

## THE HOLY CITY DESCENDING

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In chapter 21 of the book of Revelation we find these words: “And I John saw the holy city, the New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven....” This refers to a vision seen by the Apostle John on the Isle of Patmos. It was something he saw taking place in the spiritual world when his spiritual eyes had been opened by the Lord.

But what did it mean? It is always interesting to find out about things that have taken place in the spiritual world, but it is even more interesting to find out why they have taken place, because everything we are told about in the Lord’s Word is told to us for a reason. Why are we told about John’s seeing “the holy city, the New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven,” and what kind of city was it, that it would be important for us to know about it?

Many people have asked themselves this question during the hundreds of years that have passed since the book of Revelation was written, and several different answers have been suggested. For the true answer, however, we must go to the Heavenly Doctrines, because it is there that the Lord has come again to explain the Old and New Testaments and to explain what is meant by the things we are told in them.

First of all, we find out from the Heavenly Doctrines that by “the holy city, the New Jerusalem,” is meant a new church, which the Lord would form at the end of the Christian Church, when it was no longer teaching people the true way to the Lord and heaven. Secondly, we find out that this church would not be simply a new church, or another new church (since all the churches which the Lord has established have been new at their beginnings), but that it would be the *last* new church, which would exist forever, so that it may be called the New Church. And, what is more, we also find out that this church would know the Lord in a better and clearer way than ever possible before. For this reason, the Heavenly Doctrines say that “this New Church is the crown of all the churches that have hitherto existed on the earth” (*True Christian Religion* 786).

All this is meant by “the holy city, the New Jerusalem,” which the Apostle John saw in a vision, “coming down from God out of heaven.” It is called “holy,” because, like all true churches, it is a gift from the Lord and is formed by Him—because it descends from God out of heaven. It is called “new,” because everything of its teaching, or doctrine, would be new, in the sense that it would make the Lord known in a better and clearer way than ever before. At the same time, it would also show the way to heaven and human happiness in a better and clearer way than ever before, since it is by knowing the Lord and following His will that we are lead that way.

What John saw on the Isle of Patmos was a vision foretelling the establishment of this New Church, and it is important for us to know about it, because it is through the Heavenly Doctrines that the Lord has established it. In other words, the prophecy has now come true. The New Church has been established; the holy city, the New Jerusalem, has now come down from God out of heaven, and its teachings or doctrines, which make it new, are the teachings we find in the Heavenly Doctrines. The Heavenly Doctrines make the Lord known, not in parables, or in representative prophecies, or in historical stories, but plainly and directly, as never before, as He is in Himself and as He was when

He showed Himself to people in times past. And because it is in the Heavenly Doctrines that the Lord has thus made Himself known—in the most perfect way possible—it is also in the Heavenly Doctrines that the Lord has come to us again, making the Second Coming which He promised us He would, to establish and form that church which is meant by “the holy city, the New Jerusalem.”

For this we are thankful—not only for ourselves, but for all people—because now it is possible for us to *know* the Lord, not as some invisible Deity who seems to care little for the human race, but as a warm and personal God, a Father whose love reaches out to every single person and whose every effort is to lead people to happiness and protect them from harm. We are glad for this church, in which we can so know the Lord and through it come to love and follow Him in the ways that He wishes. Because we are thankful, every year, in June, we remember the birthday of the church.

How do we know when the church was born? How do we know when it came into being? The answer to this has actually been made very easy for us to know. In one of the books of the Heavenly Doctrines, called *True Christian Religion*, at the very end of the chapter on the New Church, we are told the following:

*After this work was finished the Lord called together His twelve disciples who followed Him in the world; and the next day He sent them all forth throughout the whole spiritual world to preach the Gospel that the Lord God Jesus Christ reigns, whose kingdom shall be for ages and ages.... This took place on the nineteenth day of June, 1770 (TCR 791).*

This was the birthday of the New Church, at least in the spiritual world, and because of it we now celebrate the nineteenth of June as New Church Day. We remember that day so many years ago when the prophecy of the vision seen by John was fulfilled and the holy city, the New Jerusalem, began to come down from God out of heaven.

Birthdays, however, should not only look backward; they should also look forward. We do indeed look backward on New Church Day, in gratitude for what the Lord has done in making His second coming and establishing His church, but we also look forward to what we can do in further co-operation with Him so that His New Church may grow ever better and serve people in the ways that the Lord intends. In celebrating New Church Day, we not only give thanks that the Lord has come again through the Heavenly Doctrines, to make Himself known and establish His church anew; we also come together to rededicate ourselves to living a life according to His will, to renew our intention to co-operate with Him in building His church on earth, and to encourage each other in the pursuit of those good uses and excellent purposes for which we have all been created.

Above all, we turn our eyes to the Lord and to the kind of life which is to be the spirit of the New Church. And what is that spirit of the New Church to be? The Lord Himself has already given the answer: to love one another as He has loved us (see John 13:34). This is the new commandment which He gave to those who would be His disciples, who would be His followers. And it is the spirit of this commandment which He came again to establish in the hearts of people. It is the life of the New Church to which we now devote ourselves anew: mutual love in the common worship of our Lord, who is at once God of heaven and earth and the Savior of people forever.

Amen.