

DECEMBER/JANUARY2025/2026

"After seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. All who heard the shepherds' story were astonished."

(Luke 2:17-18)

Directory

Society Minister Rev. Howard Thompson

Officers

Secretary Graham Hall

Treasurer Joel Duckworth

Church Officer Debra Barratt Thompson

Sunday Service -

The Roseville New Church holds a regular service of worship on the first and third Sunday of each month at 10:00am. The first Sunday of each month includes an opportunity to partake of the Holy Supper.

Sunday Social Hour -

After every service we have tea and coffee, an opportunity to meet socially, sometimes more formally.

Calendar - Included

The Swedenborg Centre -

The Centre is generously supported by the Sydney Society of the New Church and provides an independent and relaxing place to meet and discuss a personal approach to finding spiritual meaning. The Centre has a wide range of study materials, Swedenborg's works, and books by supporting authors. The Centre and its director Joe Vandermeer can be reached on phone (02) 9416 2812 or email info@swedenborg.com.au Opening hours are Monday to Friday 9.30am to 4.30pm. More events details at www.swedenborg.com.au The Centre can also be used to answer enquiries about the New Church, its literature and its teachings.



A **shepherd** symbolises one who leads people to neighbourly **kindness** through religious **truth**...In the highest sense...the **shepherd** symbolises **goodness** and **truth** itself.

Secrets of Heaven 6426

Roseville New Church Newsletter

Issued by the Sydney Society of the New Church Established in 1875 4 Shirley Road, Roseville, N.S.W. 2069 Church Office phone: (02) 9416 7026

> Minister's e-mail : <u>revhathompson@gmail.com</u> On Facebook – Roseville New Church

December/January 2025/2026

The Faith of the New Church is summarised as follows:
There is one God in whom is the Divine Trinity. He is the Lord God and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Saving faith is to believe in Him. Evil actions are not to be done because they are from hell and of hell. Good actions are to be done because they are from God and of God. These are to be done by a person as though they are done by himself, while believing that they are from the Lord working in him and through him.

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Spiritual Shorts Update

Our minister, Rev. Howard Thompson, shares weekly videos on his YouTube channel, Spiritual Shorts. The channel has recently completed its third evolution and is reaching a growing audience well beyond our local community. Each week features a 5-minute Sunday message summary, a 1-minute inspirational reflection, and a deeper exploration of Heaven and Hell. If you haven't already, take a look!

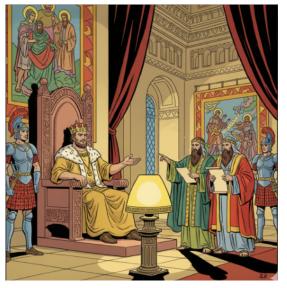


Spiritual Shorts YouTube Channel: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCsrICJGeGmrnXVawn_Y7UQA

Our Part in the Christmas Story: Even the Parts We'd Rather Not Play

This year, our Christmas readings have centred on the theme of "**Our Part**," a reminder that while the Lord is our Saviour, He calls on each of us to cooperate with Him in shaping our eternal future. He gives us hearts to love, minds to think, and hands to serve. Yet, we are reminded by the Doctrines that while this capacity to cooperate comes entirely from the Lord, we are called to use these gifts and act as if of ourselves. We are partners in the process, invited to use our freedom and rationality in kindness toward others and devotion to Him.

The Christmas story is rich with examples of people doing their part. We look to Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, and the wise men, and we see the reflection of something noble within us—faithfulness, humility, alertness to truth, and patient hope. We naturally want to identify with these figures. But there is another figure in the Christmas narrative whose part we would prefer not to acknowledge, yet he is as much a part of the story as the angels.



That figure is King Herod. If we are brave enough to look closely, we must admit that at times, he is part of us too.

Herod represents a profound spiritual lesson wrapped in a sinister package. While his behaviour certainly displays hypocrisy, the specific spiritual correspondence

goes deeper than mere deception. In the internal sense, as the Writings teach, Herod represents the love of self and the world—specifically, the love of ruling from self-love. This is a love that feels violently opposed to anything that threatens its control. His response to the news of the Lord's birth is a masterclass in this protective ego. When he tells the wise men, "Go and search carefully for the child... so that I too may come and worship Him," his smooth words mask a murderous agenda. He feigns piety, but his will is to dominate.

This internal violence is not random; it is a specific reaction to the Lord's presence. The inner sense of the Christmas story is not just about a historical event in Bethlehem; it is about the birth of the Lord's Divine Human—Divine Truth—within our own minds and hearts. Whenever a new insight of charity, a fresh resolve for truth, or a stirring of genuine innocence begins to be born in us, the "Herod" within wakes up. The selfish ego realises that if this new spiritual life is allowed to grow, the ego can no longer sit on the throne.

We see this dynamic projected onto the world stage with frightening clarity. The Herodian spirit is alive today, manifesting in public leaders who invoke Christianity for credibility but enact policies rooted in dominance, injustice, and exclusion. We see figures who preach about family values yet enact policies that harm families; who speak of "righteousness" while showing no mercy to the vulnerable.

Like Herod, they use the language of faith to protect their power, presenting agendas that are supposedly divinely ordained but bear the bitter fruit of division and cruelty.



It is easy to point the finger at these modern Herods. However, while the Writings acknowledge that religious and political leaders often misuse religion for worldly ends—and while this misuse has devastating societal consequences—they consistently direct the primary application of scripture to the individual's inner life. The warning is not only for "them"—it is for us. The transformation of the world begins with the regeneration of the individual spirit.

Christmas therefore invites us to ask gently but courageously: Are there moments when I say I follow the Lord, yet cling to old, selfish patterns? Is there a Herod in me that feels threatened by the demands of true charity? When I am called to forgive, to serve without credit, or to choose truth over comfort; do I feign willingness while secretly protecting my pride? To welcome the Lord with sincerity, we must cooperate with Him not by pretending all is well, but by admitting what needs His healing touch.



This cooperation requires a specific kind of action. If we wish to reject the Herod within, we must look to the example of the Magi. When they realised the truth, they did not return to Herod; the scripture says they "went home another way."

In the spiritual life, "going another way" is not simply a change of outward strategy or

behaviour. It represents a profound internal shift. It signifies a turning away from falsity and evil at a deep level, once we have been enlightened by the truth. It is the hard but rewarding work of repentance, reformation, and

regeneration. It means recognising the "Herod" impulses—the desire to rule, the envy, the defensiveness—and actively shunning them as sins against the Lord.

When we resist the urge to rule and instead choose to serve, something beautiful happens. We begin to offer the Lord a

place of genuine welcome—an open heart where Divine Love can be born anew, free from the fear and resistance of self. Let us not just speak of worshipping Jesus; let us live a life that worships Him. May our part in this year's story be one of honesty, humility, and courage, leaving the Herodian spirit behind to walk the new path of genuine love.



Howard

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Christmas Calendar

This past year has has seen us trial **twice-monthly services**. This has been, I believe, a success on several fronts. First, it has increased attendance at the services we do hold, as well as freeing me to begin to make regular visits to a New Church group in Canberra.

That said, with Christmas coming, we have decided to hold **services throughout the Christmas Season** and we hope you are able to join us for many of those Sundays. Here is the schedule for the Christmas Season:

• 30 November - First Sunday of Advent - 10:00am

- 7 December Second Sunday of Advent Including Holy
 Supper 10:00am
- 14 December Third Sunday of Advent 10:00am
- 21 December Forth Sunday of Advent 7:00pm Special Service - Carols by Candlelight
- 25 December Christmas Day 10:00am
- 28 December Final Service of the Year Including **Holy Supper** 10:00am

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The Doctrine of Spiritual Transformation (in a nutshell)

Regular visitors to the Swedenborg Centre will be familiar with our friend Bede Draper. Bede is, by his own admission, a "Recovering Catholic." Enrolled at one point in Catholic Seminary, Bede began a spiritual search when what he was being taught simply made no sense. Formally trained in Psychology, Bede has sought to understand the true nature of the spiritual path from the perspective of multiple faith traditions both Western and Eastern. What follows is a thoughtful reflection on the nature of true Spiritual Transformation drawing on years of study, practice and reflection.

There are four key questions at the heart of spiritual transformation: What is God? What am I? What is the real cause of our human suffering? What is the solution to this suffering in terms of my own life?

I have found very practical answers to these most important questions in the Christian, Hindu and Buddhist traditions. What I mean by this is that, within these religions, is a teaching whose subject matter is our individual transformation through spiritual means. As you will soon see, this approach is not restricted to any one faith, although each religious tradition articulates this doctrine of spiritual transformation in its own unique way.

I did not discover this teaching through studying these religions in a theoretical way. Rather, I encountered different individuals, past and present, who cast a piercing light on this approach to transformation through their spiritual instruction. This 'inner' way involves a process of discovery that enables us to see our lives clearly and without distortion, by revealing to us an entirely different way of seeing ourselves, other people and the world. Just like we can see physical phenomena with our physical eyes, we can also perceive spiritual facts with our spiritual eyes. This has nothing to do with having blind belief in any religious doctrines or obeying external rules.

The doctrine of spiritual transformation is not something you simply believe in. It's using traditional religious teachings as an instrument to open up in our life the reality of God, the truth of what we truly are, and the spiritual freedom that provides release from our suffering — this liberating wisdom is always available to us right here and right now, in whatever condition we find ourselves.

WHAT IS GOD?

This is the first question we must tackle. Many people believe that God is some kind of strict and wrathful parent

who rewards and punishes us. In order to understand what we are going to talk about, all such ideas must be set aside.

In the Christian tradition, we find the famous statement "God is Love". This does not mean that God has love but, rather, that God is Love itself. The good thing about this way of looking at things is that we're not talking about a God made in our image; in other words, a God who is hateful, punishing, envious and constantly demanding our adoration and obedience. We need to purify our awareness so that, when we conceive of God, we think of Love itself. With this understanding — and only with this understanding — can the possibility of awakening to this Love become available to us. From the Shin Buddhist tradition comes an insight that the highest Good is an omnipresent Wisdom/Compassion that continually embraces all beings and actively draws us into itself.

The Hindu tradition sees God as Sat, Chit, Ananda (in Sanskrit). This Life, Light and Fullness (in vernacular English) is the fundamental substance of everything in the universe. It is present everywhere and at all times; more importantly, it is never found apart from any aspect of our experience. In the Western tradition, we have Plato referring to this ultimate reality as the "Good, the True, and the Beautiful".

So we can see that these four traditions have their own distinct ways of talking about the ultimate Good. But they all come together in a shared awakening to this real presence of Light (Truth and Wisdom) and Life (Love, Compassion and Fullness). Awakening to the Life and Light which is God is what transform us as individuals. This is the subject matter of our work. We need to see that this

awakening to the presence of God is very different from having an idea about God that you happen to believe in. This is not to dismiss belief, but that is not the same as awakening to the reality of God as a fact to be appreciated.



It might be very helpful to understand

God as a spiritual Sun which illuminates our mind with the light of Wisdom, and fills our heart with the warmth of Love. Awakening to the presence of this Sun is very important because it leads to a new mind and heart opening up and coming alive in us.

As Wisdom/Compassion is ever abiding, ceaselessly embracing us right here, right now, as we are, our spiritual journey is one without distance. This means that the starting point of our inner regeneration is exactly where we find ourselves in the present. And the end point of our spiritual transformation is also at this very point in time. This is because God is always within reach, and completely pervades our everyday experience.

WHAT AM I?

We now come to our second question. It appears to be that we are just a material organism comprising only of physical and psychological functions. However, in light of the teaching on spiritual transformation, what we really are as opposed to what we seem to be is a "place" where the presence of God comes alive and active in us as a new mind and a new heart. The Hindus consider this to be a non-dual knowledge, which isn't knowing God as an object away from us, but consciously living the Life that God is as our very life. We become radically transformed when our minds are

drawn into the Wisdom that is God, and when our hearts are gathered into the Love that God is. It is only by living this Wisdom and Love as our life that we become composed, free and at home with ourselves.

We are a spiritual form designed to receive the Life that is God. Because of this, we have a longing for Love and Wisdom that is ever-present. This means that our hearts will remain empty and barren when deprived of these nourishing divine qualities. It is from this inner desolation that there arises an intense spiritual yearning to become whole and fulfilled. This spiritual thirst that arises from the



deepest part of our being, needs to be distinguished from the psychological cravings that consume our hearts. When this primal longing is satisfied, we are given a profound sense of peace, freedom and fullness, whereas gratifying our blind cravings tends to entrench us further in them. This can only lead to a miserable life that is driven rather than truly lived.

What is the True Cause of Human Suffering?

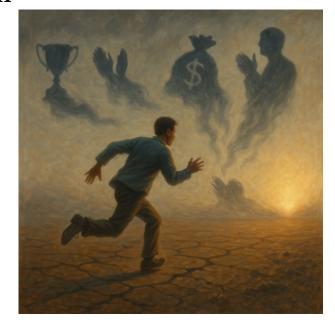
The third question concerns our attempts to find happiness and security by pursuing certain kinds of experiences. Our hankering after power, status, fame, popularity, love, approval – and the desire to be outstanding and better than other people – all serve a dire need for psychological self-preservation. We are not talking about the natural desire for physical security which is a basic requirement of human life but, rather, the self-absorbed need to look good in our own eyes and in those of others. This is very different from the desire for food, clothing and shelter, and from the

requirement to work co-operatively with others in order to attain the necessities of human life.

When we are preoccupied with finding happiness and security through the satisfaction of our emotional demands, what we're actually doing is trying to secure a lasting well-being where it cannot possibly be found. This is because every time we fail to satisfy these demands, our minds become distraught and our hearts disturbed. When this happens, we become blind to the fact that what we are really suffering from is a tremendous egocentricity that insists that things always go our way.

We are convinced, time and time again, that the cause of our suffering is other people or circumstances that we don't like. Being caught in this web of ignorance drives us to frantically try to change external things around us, in order to feel right within ourselves. This then makes our happiness and security depend entirely on others, and on events that we want to control, turning us into chronic blamers, perpetual victims and habitual slaves. When

the world is seen as responsible for making us happy or sad, we inevitably degenerate into beings that are completely determined by the changing fortunes of life. When we are ensnared in this way, there is no possibility of freedom – the world becomes a puppet master and we are its puppets.



The doctrine of spiritual transformation teaches us that happiness cannot be found in getting what we want, and

that freedom is far from doing whatever we please — this is the fundamental ignorance that disfigures the human condition. Much of the time, we fail to gain the things we desire, and we're constantly demanding that others relate to us in ways we prefer. The reality, though, is that the people in our lives will often do and say things we dislike. We can also frequently fail in our endeavours, as we encounter daily conditions that often thwart our objectives. Therefore, it is important to remember that any spiritual approach to human existence cannot be based on wanting to change people and/or circumstances in our lives that will never bend to our stubborn and misdirected wills.

When our spouse says something we don't like, we obsess over it in our minds, and feel an acute disturbance in our heart. It then appears as though the cause of our distress is something outside of us. "You make me mad" is thinking that the location of the problem of suffering is with our spouse. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, the location of any form of suffering is not external to us. Unpleasant events will always occur but our anguish about these takes place only in us. Without seeing this clearly, any attempt to release our hearts from disturbance will be in vain.

If it's not people or events that are causing my troubling afflictions, then what is going on? All that seems to be left are my mental torments and emotional pain. Some Western psychologists might say that our problem is a failure to think properly and manage our anger. The doctrine of spiritual transformation would say that the real difficulty here is that we are deprived of Wisdom in our minds and Love in our hearts.

Therefore, in light of this teaching, the origin of human suffering is not external events or neglected emotional needs. At any one moment — even in the face of extremely difficult circumstances — if our minds are full of awareness and our hearts are full of love, we as a confused and upset individual disappears. Not forever, but for as long as we remain in a state of being wise and loving.

The Solution to our Suffering?

The answer to the final question tells us that our problem is a failure of cognition (i.e. not apprehending the facts of our life in a true light) and a lack of goodwill in our heart. In other words, we need to see with the spiritual eyes given to us by Wisdom, and to live our lives from a heart full of Love.



By receiving true spiritual discernment, the predicaments that plague our lives are seen to have their origin in us — not in external circumstances, the actions of other people, or psychological difficulties. If we don't accurately identify the location of our difficulties, we will be condemned to a life embittered by blaming external causes rather than coming to terms with where the problem really lies. This is what any spiritual practice worthy of the name

should aim to do. Battling to get rid of our painful emotional states does not solve our fundamental dilemma. This is because what we are really suffering from is always a mind deprived of the Wisdom that is God, and of a heart devoid of the Love that is God.

Receiving the Life that is God into our lives as a new mind and heart does not depend on having to constantly struggle with ourselves. Rather, we need to open up, as we are, to the all-pervading presence of God and to allow true life to enter our darkened minds and unsettled hearts. It is only when we are living this Wisdom and Love as a way of being in the world can it be said that we're being true and real as individuals. As our Western scriptures would say, we then become "a holy offspring of God".

Living the Wisdom and Love which is God, as a way of being in the world, is religion.

This possibility exists for every human being; for people of all religions and for those who belong to none. This potential is built into our human nature because it is universal in all beings.

We cannot apprehend God as an object away from ourselves, in the way that we know material objects. This is a dualistic way of knowing, which is certainly useful in the mundane world when dealing with things that are away from us. However, when we are living God's life as a new heart and mind, we come to appreciate the divine presence in a non-dual way. When considered from this perspective, the question of whether or not God exists does not even arise. When we awaken to what God is, the reality of Wisdom/Compassion permeating our being is its own proof – a vivid presence that we can actually 'taste' as a ongoing spiritual event in our everyday lives which dispels all doubt.

This new life that emerges in us must involve every aspect of ourselves; namely our conduct, our cognition and our hearts. If we cannot truthfully acknowledge when we have taken a wrong turn in life, then we'll never be able to turn to the right path. To learn to live Wisdom/Compassion as a way of being in the world is the purpose of our life. Failure

to learn this makes any real happiness impossible. So how are we able to do this? Simply by living the Wisdom and Love that is God as our life. In this way, our daily life becomes our spiritual practice. And the end we are seeking is not away from our ordinary condition, right here right now, just as we are. Transformation can only become a fact for us in the present.

To live this spiritual understanding of life, we need to be aware of how we are living in terms of our conduct, our cognition and our heart. Our conduct needs to be seen in terms of Right versus Wrong. Our cognition needs to be seen in terms of True versus False and our hearts need to be seen in terms of Egocentricity versus Being (the timeless living presence of God's reality). If we are aware of wrong conduct, we can turn away from it. If we are aware that we are seeing falsely, we can turn away from this false vision. If we see we are being egocentric, we can turn away from being enclosed in ourselves. This turning away from the wrong conduct to right conduct, turning away from seeing falsely to apprehending rightly, turning away from being centred in self to abiding in Being, is what turns our daily life into a spiritual practice. This active choosing, on a moment-by-moment basis, transforms every aspect of ourselves as an individual because it transforms our lives into a movement towards the Good.

A Journey of Discovery

The doctrine of spiritual transformation is not just another teaching that claims to be exclusively true. Rather, it serves to help us discover God as a fact to be appreciated. In this way, we can discover: what we really are as opposed to what we seem to be; what our real problem is as a human being;

and, finally, how to live in a way that liberates us from wrong conduct, from false perception and from being enclosed in our suffocating egos.

What is important is not some doctrine that has no bearing on the concrete



particulars of our lives. Rather, we have to face and resolve the daily trials that afflict us: our hatreds, our anxiety, our emotional demands, our conflict with others, our sadness, our emptiness, our self-loathing, our need to impress, our pursuit of status and power, our boredom, our sense of meaninglessness, our prejudices, our self-righteousness, our condemnation of others, our dishonesty, and our vanity.

We are going to undertake a journey of discovery riding on the doctrine of transformation as a vehicle to open our spiritual eyes so that we may begin to live our lives in an entirely different way. What we are going to discuss does not demand the acceptance of any beliefs; it only asks that we listen carefully and keep an open mind, in which our unexamined judgments are held in suspension pending the discovery of deeper truths.

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Swedenborg Centre News

Wow! Is it almost Christmas again? Here is the latest event info from the Swedenborg Centre, which is also on the website at swedenborg.com.au (which has the Zoom links).



On Monday, 1st December at 6:30pm we're screening a movie for free at Roseville New Church. This month it will be the classic 1946 movie called "It's a Wonderful Life" in which a frustrated businessman, George Bailey (Jimmy Stewart), never got a chance to fulfil his life's ambitions of exploring the world and building skyscrapers. As he watches his friends and family become success stories, he dreads running his father's lending business and building it up to match the business of a grumpy rival, Mr Potter. When a financial discrepancy puts George in a difficult position, he contemplates jumping from a bridge on Christmas Eve. But his guardian angel, Clarence Odbody, is sent to show George what life would have been like in his town of Bedford Falls if he had never been born.

So come and enjoy some corn-popping entertainment and free snacks for this end of year movie night.

CALENDAR EVENTS:

The Swedenborg Centre will be closed for the Christmas and New Year break as well as the NCIA January Family Retreat. There will be no events during the closed period until our first day back which will be Monday February 2nd, 2026.

Our other regular events are (in person at the Centre AND on Zoom):

December

- Weekly Swedenborg readings happen every Wednesday at 10am.
- Dr Philip Groves readings are held at noon every Friday.

- Swedenborg Saturday discussions are at 10am on the first and third Saturday of the month (i.e. 6th and 20th of December).
- To celebrate Advent, Howard will be conducting Church Services on EACH December Sunday before Christmas at 10am at the New Church in Roseville (i.e. 7th and 14th and 21st December), in addition to a service at 10am on Christmas Day (which is a Wednesday). For a church event calendar, plus more details on Roseville Church Services, info on the Spiritual Shorts YouTube channel, and on this year's Christmas Readings, as well as info on Kathryn Baker's weekly Monday morning meditations, see https://www.rosevillenewchurch.com.au/ and look for Newsletter in the menu.
- Come and study the Word with Howard on Tuesday 2nd and 16th December at 11am. If you come on the 16th December, you will also be able to enjoy some Christmas and end-of-year snacks and drinks during the event.

Monday 23rd December to 6th January, the Centre will be closed. This includes the period of Thursday 2nd January to Monday 6th January is the New Church in Australia family retreat at Stanwell Tops, NSW.

If you're planning to visit the Centre, it's a good to check beforehand with joe@swedenborg.com.au because occasionally some events are only run remotely.

Enjoy these offerings and have a wonderful Christmas and start to the new year.

Best wishes.

Joe Vandermeer

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TUESDAY	3		10	Bible Study Christmas Part	17		24		31	
MONDAY	2		6		16		23	Swedenborg Centre CLOSED REOPEN 07 JANUARY	30	
SUNDAY	-	First Sunday of Advent 10:00am Service of Worship Including Holy Supper	8	Second Sunday of Advent 10:00am Service of Worship Rev. Howard A. Thompson	15	Third Sunday of Advent 10:00am Service of Worship Rev. Howard A. Thompson	22	Fourth Sunday of Advent 7:00pm Special Service Carols by Candlelight	29	10:00am Service of Worship Including Holy Supper Rev. Howard A. Thompson

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SUNDAY	29	10:00am Service of Worship Including Holy Supper Rev. Howard A. Thompson	5	NCIA Retreat - Stanwell Tops 2 January - 6 January	12	Summer Break No Service	19	Summer Break No Service	26	Summer Break No Service