

Candela



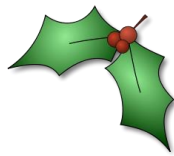
Newsletter of the Swedenborg Association of Australia Inc.

Organisational Details are provided on the next page

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

DECEMBER 2024

ISSUE 118



I'm pretty sure you'll get your Candela before Christmas so it's good to think about the season a bit before it comes. For me, the whole thing about Christmas is about how an idea can become a reality, an actuality. This is the meaning on every level; however you look at it.

The idea that God - who creates everything there is - can come into the world he creates and be physically present in it as a human being is a huge idea, but this is the claim that Christmas makes. God with us. Imagine living around 33 AD and someone says, "Hey, I'm going to see this man who talks like he's God. Wanna come?" In our times, we're much more used to God being with us more metaphysically, in our loving, in our receptivity, in our prayers, in our hearts. But him - God? - standing over there?

Then there's God in this world. When you look at the narratives about Jesus, you meet an array of characters caught up in being with Jesus - disciples, lots of sick people, some Pharisees who don't like this weird man, and some Pharisees who do. There's often a crowd too, who tend to block entrance. You meet people full of questions, foreigners, Roman soldiers, three dead people, and a bunch of people who can't work things out. It kind of begins to look a lot like my own world in me. I also get sick, healed, rushed, stilled, confused, answered, dead, brought back to life.

✨ ✨ ✨ Continued on page 2 ✨ ✨ ✨

MAIN CONTENT

President's Message	Julian Duckworth	1
Swedenborg Centre News	Joe Vandermeer	3
The two types of Hacking Cybercrime & Spiritual Attacks	Howard Thompson	4
Just a second.....	Julian Duckworth	7
Virtues - Contentment	Darren Brunne	10
Three Christmas Journeys		11

Please note: the views expressed in this Newsletter are those of each contributor and do not necessarily reflect any particular position of the S.A.A. or its committee.

NEXT ISSUE - March 2025

We hope that you enjoy this issue of the Candela and are inspired to write for our next issue. Please have anything to me by 25th February 2025.

Every best wish for a meaningful Christmas and a very Happy New Year as you continue your spiritual journey.

Ruth

email to ruth@duckworth.me





SWEDENBORG ASSOCIATION of Australia Inc

ARBN 109 811 985

Registered Office:

Swedenborg Centre

4 Shirley Road, Roseville NSW 2069

Tel: 02 9416 2812

Email: saa@swedenborg.com.au

Website: www.swedenborg.com.au

National Committee Members:

Julian Duckworth (President)

Wayne Kasmar (Secretary)

Michael Chester (Treasurer)

Caroline Neave

Debra Thompson

Ruth Duckworth (Candela)

Joe Vandermeer (Public Officer)

Membership of the Swedenborg Association of Australia Inc. is open to anyone who wishes to pursue an interest in Swedenborg, the man, his science and his spiritual teachings.

For details on how to join, call (02) 9416 2812 or browse <https://swedenborg.com.au/contact/>

✨ ✨ ✨ continued from page 1 ✨ ✨ ✨

Even when you leave God right out of Christmas, and turn it into a nice time for everybody to be together, give a gift, focus on the kids, be nice to each other at Christmas, and all those other wonderful real human traits we can be when we want to, then I believe we can be like that only because we are drawing on the presence and power of God. Me by myself isn't very much like that at all. I can pretend though. Even good things I do can often have a tinge of 'I hope people noticed.' But when I let go and 'be', and throw myself wholeheartedly into the occasion, I think only God can get that reality happening.

There's a phrase in the Bible in the Christmas account in John's gospel which says what I'm trying to say much better than I can. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory." What a powerful word "flesh" is! It conjures up slabs of meat in a butcher's shop, a carvery in a club restaurant, a gutsy physicality reality. It's about as

present in this world as anything can be, and, note, living, full of life, strong and purposeful.

I think that the Word - meaning God and everything about God that there can be - is fleshed out whenever we do something which is real, true, loving, given freely, with nothing about what's in this for me around at all. There's God incarnate (which means in the flesh), God is bringing it about, and we're letting it all come about for its own sake, not ours.

We live inside ourselves, but we're at our best, and closest to God, when we do not live there but in life itself, discovering a newness to everything that we never felt before. And each Christmas is the reminder and an invitation to pick it up and go.

*Have a wonderful time over
Christmas,*

Julian



Welcome to our new members

We would like to welcome Chris Bryce from Alstonville NSW and Jim Scanlan from Orange NSW. We hope you enjoy and benefit from your membership. There is a lot to read or join in on the website.



Swedenborg Centre News

Nov/Dec/Jan 2024/25 by Joe Vandermeer

Yay! We now have a new printer which gives us better, faster prints with sharper images, etc. Which means we're ready to enter the coming year to continue producing small booklets and newsletters locally. Interesting, that when I was looking into the Kyocera printer brand-name, I discovered that the company was founded by a Japanese Buddhist monk, **Kazuo Inamori**, who was one of the most highly successful Japanese business owners.



Photo by
Wikipedia

Inamori sought to create (several) companies which embodied a spiritual philosophy which facilitated its employees to develop a good heart and an open mind, which he felt was a core part of our spiritual self. He recognised that all living things depend on each other for survival, which inspired his corporate motto "Respect the Divine and Love People". When I was chatting to Kyocera employees who visited the Swedenborg Centre, they all spoke enthusiastically about their Monday morning corporate team meetings, in which they read something from Inamori's

extensive life-philosophy and leadership-ideals booklets, and then they discuss it with their team to see how they can realise those ideals in their life and express it in their work. This shows that spiritual life does not necessarily have to remain divorced from a good and useful corporate life which can incorporate spiritual values.

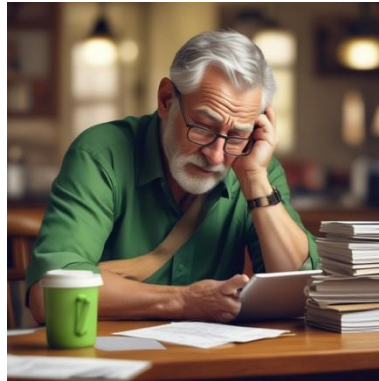
Inamori spoke out firmly against the primary purpose of capitalist businesses to maximize returns to share-holders, first advocated and articulated in 1970 by economist Milton Friedman as "[the social responsibility of business is to increase its profits](#)" while "[making as much money as possible while conforming to the basic rules of the society.](#)" Which became known as the shareholder value model that spread so widely to countries all over the world, including Japan. Inamori offers a viable alternative which enables business to both prosper and serve as a force for ecological, ethical, social and spiritual good in the world. What emerges is the opposite of the impoverished world of shareholder value maximization, thanks to Inamori's strong belief in the inter-connectedness of the material and the spiritual, in which he offers a virtuous alternative. **The purpose of business for Inamori, is not to make a few owners rich, but to transform people, and let them realise their potential.** This is still a radical move offered by a man who with great humility saw a superior path to the one the business world has chosen to follow in recent times. This certainly reminds me of the boyhood advice which Fred Rogers' mother gave him when he encountered scary things in the news, and she would say "Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping." Which has me thinking that good happens quietly, while the alternative gets so much attention because it causes all the noise. We must learn to see the quieter angelic side.



The Two Types of Hacking: Cybercrime and Spiritual Attacks

By Howard Thompson

I can say, with reasonable confidence, that the vast majority of our readers are, like me, “digital immigrants.” By this, I mean you likely did not grow up in the era of digital technology and may not feel entirely fluent in its use. You might remember watching the moon landings live on television rather than learning about them in history class. While technology has brought remarkable advancements, it has also introduced complexities and dangers that can feel overwhelming to navigate.



remarkable clarity. According to Swedenborg, evil spirits seek to exploit our thoughts and desires, subtly working in the shadows to manipulate, confuse, and disrupt our inner harmony. As I’ve reflected on his writings, I’ve been struck by how much these spiritual tactics mirror the methods of modern hackers. Both prey on weaknesses, sow discord, and seek to rob us of peace and freedom.

Let’s explore this parallel more deeply and discover how we might strengthen our defences—both against cybercrime and the spiritual “hacks” that challenge our faith and integrity.

Phishing: The Bait of Deceptive Temptations

Phishing scams real communication, tricking us into revealing sensitive information. In the same way a phishing scam preys on our trust, evil spirits exploit our doubts and vulnerabilities. Swedenborg reminds us to be vigilant, saying, “Evil spirits inject falsities that appear as truths, and they do this by influencing the imagination.” We need spiritual discernment, just as we need a skeptical eye for suspicious emails and text messages.

Yet as troubling as cybercrime is, there’s another form of hacking we rarely consider—one that targets not our devices, but our very souls. This “spiritual hacking” isn’t new, and Emanuel Swedenborg, writing long before the digital age, described it with

Secrets of Heaven 2754 - [There are spirits who use] innocence as a cover, and mercy, and various positive emotions accompanied by persuasive arguments...They are undetectable and take pains not to be exposed, because they operate in secret. They are also cruel. They cared only about themselves, and even if the whole world had been destroyed for their sake, it would have meant nothing to them.



Secrets of Heaven 1511 - Spirits who are caught up in falsity influence our thinking and thoroughly convince us that falsity is true. We cannot see it any other way, and this results from their aura.

Ransomware: Bondage to Guilt and Fear

Imagine being locked out of your computer and seeing a message demanding money to regain access. This is the cruel tactic of ransomware. Similarly, evil spirits try to hold our souls hostage through cycles of guilt and fear. They amplify our regrets and tell us that we are beyond forgiveness, that we are unworthy of grace.



The Scream by Edvard Munch

Swedenborg describes how these spirits use what we love and fear to imprison us, much like a hacker uses our data as leverage. “Evil

spirits...focus on what a person loves and fears, holding them captive by these until they yield,” he writes. But just as we can restore a hacked computer, we can turn to God’s love and mercy to free ourselves from spiritual bondage.

Other Planets 72 - To teach me what these spirits do...a spirit of this sort was allowed to come to me...He attached himself to my left side toward the back and began to criticise me for things I had done and thought, things he was drawing out of my memory, and began to put a dark interpretation on them, but was held back by angels.

Key-logging: Exploiting Our Inner Thought

Key-logging malware silently records every keystroke, stealing passwords and private information. Evil spirits act like spiritual key-loggers, monitoring our thoughts and identifying our weaknesses. They don’t plant all our negative thoughts, but they watch for opportunities to amplify them, turning a passing worry into paralyzing anxiety or a fleeting irritation into lasting resentment.

Heaven and Hell 579 - I have been allowed to find out from experience the nature of the malice of the people referred to as demons. Demons do not flow into people's thoughts but into their affections. They observe them and sniff them out the way dogs sniff out wild animals in the woods. When they notice good affections, they change them instantly into evil ones by using delights in something else to lead them astray in quite amazing fashion. They do this so subtly and with such malign skill that the victim does not notice anything. They take the greatest care to prevent anything from obtruding into thought because this would bring it into the open.

Man-in-the-Middle Attacks: Blocking Divine Connection

In cybersecurity, a “man-in-the-middle” attack occurs when a hacker intercepts communication between two parties, altering or stealing the information. Evil spirits attempt to do the same thing between us and God. They distort the truths that flow into us, making God’s love seem distant or His commands unreasonable.



Have you ever felt a moment of doubt while reading scripture, wondering if God's promises could really apply to you? That's the spiritual equivalent of a man-in-the-middle attack.

Secrets of Heaven 2123 - [With] people on earth, who are governed by spirits in contact with [evil spirits]...Everything good that is coming into the world of spirits from the Lord by way of heaven is instantly being turned into something evil, obscene, and profane there. Everything true is instantly being turned into something false. So mutual love is converted to hatred, honesty to deceit, and so on, with the result that the spirits there are no longer capable of perceiving anything good or true.

Denial of Service: Overwhelming the Soul

A denial-of-service attack is an overwhelming assault on a computer system (often a website) driving so much traffic its way that it can't function. Evil spirits overwhelm us with temptations, doubts, and conflicting emotions, making it hard to think clearly or act wisely. They seek to paralyse us spiritually, leaving us feeling helpless.

Secrets of Heaven 705 - False premises and warped reasoning drown [overwhelm] a person, as they did the pre-Flood people. The Word uses floods of water as a simile and a metaphor for times of both trial and ruin because these are similar phenomena. During them, evil spirits stream in with their persuasive lies and false assumptions and arouse the same kind of thinking in us. With a person who is regenerating these agitations are trials; with one who is not regenerating, they bring ruination.

These are just a few examples of how both cybercriminals and evil spirits exploit our vulnerabilities—whether through our worldly desires, false ideas about faith, or misunderstandings of the Lord's love and truth. Their goal is the

same: to mislead, manipulate, and ultimately harm us.

Whether dealing with cyberattacks or spiritual assaults, vigilance is essential. We secure our devices with firewalls, antivirus software and a healthy discernment; similarly, we protect our souls with prayer, careful study of the Word, and self-awareness. Swedenborg's writings remind us that just as hackers exploit technological weaknesses, evil spirits exploit spiritual ones. Both require us to remain alert and rely on the guidance of a higher power.

In this digitally connected age, we are increasingly aware of the need to secure our devices from threats. But let us also remember the importance of securing our hearts and minds, trusting that God provides us with the tools and strength to withstand any attack. Swedenborg offers us this comforting reassurance from Secrets of Heaven 741:

*"The tests that we undergo are nothing else than battles between the evil spirits and angels who are present with us. The evil spirits summon up every wrong that we have ever done or even considered from childhood on. So they stir up both what is evil and what is false in us and condemn us for it. Nothing gratifies them more; it is the central pleasure of their lives. **But through the angels, the Lord protects us and prevents evil spirits and demons from pushing beyond the furthest limits of our endurance and drowning us.**"*

Take comfort in knowing that even in moments of spiritual attack, the Lord is with us, placing limits on what we endure and surrounding us with angels who guide and protect us. Just as we secure our devices against external threats, we can fortify our souls by leaning on God's love, mercy, and truth. With His help, we can withstand any trial and emerge stronger in faith and trust.



"Just a second..."

By Julian Duckworth

Just a few weeks ago, a friend told me that the word 'second' is closely linked with the word 'sequence' and the word 'segue' which we now use to describe how one thing follows (segues...) on to another or second thing, like a sequel. As well as this, the word 'second' means coming after the first and it also means that very short 'beep' time of which there are sixty, all following each other, in one minute. All these 'sec-' words come from an incredibly old word 'sekwe' which means 'to follow'.

All of this is just an introduction to us taking a look at the spiritual idea of something being the second thing, the follow-on, the consequence (and see, there's that seq again!).

You will have come across the idea of us 'going the second mile' - a phrase that Jesus Christ said in a passage about non-resistance. *"Whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two."* It comes from the practice in the Roman Empire of troops picking on anyone in an occupied territory and telling them - 'You there! Carry those planks to the top of that hill, now'. And there was no right of refusal.



The phrase 'going the second mile' has come to mean doing more than is expected, putting yourself out, basically being generous, without expecting a reward, which Jesus also said. Volunteering your time like that would give someone else a nice surprise but we can't always drop what we're doing to help someone else. So, perhaps there is a deeper and more spiritual idea in 'going the second mile'.

One of the things we often tend to do is to judge other people or judge what they must be like if they do or say something we don't like or don't agree with. That is being judgmental, making up our mind about someone which then hangs around in our thinking from then on. 'This person is demanding, irritating, boring, clueless... x ... y ... z.' We have summed them up and that is now how they always are for us.

We have gone 'one mile' and switched off. Going the second mile means that we bring other considerations into seeing someone's difficulties. Perhaps my irritation could be something about me that I need to take a look at. Maybe this person can't help it or they don't know how they come across. We search for positives, for allowances. One of the things Swedenborg says about angels is that *"People who have faith that comes from having charity take notice of good qualities. Whatever evil or falsity they may see, they excuse it, and if they can, they work to correct it. Those who are guided by kindness hardly even notice evil in another but pay attention instead to everything good and true in the person. When they do find anything bad or false, they put a good interpretation on it. This is a characteristic of all angels — one they acquire from the Lord, who bends everything bad toward good."* (Secrets of Heaven 1079).

People aren't good or bad. People are receiving or allowing goodness or badness to have centre stage inside themselves. People may well be in ignorance, including ourselves. If that is so, then the real call on us is to excuse the human failings that we meet in each other.

So, let's move on to a ... second second. This one has a bit of a story to it. A couple of months ago I wanted to look at and think about what Jesus was meaning



when he said, *"You have heard it said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust after her has already committed adultery with her in his heart."* (Matthew 5:27-28)

On the surface the meaning is clear enough. It is *not* saying 'Don't look at women' because there is nothing really wrong with that. As a friend of mine told me when I actually asked him if he looked at women, he said, after a pause, "Well ... I certainly appreciate beauty."



Jesus' words qualify that bold affirmative statement with the addition of "to lust after her" which is the actual wrongness. Whatever thought is now going on in the looker's inner mind, it is wanting to possess this woman being looked at. Not just appreciate her beauty but a full-on intent to imagine having her. This is the adultery in the heart which will never get into a courtroom or receive an accusation, but it is nevertheless on a par with committing actual adultery. In fact, left to run wild, it is many times more toxic because it is only there with the looker.

Jesus was pointing out that action is not the distinguishing mark of what is evil. The state of the heart is the origin of us willing and then plunging into a love of wanting what is not ours to have. We can't stand before God and say, "But I never did anything!" We most certainly did.

And then I discovered Mohammed. In one of the Hadiths - which are the collection of Mohammed's actual sayings - but not in the Quran, he said, *"Beware of taking the second look."* The first look is completely natural. God created beauty which forms attraction which is the means of giving God's future children their birth into the world. But do not look again - a second look, for then the perfection and the

innocence are lost in a very different segue of consequences.

And again, this sex-related context can find relevance in countless areas of our search for personal satisfaction and purpose. What attracts you? The quality of goodness? Is it, though, some desire to look good in the eyes of other people? The fascination of history? Is it, though, the ability to always overtake and outdo someone else's limited description of Napoleon? Or maybe, the wonder of gardening? Perhaps, though, it is the need you must carry out at all costs, to have the best front garden in the street...!

These are all ... adulteries! The attractions are legitimate. The second look - the segue - is to pervert the attraction into your own craving outcome. Adultery is to have sex outside of marriage. Spiritual adultery is to mix and mingle the things of God with the way you want life to serve your own self-gratification. An adulterer can always come up with a justification.

Another 'second' comes in the wording of what are called the two great commandments. In Mark's gospel, in chapter 12, Jesus says, *"The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."*

Notice "And the second, like it, is this...." Each of these commandments come from the Old Testament, but there, they are each in a different book. Jesus was casing them together for the very first time! And if you have picked up the follow-on idea of the second thing coming to be what it is from the first thing, this is extremely revealing. These two commandments are not just this



commandment followed by that commandment. Love God oh and love other people too. No, it is to love other people - with care, respect, forgiveness, acceptance, and with their freedom uppermost for you - **because** you first love the Lord your God. We are loving God when we give love to other people because of God. You can in fact say that unless I love God, I cannot truly and fully love another human being.

And right at the end, there comes the quizzical statement that we are to love our neighbour "as ourself". It is another version of the Golden Rule, *"Do to others as you would want them to do to you."* We are to treat another human being as we ourselves would rightly want to be treated. When we know how that feels to us, then there's our call to do likewise.

So far, we looked at examples of Biblical and religious statements where the second thing is made much of. In the whole area of our spiritual life and practice, the second part is so essential because it brings the completeness.



You get an idea - you actually decide to carry it out. You are going from one level to another. The situations are endless. It is the whole meaning of taking something on board, owning it, walking the talk, or not.

Swedenborg is actually emphatic on this. You rarely come across a "one single thing" in Swedenborg's spiritual teachings. Take doing good, for an example. Swedenborg never says, "Just be nice - that's what God wants from us." Swedenborg gives a double instalment.

First, look at yourself, check out where you are reacting, getting other people to think well of you, how you are being insincere, jealous or whatever is your wrong, and second, put that away from you

as if it is pure poison, and begin to live a new life doing good for its own sake.

Then there is the two-part place of our inner life and our outer life. Our inner life is where our heart is, where our intentions form, where our purpose lies. Our outer life is where we act, where we create an impact, where we show the real nature of our wish. Inner and outer life can be in perfect harmony, with a flow through with no disruption, or our inner and outer life can be a parody of what we appear to be like and what we actually are. One is heaven, the other is hell.

This gives rise of course to the continuation of our life after our body stops functioning. Death brings the ability to dissemble and pretend to a close, and this 'second' life we have after dying leads into a quickening revelation of what we are ultimately about, inside through to outside.

There are many other first-to-seconds which Swedenborg brings out all the way through his explanation of the processes of spiritual work and spiritual life. Everything is given to us by God but we must essentially feel that we are living our own lives. You get the idea. The kernel of them all is the switch from just understanding, knowing and filing away in ourselves some tremendously important idea, something we revel in having, but we must now find our way to make this belief something we embrace, something we will now live by, something which is an embodiment of our whole grasp of life ... or else nothing is actually happening, in spite of our personal self-persuasion that we are a better person than we were.

My longstanding favourite moment in Biblical revelation is Luke 11:27-28 where the emphasis is right there up-front. *"And it happened, as He spoke these things, that a certain woman from the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, 'Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts which nursed You!' But He said, 'More than that, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!'"*



Virtues – Contentment

By Darren Brunne

Virtues are the essence of our character. Practicing virtues can help open our life to new possibilities and greater joy and fulfillment.

Contentment is the state of spiritual awareness that the Lord is sovereign over all things especially the details of our lives. Therefore, we perceive and understand that our current state of life is enough. We have all that we need to move forward in spiritual development. The result of 'being' in contentment is a simple ability to appreciate life's gifts both small and great. We can revel in a glass of water on a hot day, a helpful and insightful conversation with a friend or loved one, a humorous moment or a chance encounter with beauty. We trust the Lord to provide what we need, when we need it.



Definition - Contentment is a mental or emotional state of satisfaction drawn from being at ease in one's situation, body and mind. Colloquially speaking, contentment is a state of having accepted one's situation and is a form of happiness.

Opposite – disappointment, trouble, unhappiness, agitation, upset, worry.

Quotes

Health is the greatest gift, contentment the greatest wealth, faithfulness the best relationship.

The Buddha

Contentment does not come from achievement.

Paul Henderson

When you are discontent, you always want more, more, more. Your desire can never be satisfied. But when you practice

contentment, you can say to yourself, 'Oh yes - I already have everything that I really need.'

Dalai Lama

There is no austerity equal to a balanced mind, and there is no happiness equal to contentment; there is no disease like covetousness, and no virtue like mercy.

Chanakya

Scriptural Quotes

Luke 12:15 *And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consists not in the abundance of the things which he possesses.*

1 Timothy 6:6-11 *But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.*

Philippians 4:12-13 *I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things, I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me.*

Psalms 37:3-4 *Trust in the LORD and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.*

Heaven and Hell 414.

People in heaven are continually progressing toward the springtime of life. The more thousands of years they live, the more pleasant and happy is their springtime. This continues forever, increasing according to the growth and level of their love, thoughtfulness, and faith.



Meditation/Statement/Prayer



- I allow myself rest and peace, knowing that I am enough through the Lord's inner strengthening.
- I am satisfied with today's bread and wine.
- I allow myself positive drive, free of anxiety.
- I take time to enjoy the simple things of life, knowing that they are the source of true riches.
- I resist the urge to feel a state of lack, knowing that I already possess what is necessary to move forward spiritually.
- I trust in the Lord for tomorrow's provision and give it no more thought.

I am thankful for the gift of Contentment in my heart and the knowledge that the Lord provides all my needs through His power.

Heaven and Hell 288



That innocence and peace are together like good and its delight can be seen in little children, who, because they are in innocence, are also in peace, and because they are in peace are, in their whole

nature, full of play. Yet the peace experienced by little children is external peace; while internal peace, like internal innocence, is possible only in wisdom, and therefore only in the conjunction of good and truth, since wisdom is from that conjunction. Heavenly or angelic peace is also possible with men who are in wisdom from the conjunction of good and truth, and who in consequence have a sense of contentment in God; nevertheless, while they live in the world this peace lies hidden in their interiors, but it is revealed when they leave the body and enter heaven, for their interiors are then opened.



Three Christmas Journeys

The Biblical story of Christmas tells us that there were three journeys made at the time of the Lord's birth: the journey of Joseph and Mary from Nazareth to Bethlehem, a journey that would have taken roughly about six days; the journey of the shepherds from the hillsides around Bethlehem to the place where the baby lay in the manger; and of course the journey of the wise men from the east following the star which led them to the house where the young child was. Three very different journeys.

The first journey was probably slow and wearisome, with Mary pregnant, frequent stops, and crowds on the roads all going towards their family's home town according to the Roman census. The second journey was done in great haste over not a great distance and we can think of the shepherds running down the hillside towards the town in a matter of



WHAT'S HAPPENING?

To become a member of the Swedenborg Association of Australia, check the website at www.swedenborg.com.au and click "Contact" in the top menu, which has details on benefits of **membership** and an application form listing current membership rates.

Also check the website at www.swedenborg.com.au for details of **group events** which are held online, but you can also be physically at various locations around Australia. Follow the "about → contact" menu items on the website for a list of locations and contact info of your nearest group convenor, and see the "events" menu item for Zoom links so you can join online events.

Our new website is continually being updated with new study material and latest news and information.

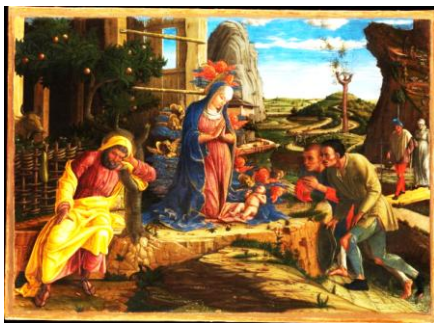
mere minutes.



Mary and Joseph on the Way to Bethlehem (Portinari Altarpiece)

Hugo van der Goes, Uffizi Gallery, Florence

Photograph: Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, Italy



The Adoration of the Shepherds by Andrea Mantegna, shortly after 1450, Metropolitan Museum of Art

The third journey, by contrast, was very determined, as the wise men set their course by the star going before them, trusting their travel to its onward movement. This would have been the longest journey by far, a journey of many days.



Three Wise Men by Henry Collier. Credit: Bridgeman Images

Note that while each journey was different, the actual destination was always the same – the place of new birth, of a Divine birth on earth.

It's often said that life itself is a journey, and it's often said too that the journey is more important than the destination. There can't be a more important destination for us than the Lord and our discovery of His presence in our lives, but yes, it will take us on a journey to be able to come to that realisation. The journey is one that we must make within ourselves; sometimes it will be slow and painstaking, like Joseph and Mary travelling, sometimes quick and perceptive like the shepherds, and sometimes we simply follow what we have seen and come to believe is true, like the wise men with the star ahead.

Literally, a journey is the route we take from being in one place to being in another. These days, journeys can be made in a matter of almost no time at all. A spiritual journey takes us from one state to another, perhaps through doubt into stronger belief, through hardship into hope, or however it is for us. Like today's very fast travel though, it is so easy for us to talk about changing from a negative state to a positive one, and not really think enough about what is involved in making that journey.

One of the words that is currently very widespread is the word 'process'. It's a very powerful word and it describes the spiritual area of life very well. A process is usually a kind of journey; sometimes it is a journey that takes you on it as you go, perhaps feeling a bit unsure of where it is taking you and how it will end. People who create art know that the process of painting a picture or carving a block turns out very differently from the idea that you had in mind when you started.

As we celebrate Christmas and the Lord's birth, and relate it to his presence in our life, notice the part of journeys in the story and try to start out on your own. You won't know what it will involve but its purpose is to lead you to Bethlehem – 'a house of bread' – to the baby lying in the manger, who later in his life would break bread with 5,000 people and break bread with his disciples in an upper room.