

The New Church Newsletter

Hurstville Society April 2023



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The Legend of the Count of Saint Germain

By Rev Todd Beiswenger

Easter is nearly upon us, and I don't think I'm out on a limb to say that Easter is a celebration of a miracle. Putting the theological implications of the miracle aside, rising from the dead on the third day after a public execution is pretty, well, miraculous! What has always tantalized me is wondering what other miracles were done that weren't written about. We're told that more did happen, but what? I tend to think more healings, and teachings, but I think there's a little bit at the end of the Gospel of John that hints to maybe something a bit more unusual.

Jesus is talking with Peter, telling him to "Feed my lambs," and "Take care of my sheep," then asks "Do you love me?" Peter says that he does, and Jesus says "Follow me." But then we have this odd bit where Peter notices that John is following as well and we read:

When Peter saw him, he asked, "Lord, what about him?" Jesus answered, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me" (John 21:21-22).

The next verse tells us that because of this statement, many believers thought that this meant John would never die. A couple of verses later the Gospel closes with this: "Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written" (John 21:25).

We know that the apostle John was exiled for his faith late in life (Revelation 1:9), but the Bible does not give us details on how John died. Is it because he *never* died? Nobody seems to take that idea seriously, but did you know there is another man – the Count of St. Germain - who claims to have been given additional centuries to his life courtesy of Jesus. Could this be one of the "many other things" Jesus did?

Let's start by asking this: Who was the Count of St. Germain? He was a mysterious man who appeared at significant political events for almost 200 years, always looking the same age. He was a talented musician, artist, historian, and alchemist who claimed to have discovered the philosopher's stone and the elixir of life. Yes, I know that last bit is hard to swallow. Yet he was seen by many people throughout history, and he had the ears of many powerful people in the 1700s including King Louis, Casanova, and Catherine the Great.

Here's what we know to be true: in 1745, an enigmatic man was arrested in London and charged with spying. He was taken in for questioning, and the Count's captors quickly learned that he was fluent in every European language, and even some languages that they didn't recognize. Beyond that, he gave them details about historical events that only an

eyewitness would know... yet he only looked to be 45 years old. They were so confounded by the Count's stories, they set him free, and this was in an age where you could permanently imprisoned for just being foreign!

We also know that about 15 years later the Count of St. Germain was hanging out with the elites of Paris, and Countess von Georgi recognized him from when he was in Venice in 1710, about 50 years earlier. The Countess asked St. Germain if he perhaps had a father or grandfather who was in Venice at the time. He said, "No, madam, it was I who had the honour of paying you court." The Countess couldn't believe it. She said the man she had met 50 years ago wasn't more than 45 years old. And here was St. Germain who looked the same age.

He would give accounts of the lives of Henry VIII, Nero, Cleopatra, and famous historical figures. And when asked how he could know so much about people that had been dead for hundreds of years, the Count would simply smile and say, "I was there." This would make the Count well over a thousand years old, which as you might imagine, made some people sceptical. But whenever another historian would try to stump the Count on obscure details, the Count always knew the answers. St. Germain even impressed the famous philosopher Voltaire, one of the keenest minds at the time, who said of St. Germain that, "He is the man who knows everything and never dies."

At this point you might be wondering what does any of this have to do with Jesus? You see, there's the story of Cartophilus, known as the "Wandering Jew." As Jesus was dragging the cross on the way to cavalry, he stopped to catch His breath. Cartophilus stepped into the street and told Jesus to stop resting and move along. Jesus said to Cartophilus, "I shall go and I will rest, but you shall not rest until I return." Cartophilus didn't know what Jesus meant by this. But as the years passed, Cartophilus' friends and family grew old and died, though he never aged. He was destined to walk the earth, immortal, until Christ's return.

Nobody took the story seriously until 1228, when an Armenian bishop spoke of having dinner with a strange man who spoke of history as if he was there. The man called himself Cartophilus. For centuries after, Cartophilus was seen in the Middle East, then Europe. It seemed as if the Wandering Jew was wandering west. Then one day, a mysterious stranger arrived in Paris. He appeared to be about 45 years old, and he called himself the Count of Saint-Germain. As a result, when the Count made claims to have known Jesus, people thought it meant that he must be Cartophilus.

So what do we make of the Count of St. Germain? Voltaire really did say that "He is the man who knows everything and never dies." That's not made up. However, what usually isn't reported is that Voltaire was being sarcastic. What you also don't often hear is that when Countess von Georgi recognized him, she was 90+ years old and senile. He did speak a few languages fluently, and because there was one where he used an uncommon dialect, it came across as an exotic language they had never heard before. The point being is that there is truth in all of these accounts, and many other interesting stories that I don't have the space for here.

What about him being Cartophilus? Unlike the other stories, there really isn't the documentation to prove that he is or isn't Cartophilus or that he did or didn't meet Jesus. If we say the Second Coming wasn't complete until June 19, 1770, maybe Cartophilus could have been still not resting around Europe in the 1700s while awaiting the return of Jesus! But maybe you remember last month's newsletter where I wrote about the eruv and the importance of having a right idea and understanding of God? Well, a New Church person who believes that Jesus is God would also pick up that God wouldn't be so spiteful as to make Cartophilus live for centuries for his remark. From my reading of the Writings, "spite" isn't considered a heavenly or Godly quality. The Bible is also clear that plenty of people were mocking Jesus, so if Jesus were to spite everybody who mocked him there would have been a lot more ancient Jews wandering around for centuries. So perhaps Cartophilus isn't another Easter miracle, but just a legend.

As for me, I enjoy a good tall tale, especially if it has a paranormal element to it. Those are the stories I want to believe, even if I know I shouldn't. As mentioned last month, thinking of God acting in this way makes our faith natural instead of spiritual. Yet I particularly like the idea that Jesus did a lot more miracles than we know about.

Getting back to the apostle John, there is another legend about his death. It's basically that he, like Elijah, ascended straight to heaven. It jives with Jesus' earlier statement of "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?" Jesus did say he would return before that generation passed away, so maybe... well... ok... the simplest answer is probably the best... perhaps he simply died as an old man sometime after 98AD, and was the only apostle to die peacefully. That really would have been a miracle.

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Kogarah Store House Food & Toiletry Drive

Easter Sunday, April 9th 2023

Once again we're taking in a food and toiletry collection for the Kogarah Store House. These drives are really important to the local community. As you have no doubt noticed, the prices for everything have been going up, and there's probably not an end to it in the near term. The problem is that price hikes hurt most the people who can afford it the least, so while we're all feeling the pinch, those who are less fortunate are feeling the pain more like a punch than a pinch. Let's be a blessing to somebody! We'll be taking donations up through Easter Sunday, April 9th, and then delivering them on the 10th.

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Regional Clergy Meetings

Last year I attended clergy meetings in the US for the first time since 2018, but this year the GC decided it would be best to have regional meetings. Part of the reason for this is they're hoping to have an assembly next year, and wanted to have Clergy meetings either before or after that. But if we have meetings in BA next year, that would mean it would be BA meetings 3 years in a row. The solution - regional meetings in 2023 to break things up.

All of which is to say I'll be attending regional meetings in **Seoul, South Korea**, leaving Sydney on Monday April 17th, returning on Sunday the 23rd. It will be interesting to hear what other pastors are seeing in different parts of the world, and I'll be sharing with them some of my experiences in the social media realm.

Due to the proximity of the Anzac Day holiday there will be **NO CHURCH** on **23rd April**.

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The Social Media Experiment

Last month I wrote that I would be publishing some short videos on **YouTube**, **Tiktok**, **Instagram** and **Facebook**. I'm happy to report that I actually have done this! For each of the seven weeks of the Shift program I produced a 1-minute synopsis of the church service. The results have been interesting, and much like the stories of the Count of St. Germain, I'm not sure of the truth of them.

Instagram is the worst performer so far, where I'm getting 40ish views a week. Except that I got 160 on the last one. I guess considering it was a new account I set up for this, it probably isn't too surprising that views aren't very good. Posting the Hurstville New Church Facebook page has yielded a better result, with Facebook showing that I'm getting 500-600 views a week, with one hitting 1,100 and another about 250. But average view time is only 6-8 seconds.

Tiktok feels similar to Facebook. The last few weeks I've been getting 800-950 views, but Tiktok is known for exaggerating viewership, and so it's hard to know what of that is real. Tiktok is also strange in that it hasn't provided me with analytics for all of the videos, but one shows that only 8.7% of people watched the whole thing, with people on average watching 13 seconds. Better than Facebook, but still "Ouch." But apparently that isn't too far off the norm for that platform.

Then there's YouTube. The first short got 60 views or so, and each one was getting more views. Week 6 was around 240, and with these almost 60% of people were watching the whole thing and one video even had 93% watch it entirely. So those numbers are really good. There was one other positive too. I published a 9-minute video on YouTube after the Week 6 short, and that video has received about 4 times the amount of views than my videos normally would get at this point. I don't know why, but some suggest that YouTube shorts are a good way to get people into the longer videos.

Overall, I think the numbers say that this is something worth continuing to experiment with so I'm going to continue with the practice and maybe even try to post multiple shorts every week and see what happens then.

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Lord, I'm Trying Logo

I've not been publishing new long form videos to my "Lord, I'm Trying" channel over the last year, which I've written about before. A couple of things I've been working on before resuming was adding some polish to anything new, which means including some background music, as well as doing some branding. To that end I commissioned a digital artist to create for me a logo to go with the channel, and this is what she came up with:



I might get her to tinker around with the text a bit, as the lettering has a different gradient than the logo, but I basically like it. Anyway, if you see this logo on your YouTube feed, it's me!

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Church Camp/Retreat Returns

by Rev Howard Thompson

When last we were able to gather for an NCIA Church Retreat it was January 2020 in Adelaide. Life, shall we say, has become quite 'complicated' since then hasn't it? Well, mark your calendar, we have a date for a resurrected (seemed an appropriate word for the March/April Newsletter) New Church Camp/Retreat.

While we are still working out a few details we have booked a small venue just into the **Blue Mountains**, approximately 90 minutes drive from Sydney. Camp will be held from **15 to 20 January 2024**. The facility is self-contained, air-conditioned rooms and common areas, pool, outdoor facilities, many great bushwalking tracks and walking distance to closest town. If you are interested in attending, please let me know!

Also, as this is my first go at organising a camp for the NCIA crew I need your help. Please contact me if you have any interest in any of the following aspects of running a camp; program ideas, presenter (yourself or someone you'd like to see), registrations, children's program or social activities. revhathompson@gmail.com

Birthdays

Happy Birthday to **Todd Beiswenger** (3rd), **Donna Heldon** (5th) **Dylan Johnson** (7th), **Riley Evans** (11th), **Aneira Robson** (14th) **Huiling Sun** (20th), **Kerry Horner** (22nd), **David Horner** (25th), **Lucy Evans** (27th), **April Hams** (28th)

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