

HEAVENLY LIFE

A New Church Day Pageant

by Rt. Rev. Brian W. Keith

SUGGESTED CAST FOR HEAVENLY LIFE PAGEANT

SCENE 1: SWEDENBORG'S SPIRITUAL EYES ARE OPENED

Swedenborg
Angel

SCENE 2: AWAKENING IN THE SPIRITUAL WORLD

Awakening person
Celestial angels (2)
Spiritual angels (2)
Friends (2-4)
Wife

SCENE 3: FALSE IDEAS OF HEAVEN

Power (2-4)
Angel
Paradise (2-4)

SCENE 4: THE WAY TO HEAVEN

Rock
Hell group
Heaven group
Society greeters

SCENE 5: CHILDREN IN HEAVEN

Angel mother
Young children (2-4)
Wise Angel
Older children (2-4)

SCENE 6: THE WEDDING

Bride
Groom
Bridesmaids (6)
Wedding guests

SCENE 7: THIS REVELATION IS THE LORD'S SECOND COMING

Swedenborg

Scene 1: Swedenborg's Spiritual Eyes Open

[Swedenborg seated at desk, writing.]

When confusion reigned about who the Lord was, how to live a good life, and what happens after death, the Lord appeared to Emanuel Swedenborg, opened his spiritual eyes, and revealed heavenly truths for the New Church. He then saw the spiritual reality with clarity and perception.

[Swedenborg then turns and sees an angel standing next to him.]

Swedenborg said: "I have been allowed, in the Lord's Divine mercy, while still in the physical body in the world, to be in the spirit in the next life — for a human being is a spirit clothed with a body. In that world I have been allowed to talk to souls who have risen again not long after their decease...and to see the remarkable things in that world which have never entered anyone's imagination." (*Arcana Coelestia* 1886 pref:3).

[Angel comes from right of hill as you face hill.]

Angel's Cue: *The Lord*

New Church Day Pageant: Heavenly Life

Scene 2: Awakening in the Spiritual World

Swedenborg was allowed to observe the process whereby a person who is said to die actually awakes to a new and eternal life.

As the earthly body is put off, two of the highest, celestial, angels are present at the person's head. They are silent, creating a sphere of security. They often comfort the person with the thought that life is eternal. While the Lord's attractive power is drawing the person into the spiritual world, these angels remain.

As the person is beginning to awaken, spiritual angels then assume the task of opening the person's eyes. This they do by apparently rolling away a covering from the eyes and the face.

Once awakened the person is told he is still alive and a spirit.

Since the person looks just as he did on earth, he is immediately recognized by friends and relatives.

The newly awakened person is delighted to see friends again, who are equally pleased with his arrival. Husbands and wives come together and congratulate each other, and continue together" (*Heaven and Hell* 494).

[Person to be awakened comes from right of hill (as you face it).]

Cue: when scene 1 is over, awakening person comes out and lies down.

[Two Celestial Angels cone over top of hill.]

Celestial Angels' cue: *As the earthly body is put off*

[Two Spiritual Angels come over top of hill.]

Spiritual Angels' cue: *As the person is beginning to awaken*

[Friends come over top of hill.]

Friends' cue: *Since the person*

[Spouse comes over top of hill]

Spouse's cue: *Husbands and wives*

New Church Day Pageant: Heavenly Life

Scene 3: False Ideas of Heaven

Some people have false ideas of what the life after death is like. Usually they are willing to have their ideas corrected when instructed by angels. But the Lord allows those who stubbornly insist they are right to experience what they think heaven to be.

One group thought heaven was being rich and powerful—being able to judge others to heaven or hell. They were led to thrones, given crowns and robes, and told to wait.

As the hours passed, they grew bored. Finally an angel came down from heaven and said, “Why do you sit foolishly and play the part of actors? They have been playing tricks with you! Have you forgotten the Lord’s words, that he who wishes to be great in heaven becomes a servant? To be servant is to perform uses for others” (*Conjugal Love 7*).

Upon realizing this, they got down from their false thrones, and sanity returned to their minds.

Another group thought heaven was a paradise—sitting around all day long relaxing on a bed of roses and plucking fruit from the trees. Swedenborg saw some who had been there seven days and were not happy but sad!

They said, “When we entered, our minds seemed as though elevated into heaven and admitted to the inmost joy of joys. But after three days, this happiness began to grow dull and become nothing. Now we doubt there is any eternal happiness.”

The angel then told them that this garden is an entrance to heaven, but not heaven itself. They learned that external paradises are not the source of heavenly joy, but reflect inner joy when a person loves the Lord and cares for those around him. Then outer beauty becomes a delightful and eternal paradise.

Upon hearing this they arose with joy, eagerly wanting to be led into genuine heavenly life (*Conjugal Love 8*).

[Power comes from left of hill (as you face it).]

Power’s cue: *One group thought*

Power carry their chairs

Power leave — taking their chairs at “*upon realizing*”

Angel’s cue: *As the hours passed*

[Paradise come over top of hill.]

Paradise cue: *Another group thought*

Leave on: *upon realizing*

New Church Day Pageant: Heavenly Life

Angel's cue: *They said, "When we entered..."*

Scene 4: The Way to Heaven

As people grow accustomed to the spiritual world, resolving problems in preparation for heaven, they are led to their eternal home. Pathways open up before them, and they naturally want to follow them.

Once Swedenborg saw a wide pathway with many spirits going on it. It ended at a large stone, from which two pathways went off in different directions. One path led into the light of heaven. But the other path led downwards to hell.

At first all seemed to go on the same way until they came to the large stone. Those who were good saw the stone and turned towards heaven. But the evil did not see the stone and fell over it, hurting themselves. As they got up, they ran towards hell (*Heaven and Hell* 534).

The good people progressed along the path until they came to a heavenly society of people like themselves. They were warmly welcomed and saw these angels as if they were relatives and friends. In fact, it seemed as if they had known them all their lives (*Divine Providence* 338:4).

[Rock comes from left of hill.]

Rock's cue: *As people got accustomed*

[Going to Hell and Going to Heaven come from right of hill (as you face hill)]

Hell group and Heaven group cue: *At first they seemed to be*

(Society Greeters come over hill]

Greeters' cue: *As they got up, they ran*

New Church Day Pageant: Heavenly Life

Scene 5: Children in Heaven

Although “it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish” (Matthew 18:14), special care is given to those who die as children.

As soon as they enter the spiritual world, they are carried to heaven and entrusted to angelic mothers who loved infants and God. Because in the world they had tenderly loved all young children they accept these children as their own. And the children love them as though they were their own mothers (*Heaven and Hell* 332).

As they grow and explore the world around them, they learn many things. They are instructed from the Word about how to be good.

Older boys are guided by wise instructors. From them they learn to cooperate by working together in choirs and by playing games. There are races and games with racquet and balls. Laurel leaves are given to the more active (*Conjugal Love* 17:4).

They quickly develop into young adulthood and are given more responsibilities. They receive clothes which must be cared for. They have a garden, where the plants and flowers grow if they are kind to one another (*Spiritual Experiences* 56660ff).

In this way they are led to love their neighbors and be prepared for heaven.

[Angel Mother and Young Children come over the hill.]

Angel Mother and Young Children cue: *As soon as they enter*

[Wise Angel and Older Children come from left of hill.]

Wise Angel and Older Children's cue: *There are races and games*

New Church Day Pageant: Heavenly Life

Scene 6: Wedding

“Because all the delights of heaven stream from the delights of conjugal love” it is provided that children raised in heaven “are continually educated for their marriage, neither the boy nor the girl knowing it.”

“Then when a suitable time has passed, she, now a marriageable young woman, and he, now a young man ripe for marriage, meet somewhere as if by chance, see each other. At once they know as by a kind of instinct that they are meant for each other. And they think within themselves as though from some dictate, the young man, ‘She is mine,’ and the young woman, ‘He is mine.’

“Then, after this thought has been seated for some time in the mind of each, they deliberately speak to each other and betroth themselves.”

“It is said, as if by chance, instinct, and dictate, though what is meant is by Divine Providence...for the Lord opens their inner similarities that they may see them”
(*Conjugal Love* 229).

After an appropriate time, a wedding ceremony takes place.

[Wait for bride to be dressed. Then the virgins come out, and bride also. Groom and attendant come.]

Six virgins begin the wedding procession. The bride and bridegroom then come out “holding each other by the hand, and leading each other.”

The bridegroom then turns to the bride and places on her finger a gold ring. He then gives her bracelets and a necklace of large pearls, and fastening the bracelets upon her wrists and the necklace around her neck, he says, “Accept these pledges.” And as she takes them, he kisses her and says, “Now you are mine,” and calls her his wife.

The guests then cry out, “Let there be a blessing!” and at that moment the room is filled with a wonderful fragrance, the sign of a blessing from heaven.

They then celebrate with festive eating and drinking (*Conjugal Love* 20).

[Husband comes over hill from left. Wife comes over hill from right.]
Husband’s and Wife’s cue: *Then when a suitable time has passed*

[Wedding Guests come over the hill.]
Wedding Guest’s cue: *After an appropriate time*

Scene 7: This Revelation is the Lord's Second Coming

Emanuel Swedenborg was led to see all this and much more about the life after death. As he experienced this, he was enlightened by the Lord to see the spiritual truths of the Old and New Testaments. Thus the Lord used Swedenborg as the means for revealing what could not be understood before. As he declared, “this second coming of the Lord is effected by means of a man to whom the Lord has manifested Himself in Person, and whom He has filled with His spirit, that he may teach the doctrines of the New Church from the Lord by means of the Word” (*True Christian Religion* 779).

Thus was the New Church begun — the crown of all the churches that have ever existed on earth, which will endure for all generations.

[Sing hymn *The Lord God Jesus Christ Doth Reign!* as the minister ascends the hill.]

[Benediction given.]

[Sing hymn as all follow minister off.]

[All line up on top of hill.]

All cue: *Emanuel Swedenborg*