

December 2019
Volume 31
Number 12



THE MARK

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



MERRY MATTER, HAPPY HUMANITY

BY PETER HAAS

Weeks before Thanksgiving and over a month before Christmas, I walked into a coffee shop and was greeted by a Christmas advertisement. It was a perfect example of how Christmas has devolved in our culture. The slogan was plastered all over the coffee store – on the coffee cups, on the posters in the window, on the napkins – and it read:

Merry Coffee!

Yes! That's the Christmas spirit! Coffee! My next thought was why not just replace Merry Christmas with:

Merry Shopping!

In the absence of inner psychological moorings or spiritual depth, the Christmas story often withers on the thin vine of consumer culture. The point is *not* that shopping, or gift-giving is “bad,” but rather that it is the most elementary expression of Christmas modeled from the threefold gifts given to the Holy Family by the Magi from the East of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Yet, there is so much more to the story of Christmas at a deep, inner,

psychological level. We just need help Remembering.

As a way of Remembering the deeper meaning of Advent and Christmas, consider a selection from Maurice Nicoll, who reminded his group members during the Fourth Week of Advent on December 20, 1952, just nine months before his death, that:

“The conjunction of humankind with a higher level can be broken. Christ came at a critical time. Christ set things in order and re-established [a] connection – for a time. Christmas commemorates this setting of things in right order for humankind.”

This is the first insight that helps us Remember the deeper meaning of Advent and Christmas: higher levels of Being are available to us and our human development, and the Way of Christ shows us what this “level” looks like in human experience. Additionally, the good news of Christmas is that the re-linking has already been done for us.

In Christ, human nature is united with divine nature, and this

connection exists not only as a template for our recapitulation, but also as an energetic source of life, light and love that we can, as it were, plug into. That, in part is one reason this season is the festival of the lights! We are Remembering that Christ is the Light of the world, and that we are invited to also partake in connecting more completely (body, mind and emotions) into this Light.

Contemplative Bernadette Roberts also provides a compelling reminder that helps us Remember. She grounds Christmas in the overarching story of God's three primary revelations: transcendent, omnipresent and immanent. In her essay from *The Christian Contemplative Journey: Essays on the Path* entitled “Our Spiritual Journey Recapitulates the History of Religion,” Bernadette teaches us that:

“We have already seen that God's triune revelations were around long before Christ came on the scene. Although Christ brings these revelations together [in the Incarnation we memorialize

at Christmas], it cannot be said Christ revealed God to us – God had already been revealed – rather, what Christ revealed to us was humankind itself. Thus, Christ revealed humankind’s essential oneness with God, path to God, and humankind’s ultimate destiny with and in God. In short, Christ reveals God’s plan for humankind from beginning to end. Christ reveals what humanity is to God, how much humanity means to God, and how God wants us to live with God on earth and in heaven. Thus, it could even be said that the primary focus of Christianity [and Christmas] is not on the revelation of God, *per se*, but rather on the revelation of humankind. The center of this focus, of course, is the incarnate Logos, Christ.”

Bernadette’s phrase *how much humanity means to God* seems to sum up for me the essence of the Christmas message. And if

humankind means so much to God, then perhaps we can be inspired to mirror that care for one another. We matter to each other. The Incarnation of Christ teaches us that we are matter that matters.

Fear often gets in the way of such understanding and mutual care for one another, and fear often becomes the root of violence. We reduce another to mere matter – a commodity to be enjoyed or an inconvenience to avoid. Fear and violence are familiar patterns in our family systems, patterns that often raise their faces during our holiday gatherings, especially if alcohol or addiction infuses the blood of our bloodlines.

Violence is a deep form of disconnection from Source, Self and others. That’s one reason why the Christmas story doesn’t shy away from violence. It places it right in the middle, for all to see: Divine Love incarnates among and as humankind, even violent humankind, represented by Herod’s hatred and violence.

Christ confronts the violence of our human hearts so to reveal it to

us, and in the seeing of it, perhaps there is a freeing from it. The fear and violence of Herod is contrasted with the simplicity and humility of the Holy Family, more akin to refugees than tourists, they rely upon the generosity of strangers and the comforts of simple things, such as the silence of a winter night and sacred words of hope remembered in the heart.

This Christmas, practice enjoying the gift of being you, of being you becoming Christ, and being you in relationship to love through the beloveds in your life, and through the universal family of humankind. This Christmas, I invite us to observe the flickers of fear that wish to tempt you into full-fledged violence – toward yourself, or toward another – and Remember how much you mean to God. Remember how much all of us mean to God.

Perhaps, this is the phrase I like best that sums up the most joyful message of a Christ-flavored Christmas:

Merry Matter,
Happy Humanity! ☺

BOOK LOOK

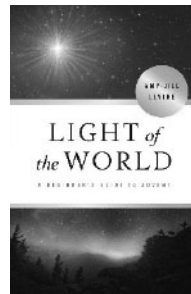
NEW ADVENT READERS

It is always meaningful to supplement our Advent journey to Christmas with a daily Advent reader. Here are two new readers that you may find useful. In year's past, our community has been especially blessed by the Advent compendium called *Watch for the Light*. Here are two new resources that might be a blessing to your spiritual journey this Advent and Christmas season.



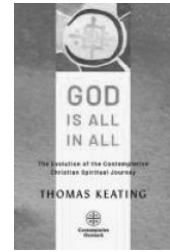
The Living Nativity, by Larry Peacock is a very accessible spiritual resource that connects with the life of St. Francis Assisi. The book is contemplative in nature, and offers very short daily reflections.

Amy-Jill Levine's new book *Light of the World*, offers more of a historical background to all the stories and characters involved in the Christmas story. It is more of an intellectual resource for the season, that journeys through the scriptures in a very accessible and formatory way.



COMMUNITY READING

NOV - DEC



God is All in All
The Evolution of the Contemplative Christian Spiritual Journey

by Thomas Keating

Please join in community as we share in Fr. Thomas' inner wisdom on the infinite compassion and the mercy of God; the three stages of the transformational spiritual journey; the new cosmology, human nature, science and their relationship to spirituality; the message of the cross for our times; the meaning of redemption; and more in this recently released book.

DECEMBER SERMON TEACHING THEMES



First Sunday of Advent	Dec 1	The Light Illumines the Way
Second Sunday of Advent	Dec 8	The Light Prepares the Way
Third Sunday of Advent	Dec 15	The Light Demonstrates the Way
Fourth Sunday of Advent	Dec 22	The Light Fulfills the Way
Christmas Eve Service	Dec 24	The Light of the Way
Holy Family Sunday	Dec 29	The Light of Family Love
New Year's Eve Taizé Service	Dec 31	The Light of a Lifetime



Whoever is in Christ is a new creation ...

behold, new things have come.

2 Corinthians 5:17

ANNUAL AIM: A NEW CREATION

INCARNATION BY RODNEY EDMONSON

God has no other possible revelation but ourselves, ... we are the only expression of his face in the area where we live and ... others have the right to ask me to be Jesus Christ: in spite of all my shortcomings, I am entrusted with the mission of being Christ.

That, I believe, is the gate of light opening out on the mystery of Jesus: that the Incarnation is continued through us and that we, that is each of us, are [to be] Christ for others. Saint Augustine says so: "We have not only been made Christians, we have been made Christ." And not only Christ to live in union with him, but to bear the light and the presence of Christ to others, to be what he would be in our place, to continue the act of the washing of the feet, to be given, consumed, eaten like Christ, to be nourishment for others.

Maurice Zundel, *With God in Our Daily Lives*

The coming of Love into the human race, as witnessed in the Incarnation, is the most important event in human history.

J.G. Bennett, *The Sevenfold Work*

"To go towards a conscious sensation, a sensation of *what is*, I need a new thinking, a thought that is free of all knowing and believing, free from past experience. This thought sees at once all the contradictions and disorder, and at the same time is able to remain

absolutely still, tranquil. Then I may feel my body entirely passive, as though it no longer existed. To maintain this state of passivity is my first power over the body. It indicates that a new energy participates in my Presence. I no longer let myself be taken by any tensions – any

contradiction, thought or feeling. I have only one aim in which all my centers participate: to perceive the fine vibrations to the extent I am able to discern their quality. A conscious sensation of ourselves signifies and is proper incarnation, in which the spirit materializes and takes on a

definite density, and becomes flesh.”
Reality of Being, Jeanne de Salzmann

I think of the Christ’s incarnation as the descent of the infinite into the finite. Infinite consciousness stuffed into a human body is impossible to imagine. Bernadette Roberts described that state as “God awful” in her book, *What is Self?* For humanity, not ever knowing the divine condition, being in this body in this place is merciful because we have never known any better. For us this mess is a *place*.

For those of us on the path, true incarnation can be defined by the term *constatation* utilized by Boris Mouravieff in his *Gnosis* series. Essentially this is the state of full three-centered awareness. This is the ultimate use of the attention through the mind and body. This is the idea illustrated in the parable of the Virgins and the Lamps (Matthew 25: 1-13). The wise virgins were being entirely here and now.

During a retreat with Bernadette Roberts, she emphatically pronounced, “As it goes for Christ, so it goes for us.” She explained that the life of Christ is a template for our own lives. We too shall suffer, and through our crucifixions, we too shall ascend. Though most of us will never have to experience the extreme suffering of Christ, his example had to be extreme in order for us to get it. I knew that the blueprint of incarnation, death, and resurrection was true, but most of my life I wanted to skip the death part

and go straight to the resurrection part. What I have learned in the last 65 years is that if I would have known how to suffer, I would not have suffered.

Cancer gave me a vehicle to employ these teachings. I realized that through unconsciously contracting the muscles in my shoulders, neck, and face I was keeping the coarser energy mechanically trapped in my head. By taking in a slow deep abdominal breath, relaxing the muscles in the face, neck, and shoulders, and surrendering my mind, the energy could be felt in its rawness. Inevitably I would then feel the energy become lighter and flow down to the rest of my body where I could feel a subtle radiation throughout. This became a practice that I would perform many times a day. It changed everything – my attitude became gratitude.

In early December of 2018, I received a large shock with the diagnosis of a rare cancer in my right tear duct. I was told I might lose my eye and that if we didn’t stomp on this thing with extreme prejudice, it would kill me. In a week, I was getting chemotherapy at MD Anderson in Houston. Within a month, surgery. That was followed by six more weeks of daily radiation and weekly chemo.

From the moment I left the doctor’s office, it came to me that all things happen for the good for those who love God. God speaks most plainly if I listen. At this time, there

was a Cheetos commercial on air in which Chester, the cheetah, told his young apprentice, “Remember your training.” It sank into my tissues and lifted me up. Through God’s infinite mercy and intelligence, everything that I learned in life and everything I learned at The Church of Conscious Harmony came to meet me. It had all led up to this point. Over long tedious years, through Centering Prayer and the Work of Inner Christianity and much humiliation, I had substantially cleaned out a lot of emotional debris. And through Madame Jeanne de Salzmann, I learned that my body, in particular the human nervous system with its four million years of evolution behind it, was now my greatest ally. Her work might be considered as the seventh volume in the *Psychological Commentaries on the Teaching of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky*. It is all about the Second Conscious Shock, and development of Will through full constatation.

After years of practice in the Work, I began to become interested in the Second Conscious Shock, which is defined as the transformation of negative emotions. In volume two of the *Commentaries*, Dr. Maurice Nicoll extensively discusses the transformation of coarse energies into finer energies, called hydrogens in the Work. Nicoll writes,

“The Work teaches that a human being is not merely a function of the world he is born in or a slave to it. The apparatus of the universe

is, so far as our Ray of Creation is concerned, for the purpose of Evolution. It is a vast distilling machine, to extract *finer* from the coarser ... What is individual evolution, in the esoteric sense? Seeing by long inner work, and then choosing the finer, and eventually willing and ultimately living the finer ... This begins personal work. It takes a long time before it begins. What is meant by finer? If you have a moment of fuller understanding, of insight or of outer perception by means of Hydrogen 24, it will be finer than anything that can be achieved by the intelligence due to Hydrogen 48."

Hydrogen 48 is the energy we utilize in the Second State of Consciousness, the state of waking sleep. Only dualistic thinking is active under Hydrogen 48. However, Hydrogen 24 allows the person to live in the Third State of Consciousness, the Kingdom of Heaven.

I woke up one morning thinking that on one level my job each day is to transform lower hydrogens into higher hydrogens. Being invited to the cancer show in all its facets, was an opportunity not a tragedy. I adopted the humility of our Blessed Mother Mary and decided to *let it be done unto me*. The chemo made my joints ache, my hair fall out, and the nausea stole my appetite and sense of taste. I found out there is such a thing called "chemo brain" that produces a chemically induced

state of stupidity. I thank God for my wonderfully skilled surgeons, but the surgery did leave my face a mess, and I became acutely aware of the distraction it caused in others. If I reacted mechanically to these consequences, I would have fallen into the hole of depression and victimhood. Yet I remember Tim telling a story in which he told Fr. Thomas Keating, "I can't take it anymore!" Fr. Thomas replied, "Yes, you can. It's only a sensation."

Boris Mouravieff writes in *Gnosis*,


"If by persistent introspection, the subject manages to observe the rise of negative emotion in himself immediately after its birth, that is, while the limits of the slot in his individual Present have not been crossed in the passing of time, it is possible for him to disassociate the components of this emotion. Introspective observation brightens our inner being just like a streetlamp, and negative emotions can only be formed and begin to act in the inner darkness which characterizes the state of confluence [identification]. The light projected by constation within the limits of the Present disassociates the negative emotions, and the passions which gave rise to them fall back into a latent state."

Our deepest wounds as children infect our being in profound ways. An early childhood memory was recurrent in my life and had a

profound effect on my personality. I can pinpoint the exact event that established my personality type on the Enneagram as Type Four. This realization came to me as a I recounted the event during a Second Line group in which we were asked to provide our biography. At about the age of four, my parents divorced. My mother, who was only 22 years old, moved my brothers and me back to Texas to live with my alcoholic grandmother. I began wetting the bed, which infuriated my grandma. On one occasion she severely berated me in front of neighbors calling me the worst epithets. I had never been treated this way and the humiliation felt unbearable. This was my first issue invading my tissues, and I later realized that this event created a post-traumatic stress disorder reaction that would recur during times of stress, or particularly when I was criticized. This child vowed that he would never let anyone make him feel this way again without a fight. At the same time, another 'I' was created that said at any moment something bad could happen. In addition, there was a growing feeling that nothing was good enough. This 'I' says, "This life (the way God set it up) is not how it should be" and has a definitive subtle yet pervasive vibration that is palpable in the middle of my forehead. It whispers its resentment and weighs on my unconscious mind. However, this would also be the impetus for me to pursue a life-long search for Truth

and Goodness. Also as a defense mechanism, I began to think of myself as “special.”

My favorite passage in the *Commentaries* is, “We are living on a planet that is a school for self-developing organisms.” All of the conditions – the gravity, the atmosphere, our natural environment, our human nervous systems, the whole human condition – are perfectly laid out in order for us to evolve our consciousness. The curriculum of this school is individually determined by each person’s level of being. Hence, our being draws our life and everything is happening in the only way it can.

During the period when I was undergoing treatment because I had taken leave from my job, I had plenty of time to really look at the habit of being myself. In particular, my chief feature that “life is not good enough” became more intense. I viewed this as a gift and welcomed the feeling and sensation, knowing that it was only a sensation and that God is with me. It became my personal Eucharist in which I could incarnate Christ in my body. I came to the realization that because Christ is incarnate in all matter, that everything matters, and that my life, this school, is perfect. Our wounds and difficulties are not being done to us, they are being done for us. Metanoia is required. Incarnation is the way. 

A YEAR IN REVIEW: A NEW CREATION

In 2019, we were invited to move ever deeper together as a community of intention, practice and devotion in the annual aim of “A New Creation.” Let’s review and reflect...

“All religion, all esoteric teaching, is about the fact that we are born as self-developing organisms ... in order, by a certain kind of work on ourselves, to reach something inherent in us, which is called Real I ... the Kingdom of Heaven lies within you and that means the realization of Real I ... a potentiality in any one of us. Now to do this we must leave Imaginary ‘I’. ... Now the application of the Work to yourself is all about making it possible to go on a journey, spiritual or psychological, towards what is really you, Real I in you.” Maurice Nicoll, *Commentaries*

January	Honor Thy Mother & Thy Father
February	Affirmation
March	Conscious Labor Intentional Suffering
April	Rebirth
May	The Old Man & The New Man
June	Effortless Receptivity
July	An Enormous Love
August	To Serve a Higher Purpose
September	Hearing the Most Beautiful Thing
October	In the Heart of Life
November	A Consecrated Life
December	Incarnation

Whoever is in Christ is a new creation ... behold, new things have come.

2 Corinthians 5:17



Previous issues of *The Mark* are available at consciousharmony.org/read-listen/the-mark if you would like to further review and reflect on these monthly community aims. May you continue to go ever deeper in your spiritual journey. All glory to God!

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

LIVING THE WORK OF INNER CHRISTIANITY IN DAILY LIFE


RETURN TO REAL I BY NATHAN JONES

Work Idea: The Work speaks of each individual having Real I. Having forgotten ourselves through descending into personality and False 'I's we are offered a path to return to Real I. Through self-observation, non-identification and Self-Remembering, we can be shown our False Personality and allowed to withdraw our over-identification with it. This reduces the dispersion of energies through multiplicity and allows for an accumulation of force. The accumulation permits one to focus on the process. The progression towards Real I moves through Observing I, Deputy Steward, Steward and lastly Real I. Behind Real I lies God. In a simple yet beautiful way, the Work reveals that each of us comes from the stars. It then shows us a path back.

Work Source: "By doing all of the Work on its practical side, we move towards this inner thing called Real I, or, in terms of the Gospels, the Kingdom of Heaven, or, in terms of the Work, the Conscious Circle of Humanity, where people are different from people on Earth and can understand one another and so not hate." Maurice Nicoll, *Commentaries*, 1326.

Application: Especially during family gatherings this Christmas season, self-observe, non-identify, and Self-Remember. Next, self-observe, non-identify, Self-Remember. Finally, self-observe, non-identify, Self-Remember.

Further Resource: "The Self (Real I) is beyond, yet innate, in all form – timeless, without beginning

or end, changeless, permanent and immortal. Out of it arises awareness, consciousness, and an infinite condition of 'at homeness.' It is the ultimate subjectivity from which everyone's sense of I arises. The Infinite Reality does not even know itself as 'I' but as the very substrate of the capacity for such a statement. [Behind Real I lies God.] It is invisible and all present. In ordinary terms, it is more like a quality that is devoid of any innate content but is capable of any content. It is the quality that makes experiencing or witnessing possible. The source of the Self is the reality of Divinity. Although it is the source of existence, it is not subject to nor is such a term applicable." Dr. David Hawkins, *I: Reality & Subjectivity*, 267-268. 

2020 CENTERING PRAYER RETREAT SCHEDULE

AT THE CHURCH OF CONSCIOUS HARMONY

Jan 18*	9:00am-4:00pm
Feb 5	9:00am-5:30pm, with optional 7:00am-7:15pm
Feb 22-23	Sat 9:00am-4:00pm & Sun 12:30-4:00pm \$50 (Preparation for Lent)
Feb 29	9:00am-12:30pm
Apr 11	9:00am-12:30pm
May 15-16	9:00am-4:00pm \$100 (Jim Reale, Doorway to Devotion)
June 13	9:00am-4:00pm
July 11	12:30-4:00pm
Aug 7-8	9:00am-4:00pm \$50 (Forgiveness)
Sept 26	9:00am-12:30pm
Oct 10-11	Sat 9:00am-4:00pm & Sun 1:00-4:00pm \$75 (Fr. Carl Arico, Celebrating Life)
Oct 24	9:00am-12:30pm
Nov 13-14	9:00am-4:00pm \$50 (Discernment)
Dec 12	9:00am-4:00pm

Half-day ~ \$10 love offering

One-day ~ \$20 love offering (Please bring your lunch)

Two-day commuter retreat (sleep at home; bring your lunch)

March 14 is United in Prayer Day at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary
9:00am-3:00pm, \$25.

*New to Centering Prayer retreats?

Register for the Jan 18th "Introduction to CP workshop" being offered from 9am-noon, with an option to experience the afternoon retreat from noon-4pm. Cost \$35 and includes Fr Keating's book, "Open Mind Open Heart".

Intro workshop has 6 followup sessions Monday evenings 7:30-8:30 at CCH.

AT CEDARBRAKE RETREAT AND RENEWAL CENTER

Jan 24-28	5-day	Renewal	\$495
Mar 6-15	10-day	Lenten	\$895
July 24-29	6-day		\$595
Sep 11-16	6-day	Jim Reale	\$625
Dec 4-10	7-day	Advent	\$695

Double room prices. Single rooms are an additional \$10/night.

Contact the office for further information and registration.



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CANDLELIGHT CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE

Join us 6:00-7:00pm in the Sanctuary
to Remember and Receive the Light of Christ.

This is a deeply meaningful family-friendly service
and an important way to celebrate the Gift of Love in our lives,
along with celebrating the Eucharist.

NEW YEAR'S EVE TAIZÉ SERVICE

Join us New Year's Eve for an alcohol-free evening,
remembering the past year and envisioning the new year to come.

Join us for any or all of the evening's activities.
Please bring finger food or a dessert to share for the fellowship time.

Taizé Service in Sanctuary	8:30-9:30pm
Fellowship & Food	9:30-10:30pm
Burning Bowl Ceremony	10:30-11:30pm
Centering Prayer & Eucharist	11:30-12:15am

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 appears in these pages each month.

GUIDELINE 23

The moderation of the instinctual drives of the developing human
organism for survival and security, affection and esteem, control and
power allows true human needs to come into proper focus.

Primary among these needs is intimacy with another or several
human persons. By intimacy is meant the mutual sharing
of thoughts, feelings, problems, and spiritual aspirations
which gradually develops into spiritual friendship.

DECEMBER CALENDAR

Visit consciouharmony.org
for a complete listing of events

SPECIAL EVENTS

Half-Day Centering Prayer Retreat
Dec 14 1:00-5:00pm
Pre-register with the office or website. \$10

The Glorious Impossible Christmas Program
Dec 19 7:00pm
Please join us for a joy-filled experience.

Men's Winter Solstice Fire Circle
Dec 21 6:00pm
Pre-register with the office.

Christmas Eve Candlelight Service
Dec 24 6:00-7:00pm

New Year's Eve Taizé Service
Dec 31 8:30-9:30pm

Church Office & Bookstore Closed
Dec 25-Jan 1

MONTHLY

1st Sundays
Bring non-perishables for Caritas

WEEKLY

Sundays
Lectio Divina 8-9am
Prayer Circle 9:15-9:45am
Worship Service 10-11:30am
Youth Program 10-11:30am
Fellowship 11:30am

Wednesdays
Contemplative Lunch noon-1pm
Contemplative Communion Service 6:30-7:15pm

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

Fridays
Yin Yoga 1-2:15pm \$15
Preregister: AwakenedHeartAustin@gmail.com

Saturdays
Scriptorium 11-11:50am

DAILY
Sunday-Saturday 7-7:35am
Centering Prayer Service, Theosis Chapel

Recordings of services are available
through the Bookstore and online at
www.consciouharmony.org



THE CHURCH *of* CONSCIOUS HARMONY

A CONTEMPLATIVE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

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*In the sixth month,
the angel Gabriel was sent from God
to a town of Galilee called Nazareth,
to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph,
of the house of David,
and the virgin's name was Mary.
And coming to her, he said,
'Hail, favored one!
The Lord is with you.'*

Luke 1:26-28

THE GRACE OF CHRISTMAS

Mary's expectation of her vocation was shattered in an instant
... The shattering of our vision of life –
the disappointments, the heartbreaks, rejection, loneliness, confusion –
these things are part of the preparation for a greater vocation.

Our personal history becomes sacred history.

God never takes anything away without giving us something better.

Sacred history is about how God prepared His people
in order to give them the fullness of grace in Christ.

If we come to the Christmas graces with this open heart and
open mind, the grace of Christ is transmitted to us personally,
enabling us to experience what the liturgy calls 'the gifts of Christmas.'

As we pray for these gifts, we realize that these words point
to the life of Christ welling up within us and giving us
the strength to make all our activity an act of divine love

My one activity is love (John of the Cross).

The divine life within us

is teaching us not only how to receive but how to give.

Thomas Keating, *Rearwakenings*

