

**Lesson 28: LIFE IN THE MOST ANCIENT CHURCH:
PEACEFUL AND PLENTIFUL LIKE THE GARDEN OF EDEN
Genesis 2: 8-9**

INTRODUCTION:

Swedenborg's writings tell us that in the very beginning, people were a lot like animals. They mostly concerned themselves with finding food and shelter, and weren't able to think about things like God or heaven.

But the Lord helped these first people to grow and learn, and in time, human beings came to know their loving Father, the Lord, and to worship Him. And so was formed the very first church – the Most Ancient Church. These people were completely willing to follow the Lord's teachings. They were not troubled by any evil. And so their lives were peaceful and content, and full of everything they needed. They were very close to heaven.

The story of Adam and Eve living in the Garden of Eden is a picture of the life of the Most Ancients. Adam and Eve are symbols of these people, who loved to live according to the Lord's teachings. The Garden of Eden is a symbol of their life – peaceful, beautiful, and full of everything they needed.

READING:

Now read aloud *Life in The Most Ancient Church: A Heaven on Earth*, by Gretchen Keith. (This book is out of print but we have attached the text at the end of this lesson.)

**PROJECT:
SPONGE PAINTING OF THE GARDEN OF EDEN**

Supplies:

White poster board (can be one sheet or two, depending on the size of your group); sponges cut into various shapes, including leaf, flower, and fruit shapes; a variety of paints to dip the sponges into; newspaper; smocks.

Ahead of Time:

Draw in pencil on the poster board some basic outlines of a few trees, a river, the ground. This will be to help them get them started.

Procedure:

Have them dip the sponges into paint and dab them onto the poster board to create a soft picture of the Garden of Eden. They can first fill in the tree trunk areas, the river, and the ground in appropriate colors. Then encourage them to have fun dabbing leaves onto the trees, bushes on the ground, flowers in the grasses, and fruit on the trees. And they can add more trees as well. If anyone feels inspired to insert birds or other animals, that would be fun, too.

Variations:

This project can be done to display as a flat picture on the poster board, or by cutting the front off of a cardboard box, setting the painted poster board in the back of the box, and adding small clay animals in the foreground.

Life in the Most Ancient Church

A Heaven on Earth

By Gretchen Keith

The Lord planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed. And out of the ground the Lord God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The Tree of Life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:8-9).

The story of the Garden of Eden is about the very first church that the Lord gave to people of our earth. It was called the Most Ancient Church. It was before Noah and the Ark. It was before the Lord gave Moses the Ten Commandments. It was before the shepherds hurried to see the infant Lord. It was before the Lord appeared to Swedenborg.

The Most Ancient Church was very special. Everyone loved the Lord. They loved Him more than anyone or anything else in the world! They knew Him as Jehovah.

The Most Ancient Church did not have a written Word like we do. Instead, the people talked with the Lord, and He gave them delightful dreams and visions. In these ways, He taught the most ancients what was good and what was true. The people of the Most Ancient Church could be friends with the angels and talk with them, because they were almost like angels themselves. The angels could share the happiness of heaven with them.

Can you imagine knowing right away if something was true or false? The people of the Most Ancient Church could do this, because they loved what is good. If an idea was true, they would say, "Yes, that is the truth!" But if they heard a false idea, they were horrified.

In the time of the Most Ancient Church, married couples loved each other tenderly. They looked to the Lord together, and the more they loved the Lord the more they loved each other! Marriage gave them great happiness, because they had conjugal love.

Each family lived in a tent or in a wooden tabernacle. Father, mother, sisters, and brothers all loved each other very much and tried to bring joy to one another. In those days, children were born wanting to become good people. They listened as fathers taught the rules of charity and the life of love. They watched how their parents lived and practiced being good and loving.

The people of the Most Ancient Church worshiped the Lord on mountains, because these are the highest parts of the earth. This made them feel closer to the Lord. They also worshiped the Lord in their tents and tabernacles. Because their worship in tabernacles was so holy, the Lord later commanded the Children of Israel to build a tabernacle for their worship.

Life in the Most Ancient Church: A Heaven on Earth

As part of their worship, the most ancient people touched their faces to the ground. This showed their adoration and humble praise of the Lord, for they knew that all good comes from Him.

The Lord provided for the most ancient people. The plants and animals of His creation gave them everything they needed for food, clothing, and shelter. They gathered fruits, vegetables, and seeds from fields and gardens. They made bread and butter, and they had milk to drink. They did not eat meat, but they tended flocks and herds for their milk and wool.

Many of the most ancient people were shepherds. They moved from place to place so their sheep would have fresh grass to eat and water to drink. The family worked to use all that the Lord gave them. They gathered and prepared food. They had beautiful homes, and they made clothing and many useful things. Everyone in the family helped. Helping other people is a way to love the Lord and the neighbor.

In those days the Lord wanted family groups to live near each other because each family had its own special love of the Lord and found a special way to show it. A married couple and their children lived together in a tent or tabernacle. This family was called a household. Their cousins lived nearby with their own parents. Several nearby households were part of an extended family. These large families also belonged to a tribe or nation of people. And they all lived in peace with each other.

Think how different life was in the Most Ancient Church. There was no evil, no hatred, and no fighting. People did not want power or riches. They were content with what they had. There was no illness, and people died of old age. People in the Most Ancient Church loved the Lord and their neighbors. Because they followed the Lord, they wanted to help their neighbors. The Golden Age was like Heaven on earth!

The most ancient people loved the beauty of the Lord's Creation. They saw the light of the sun, the moon, and the stars. They appreciated the tall mountains and the clear rivers of water. Trees, flowers, and fruits grew all around them. And they enjoyed watching beautiful birds, fish, and many other animals.

When the most ancient people saw these wonderful things, they thought about the Lord and heaven! When they raised their eyes to look at a high mountain, they thought of the Lord Himself. In the warmth of the sun, they could feel the Lord's love. When they saw fruit on a tree, they thought of how they could help their family and friends. They knew the correspondence or precious heavenly meaning of every single thing that the Lord had created. These correspondences were another way the Lord could teach the most ancient people about heavenly ideas.

Thousands of years later, Emanuel Swedenborg wanted to learn about the love that brings so much happiness to the angels—conjugal love. The Lord allowed him to visit many angelic couples who told him about this love.

Life in the Most Ancient Church: A Heaven on Earth

One morning Swedenborg heard a lovely song about marriage coming from heaven. The Lord opened his spiritual eyes to see golden rain beneath the sun in the east. That rain falls upon a hall where three married couples live who love each other tenderly.

An angel took Swedenborg to the hall and introduced him. Then Swedenborg asked the angel wives to tell him about conjugal love. They looked at their window and saw a white dove with silvery wings and a crown of gold—a sign from the Lord that they could answer his questions. The women told Swedenborg many things about the way husbands and wives can grow together to become one angel.

Swedenborg also visited the heaven of the golden age and talked with an angelic couple who had been members of the Most Ancient Church. Looking at their faces, Swedenborg could see that the husband and wife loved each other very much. He said to them, “You two are one.”

As they told him about conjugal love, a flaming light seemed to cover their tent with gold. And before Swedenborg left this heaven, the angel husband gave him a pomegranate with many golden seeds.

The Lord wants us to know about the most ancient people and the precious gifts He gave them: love, wisdom, peace, the joys of heaven and conjugal love. The Lord wants to give these precious, golden gifts to us as well.

“Thy will be done as in heaven so upon the earth.”

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