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THE MARK

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PRACTICE BEING FULFILLED

BY PETER HAAS

Seneca, the first century Roman philosopher and author of letters, wrote to a young person discerning their way in life, giving the following guidance: a person is never poor in life, if what little one has is enough.

As we prepare for the Thanksgiving holiday, Seneca's wisdom is useful for us to take to heart: *Even a little can be enough*. Many people around the world have very little, and what little they have is enough. Many people, perhaps a family you know, have so very much, and yet it is not enough. It is an interesting observation. Sometimes having so much, leads to never having enough. And so, one's sense of fulfillment is an interesting experience to self-observe.

Fulfillment has as its root the notion of being filled, which is related to the idea of being satisfied, made content, even happy. When it comes to delicious food, to be filled with fullness can be a delightful experience – especially

if one is hungry or famished. On the other hand, it can also lead to an uncomfortable experience, when once satiated, satisfied and full, one keeps eating more and more, becoming over full. This can be painful, ruining the fulfillment with gluttony.

A similar wisdom teaching related to Seneca reminds us that the way of balance leads to fulfillment, or: *Take all things in moderation*. This is useful to remember as we prepare to gather with friends and family during the Thanksgiving holiday.

There is also another way of looking at the gift of being fulfilled. We tend to think of fulfillment as something that occurs *after* we eat. But what if we shifted our perspective and made an aim to practice being fulfilled as we prepare to gather; practice fulfillment as we cook.

This expands the source of fulfillment in subtle and practical ways. Fulfillment not only can come from eating physical food,

but it can also come from eating the food of impressions, such as the joy of preparing a meal; the creative care of getting the ingredients together; the delight in talking with family and friends as you prepare the meal. And of course, the fulfillment of eating the meal and knowing with joy that it is delicious, and very fulfilling.

Another way fulfillment can arise in us is by inviting more meaningful, fulfilling conversation before, during and after the holiday meal. This may be challenging. Many families prefer to be mechanical, keep things light and focus on sports or entertainment. That's pretty common, perhaps even necessary in some families, just to keep the peace.

For example, growing up, I recall that our holiday meals were often extended conversations about recent movies and also endless hours watching and cheering for the Green Bay Packers. There is nothing wrong with this kind of conversation, but it certainly isn't



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*As the deer pants for a stream of running water, so
my soul longs for Thee O My God.* Psalm 42

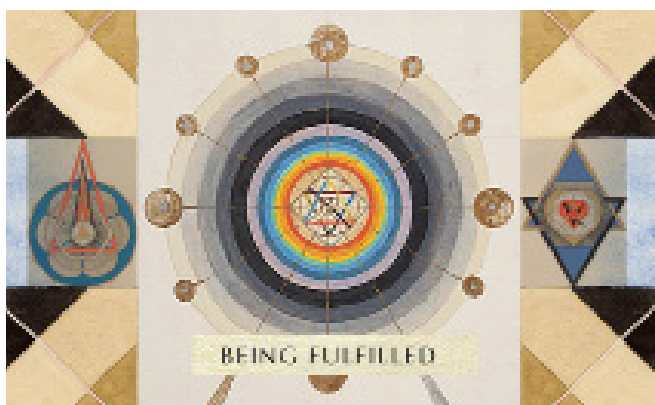
the most fulfilling way of relating. Perhaps we can aim to introduce a topic of conversation that would lead to more fulfillment.

One way to do this is by playing a question game. Ask each person to write down up to ten meaningful questions, each on a slip of paper. Then collect the slips of paper with the questions on them, mix them up in a bowl, and each person draws a question to answer. If you draw a question you don't want to answer, you can take a pass on that and draw another question – until you find one you wish to answer.

No matter what your relationship with your family, or their state of being, or how much you may find them difficult to be around, practice being fulfilled with what it is; accept them as they are, and in so doing, you may discover that fulfillment is a contagious gift you inspire in others. As you are fulfilled, content and at ease with reality, it invites a space for grace, where others can show up and be themselves, and

feel a little more free and loved, and in so doing, perhaps even fulfilled.

Finally, fulfillment and longing go hand in hand. While the pain may be in the wanting, there is also an exquisite joy in the longing for fulfillment. It's typically a mixture, a bittersweet pain. Many traditions speak of this emotional experience. The German word *Sensucht*, the Spanish word *Duende*, and the Sanskrit word *Viraha* are just a few examples of how powerful and pervasive longing is a part of the human experience. With that in mind, we close with two witnesses to the ultimate source of our fulfillment and longing. St. Augustine, who begins his autobiography with the soaring words, "Our hearts are restless and unfulfilled until they find rest and fulfillment in Thee O God." And the balm of the Psalmist, who reminds us that: *As the deer pants for a stream of running water, so my soul longs for Thee O My God.* Psalm 42



*Now and always may Christ be magnified in my body,
whether by life or death. Philippians 1:20*

ANNUAL AIM: ARISING *AS* EMBODIED LIFE

BEING FULFILLED BY MARCIA DILLY

The time is approaching when many ... old and new believers, having understood that from the depths of Matter to the highest peak of the Spirit there is only one evolution, will seek the fullness of their strength and their peace in the assured certainty that the whole of the world's industrial, aesthetic, scientific and moral endeavor serves physically to complete the Body of Christ, whose charity animates and recreates all things.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Future of Man*

There is a cosmic need for the new being that I could become.

Jeanne de Salzmann, *The Reality of Being: The Fourth Way of Gurdjieff*

Sometimes there is a feeling of wonder at how this spiritual journey opened up for me. Who am I to be invited on this path to spiritual transformation and being fulfilled? Indeed, the route to Centering Prayer, The Church of Conscious Harmony, the Work of Inner Christianity, The Journey School, and this moment here and now has been a long, winding road – with every step guided by God.

Growing up Southern Baptist, a view of God as judge and policeman

was instilled. There was a fear of not believing the right things and thereby risking hellfire and damnation. Since my personality is definitely risk-averse, it took a long time to decide it was safe to explore my beliefs. Eventually, I would sense that filling roles was not fulfilling, neither was believing things without experiencing them as truth for myself. Maurice Nicoll wrote that a mechanical person “has never himself faced truth or really desired it, but has always followed

the opinion of others in order to be, as he believes, on the safe side.” That was certainly familiar.

How could a busy working mom learn to “Be still and know” and to “Be here now?” A powerful experience in the silence came on a sunny, cool day. Instead of grabbing my purse and running errands, there was an urge to sit outside in the sunshine and stay still for several minutes, soaking in the solar energy. The mind that was normally busy planning, thinking or

worrying was unusually quiet. I felt a sense of God's presence become palpable. God was very, very near – in fact, within me. This distinct experience of Self-remembering can still be felt today. Then, a list of undesired habits was formulated with a real wish to let them go: worry, stress, lashing out reflexively, being overly defensive, mindless busyness, and not allowing time for quiet reflection.

Meditation sounded intriguing. Could it bring peace of mind, alleviate stress and worries, and answer some questions, like: Who am I? What do I really believe? What is the purpose of life? How can one establish a closer relationship with God? How does one fulfill what one has been placed on earth to become? By divine design, an Introduction to Centering Prayer meeting was offered at a local church. With an answer of "yes," the journey began in earnest. Centering Prayer became a regular, twice-a-day practice. Since that first introduction, Centering Prayer continues to bring real joy and peace and has truly changed my life.

Eventually, Centering Prayer led me to The Church of Conscious

Harmony. This was certainly a divine invitation. From the first step onto the CCH campus, there was an instinctive knowing that this place was special and could guide me in my wish for transformation of being. In my journal around that time, I expressed: "Just as I must breathe, I must follow my heart on this journey," and "I seek a calm union between my inner and outer life."

Before The Journey School started, the Thursday evening classes based on Nicoll's *Commentaries* provided a way to begin learning about the Work of Inner Christianity and led me to sample other CCH delights that feed the soul. Soon CCH became my spiritual home. In recent years, technology has expanded the opportunities to connect from everywhere, including the four months of each year that I spend in Michigan. Now there's the capability to attend Church year-round, tune in to The Journey School from anywhere, join my Spiritual Journey Group from afar, and listen to anything that was missed. Gratitude is lifted up for that gift from the pandemic and for new friends from all over.

Besides Centering Prayer, the Work, and The Journey School, several additional practices help support my journey. First, there is a habit of writing in a journal to make note of my daily aim, what has inspired me, self-observations that are made, and significant realizations. During the pandemic in 2020, a new project arose to reread the journal entries from several prior years. It is amazing to rediscover truths and insights that had stirred my heart in prior years and to see how they land in a new way. The reminders of important teachings previously studied bring a renewed gratitude and a sense of growth that is happening.

Also, my mobile phone has become a tool to record guided meditations, CCH music, and selections from books, videos, or The Journey School. It is wonderful to have these recordings on hand for whenever inspiration or a reminder to Work is needed. Sometimes I listen to them while driving, walking, or trying to get out of a state of being identified. The beautiful contemplative music from Sunday mornings reminds me to simply remember God.

Great joy is found in taking

sensory walks in nature. Nature reminds me of God's presence in the here and now. It is wonderful to walk in my neighborhood and along creekside hiking trails. During summertime in Michigan, the scenery changes to farms, woods, rivers and lakes. On these sensory walks, the aim is to feel the sun on my skin, the breeze brushing past me, the footsteps rhythmically hitting the ground, and to listen to the birds and the wind moving through the trees. "The more I surrender to the power of my own materiality, my embodied existence in which God dwells, the more I am drawn to God in the leaf and the tree and the clouds and the wind. My body and the body of the world are one, and God is shining through this unfolding unity." Ilia Delio, *The Hours of the Universe*

Learning to be present in all three centers is a gradual process. My aim is to move from the head into the heart and be more present in the body, to be where I am, to cultivate inner stillness, and to slow my pace, especially on the inside. Learning to let go of trying to control and analyze everything is an important lesson, too. As Tim Cook would say, the spiritual journey takes place below the neck. This year's annual aim of "Arising

as Embodied Life" has been a wonderful adventure in learning to incarnate more consciously as this version of Christ.

As if on cue, my "embodied life" entered a new chapter this year. In February, a doctor gave me some unexpected news that jolted me and dashed my illusion that I could waltz in the latter years of life unscathed. Yet, there arose a sense that the deeper self has always been and always will be whole. What is Real in me is unaffected by the circumstances of life. "Pain, sickness, poverty, old age, and death [or a medical diagnosis] cannot master me, for they are not real," as Emilie Cady teaches in *Lessons in Truth*. There is a wish to focus not on diminishment, but on God's love, gratitude, health, energy, the present moment, and to trust that all is working out in divine order.

What draws us to the spiritual journey? Why am I here? There had been a vague feeling that I was in training for something, but it took a while to discover what that "something" was. Now the realization comes that this next stage of life is why this path was set before me. This is the time to Work on myself earnestly, to add more consciousness into all

aspects of life, to develop an inner spaciousness for Spirit to reside, to grow wings of Self-remembering, to focus on what feeds Essence and connects me with God, to put less negative energy and more love into the world, to let go of the programs for happiness that only bring unhappiness. The three steps of the Welcoming Prayer are: feel and sink into, welcome, and let go. There arises a real wish to live this prayer practice in my everyday life. "Welcome. I let go of my desire for security, affection, control, and embrace this moment as it is."

What does "being fulfilled" feel like? Perhaps it feels like freedom from the prison of the small self and liberation from fear and the lie of separation, so that the soul can act out of the highest and most noble aspects of being human. Being fulfilled is not a result of *doing*. It is a result of *allowing God* to act in and through us. To be fulfilled is to become what one has been placed on this earth to become ... and to transform into Love and radiate Love to others. May it be so for all of us.

For all that has been... Thanks!

For all that will be... Yes!

Dag Hammarskjöld

From the Welcoming Prayer, let's add:

For all that is... Welcome! ☺

ELDER WISDOM: HONORING OUR FATHERS AND MOTHERS

SURRENDER TO WHAT IS

BY BONITA GRIFFITH

I recently came across this poignant quote: “Questions are an invitation to greater awareness.” My whole life I’ve been seeking answers to existential questions. Who am I? Why am I here? If you ponder such ideas, you also have what Gurdjieff calls an awakened “magnetic center,” the inner guidance that plays some part in the development of enhanced consciousness in human life.

I first realized I wasn’t invincible when faced with being a widow and single mother of three; I lacked the inner resources to manage. Terror set in and a quest for meaning and help began. It led me down many captivating roads, and eventually to The Church of Conscious Harmony. Here I breathed the fresh air of recovery and hope.

Experiencing many teachers along my road to awakening and the emergence of wisdom, the angel of death was a significant one taking my father, first husband, son, all in their 40s, then my mother, and second husband. I wondered about karma or if there was a

specifically designed task for this one, wild, authentic life. I was led to find meaning. Much of the time I couldn’t discern God’s direction for me, but upon deeper reflection it became clear.

For 25 years, I worked as a Hospice Spiritual Counselor. Our culture and the medical profession tend to help us deny, or postpone, the reality of death at all costs. This perspective prevents us from recognizing death as the most profound meaningful experience of our lives. Many of my patients and their families appeared spiritually bankrupt as they journeyed together through this passage. Watching and listening to the bedside stories, I formulated a mandate for myself: *Live life to the fullest!* As Jesus said, “I have come that they may have life and have it more abundantly.” It appears true that people die the way they lived. We always have the choice of fear or freedom.

In choosing freedom, my spiritual journey and gypsy nature took me through 32 residential

moves and 55 countries along the way. It was during a two year stint in Poland that I felt most lost and adrift. Not knowing the language or being allowed to work, my isolation was oppressively intense. I longed for roots in a place where I could be seen, embraced, and surrounded by a loving community. At that time, I had no idea of the power of a wish. My heart’s longings led me to CCH.

Initially, I was stunned by feeling a mysterious energy that provoked deeply held tears from my heart. I was amazed at the sincerity of the community sharing at a level I never experienced before. I found a community of kindred spirits where my passion for an authentic spiritual life could blossom. I sensed it would be a safe place “to die, before I died.” I embraced Centering Prayer as a lifeline, especially in my grief work after my son Trey was killed in a car accident. I found myself preferring to sit in the silence as the “Divine Therapist” healed the broken pieces of my heart and led me to a perspective for

living the abundant life. I choose to embrace Maurice Nicoll's teaching on "Useless Suffering."

"Most people have such a great register of unhappy moments which they have nourished so much that often it is very difficult for them to escape from these pathetic states which of course only give rise to continual negative emotions which only create useless suffering."

In this grief work, I pondered the question of "why?" I concluded it would behoove me to "surrender to what is" rather than become an angry old lady who missed out on living. It was a gentler grief journey than that of my husband, because of the years I had developed my philosophy of death and had a viable relationship with the Unknowable.

My many teachers were formal and informal. My children taught me what Kahlil Gibran meant, "Children have their own journey, they only come through us and are not ours." Husbands were sometimes amazingly difficult teachers. I buried both of mine and can fortunately say with sincere love, "I owe you everything, you owe me nothing."

The learning and teachers continue to show up as I remain open and receptive to what life presents. An unexpected romance

brought untold delight and companionship into what already felt like the best years of my life. This relationship has become the greatest opportunity to practice the "Fifth Way." In the Christian inner tradition, this path of the intense fusion of two souls into one abler soul was coined by Boris Mouravieff in imitation of Gurdjieff's Fourth Way. Cynthia Bourgeault calls it the "path of conscious **love**."

At the age of 83, I find myself wondering, what's next? I totally enjoy living in this body. Life has never been so happy, filled with contentment and with uninterrupted opportunities to indulge my spiritual quests and delights. I'm seeing and feeling little physical witherings and diminishments, thus the practice of surrender has become more compelling. There is a razor's edge between imagining and praying for a healthy body, and allowing-accepting-letting go into the natural order of things – the conscious process of dying. I'm curious as to how it will proceed. I've found this slowing down process graciously allows ample time for Centering Prayer and study. These extended periods nourish my soul and are gifting me with preparation for my journey into the Great Expanse. I've watched hundreds of patients

go through this usually slow decline and winding down of the body. I suspect this process will be my final lesson – *surrender to all that is!*

How are we to proceed with dying? Just as in my three natural childbirths, I'm aware our bodies know how to start shutting down and how to expire, if we don't interfere too much. We are invited to trust that the same spiritual qualities we drew upon to navigate our early journey – trust, openness, and acceptance – will be there to carry us through that final passage. Rumi wrote, "My soul is from elsewhere, I'm sure of that, and I intend to end up there."

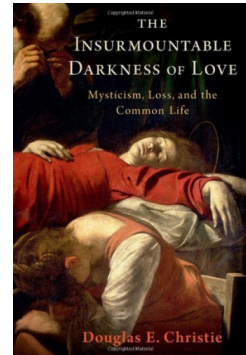
Across spiritual traditions, teachers have spoken of this universal gesture: letting go, consenting, non-clinging, and trusting myself to a higher power. I've pursued the experience of the unitive state for over fifty years, though at times it eludes me. I trust when the diagnosis is proclaimed and the bell knell has sounded, I will embrace it all.

I recently was given a poem and thought this is the poem that expresses my final desires. Not just the final "Yes," but all the other little surrenders and letting go's that are being asked of us each day in order to live a contented life and prepare for a peaceful death. May it be so!

She Let Go by Rev. Safire Rose

Without a thought or word, she let go.
She let go of fear.
She let go of the judgments. ...
She let go of the committee of indecision within her. ...
Wholly and completely, without hesitation or worry, she just let go.
She didn't ask anyone for advice.
She didn't read a book on how to let go.
She didn't search the Scriptures.
She just let go.
She let go of all the memories that held her back.
She let go of all the anxiety that kept her from moving forward.
She let go of all the planning and all of the calculations about how
to do it just right.
She didn't promise to let go.
She didn't journal about it.
She didn't write the projected date on her Day-Timer. ...
She didn't check the weather report or read her daily horoscope.
She just let go.
She didn't analyze whether she should let go.
She didn't call her friends to discuss the matter.
She didn't call the prayer line.
She didn't utter one word.
She just let go.
No one was around when it happened.
There was no applause or congratulations.
No one thanked her or praised her.
No one noticed a thing.
Like a leaf falling from a tree, she just let go.
There was no effort. It wasn't a struggle.
It wasn't good and it wasn't bad.
It was what it was, and it is just that.
In the space of letting go, she let it all be.
A small smile came over her face.
A light breeze blew through her.
And the sun and the moon shone forevermore. ☸

Book Look



We again draw your attention to Douglas E. Christie, who may be one of the most important scholars of contemplative and monastic spirituality of this generation. Though you've probably not heard of him, his books are essential reading for anyone interested in deepening their knowledge and understanding of the contemplative and monastic streams within the long enduring Christian tradition(s). Christie serves as professor in the Theological Studies Department at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles.

His most recent book, *The Insurmountable Darkness of Love: Mysticism, Loss and the Common Life* is a masterpiece of introspective spiritual autobiography. In nourishing ways, it teaches the wisdom of the contemplative monastic tradition is very accessible. ☸

LIVING THE WORK OF INNER CHRISTIANITY IN DAILY LIFE

THE CONSCIOUS CIRCLE OF HUMANITY BY NATHAN JONES


Work Idea: The Work speaks to us of the Conscious Circle of Humanity. A mythic, or likely literal, group of individuals, dare I say *beings*, who convey and interpret the wisdom and the way through the ages. It has been said that they are the ones responsible for the ancient schools that are necessary to the development of humans in each age. The Work provides a path toward this circle, which runs through Balanced Man arriving at the outer circle of the Conscious Circle of Humanity. Maurice Nicoll wrote that the “kingdom of God is the circle of conscious humanity. It means the circle of those who have evolved beyond violence of those whose knowledge is practical – that is, *what they know, they will, and so, do* – of those who understand one another because they speak a common language – (and let us remember that we, in this work, are learning a common language). Everyone knows and feels that there must be some place, some society, some beings who live without mutual violence, criticism, dislike or hatred.”

Work Source: “From the passage of Plutarch ... we learned that those among men who had lived many lives and developed the fullness of their being were able to return and

become intermediaries, messengers, and to help those who had come to the point of awakening and wished to return. They were not interested in helping those who were still enmeshed in life, but only those who were seeking meaning and rebirth. This describes part of the work of Conscious Humanity. This is the work Dr. Nicoll wanted to be able to do to help invisibly through the mind.” Beryl Pogson, *The Work Life*

Application: What would it mean to approach this circle? What would you have to give up? Perhaps nothing, which feels like everything. The you that you know and love, full of so many justifiable worries. All of which are shifting sands. Remember, the seed must die for the fruit to be.

Further Resource: In Mahayana Buddhism, a Bodhisattva is a being who is able to reach Nirvana, but delays doing so out of compassion in order to save suffering beings. A pervasive legend of a Bodhisattva is that of Guan Yin. “The Legend of Miao Shan usually ends with Miao Chuang Yen, Miao Shan’s father, falling ill with jaundice. No physician was able to cure him. Then a monk appeared saying that the jaundice could be cured by

making a medicine out of the arm and eye of one without anger. The monk further suggested that such a person could be found on Fragrant Mountain. When asked, Miao Shan willingly offered up her eyes and arms. Miao Chuang Yen was cured of his illness and went to the Fragrant Mountain to give thanks to the person. When he discovered that his own daughter had made the sacrifice, he begged for forgiveness. The story concludes with Miao Shan being transformed into the Thousand Armed Guan Yin, and the king, queen and her two sisters building a temple on the mountain for her. She began her journey to heaven and was about to cross over into heaven when she heard a cry of suffering from the world below. She turned around and saw the massive suffering endured by the people of the world. Filled with compassion, she returned to earth, vowing never to leave till such time as all suffering has ended. After her return to Earth, Guan Yin was said to have stayed for a few years on the island of Mount Putuo where she practiced meditation and helped the sailors and fishermen who got stranded. ... After some decades Guan Yin returned to Fragrant Mountain to continue her meditation.” nationsonline.org 

COMMUNITY PRACTICE

LIGHTING CANDLES DAILY

As Daylight Savings ends, dusk and dark come earlier and earlier through the Winter Solstice on December 21st. During these shorter days, it is a useful practice to consciously light a candle as a witness to Christ's light. Each morning while it is still dark and around dusk as the night arrives provide two ideal times to take a moment to light your candle and be present. Perhaps, say a prayer or remember your beloveds. Send them the light of Christ and declare over them and your household:

The light of Christ surrounds us.
The love of God infills us.
The presence of God encircles us.
All is well. Amen. ☸

SERMON THEMES

CHRISTIC BODIES

November 6	Eucharistic Body
November 13	Community Body
November 20	Heavenly Body
November 27	The Four Bodies (Advent begins)

DREAMS AND THE SPIRITUAL JOURNEY CLASS

MODERATED BY LOREN STELL & PETER HAAS

WEDNESDAYS, NOV 9-DEC 14 7:30-8:45PM

The Dream Group will meet on Zoom for six consecutive Wednesdays to share experiences and memories of our nighttime dreams, while aligning with our Annual Aim of "Arising as Embodied Life," To join, please register on the church website. ☸

NOVEMBER CALENDAR

For more details, visit
<https://consciousharmony.org/>
or call 512-347-9673

SPECIAL EVENTS

Dreams & the Spiritual Journey Class
moderated by Loren Stell
& Peter Haas
Weds, Nov 9-Dec 14 7:30-8:45pm
Register online

Gurdjieff Music
Sun Nov 13 6pm

Forgiveness Prayer Online Workshop
led by Mary Dwyer
Nov 18 6-8pm & Nov 19 9am-3pm
\$30 Register online

Advent Centering Prayer Retreats
Dec 2-8 at Cedarbrake
Dec 10 at CCH & Online
Dec 16-18 at Cedarbrake
Pre-register online

†Lux Divina Advent Vespers
Fridays, Dec 2-23 7-8:05pm

MONTHLY

Caritas Donations
1st Sundays
Bring non-perishables to CCH or
donate to caritasofaustin.org

WEEKLY

Sundays
†Centering Prayer & Lectio Divina 8-9am
*Intercessory Prayer 9am
†Worship Service 10-11:30am
Youth Program (preK-12) 10-11:30am

Wednesdays
Contemplative Lunch noon-1pm
†Contemplative Worship Service 6-7pm

Thursdays
*The Journey School Class 7-8:30pm

Saturdays
*Scriptorium noon

DAILY

Centering Prayer Service 7-7:35am
*Centering Prayer 6pm
(on Weds, please join our 6pm service instead)

*Please join via internet; links are
on our website.
†In person and online.



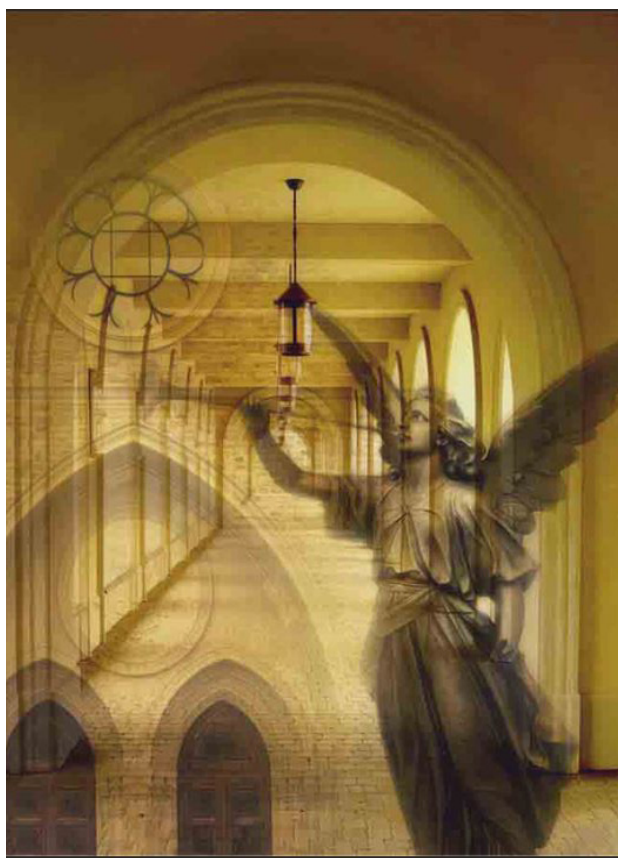
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ADVENT

The Eastern Christian tradition sees the Advent season as a time of waiting for the light that will first shine forth at Christmas and reach its peak on Epiphany, the Feast of Lights.

This beautiful text of Isaiah is proclaimed during the liturgy of the season:

*Rise up in splendor!
Your light has come,
the glory of the Lord shines upon you . . .
Upon you the Lord shines,
and over you appears the Lord's glory.*

ISAIAH 60:1-2

On the feast of Christmas, the joyful expectancy exemplified by the Virgin Mary, John the Baptist and Isaiah – and shared by us in the Advent liturgy – comes to fulfillment.

Christ is born anew in our hearts . . . and our incorporation as members of Christ's mystical body is the light that empowers us to follow Christ and to be transformed into Christ.

Advent & The Octave of Christmas, A Journey into Faith with Fr. Thomas Keating

