclitus held that in the world of nature and events, all things happen according to the *Logos*, and that in the individual person, the *Logos* is the judge of truth.

John's Gospel reveals that the Word, or Infinite Reason, was certainly the *real light*, which gives light to everyone. John gave testimony by his years of personal experience of living with Christ that the Word was coming into the world that had come into being through Him. "The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth."

Suddenly, with the Incarnation, things have gotten *much more intimate!* John revealed a truth that Swedenborg elaborated upon very highly in his theological writings, namely, that there can be only one Divine Being of Life, and this infinite Creator and Sustainer has always had the power to reveal His love and wisdom to us. Christ is that aspect of the one God that becomes eminently present with us ("God with us" - Emmanuel); who shines forth his light of truth upon us more so than ever before in history; who makes the infinite Father visible and known. And the beautiful, healing, guiding light that shines from Christ is truly the only light that enlightens all people. The spiritual and divine light of the Lord shines everywhere, even into non-Christian religions and into their holy scriptures. This is why people may find a lot of saving truth and light in the Jewish, Islamic, and other non-Christian religions without confessing Jesus as the Christ. And this is why we read in *John 1:9*: "The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world."

I began my message to you by saying that light dispels darkness. This truth needs to be underscored and expanded! Jesus says, "I am the light of the world; whoever follows me will not walk in darkness" (*John 8:12*). But let us all know with utter clarity that the light of Christ is more than a light of peace and goodwill toward all. It is a searching light, a penetrating light that will shed light into places within you that you won't feel

very good about at first. Yet if we can stand it, later comes *experiential salvation!* Later comes growth and transformation!

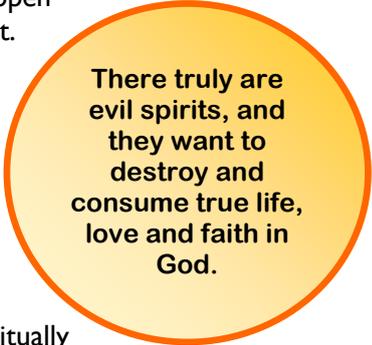
The light of God is true life; it is love and wisdom. It therefore won't stop halfway, but will shine fully throughout your heart and mind. It will reveal the truth behind your deep fears, your dreads, your falsities. It will continue to shine into *your* darkness. The light of Christ has a simple aim: to get you fully exposed to it, so that you yourself shine with it. It is having the light of God within us that enables us to be, as the Lord said to His disciples, "the light of the world" (*Matthew 5:14*).

Jesus came into the world in part to enable people to experience a terrific growth of love, joy, and peace centred in truth. His beautiful and searching light makes this possible, and makes it happen with our openness to His light.

Thus, spiritual love and truth are His great aim—and *your life and my life are Christ's target*. But make no mistake about it: His light, which is truth, will bring you mercifully in touch with the dark, problematic falsities, addictions, neuroses, and spiritually disorderly elements within you that try to avoid God's light, just as chapter one in the Gospel of John says: "The world did not know him. He came to what was His own, and His own did not accept Him." These dark elements of life are what trip us up and make us fall. The darkness within us, before it is transformed, hates the light. Our inherited evil inclinations within our naturalness hate the light, and will battle it fiercely at times. So John is saying, as William Barclay puts it: "Into this world there comes Jesus, the light of the world; for there is a darkness that would seek to eliminate Him, to banish Him from life, to extinguish Him. But there is a power in Jesus that is intractable—not easily governed or controlled. The darkness can despise the Lord, but it can never get rid of Him. As has been truly said: "Not all the darkness in the world can extinguish the smallest flame."

Swedenborg wrote that God, who is love and therefore life itself, wants to share all of Himself with you, that you might receive the Lord's love and wisdom within your own unique heart and mind. You were created for this purpose: to enjoy life being conjoined and deeply close to our divine Father, Jesus Christ. It is a vision of life with the Divine that is close, personal, and intimate. God the Father came here and lived among us to make sure your access to the kingdom of heaven remains open and vitalised. He is as close to you as life itself.

(from www.Swedenborg.org)



There truly are evil spirits, and they want to destroy and consume true life, love and faith in God.

Therapeutic Praise

Eric Hoffman

On December 16, 1770, in Bonn, Germany, Ludwig von Beethoven was born. The reason why it is appropriate for us to remember this man today is connected to one of the few things that most of us know about him. During the time that he wrote most of his most memorable compositions, including his Eroica Symphony and his famous Fifth Symphony, Beethoven was almost completely deaf.



He began to go deaf when he was about thirty, which troubled him greatly, for obvious reasons. In addition to this unhappy turn of events, Beethoven did not have the happiest of childhoods. His father was an alcoholic and abusive, driving his children mercilessly to excel. Beethoven had to become the sole support for his family when he was only eighteen, which he accomplished by serving as a court musician. He was a bachelor his entire life only because he was attracted to women who were unattainable—either too aristocratic or already married or both. He ran away from the one woman who returned his affections because, as it turns out, he was terrified of marriage, never having witnessed a healthy one. Yet in spite of all of this, he produced some of the most emotionally charged and joyful music in the Western tradition. Modern psychologists would undoubtedly see that Beethoven created his music to compensate for the woundedness in his life. It was therapeutic for him to compose.

It calls to mind a strange thing that once happened to me. I was in, of all places, a laundromat. As I was doing the washing, a song kept running through my head. You know how sometimes you get a tune stuck in your brain and you can't get rid of it? It was an old Roger Whittaker tune, and I was whistling it as I folded clothes from the dryer. A lady across from me said, "Boy, I don't know how you can be in such a good mood. I think a laundromat is one of the dreariest places there is."

As I stood there talking to her, I remember thinking that, you know, she had a point. I

remember the laundromats that my mother dragged me to as a child were probably the most boring places I had ever seen, exacerbated by the fact that with a large family it took us hours to finish the laundry. It was agony. The place where I was talking to the lady was nice enough, but it was still a laundromat. People rarely become giddy at the thought of having to do the laundry. To top it all off, my car was at the mechanic's at the time, getting about a thousand dollars of transmission work done, and the rest of my schedule that day was looking pretty crowded. In the midst of all that, there I was in a laundromat whistling a happy little tune. Could it be, as the lady suggested, that I was actually in a good mood?

Sing as if you were happy and it may very well lead you actually to feel happy.

Without realising it, I think I, like Beethoven and countless other happy people with dirty laundry, was on to something that really works. I'm going to call it "therapeutic praise."

We hear in the Word many encouragements to praise God and to "make a joyful noise unto the Lord." But the reality is that sometimes we just don't feel like it. Sometimes there is so much stress and hardship and anxiety that we lose sight of the beauty and purpose in our lives. I don't believe that all those prophets and psalms were saying, "Praise God, but only if you're having a really good day." I think they understood that praising God re-establishes and strengthens our awareness of the divine Presence. It has been said that the night before Jesus was born was the darkest night in history, spiritually speaking, and yet in the Christmas story an entire heaven's worth of angels are

singing praises at the top of their celestial lungs. What a remarkable response! To put it simply, singing praises helps us to feel better. It reinvigorates our sense of hope.

This should come as no surprise to anyone who's had a really bad day, full of unwelcome surprises and unappreciated challenges, and who turns on the car radio on the way home and hears a really good song. Involuntarily, we start to sing along. Lo and behold, the next song is pretty good too, and so we sing that one. A few songs later, we notice that we are feeling better—the music has, on some level, helped us to re-establish our priorities in life. You don't have to be Pavarotti or Beverly Sills. How well you sing isn't the important thing. It's the singing—the act of letting go—that does the trick.

I think Swedenborg understood therapeutic praise. He wrote that in any person's spiritual development a stage occurs at which we do certain things because we understand that they are good, with the hope that soon we will be able to *feel* the good in them. This is the stage in our process he called "reformation." Some more contemporary theorists call it "fake it 'til you make it." If we persist in doing good, exercising charity and living love even when we don't feel like it, God can demonstrate to us on a deeper level why it's so wonderful to do these things, and pretty soon we do them because we *feel* them.

So it is with praise. When we express our acknowledgement of God in the form of praise, especially during the times when we don't perceive God all that clearly, then we can open ourselves up to the divine Presence, and God can be made known within us. In other words, sing as if you were happy and it may very well

lead you actually to feel happy. And, you know, happy isn't a bad thing to be: not only is life more enjoyable, but we actually get more done when we're happy.

We can apply the concept of therapeutic praise right here and now, especially if we're getting just a little tired of all the Christmas confusion and chaos going on out there. I know Christmas is a joyful time for most of us, but for some Christmas can be depressing, especially if everyone around you has family to share Christmas with and you don't. Many people in this world have "blue Christmases," and it's important for all of us to be sensitive to that. I confess that there are times when Christmas gets me down. But I would offer that one possible answer to the Christmas blues is to *sing praises anyway*. Go out and intentionally find Christmas and enjoy the season for all it has to offer, as if you've always known it. Sing those carols with life in your voice, no matter how old and familiar they seem to you. Instead of pretending you're not home, open the door when you hear carollers outside and have fun with them. Wrap those presents with joy, knowing that someone will receive that gift and love it and be grateful for it. Most of us, when wrapping gifts, tend to focus on it as a chore, one more something that has to get done. Try visualising someone unwrapping it as you wrap it and see if that changes anything for you. And for those of us who share Christmas with children, don't be afraid to show a little excitement on Christmas morning. Santa Claus visits grown-ups too, you know.

Let's all endeavour this year to let go of whatever cynicism we may feel and open ourselves up to Christmas so that God can show us just how wonderful it can be.

(from www.swedenborg.org)

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A New Spirituality

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