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# THE MARK

A Publication of The Church of Conscious Harmony ❖ A Contemplative Christian Community



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# THE ROAD TO HEAVEN IS PAVED WITH GOD INTENTION

by Tim Cook

When I was a kid, my parents would commonly respond to my excuses for uncompleted chores or homework with the old saying, “The road to hell is paved with good intentions.” On looking back, though, from the more experienced perspective provided by age, I can see that I was already in a kind of pressurized hell of accumulating unmet demands because I was constantly realizing my true intention – which was to not do all the things required of me. My real intention was usually to get out of doing these things at all.

Our real intention reveals our will, what we wish for, and it is the most powerful instrument in our creative toolbox. Sri Ramakrishna, the great Indian saint, said that we had better know where we really want to go or we’ll end up somewhere else. Intention sets the direction our lives will take, so we need to be certain that it is true, direct and deeply felt; not half-hearted, fuzzy or unclear. The word intention means to have

an aim, a purpose or a plan that has an anticipated outcome and that guides our actions with the purpose of achieving or obtaining the desired result. When I am hungry, if I want food I must intend to do what is required in order to obtain it. When I am tired, if I want to sleep, I must likewise intend to do what it takes to get to bed in order to rest. It’s that way with everything we do. From the world’s point of view, the onus is all on us to come up with the plan and manifest the required action. With God, though, it is different. If we hunger for order, harmony, meaning, peace or joy, or if we feel weary, burdened or worn out by life, God already has a graceful plan for us and the only action required is to let Him carry it out in our lives. Our part is simply to learn the intention to consent to His presence and action. The word “simply” may be a bit misleading if we tend to confuse it with the word “easy.” Getting our intention, our will aimed toward God is one of the

most difficult tasks we’ll ever encounter in our lives. The reason is that we usually have a host of lesser intentions that seem to require our attention first and that seduce us into postponing our God intention until later. And to make it even more difficult, most of these lesser intentions are invisible to us. They arise automatically from the unconscious, from what Fr. Thomas Keating refers to as “energy centers” embedded in us since childhood. They are concerned mainly with issues of security and survival, power and control, and affection and esteem.

Jesus, however, clearly advises us on where to put our intention and what to aim at. He says,

*If you decide for God, living a life of God-worship, it follows that you don't fuss about what's on the table at mealtimes or whether the clothes in your closet are in fashion. There is far more to your life than the food you put in your stomach, more to your outer appearance*

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*than the clothes you hang on your body. Look at the birds, free and unfettered, not tied down to a job description, careless in the care of God. And you count far more to him than birds. Has anyone by fussing in front of the mirror ever gotten taller by so much as an inch? All this time and money wasted on fashion – do you think it makes that much difference? Instead of looking at the fashions, walk out into the fields and look at the wildflowers. They never primp or shop, have you ever seen color and design quite like it? The ten best-dressed men and women in the country look shabby alongside them. If God gives such attention to the appearance of wildflowers – most of which are never even seen – don't you think he'll attend to you, take pride in you, do his best for you? What I'm trying to do here is to get you to relax, to*

*not be so preoccupied with getting, so you can respond to God's giving. People who don't know God and the way he works fuss over these things, but you know both God and how he works. Steep your life in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. Don't worry about missing out. You'll find all your everyday human concerns will be met. Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don't get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes.*  
(Matthew 6:25-34, *The Message*)

If we **hear** what Christ is saying and **understand** that He is speaking directly to all humanity, to each human person, we'll realize that He is speaking to us, just as we are and right where we are, right now. And we'll do

whatever it takes to “decide for God, living a life of God-worship.” What it takes, of course, is practice, daily practice. And that is where Centering Prayer and the Work of Inner Christianity come in. A life of regular, twice-a-day Centering Prayer familiarizes us with what it feels like to hold our intention to God and gradually builds a new habit of keeping our intention in God. It also helps us unload and disempower those troublesome energy centers.

The Work provides us with tools and skills to notice when our intention strays back into the mechanical service of those invisible yet powerful energy centers so that we can return it to God, where it belongs.

Remember, Sri Ramakrishna warned us that if we don't know where we really want to go, we'll probably end up somewhere else. Jesus helps us set our aim, “the Kingdom of Heaven is within you.” The road to Heaven is paved with God intention. 

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# EAR OF THE HEART

by Barbara Cook

Lectio Divina is reading the Word that is inspired by God; it is a way to enter into relationship with God and transformation into God. In the days when it was first used to develop relationship with God, not everyone could read and there weren't that many books, even Bibles. Even for people who could read, listening allowed them to truly hear what was being spoken. The act of hearing is a much different experience than the act of reading. So reading for these purposes is really hearing, and hearing is really letting the word of God penetrate into us. In Lectio Divina, we are letting the word of God into our hearts to change us, to transform us.

There are four stages in the practice of Lectio Divina,

- 1) Lectio, or hearing,
- 2) Meditatio, or pondering the word,
- 3) Oratio, or dialoging with God from the heart in response to the word or phrase we are moved by, and finally
- 4) Contemplatio, or

contemplation, resting with God in the power of His word.

Those are guidelines that we would use if we were doing the prayer in community.

In the very first introductory course given on Centering Prayer, Fr. Thomas Keating taught that Lectio is actually the ancient background for Centering Prayer. It prepares the faculties for contemplation. He would always say that it didn't matter if you followed the four stages of the practice in a particular order; no matter where you started, the stages would eventually complete each other. That was it – there was very little else taught about Lectio.

Then about 12 years into the development of Contemplative Outreach, a hunger popped up throughout the network to practice Lectio and to know more about it. It seemed that after sitting in the silence with God in intimacy and being infused with His Spirit, we wanted to know more about Him through His word. That's the very time when CCH began the

still ongoing 8 a.m. Lectio Divina service on Sundays.

For me, personally, practicing Lectio is how I have come to know God, and it is transforming me. I love slowing down enough to hear the words in a new way. We don't listen with the intellect and we let go of all we thought we knew before, so each time we come fresh. I really know God as Love as I drop behind the moral, historical, and allegorical levels of the scripture. It continues seeping into my bones,

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to register and inquire about  
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## YOUR SERVANT IS LISTENING

*Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.* (1 Samuel 3:9, TEV)

Lord, I am keeping silent in my affliction.  
I am keeping silent, but I am listening to you  
with the silence of a contrite, humble soul  
to whom there is nothing left to say in its suffering.

Dear God, you see my wounds.

You are the One who made them.

You are the One who is bringing them on me.

I am keeping silent. I am suffering.

And I am adoring you in the midst of my silence.

But you hear my sighs of grief,  
and the groans of my heart are not hidden from you.

Lord, I do not want to listen to myself.

All I want to do is listen to you and follow you.

*The Complete Fénelon*, page 219. François Fénelon was a seventeenth-century French archbishop, controversial theologian and spiritual thinker. His writings have been translated into English and edited by Robert J. Edmonson & Hal M. Helms.

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bathing my reason, and softening my heart. It has helped me to slow down a bit in life and see God more readily in everything.

Like Contemplative Outreach, CCH uses the monastic form of the prayer, described above. We listen with the ear of the heart, not our sensory or intellectual hearing. As we do, we begin to develop our more subtle inner sense organs that are dormant in most of us. This was the standard way of entry into contemplation until the 15th century when intellectual

development was occurring in Europe.

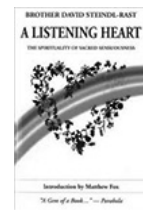
Now that we've taken that intellectual mind almost to the farthest reach of separation from its Source, it is time to develop the living flame of love in the heart and to love our world into wholeness or union with its Source, God. Just think, we are a living part of that great exodus from the head back to the heart. We have the tools we need and are already on the journey. What a wonder, what a mystery and what a joy! ☉

## CCH BOOKSTORE

### SUGGESTED TITLES FOR NOVEMBER



*The Unbearable Wholeness of Being*  
by Ilia Delio



*A Listening Heart*  
by Brother David Steindl-Rast



*Lectio Matters*  
by Mary Margaret Funk



*Listening: God's Word for Today*  
by Basil Pennington

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BOOKSTORE AND LIBRARY HOURS  
Open Monday-Friday 9 am-4 pm  
Sunday 9:30-10 am & 11:30 am-noon



*Come, O you blessed of my Father!* Matthew 25:34

## ANNUAL AIM: BLESSED

*Blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it* (Luke 11:28).

WHAT AM I HEARING? by Jeff Frank

The Turning Circle of the Stages of the Work is the development of appreciation of an idea from the moment first hearing it to a full understanding of its meaning – an Octave ascending. ... The stages that lead to a state of being able to act on what is heard are: hearing, knowing, acknowledging, understanding, aim, willing, doing. An ascending Octave – a return to the Source – is the path of regeneration in spiritual life.

Each time you begin the spiral again you hear in a new way.

Bergl Pogson, *Brighton Work Talks*

*Blessed are those  
whose strength is in You.  
In their heart,  
they have prepared their ascent  
... For in this way  
the Lord will give a blessing,  
and they will go  
from strength to strength,  
till each appears before God.*

Psalm 84:6-8

Those who ‘have ears’ develop an organ of subtle perception, a special faculty of attention ... a contemplative intelligence that arises from endless wonder at all Being, a kind of feeling for the infinite, open without which the unveiling of true being is impossible. For the Real only offers itself to those who take the time needed to hear, who can endure and listen fully to the silence of the fathomless before it finally begins to speak.

Jean-Yves LeLoup, *The Gospel of Mary Magdalene*

In pondering this month’s Aim about hearing the Word of God and obeying, I began to wonder what I heard growing up and what have I been listening to throughout my whole life.

Some things we literally hear and take in intellectually. Other things we absorb such as ideas, impressions and responses we get from our parents, siblings, teachers and friends. We begin to assimilate

them according to our age and our level of development and being. Over time they become our opinions, beliefs and form attitudes about the world. Particularly if we hear them often enough.

I am the second of two children in my family and that carried a message with it. My sister was born almost three years before me. In true “first child” fashion, she understandably resented the

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intrusion I made into her world and did everything she could to make sure I knew who was boss. When I was brought home from the hospital she grabbed one of the stuffed toys that was in my crib and whacked me on the head with it. Welcome to the family! By default, she always was first in everything as we grew up. She went to kindergarten first, could read and write before me, was free to drive herself around in a car while I was still on my bicycle. She excelled in school, joined clubs and always was involved in something. Partially due to the force of her personality and partially due to my own insecurity, I was always in her shadow and just didn't think I could compete with her. Meanwhile I didn't get any coaching from my parents to go after things, take risks, compete or challenge myself. I took those messages in over the years as a statement of my status in the world: nothing special. That was the way it was and that was what it would always be, whether I liked it or not. To hide the shame of that position, I began to pretend that it didn't matter to me, when in fact it mattered a great deal.

Another message I "heard" and took in was that I was not high on my father's priority list as a child. He had an important job at the newly created NASA space agency and was always working, even when he was at home. My days as a boy looking for approval and validation

as a son went by without much of a response. We didn't play catch in the evenings or spend any significant father-son time together. He didn't show me how to use the tools in the garage or teach me how to fish. He never told me what he did all day or share his own challenges with me. I spent a lot of time making up my own games, figuring things out on my own and was generally out of his realm of influence. My stay-at-home mother fulfilled her role extremely well. She was very loving, took me places with her, and taught me a lot about how the world worked. I learned a lot from her but she couldn't be 'Dad'. On one level, I believed my father loved me; but, it always felt at a distance, unexpressed and not a priority to let me know he cared. As I grew older, I came to know that the distance I felt from him wasn't indifference. It just didn't occur to him to go out of his way to express his feelings. He approached everything intellectually and his emotions just weren't called upon to be a part of the conversation. For that reason, he seemed to have a closer relationship with my sister but couldn't find that engagement with me.

Along the way I began to believe that God had the same relationship with me as my father. I thought that in some vague sense He loved me, but it was not obvious or evident to me. I figured He was

too busy tending to bigger and more important things. I wasn't on the radar. Gradually my fears, problems and insecurities became mine alone to bear.

It's not like I didn't lead a nice life, mind you. I married Jill, my soul mate, who I met in high school; graduated from college somehow; and worked steadily doing something I liked. We bought and fixed up an old house, traveled, took backpacking trips and kept a nice sailboat on Lake Travis. We loved each other and yet for me, deep down there was always a sense of being alone in it all. I often woke up at 4AM worried about money, our future, a gnawing sense of angst and without solace. I didn't feel like I could wake up Jill and burden her with it and just bore it alone. We were so close in so many ways, but something in me kept my fears in the shadows. And God, being too busy with other things, was not an option for me either. I didn't pray or seek any kind of spiritual path because I felt like any pleas for mercy or comfort would fall on deaf ears.

One night in our old house I was up late listening to music and a song by Mike and the Mechanics came on. Something came over me and brought me to a dead halt. The lyrics: "Can you hear me... Can you hear me calling you?"

Now, I had heard that song at least 50 times before. But in that

moment, a knowing came over me that made the hair stand up on the back of my neck. A feeling of connection and belonging came over me like nothing I had ever felt before. For the first time I *heard* the truth. The jig was up. I wasn't alone in this world after all! Something much greater than myself and infinitely loving was reaching out to me. God was in my immediate presence and made the effort to tell me so. It was a new world.

I began to pay attention to this new spiritual aspect of my life. Jill and I started reading *A Course in Miracles* together and began a yearlong study of it with a small group. The fire had been lit in me and it was fresh and exciting.

But old patterns die hard. In time, the old sense of isolation came creeping back in and began to reassert itself. Fast forward 10 years. Jill and I continued our lives and had two children. We began to attend church services, largely for the kids' sake. By the time they were five and two years old, I was feeling even more isolated. For some reason I couldn't feel like I was part of the family or anything greater than myself. I went in search of something I couldn't find. Something that was right in front of me and all around me, but I couldn't notice. Jill and I ended up divorcing after 18 years of marriage. It felt like I had lost or thrown away

everything that mattered to me and was set adrift. I had hit bottom and there was nowhere to go but up. And so began a long slow journey back to the living and balance.

I had heard of the Church of Conscious Harmony from members of our Course in Miracles Group but had never gotten the nerve to attend. To be honest, the name always threw me off. But at Jill's urging I attended a service one Sunday morning. I think I made the effort partially to please Jill and partially because something deep inside knew it was the next step to take. I sat in the back in case I felt the need to get out of there in a hurry. As Tim Cook began to speak, something opened up in me. Like a story from the Gospels, my ears were opened and I could hear again. As he spoke, an awareness again came over me. An awareness that I was a part of something much greater but I hadn't been conscious of before.

I began to attend the church more regularly and my 'hearing' began to improve further. I also began to take in the teachings of Fr. Thomas Keating regarding the patterns of our behaviors from frustrated energy centers, starting in childhood. Unfulfilled needs being accommodated or compensated for in the only ways a child can muster on his or her own. Innocent misinterpretations. His teachings,

combined with the Gurdjieff Work of Inner Christianity began to give me tools to see my behaviors, beliefs and attitudes for what they were. I began to hear the parts of myself clamoring for their needs to be met and their little stories to be heard. I began to see them for the lies that they were. Oh, the things they would demand and the debilitating thoughts they planted in my mind! In time, more and more Truth would be shed on my past and I continued to let go of the old stories about myself and the false conclusions of my childhood.

I began a Centering Prayer practice. Sitting in silence for 30 minutes twice-a-day with a quiet mind seemed like a lofty and elusive goal and was, in fact, difficult at first. There was lots of inner chatter and head games going on every time, but I kept at it. One day I heard Barbara Cook say that the first word of God was silence. I didn't really understand what that meant at the time but it gradually became clear. I began to approach Centering Prayer with the intention of listening to the silence. A different way to hear. And in that silence, a new life has opened up and God's presence has infused my life.

The more time I spend in the silence, the more God's Presence becomes apparent and opens up to me. And as that Presence opens up, I can know, moment by



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# SEEDS

The man who does not permit  
his spirit to be beaten down  
and upset by dryness and helplessness,  
but who lets God lead him  
peacefully through the wilderness,  
and desires no other support or guidance  
than that of pure faith and trust in God alone,  
will be brought to the Promised Land.

Thomas Merton, *Seeds*, page 98.

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moment, that God is in everything, in every part of my being and in every part of my life. And in that knowing, a “Yes” comes out more often after so many years of “No!” Welcome, welcome, welcome. Most importantly, there is purpose to it. In that realization, I am healed, comforted, guided, held and most importantly lived by and with God.

To paraphrase Llewellyn Vaughn-Lee, the Sufi mystic:


“Our purpose in Life and the reason for our Life is to share this Life with God in the world. This is God’s world and this is why we are here. This is the Great Mystery of God: to experience Life with and through God.”

And from Catherine LaCugna:

“The very nature of God is to seek out the deepest possible communion and friendship with every creature on Earth.”

And now 16 years have come and gone since I was at the bottom.

So much has happened in that time. Jill and I remarried in 2009 and now get to have two anniversary celebrations each year! Our children are grown and starting to live their own lives out in the world. Maintaining a dedicated twice-a-day prayer practice is still a struggle for me, but I keep at it. There have been many difficulties and struggles that have taken place as well. Some of them have, at times, seemed insurmountable. Times and events I didn’t know if I could endure have come and gone and somehow I can find God’s presence in them all.

My wish is to hold that in mind and to continue to hear the Word of God in each and every moment. And in each moment, even when I forget, God provides a chance to consent to His Will and give all that I have to offer back....my Life. To be lived by and through God. What greater Blessing could there possibly be? 



**THE CHURCH of  
CONSCIOUS HARMONY**

A CONTEMPLATIVE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

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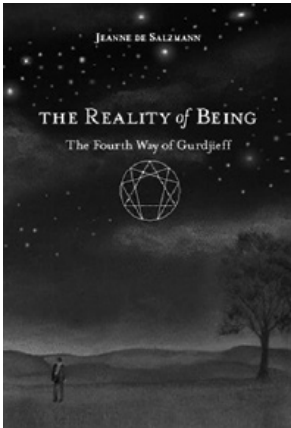
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# THE WORK

OF INNER CHRISTIANITY

*My Father is still working, and I also am working.* John 5:17

## HYPNOTIZED BY MY MIND

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An inattentive mind is filled with thoughts. In a passive state it is constantly creating images and applying them to what I observe. The images provoke pleasure or pain, which is recorded in my memory, and illusions form around desires for satisfaction. In observing from a fixed vantage point, this mind creates a kind of separation, an opposition, a judge that reacts to everything with a preconception based on what has been learned. This inner disposition is one of the greatest obstacles to receiving impressions, any impression—judging oneself, judging another, judging others, judging...no matter what. In truth, our entire life is colored, even directed, by this tendency, which is stronger than we are. Whenever and wherever it arises, this judging shows that our ordinary “I” is involved. There is not a moment in the day when we stop judging, even when we are alone. It keeps us in ferocious slavery, enslaved by what we believe we know and what we believe ourselves to be.

There is in me an essential energy

that is the basis of all that exists. I do not feel it because my attention is occupied by everything contained in my memory—thoughts, images, desires, disappointments, physical impressions. I do not know what I am. It seems that I am nothing. Yet something tells me to look, to listen, to seek seriously and truly. When I try to listen, I see that I am stopped by thoughts and feelings of all kinds. I listen poorly. I am not quiet enough to hear, to feel. What I wish to know is more subtle. I do not have the attention that is required.

I have not yet seen the difference between a fixed attention coming from only one part of myself and a free attention attached to nothing, held back by nothing, which involves all the centers at the same time. My usual attention is caught in one part and remains taken by the movement, the functioning of this part. For example, I think about what I am feeling, and my thought responds in place of me. It answers with a knowledge that is not true, not an immediate knowing. My thoughts are merely

the expression of what is stored in my memory, not revelations of something new. This thinking is enclosed in a narrow space within myself. Always preoccupied, it holds back my attention in this space, isolated from the rest of me, from my body and feeling. With my attention continually projected from one thought to another, from one image to another in a flowing current, I am hypnotized by my mind. These thoughts—and all my desires, affections, fears—are connected only by habits or attachments, which link each one to the next. My attention is caught in this current because I have never fully realized that it was given to me for another purpose.

Could my mind be silent in its perception? Could it perceive without recognizing and naming, that is, without separating to be someone who looks, judges and knows? For this, I would need an attention I do not know, an attention never separated from what it observes, allowing a total experience without excluding anything. It is only when I exclude nothing that I

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## GUIDELINES FOR CHRISTIAN LIFE, GROWTH AND TRANSFORMATION

Fr. Thomas Keating, in his seminal work  
*Open Mind, Open Heart*,  
lists 42 principles underlying the Christian spiritual journey.  
Fr. Keating asks that these principles be read according  
to the method of Lectio Divina.  
One principle will appear in these pages each month.


### 28<sup>TH</sup> GUIDELINE



The goal of genuine spiritual practice is not the rejection of  
the good things of the body, mind, or spirit, but the right use of them.  
No aspect of human nature or period of human life is to be rejected  
but integrated into each successive level  
of unfolding self-consciousness.  
In this way, the partial goodness proper to each stage of  
human development is preserved and  
only its limitations are left behind.  
The way to become divine is thus to become fully human.

am free to observe and understand myself. When my brain can be active, sensitive, alive in a state of attentive immobility, there is a movement of an extraordinary quality that does not belong just to the thinking, the sensation or the emotion. It is a wholly different movement that leads to truth, to what we cannot name. The attention is total, without any distraction. ... In this state I wish to see if I am capable of "not knowing," of not putting a name on what I perceive. I have a sensation of myself, which my habitual thought calls "body," but I do not know what it is, I have no name for what is here. I am aware of tensions, even the

smallest, but I do not know what tension is. Then I feel breathing, which I do not know...in a body that I do not know, surrounded by people I do not know. ... My mind becomes quiet.

I begin to see that real knowing is possible only in the moment when my attention is full, when consciousness fills everything. Then there are no distinctions— one thing is not more than another. There is pure existence. The creative act is the vision of what takes place. I learn to watch. 

Jeanne de Salzmann, *The Reality of Being – The Fourth Way of Gurdjieff*, pages 34-36. For more information and experience with these teachings, you are invited to attend the *Work of Inner Christianity* class held Thursdays at 7:30 p.m. at The Church of Conscious Harmony.

## NOVEMBER CALENDAR

Visit [consciousharmony.org](http://consciousharmony.org)  
for a complete listing of events

### SPECIAL EVENTS

Half-Day Centering Prayer Retreat  
Nov 12 12:30-5:00 pm  
\$10 No need to pre-register.

Thanksgiving Day Potluck  
Noon- doors open; 2pm dinner  
Sign up with office or in kitchen

### MONTHLY

1st Sundays  
Bring non-perishables for Caritas

Gurdjieff Music  
Nov 15 7:30-8:30 pm

### WEEKLY

Sundays  
Lectio Divina 8-9 am  
Worship Service 10-11:30 am  
Youth Program 10-11:30 am  
Fellowship 11:30 am

Wednesdays  
Prayer Circle 10:15-10:45 am  
Contemplative Lunch noon-1 pm  
Contemplative Communion Service 6-7 pm

Thursdays 7:30-9 pm  
Work of Inner Christianity Class

Fridays 7:30-8:30 pm  
Devotional Service

### DAILY

Mondays-Fridays 7-7:35 am  
Centering Prayer Service in Theosis Chapel

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Recordings of services are available  
through the Bookstore and online at  
[www.consciousharmony.org](http://www.consciousharmony.org)



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... The coming of Christ into our conscious lives  
presupposes a presence of Christ  
that is already within us waiting to be awakened.  
The Christmas-Epiphany mystery invites us  
to take possession of what is already ours.  
As Thomas Merton put it,  
we are 'to become what we already are.'

Thomas Keating, *The Mystery of Christ*

## ADVENT

The liturgical season begins with Advent,  
a period of intense preparation to understand  
and accept the three comings of Christ.  
The first is His historical coming in human weakness  
and the manifestation of His divinity in the world;  
the second is His spiritual coming in our inmost being;  
the third is His final coming at the end of time  
in His glorified humanity.

... Suddenly we perceive a new way of seeing all reality.  
Our old world view ends.  
A new relationship God, ourselves and other people  
emerges based on the new level of understanding,  
perception and union with God  
we have been given.

*'How can this be?'*

Luke 1:34