

***Religion is of life, and the life of religion is to do what is good***

*(Doctrine of Life 8)*

**The New Church** is an international organization of people striving to improve their conscious relationship with the Lord, Jesus Christ, the one God who rules heaven and earth.

We extend a warm welcome to everyone, and invite you to take what you like and return it freely. We use the Bible and the Heavenly Doctrine revealed by the Lord and published by Emanuel Swedenborg to guide us in our lives, especially in our relationships. We freely share our love and understanding with each other, and try to give one another support in our spiritual journeys.

Our pastor is **Rev. Garry Walsh**. Garry grew up in the Hurstville congregation and is pleased that together with his wife and children, he is able to serve this group as their pastor. He is available on call to help people work through any of the life issues that affect their relationship with themselves, their neighbours and their Lord.

**Worship Services** are held each Sunday at 10:00 AM. **Sunday School** for children ages 0-14 runs concurrently with the Sunday Worship service. In summer there is child minding during the services.

**Young People's Group** is held on the last Friday evening of each month.

**Doctrinal Classes** are held on the 1st and 3rd Fridays of each month (summer excepted) beginning at 7 30 pm. Tea and social precede the class on the first Friday each month at 7.00 pm..

**Discussion classes** on fundamental New Church teachings are held on Wednesdays at 9 30 am.

**The Swedenborg Bookroom**, at 22 Dudley Street, Penshurst, contains books by and about Emanuel Swedenborg for sale or loan. It is open by appointment.

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Tel (02) 9580-1589. Fax (02) 9570-8447  
Email: [newchurch@optusnet.com.au](mailto:newchurch@optusnet.com.au)

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Call or come at anytime.



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**The New Church Newsletter**

**Hurstville Society December 2004**

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**A Multitude of the Heavenly Host**

**By Rev Garry Walsh**

*Sing to the LORD, bless His name;  
Proclaim the good news of  
His salvation from day to day.*

*For He is coming,  
for He is coming to judge the earth.  
He shall judge the world  
with righteousness;  
And the peoples with His truth.*

*(Psalm 96:2, 13)*

Most Christians, regardless of the extent of their commitment to their faith, tend to find themselves emotionally moved each year by the re-telling of the story of the Lord's birth. There is something wonderful in the Lord's descriptions of His story that makes a strong emotional impression on people. And so Christmas becomes a time each year when the Lord reconnects with His people. It is a time when hearts become softer and many melt into pure awe of all that the Lord has done.

The Lord's birth was the fulfilment of prophesies that had been given for centuries. And, it was the message of this fulfilment that came so dramatically to shepherds keeping watch over their flock by night. They were out in the fields beyond Bethlehem, blissfully unaware of the events that were transpiring in the town and completely unprepared for the incredible sights that would soon be displayed before them.

*And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid (Luke 2:9).*

There has been much debate about why these shepherds were the first to hear the wonderful news of the Lord's birth. Many people have compared the shepherds to the innocence of their sheep, finding them to be better Christian symbols than the wise men from the East who were also early receivers of the good news. The literal story in the Lord's Word sheds little light of its own. Interestingly, the Writings for the New Church don't tell us much more.

In general, "shepherds" in the Word stand as symbols of those people who actively teach and lead others into goodness and truth. These are the types of people who believe enough in the Lord's message that they are willing to share that message with others and to help others also come into a life that is expressive of the Lord's teachings.

Consider what it was that these shepherds saw. At first it was a single angel of the Lord suddenly bursting into view before them. The story though suggests that the angel had not come alone, for, in addition to the

Cooper, Ralph Horner, Lori Heldon and Patricia Walsh. To this list we add Kerry Lockhart who had previously indicated her interest.

We hope to have our first meeting as soon as practical so that we can get everything moving forward. A tentative date of **Sunday, 12<sup>th</sup> of December** following church has been chosen pending the availability of as many members of the committee as possible. Please note that the membership of the committee is not closed and other interested people are encouraged to join us.

## Christmas Events

*Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> 7 30 p.m.* Christmas carols at Roseville. All are welcome.

*Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> 6 00 p.m.* **Evening service & Christmas social**  
The evening will begin with a family worship service followed by a **Pot Luck dinner**. There will also be an end of year Sunday School display and carol singing. Please bring food to share. Drinks will be provided.

*Friday 24<sup>th</sup> 7 30 p.m.* Christmas Eve service

*Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> 10 00 a.m.* Christmas Day family service

*Sunday 26<sup>th</sup>* No service

## No Newsletter in January

As in previous years there will be no newsletter in January. However a calendar will be printed with a page of Society news notes.

## Birthdays

Birthday Greetings to **Sam Johnson** (1<sup>st</sup>), **Gai Kennedy** (2<sup>nd</sup>), **Beryl Laidley** (14<sup>th</sup>), **Tom Taylor** (15<sup>th</sup>), **Ken Horner** (16<sup>th</sup>), **Patricia Walsh** (19<sup>th</sup>), **Kristen Johnson** (29<sup>th</sup>).

Despite her up and down health, **Dot Heldon** has still managed to spend much of November travelling. Her first stop was Canberra to visit family, before flying to Queensland to visit others. Dot was accompanied on the Queensland trip by daughter and son-in law **Patricia and Brian Walsh**. This travelling schedule continues to be necessary in order for Dot to keep up with all of the new great-grandchildren that are being born around the country.

A highlight of November has been the visit of **Bishop Peter and Lisa Buss**. The Hurstville Society has been blessed by their regular visits during the duration of Peter's term as Executive Bishop. It is wonderful to have them back now that Peter has officially moved into retirement. Peter took the worship services on the 21<sup>st</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> of November, as well as leading the doctrinal class on the 19<sup>th</sup> and the Young People's group on the 26<sup>th</sup>.

A primary part of Peter and Lisa's visit will be the wedding in Perth of **Verity Smuts** and her fiancé **Tony** on the 5<sup>th</sup> of December in Perth. All of us in Hurstville wish to pass on our congratulations and blessings to Verity and Tony and wish them unbridled happiness in their married life together.

Speaking of the General Church community in **Perth**, **Garry Walsh** was thrilled to be able to lead a worship service with Holy Supper followed by a class during a Perth stopover on his recent return from a minister's study retreat in South Africa.

## 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Planning

Mention was made in the November Newsletter of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Hurstville Society that will occur in July, 2005. As a follow up, several people have spoken of their interest in being part of a **committee** to help get the planning process moving forward. At the Society AGM held on Sunday the 14<sup>th</sup> of November, a number of people volunteered to be part of this committee. These people are: Garry Walsh – Chair, Michelle Heldon, Angela Heldon, Cliff Adamou, Margaret Heldon, Laurel Walsh, Robert

angel we are told that the glory of the Lord shone all around them. We might be able to imagine the brightness they saw, a brightness that was beyond description. The shepherds would have been awestruck by the vision that enveloped them. It is little wonder that they were “greatly afraid.”

The Writings define the “fearful” as being people who have no faith. Such a condemnation appears misplaced with the shepherds though. The angel spoke to them. He implored them saying, “Do not be afraid.” And, all indications are that the shepherds responded. The spontaneous anxiety they experienced seems to have subsided. They were then open to hearing the good news that was contained in the second part of the angel's message:

*“I bring you good tidings of great joy, which will be to all people.”*

The angel continued:

*“For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.”*

We can imagine the angel barely able to contain his joy at proclaiming that the Lord had finally come. The prophecies of old were being fulfilled. Yet, despite the magnitude of the angel's joy, there must have been some sadness that the true magnitude of this remarkable event could not be openly revealed. The prophecy above from Psalm 96 states clearly that the LORD Himself would come. It is worth noting at this point a portion of the “Explanation of Format” that appears as a preface to most New King James translations of the Bible.

*The covenant name of God* in the Old Testament, represented by the Hebrew consonants YHWH (pronounced Yehowah or Jehovah), is translated “LORD” or GOD” (using capital letters as shown), as it has been throughout the history of the King James Bible. In this edition the capitalized form is also used whenever the covenant name is quoted in the New Testament from a passage in the Old Testament.

In the Psalm 96 prophecy and elsewhere it is clear that the “LORD” or God Himself was coming. In the message to the shepherds the angel declared that “Christ the Lord” had come. The titles, “Christ” and “Lord” here carry more of a sense of “Anointed One” or “Messiah” and “Master” than they do a sense that the One who had come was indeed YHWH the Great God Himself.

Two reasons are given for this lack of clarity when it came to the Lord’s true identity at this time. The first was simply that people would not have believed it. The second was that until the Lord had glorified His Human, putting off what had come from Mary and putting on what was Divine, it was not really true to say that people were physically seeing God (see Arcana Coelestia 2921:6).

So it was that the angel spoke of the coming of “the Lord” (small characters) not the coming of “the LORD.” The angel of the Lord then told them that in Bethlehem, the city of David, they would find a sign giving proof of the wonderful message they were hearing.

*“And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.”*

Then, before the shepherds could begin to contemplate the enormity of the things they had heard, the angelic scene around them was transformed once again:

*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,  
good will toward men.”*

These words echo the words of praise that are given to us in the opening of the 148<sup>th</sup> Psalm:



Kaye Macfarlane and Janette Simpson at opening of Aqua Gifts

In November **Karen Lockhart** accepted a career opportunity overseas. She has now settled in a place called Cricklewood in London with the company itself based in Hackney.

Staying with the Lockhart family, it is sad to announce that Joanne Lockhart, the elder of Mike’s two sisters, remains in Intensive Care in a

hospital in Tom’s River New Jersey. Our thoughts and prayers are with the family as Joanne fights through this very difficult time.

Last month we reported that **Vera Buck** was living in Newcastle with her elder son Mick and wife Lynne and family following the passing of her husband Dave. The latest word we hear is that Vera is on the waiting list for some low assistance retirement communities in the Newcastle area. There is likely to be a significant delay until a place in one of these communities opens up. In the meantime, Vera has made the decision to return to her home in Sydney. We wish her all the best as she transitions back into her old home and we look forward to the chance of seeing her a little more than we first thought we might have.

Also in November we reported the heart problems being experienced by **Philip Richards**. Since that time Philip has undergone a multiple bypass and has subsequently shown remarkable powers of recovery. We were delighted to see **Philip** and **Eleanor** in Sydney on Sunday 21<sup>st</sup>. Philip declares he is confident that they will be able to attend the Summer Camp in Queensland in January! Our thoughts remain with Philip and Eleanor as Philip continues on his path back to full health.

- Notes:
- 1 modern notation for naming comets: 'D' denotes a non-periodic comet
  - 2 an Astronomic Unit equals 149,597,870 kilometres and is the average distance between the Sun and the Earth

## Disaster, Disease and Divine Providence

As a corollary to Robert Cooper's article readers may wish to read the article *Disaster, Disease and Divine Providence* by Rev Arne Bau-Madsen in the July 2004 issue of *New Church Life*. This considers the possible relationship of dramatic physical events to spiritual events especially the Great Earthquake that struck the city of Lisbon in Portugal in 1755, which at an estimated 8.5 to 9 on the Richter scale is thought by many to have been the most powerful earthquake known to man. It utterly destroyed the city and killed an estimated 70,000 people and was felt right across Europe.

Lisbon was the centre of power of the Jesuits who wielded immense power in the Roman Catholic world and whose power needed to be smashed to make way for the Last Judgment and the Second Coming. The article is well researched and argued and makes fascinating and startling reading.

Owen Heldon

## Society News

November saw **Kaye MacFarlane** leave Sydney to take on a new business venture on the Gold Coast in Queensland. Friday the 19<sup>th</sup> of November marked the opening of her new store called **Aqua Gifts**. It is located adjacent to the beach on the ground floor of an upscale apartment building on Marine Parade, Labrador. Early reports say that the shop looks wonderful in its aqua striped colour scheme, and that it "smells delicious." We wish Kaye and her business partners all success in their new venture. One last thing, Kaye won't let us say a formal "good-bye" to her. She tells us that she intends to be back in Sydney on a regular basis before ultimately settling in Queensland full time.

*Praise the LORD!*  
*Praise the Lord from the heavens;*  
*Praise Him in the heights!*  
*Praise Him, all His angels;*  
*Praise Him, all His hosts!*

We can imagine all the inhabitants of heaven, some of whom had lived there from the time of the Psalms, waiting in anticipation for the day when the Lord would make His Advent. It was these angels, this heavenly host that restrained themselves and stayed in the background while the one angel of the Lord spoke to the shepherds. Now that the angel's task was completed they would have burst into view. Their veiled presence had perhaps accounted for the "glory of the Lord" that had shone all around the shepherds from the moment the angel had come. There was now no holding them back and they broke into the style of praise that had been promoted in the 148<sup>th</sup> Psalm.

It is valuable to consider why such sincere praising of the Lord is so important.

"To praise God" signifies confession and worship, because the Lord has no wish to be praised and glorified from any love of Himself, but only from His love for every person, for each person must needs praise and glorify the Lord, that is, give praise and glory to Him, when he acknowledges in heart that there is nothing of good in himself, and that he can do nothing of himself, and on the other hand, that all good is from the Lord, and that the Lord can do all things (Apocalypse Explained 1210).

This passage goes on to say that when a person is in this type of true humility and praise, the Lord is able to flow into them with goodness and with power. We can imagine the host of angels then, being given the power by the Lord to express themselves with power and with one voice into the hearing of these shepherds. This could only have occurred as a reflection of the humility that was in the angels' hearts, and because they knew that the salvation of mankind could only be secured through the Lord's power alone.

It is interesting to note that the heavenly host first gave glory to God in

the highest. They then went on to send wishes of peace to people on earth. If we look at the Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem some thirty-three years later, we find the disciples rejoicing and praising God with a loud voice. The disciples then cried out:

*“Blessed is the King who  
comes in the name of the  
LORD!”  
Peace in heaven and glory in  
the highest!” (Luke 19:38)*

So it is in the Gospel of Luke that we have the beginning of the Lord's life on earth pronounced with the praises of the angels and their hopes and wishes for the peace of mankind. And, we have the virtual end of the Lord's life on earth marked by the praises of the disciples and their wishes for peace in the heavens. These two canticles of praise stand as bookends to the Lord's life on earth. The first is a sign that the angels understood the enormity of what the Lord's life on earth meant. The second showed that the disciples were beginning to truly understand as well.

As a side note when we consider the obvious joy that the angels were experiencing on the day of the Lord's Advent, it is worth stressing that the angels of heaven associate the goods of charity with heavenly joy (see Heaven and Hell 404). So it is that their praising and glorifying of God comes in the form of performing uses. Consider what this means in terms of their everyday lives. Whenever angels feel inspired to praise the Lord, which would be very regularly, they express that sense of praise by doing something useful for someone. Think about what an incredible model for life is being presented here. What would our world look like if people were truly humble and full of praise and then expressed their praise through random acts of service and kindness?

The canticle of praise from the heavenly host was an act of kindness towards not only the shepherds out in the fields that night, but to all mankind for ever more. And, the shepherds responded to the message of the angel of the Lord and the praises sung by the heavenly host and they set

overthrown.

Fourthly, the event is steeped in rich correspondences. Both in its coming and going, Comet Lexell was profoundly influenced by Jupiter's gravity. Given the pagan representation of Jupiter as God, the scenario could be interpreted as that of God sending forth a messenger and returning Him. Comet Lexell came as close to Jupiter on both orbital legs without actually colliding.

And finally, there is the part of Anders Johan Lexell. He was born December 24, 1740 in Sweden and served as Professor of Astronomy at St Petersburg in 1771. Now isn't that a small parable of Swedenborg himself – a Swedish scientist given to examining the details of celestial light and truth? Except that Swedenborg studied the spiritual truths of Faith as represented by St Peter in all their detail.

Interestingly, Swedenborg himself speculated on the existence of the solar disk from which the planets were formed. It is the residual part of this disk, or Kuiper Belt, which is the source of comets. Thus Swedenborg inadvertently grasped *both* the literal and spiritual senses of Biblical prophesy.

But Swedenborg was right about people's reactions. I doubt that many will be compelled to believe this sign; but those in the New Church can draw both comfort and excitement from this wonderful connection with June 19, 1770.

This article is dedicated to my father - a gifted amateur astronomer who enjoyed his hobby but died short of seeing Halley's Comet - from Earth's perspective anyway!

### **Reader Challenge**

Halley's Comet was resighted on Christmas night 1758. Did this conclude the Last Judgement begun in 1757 – and would anyone believe it anyway?

Comet Lexell disappeared forever after October 3 when its orbit was interrupted and was ultimately ejected by the planet Jupiter. The orbit of the comet was so mysterious that the French Institute of the time offered a prize to anyone who could explain it: the scientist Le Verrier suggested a hyperbola, Lexell an ellipse and others a parabola. It had never been seen previously despite calculations showing that it had had a period of 50 years – its earlier perihelion was beyond Jupiter.

### **So why should this be a sign?**

Firstly, the name of the comet itself is certainly telling, being composed of: Lex (Latin for law) concatenated with Ell (Hebrew for God) – hence Lexell. This certainly was not contrived by anyone: Messier already had several comets named after him and so it was fairly awarded to the brilliant Lexell who described the comet’s motions; and *The True Christian Religion* was as yet unpublished.

And indeed the Writings given to Swedenborg are nothing less than the Law of God written in the Latin language. So the Law of God comet made its visitation to Earth after having passed under the influence of Jupiter.

Secondly, like a “thief in the night” (Matthew 24:43, Luke 12:39), Comet Lexell’s origins and fate were a complete mystery. The place, the day and the hour of its arrival were, as the Scriptures would indicate, completely shrouded. Even today, two hundred and thirty years later, who would connect Comet Lexell with the Second Advent? The fate of that comet is still unknown.

Thirdly, the comet is remarkable solely for its amazing proximity to both Jupiter and Earth and not for being a ‘Great Comet’. It didn’t have a long tail, indeed it had no tail to speak of and its magnitude of brightness was unspectacular. Nor was it a periodic comet, this was to be a one-off event.

The Lord’s advents too are about proximity – between that of God and man. He came neither as a warrior or a Caesar, nor did He come with ostentation. His advents required watchfulness and discernment lest free-will be

themselves to go to Bethlehem. We hear their words:

*“Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us.”*

*And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the Babe lying in a manger.*

It was said earlier that “shepherds” in the Word stand as symbols of those people who teach and lead others into goodness and truth. It was now, after the shepherds had seen the great sign in the manger in Bethlehem that their shepherding use became so important. We read:

*Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning the Child. And all those who heard it marvelled at those things that were told them by the shepherds.*

The Writings for the New Church say that “giving glory to God is to live according to Divine Truth.” They also say that it is to “bring forth fruit” (Apocalypse Explained 874:2). The angels may have expressed glory to God in words on the day of His Advent, but the true everyday expression of their glory to Him came in the usefulness of their lives and the fruits of their service to others. The shepherds gave glory to God by going to see the sign of His Coming and by proclaiming the Lord’s message to others. Thirty-some years later the Lord’s disciples also expressed glory and praise in words. The true expression of their giving glory though, was in their service to the Lord once He had been resurrected and glorified. They went out and spread the message. In doing so they faced the very real dangers that the pagan Roman world presented. Many perished for their efforts. Still the danger did not deter them. What else could they do but spread the good news once they truly understood in their hearts all that the Lord their God had done?



# A Physical Sign Of The Second Coming

By Robert Cooper

## Challenge

In a letter that Friedrich Oetinger, a Lutheran prelate, wrote to Swedenborg on October 7, 1766, he asked whether a sign would be given that the Doctrine of the New Jerusalem is true. On the following November 11, Swedenborg wrote back that “signs compel outwardly” but that “perhaps some sign will be given”.

This occurred some years before the advent of June 19, 1770 and it is well past time that the historical record be examined to have the question finally resolved.

## Hints and Clues

The only spiritual precedent to this event was, of course, the first advent or Christ’s birth into the world. The Gospel of Matthew spoke of a star “seen in the east” - the Star of Bethlehem as we know it, and which today some think to have been a comet. Indeed the artist Giotto represented the Star of Bethlehem in his *Worship of the Magi* as a comet having seen Halley’s Comet himself earlier.

Throughout history comets were powerful omens. Halley’s comet for instance was linked to the death of Agrippa in 11 BC, the destruction of Jerusalem in 66AD and the Norman Invasion of 1066 - featuring on the Bayeux Tapestry. Herod himself sought out the exact time that the Star of Bethlehem appeared to fix the age of slaughter in his murderous campaign against the Lord two years later.

In natural history, it was a comet 65 million years ago that struck the Yucatan Peninsula, closed the era of the dinosaur and gave mammals dominion of the planet. Comets also turned the tide of human history by either giving courage or inducing fear. A spate of comets had sapped Montezuma’s will to resist the Spanish whilst Comet Hale-Bopp

precipitated the suicide of the Heaven’s Gate cult group.

The three synoptic Gospels each contain sections on ‘Signs of the end of the age’. In Matthew 24:3, the apostles ask “Tell us when this will happen and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” for which the Lord answers “At that time the Son of Man will appear in the sky” but that “No-one knows about the day or hour, not even the angels in heaven”. And in Luke 21, it is written that “There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars ... heavenly bodies will be shaking”. Further, the Book of Revelations is littered with astronomic references.

If there is one commonality in the Biblical clues (taken in the literal sense) and the context of human history, it is that the ‘sign’ may be astronomic in nature. Such a sign is also beyond the realm of human intervention and therefore is unimpeachable.

## A possible candidate

It is here therefore, in the annals of astronomy, that the quest for a sign was begun. An examination of the record of comets led to a singularly spectacular comet that exactly coincided with the new revelation and measured up to a miraculous standard.

Discovered by Charles Messier on June 14-15, 1770 within the constellation of Sagitarius, it was named Comet Lexell (D/1770 L1)<sup>1</sup> after the mathematician Anders Johan Lexell who calculated its orbit. Remarkably, on 1 July, 1770 this comet made the closest approach to Earth *in all recorded history*, coming within 0.0151 AU<sup>2</sup> (2.25 million kilometres) to Earth or the equivalent of six times the distance to the Moon. Its sighting was also noted in Burke’s Almanac.

The coma measured 2’23” across the sky and was first visible to the naked eye on June 20. On July 26 it was noted by Chinese astronomers and the nucleus was described as a brilliant silvery white with nebulosity but the usual tail was absent. The comet reached perihelion, the point closest to the sun, on August 14 and was then at a distance of 0.67 AU from the sun.