

December 2023

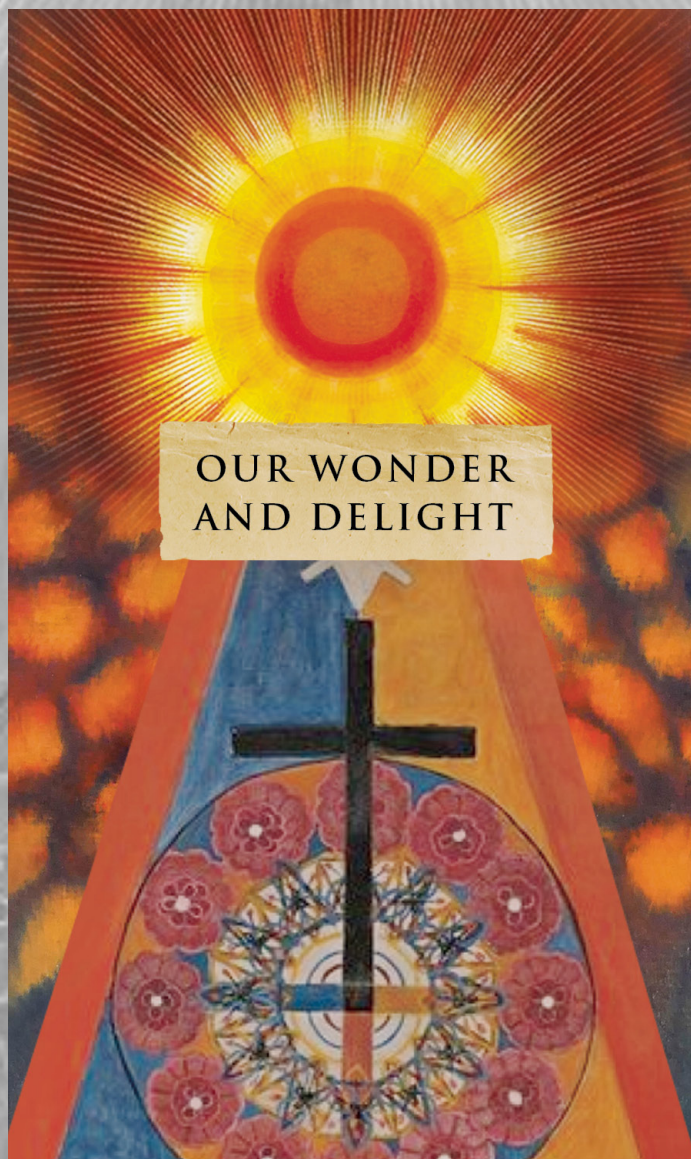
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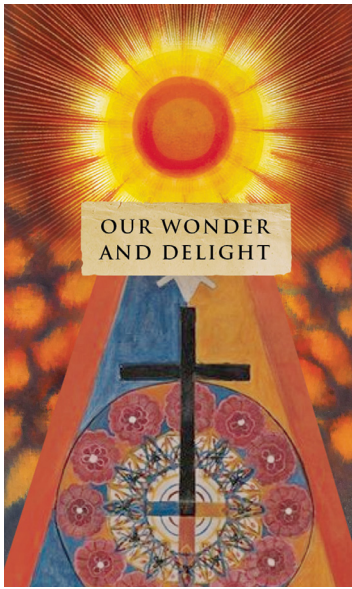


# The Mark

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



OUR WONDER  
AND DELIGHT



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*Holy, holy, holy ... the whole earth is filled with God's glory!* Isaiah 6:3

## ANNUAL AIM: HOLY REMEMBERING

OUR WONDER AND DELIGHT BY STEVE AND KATHY UTTS

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Everywhere on Earth,  
at this moment,  
in the new spiritual  
atmosphere created by the  
appearance of the idea of  
evolution, there float,  
in a state of extreme mutual  
sensitivity,  
love of God and faith in the  
world. ...  
Truth has to appear only once,  
in one single mind, for it to be  
impossible for anything ever  
to prevent it from spreading  
universally and setting  
everything ablaze.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin,  
"The Christic," *The Heart of Matter*

*Anyone who is in Christ; that  
one is a new creation.  
The old has passed away; behold,  
the new has come.*  
2 Corinthians 5:17

A deepening of the sacramental nature of everyday life is an  
awakening of consciousness that can celebrate divinity within the  
ordinary, and, in this celebration, bring to life a sacred civilization.

Ilia Delio, "The Sacrament of Everyday Life"  
Zoom talk, Center for Christogenesis, May 8, 2020

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One of the most iconic gospel  
verses of Advent is Luke 2:8. *And  
there were in the same country,  
shepherds abiding in the field, keeping  
watch over their flock by night.* This  
evocative verse paints a scene of  
ordinary life in Palestine.

In earliest nomadic times  
of Israel, shepherds assumed  
respectable status. Abraham,  
Moses, Jacob and David were  
all shepherds. Over time, with  
the advance of civilization and  
agriculture, shepherds were  
marginalized and considered  
unclean and unreliable. They were  
likely children, boys as well as girls.  
Not in line to inherit any land,  
they adopted a nocturnal lonely  
nomadic life. Living embedded in  
nature, they sharpened their senses

to nature's signs and would learn to  
protect their vulnerable flock from  
predators and navigate grazing  
sites by the seasons. With rod, staff  
and voice, they encouraged and  
prodded their flock, later becoming  
inspiration for parables.

To these, "the least of man,"  
the angels first came with glad  
tidings. The shepherds' fear gave  
way to wonder and delight. They  
were obedient to the angels'  
instruction and with great haste  
made their way to the manger. The  
only offering they had in kneeling  
before the child was their presence  
and adoration. This simple yet  
powerful scene projects emptiness,  
lowliness and humility that would  
later characterize Jesus' ministry.

Mary, Joseph and the newborn

Jesus seemed like outcasts as well. There was no room in the inn and they were relegated to an outdoor feeding stall. The shepherds must have felt right at home in this setting. One wonders if the infant in the manger was energetically marked by their humble adoration, without gifts, affectation, or agenda.

Thomas Merton reflected on this in his essay “The Time of the End Is the Time of No Room.”

“So, there was no room at the inn? True ... but when we read the Gospels and come to know them thoroughly, we realize there are other reasons why ... there had to be some other place. In fact, the inn was the last place in the world for the birth of the Lord. ... Why then was the inn crowded? Because of the census, the massing of the ‘whole world’ in centers of registration, to be numbered, to be identified with the structure of imperial power. ... But The Great Joy is announced, after all, in silence, loneliness, and darkness, to shepherds, ‘living in the fields’ and apparently unmoved by rumors or massed crowds. These are the last of the desert dwellers, the nomads, the true Israel. ... His place is with those others for whom there is no room.”

After Christ first appears to the ordinary, the lowly, the Word spreads first among the nomads, the desert dwellers, and not among those of greater status living in the cities. In this New Creation, everything is reversed. As Paul



IN LOVING MEMORY  
OF  
TIM COOK  
(1943-2023)

We hold in our hearts Tim Cook, the beloved co-founder and spiritual father of The Church of Conscious Harmony, grandfather, father, husband, brother, uncle, friend, son of God, Beloved. Tim passed into the Communion of Saints on November 9. The memorial service celebrating his life will be held on Saturday, December 9, 2:00 p.m. in the sanctuary. ☸

states, *The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.* Merton concludes,

“We live in the time of no room ... the time when everyone is obsessed with lack of time, lack of space; with saving time, conquering space, projecting into time and space the anguish produced within them by the technological furies of size, volume, quantity, speed, number, price, power and acceleration. Shepherds remain outside the agitation, untouched by the vast movement. They are designated, surrounded by a great light; they receive the message, and they believe it with joy. They see the Shekinah (glory of the divine presence) over them, recognizing themselves for what they are. They are the remnant, the people of no account, who are

therefore chosen – the anawim (the poor ones). And they obey the light.”

It is fitting to conclude this year with an excerpt from Douglas Christie as he quotes Edmond Jabes:

“You do not go into the desert to find identity, but to lose it, to lose your personality, to become anonymous. You make yourself void. You become silence ... And then something extraordinary happens: you hear silence speak.”

Luke’s Nativity scene is penetrated with silence and humility, with recognition and joy in ordinary life. As we approach the coming year, may we continue in wonder and delight. Remembering confidently that Shekinah will guide us to a new creation. ☸

## REFLECTIONS ON THE WORK OF INNER CHRISTIANITY

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### REMEMBERING HIGHER INFLUENCES

BY KEN ELY

In my early years at The Church of Conscious Harmony, I struggled with an idea that Tim Cook, our co-founder, referred to as “coming under authority.” Having a fiercely independent personality, authority carried a connotation of control, and no way, no how was I going to allow anyone to have control over me!

One idea from The Work of Inner Christianity that did resonate with me was that we are always under some influence – whether we choose them consciously or not. This idea of choosing influences was empowering. The Work informs us of three types of influences. A influences are those that come from the outside world, from mechanical life, like news, sports, movies, social media, etc. The Work teaches that these influences are of no value for our transformation and serve only to keep us asleep. There are C influences that are the direct revelations given to conscious man, or the Circle of Conscious

Humanity, from higher centers or the spiritual world within. The Work teaches that these higher influences are constantly trying to communicate with us, but we do not have ears to hear. Opening ourselves to these influences is a key aim of our journey. Lastly, B influences are teachings sewn into our world by the Conscious Circle. B influences help us to open our minds. Examples of B influences are Scripture, the teachings of Gurdjieff, Ouspensky, Nicoll and others and certain works of art, music and literature.

What I’ve come to understand is that Tim was ultimately pointing us to come under the authority of God’s Will. This requires tremendous focus, attention and radical trust that most of us simply don’t have early in our journey. Giving our attention to God and the higher influences that cultivate the space of receptivity in our inner world requires us to let go of things in the outer

world. This takes a lot of practice. I recall Tim emphasizing some core practices of our community, one of which was getting up at 5 a.m. daily. I immediately gravitated to this since I already had a long-standing habit of getting up early to run and train for a marathon. I began my days by reading a Commentary, doing Centering Prayer and incorporating some body movement. Over time, I added other practices in the mornings and throughout the day like reading Scripture, choosing B influences, reducing A influences, tithing, walking, praying the Jesus Prayer, attending multi-day retreats, serving together in community through Seva and other ways, plus many other practices I learned from others.

Coming under the influence of higher ideas resonates with me. As I engage with various Work ideas and practice self-observation, non-identification and

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Self-remembering, I observe how A influences keep me in states of reactivity, distraction, negativity and anxiety. The more I choose B influences, the easier it is to separate from and replace mechanical habits that rule my life with intentional practices.

Consciously engaging in these practices over and over cultivates a space of receptivity within me. Opening to this receptivity, I observe more clearly the false programs for happiness running my life. I ask questions and listen for answers from higher influences.

Difficulty listening, fierce independence and issues with authority figures emerged as core threads of my inner Work. I discovered that my reactions to the world outside (defiance, arrogance and independence to name a few) were intertwined with feelings of unworthiness and inadequacy inside. This was most difficult to come to terms with. Over time, I wished deeply to understand where this came from. A few years ago, while on retreat at Cedarbrake and taking in higher influences, I was given a clear answer in a flashback.

Six years old, awakening from my first ear surgery, blinding lights, deafening sounds, intense pain in my ear drums. I immediately try to cover my ears. The doctors and nurses hold my arms at my side. I struggle, feeling vulnerable, disoriented and angry that I can't

protect myself. I think but do not vocalize, "Don't you understand that I'm in pain, why are you making me suffer?" This moment births my independent streak and self-preservation mindset.

This event also impacts my faculty of listening. With the opening of the eardrums, everything was extremely loud, amplified and overwhelming. I retreated from the noise of our 7-person household into the basement. I also retreated into my mind. As I shut out the outer noise, the thoughts that filled my head became inner noise that made it difficult for me to express myself clearly – making it a challenge to hear and listen to higher influences.

Observing this scene, I clearly saw the origins of Fr. Thomas Keating's programs for happiness within me and the underlying thoughts that brought them to life. One of these thoughts was "They don't understand." (Don't they know they are hurting me?) I am given another flashback.

Eight years old. Another post-surgery scene. I'm trying to tell the doctor that hearing is not the only issue. It is hard to breathe. The right side of my nasal passage is completely blocked. The doctor, half listening, bends forward to say, "Son, I am the doctor here," implying – you don't know, you don't understand. In my mind, I am screaming back, "You don't

understand!" Of course, the words never come out. At this moment, I question what I know about myself – what I feel and know to be true is now in doubt. Here, the struggle with authority figures in my life begins. From that point forward, I doubt my own thoughts, inner knowledge of myself and capabilities. My thoughts are jumbled. And yet somehow, I know that I know. I just cannot express it clearly. The belief that I do not understand settles in, and the search for knowledge becomes the primary means of my protection. Observing these aspects of my personality altogether, reveals that my outer reactions to the world were really unmasking the fear to step forward into the fullness of who I am and what God's Will is for me. After much Work and Practice, I know now that to put myself under God's authority is both an act of trust and a validation of my own self-worth. Through grace, I see that I have been preparing to listen to higher influences and to do God's Will and I am willing and ready to step forward into the unknown.

In my last conversation with Tim, I asked him for a word to share with the community. He closed his eyes, sat up straight with his head slightly forward and took in a breath. After about 10 seconds he said, "Listen. Do your practice, and listen." May it be so! 🙏

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*But whenever you pray, go into your inner room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. Matthew 6:6*

## REFLECTIONS ON THE PRACTICE OF CENTERING PRAYER

STILLNESS AND JOY BY MARNIE HALUSKA

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As I suspect is the case for most of us, I find that the Book of Creation delivers revelation at its most eloquent. The ongoing Incarnation of the Word through the created order is my greatest teacher, the one that most reliably points me toward that which is higher. Often, my questions of “who are you, Lord, and who am I?” are best answered by turning an eye to the physical world around me – its beauty, interactions, lawfulness, and wisdom. So many of Jesus’ timeless teachings are grounded in the simple, earthy metaphors – birds, seeds, trees, minerals – “you can be like they are,” he reminds us.

When I feel untethered, unsure how to proceed, very often the natural world provides the insight I seek as I am reminded once again of the great engine of life on this planet. I believe that this is the reflection of a natural alignment that occurs

between like things. As a child of earth, I can quietly observe and wonder what it means to joyfully participate in the ongoing story of this planet by looking deeply at how creation itself functions, how it accomplishes what needs to be done for its survival, for its thriving.

One wonder that often eludes my experience of the world around me is that this planet extends nearly 4,000 miles beneath my feet. By remembering the Work of Inner Christianity concept of *scale*, a deeper perspective and understanding comes to meet me – with “home” as a tiny fraction of what the earth actually is. I remember a vastness of creation lies beneath my feet, literally below the level of my awareness. As things are continually evolving, driven by the ever-present dynamics of creation, destruction and new arising, so it is with the earth’s inner workings.

The surface of our planet is formed by massive rock plates in relationship with one another. The plates fuse, fracture, collide and, via a system of deep ocean trenches around the world, they return into the interior of the planet at the end of their life cycle. As they are subducted below the ocean floor, what was once land melts and flows into the earth’s mantle, the vast molten ocean below our feet.

What a beautiful likeness to the spiritual journey! These planetary events unfold outside our awareness and certainly their work is accomplished beyond the scale of a human lifetime, in deep time – this internal reprocessing from land into magma into eventual new land that the earth cycles through is invisible and imperceivable to our senses. Like these rock plates, and like the birds, seeds

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and trees in Jesus' teachings, we are quietly consenting to a process of transformation to "be like they are." The destruction of our individuality for the sake of union with our source. An apparent stillness belies great transformational activity that eludes our ability to perceive it.

Lately, it has felt to me that this process of planetary recycling via subduction is an apt analogy for my Centering Prayer practice. Through the grace and silence of the Prayer, the aged plates of my surface personality that at one time were essential for my survival are pulled down into the void, to be melted down, restored by divine grace to a decrystallized state of potential. Freed energy flows in the molten love of divine possibilities. What was once experienced as "I" is that no longer, and it becomes entirely unclear where I end and the Divine begins. In this process of the passing of former things, the One melts down what was so that the energy previously consumed by the former can be redirected into something new – a new creation within, a new becoming.


I attended a Centering Prayer retreat this past summer at beautiful St. Mary's Sewanee on the edge of the Cumberland Plateau in southern Tennessee. Maybe it was the extended communion

with the silence and the beauty of the place, maybe it was my growing relationship with the Work, maybe it reflected a larger capacity for consent, but something definitely shifted during this retreat. Centering Prayer went beyond a discipline or spiritual practice ... it became relationship. And that has changed everything for me. Previously an integral part of the practice, my use of a sacred word dropped away on that retreat, to be replaced by what feels like a sense of Presence, which pulls me back into the silence. In that still room of the heart, I sit with my Lord in loving exchange – seen, known, and held close. Those eyes that look back at me ... love, only love. My stillness allows the flow between us, my saying yes to rebirth by means of deep calling to deep.

The earth's destructive process of subduction has an analogue that results in creation. New geological plates rise up at rifts in the ocean floor where the earth's surface has been torn open by the upwelling of molten rock that will become new land, someday. What was subsumed beneath the earth's surface arises once again to become something new.

In that inner room of the heart, there is similarly a re-emergence of that fundamental energy that

can ultimately be formed into something new, that is, the mother of a new creation! Something that has mingled with the Divine has been forever transformed by the exchange that happened deep below the surface. In stillness. A new creation emerges, a rebirth, a substance whose history is no more, prepared to be shaped into something previously unknown. This process of being pulled down into the inferno of God's love via this prayer that we practice, melted down and then re-emerging above ground is a continual flow as we continue to submit to the forge that lies at the center of who we are. Within this flow, we have the possibility of emerging again at the surface of who we are as something new, something more real, something more essential.

Ultimately, this is about creation, about becoming, about delight in how we are all given the potential of conscious evolution, what we can offer our world that is groaning in desire for all that it can become, what we can incarnate through grace. Seems a fitting gift through the internal reshaping that happens through Centering Prayer, new birth. And as the incarnation of New Life is celebrated with joy this month, can you sense the new creation that is being forged in you? Sing for joy! 

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# SCRIPTORIUM

## OUR WONDER AND DELIGHT IN CHRIST

BY JO FUENTECILLA

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To wrap up this year of Holy Remembering, our focus for December is on “Our Wonder and Delight.” A common experience found within the ordinary and extraordinary moments of our lives when we are attentive. Our scripture for this month’s Scriptorium is found on our monthly aim card.

*Anyone who is in Christ;  
that one is a new creation.  
The old has passed away;  
behold, the new has come.*  
2 Corinthians 5:17

What does this mean? I wonder, focusing on each part.

Does it take a certain amount of time or effort to be in Christ? Or am I already blessed with grace? In the Work of Inner Christianity, the invitation to Self-remember leads me to consent that I am a child of God. With joy and gladness, I am receptive as a child of God believing that I must have incredible birthrights and

inheritance. Assuredly, to be in Christ is to be a truer version of oneself. With amazement, we are brought into communion with Christ and that which is true for Christ becomes true for us. Being at peace with all living things is a choice to be in Christ. Similarly, like choosing what kind of clothes to wear, St. Paul encouraged all followers of Christ to be clothed in sincere compassion, in kindness and humility, in gentleness and patience, and that we need to bear with and forgive each other. Additionally, on top of all these ‘clothes,’ we need to put on love and always be thankful. The invitation to be in Christ asks for our sincere effort and consent. Can you hear it?

*A new creation* feels like an awakening or transformation. The Greek term is *kainos*, and translates to recently made, fresh, recent, unused, and unworn. Being a new creation opens the door to a fresh start, a different way of being, knowing, and understanding.

Whereas the phrase *the old has passed away* seems to reveal death. Perhaps, old values, beliefs, and interests are put to death when one is in Christ. It is a delight to ponder unnecessary parts of my personality falling away because they take energy. By letting go and not identifying with negativity, for instance, I gain energy that can be used to create freshness.

The verse *the new has come* brings me to a state of wonder and delight. Being in awe of Jesus Christ, I wonder about His connection with the Divine. I wonder about His healing powers. I wonder how He was able to love everyone unconditionally.

What if during this Advent and Holy Season, each of us made intentional, daily effort to follow Paul’s advice? Would we make the Light of Christ more visible within ourselves and available to those living in darkness? While not easy, it would be delightful to put on love and always be thankful, to be in Christ and behold the new. Ⓐ



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## A YEAR IN REVIEW: HOLY REMEMBERING

In 2023, we were invited to move ever deeper together as a community of intention, practice and devotion in this annual aim focused on remembering our real self always and everywhere.

“We are seeking to approach the unknown,  
to open the door to what is hidden in us and pass beyond.

It is necessary to submit entirely to an inner voice,  
to a feeling of the Divine, of the sacred in us.

But we can do it only in part. We can ask for help ...

We can say ‘Lord, have mercy’ in order to Be.”

Jeanne de Salzmann

January	Looking Up
February	Looking Deeper
March	Being in Time
April	Being Human
May	Being Awake
June	Being the Family of God
July	Being-Duty
August	Our Journey
September	Our Primary Work
October	Our Past and Possibilities
November	Our Foundation and Future
December	Our Wonder and Delight

*Remembering what you have received and heard;  
keep it and come to yourself...*

*“Behold, I have left an open door before you,  
which no one can close.”*

Revelation 3:3, 8

To further reflect on these monthly aims,  
you may review previous issues of *The Mark*  
at [consciousharmony.org](http://consciousharmony.org) under the View tab. ☸

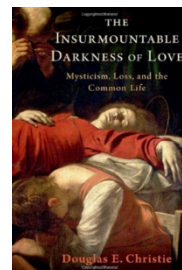
## COMMUNITY PRACTICE

### KEEP A BRIEF VIGIL IN A SACRED PLACE

Advent is a perfect time to keep an intentional vigil. To watch for the light. To stay in a place and quietly pray for a time. While certain places have resonances by virtue of their intention and how they have been regarded, everywhere is sacred! Praying silently for, with or near a loved one. Sitting quietly in nature. Pausing with a special intention in your prayer space. Praying in Theosis Chapel at the Church. Wherever we may be, let us join together for prayer, renewal, and inspiration as we end our year of Holy Remembering. ☸

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## COMMUNITY READING



*The Insurmountable Darkness  
of Love: Mysticism,  
Loss and the Common Life*  
by Douglas E. Christie

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## ADVENT & THE OCTAVE OF CHRISTMAS

YOU ARE INVITED TO JOIN US FOR THESE SACRED EVENTS

Sunday, Dec 3	8-11:30am	First Sunday of Advent
Friday, Dec 8	7-8:05pm	Lux Divina: Advent Vespers
Sunday, Dec 10	8-11:30am	Second Sunday of Advent
Thursday, Dec 14	7pm	The Glorious Impossible
Friday, Dec 15	7-8:05pm	Lux Divina: Advent Vespers
Saturday, Dec 16	9-noon	Half Day Centering Prayer Retreat
Sunday, Dec 17	8-11:30am	Third Sunday of Advent
Friday, Dec 22	7-8:05pm	Lux Divina: Advent Vespers
Sunday, Dec 24	10-11am	Christmas Eve Family Worship
Sunday, Dec 24	6-7pm	Christmas Eve Candlelight Family Service
Sunday, Dec 31	10-11am	New Year's Eve Family Service
Sunday, Dec 31		New Year's Eve Program
	8:30pm	Fellowship (bring finger foods)
	9:30pm	Taizé Service
	10:45pm	Burning Bowl
	11:40pm	Centering Prayer through the New Year

Office closed and no weekday services or classes Dec 25-Jan 1. No Lectio Divina, intercessory prayer, youth program, or brunch on Dec 24 or Jan 31 mornings. Please check the website to verify which events are offered online and/or in person. 📍

## SERMON SERIES

### HOLY REMEMBERING HOLY ADVENT

December 3  
Holy Remembering  
Holy Advent: Hope

December 10  
Holy Remembering  
Holy Advent: Peace

December 17  
Holy Remembering  
Holy Advent: Joy

December 24  
Holy Remembering  
Holy Advent: Love

December 31  
Holy Remembering  
Blessed Year

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## BOOK LOOK

### READERS FOR ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS

To prepare and enter into the deeper mystery of this sacred time, here are three daily Advent companions for us.

*Watch for The Light: Readings for Advent and Christmas*

An inspiring anthology of 45 reflections by 45 writers, ancient and modern, that actually begins in November. It includes meditations from Henri Nouwen, Dorothy Day, T. S. Eliot and many others.

*The Art of Advent, A Painting a Day from Advent to Epiphany* by Jane Williams  
A beautiful small book of art, meditations and questions for reflection for 37 days.

*Faith: An Advent Companion*  
*A Journey into Faith with Thomas Keating*

Published by Contemplative Outreach, this 105-page booklet features daily Scripture passages, reflections from the works of Fr. Keating and practice suggestions from Advent through the Feast of the Epiphany. 📍

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# DECEMBER CALENDAR

For more details, visit [consciousharmony.com](http://consciousharmony.com) or call 512-347-9673

## SPECIAL EVENTS

†Lux Divina: Advent Vespers  
Dec 8, 15, & 22 7-8:05pm

†Memorial for Tim Cook  
Dec 9 2pm

†Half-Day Centering Prayer Retreat  
Dec 16 9am-noon Register online

Multi-Day Centering Prayer Retreats  
Dec 2-8 at Cedarbrake \$800 (Full)  
Jan 12-14 at Cedarbrake Register online

†The Glorious Impossible Christmas Program  
Dec 14 7pm

†Special Holiday Family Services  
(see details on page 10)

❖New Year's Eve Offerings  
(see details on page 10)

Church & Office Closed Dec 26-Jan 1

## MONTHLY

1st Sundays Caritas Donations  
Bring non-perishables to CCH or donate to [caritasofaustin.org](http://caritasofaustin.org)

## WEEKLY

Wednesdays

- ❖Communion Service in Sacristy 7:40am
- ❖Contemplative Lunch noon-1pm

Contemplative Lunch ends Dec 6 for this semester, resumes in spring 2024

Saturdays

- \* Online Centering Prayer Support Group 7:35am

Sundays

- †Centering Prayer & Lectio Divina 8-9am
- ❖Intercessory Prayer in Room 211 9:15-9:30am
- †Worship Service 10-11:30am
- ❖Youth Program (preK-12) 10-11:30am

Thursdays

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

## DAILY

- †Centering Prayer Service 7-7:35am
- \* Centering Prayer 6-6:20pm



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\*Please join these services, groups, and classes via online video options.

Contact the website for accessible links and more information.

†In person and online ❖In-person only at CCH



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*Behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem,  
saying, 'Where is the newborn king of the Jews?'*

Matthew 2:1-2

## TO BECOME THE LIGHT OF CHRIST

Today the Magi gaze in deep wonder at what they see:  
heaven on earth, earth in heaven, man in God, God in man,  
one whom the universe cannot contain now enclosed in a tiny body.

Saint Peter Chrysologus, Bishop of Ravenna, Italy, Yr. 450

To become the light of Christ requires us to stay focused,  
as the Magi did, on the Light of Christ. ...

He is hidden, not only in the stars,  
but in the less spectacular events of our daily life,  
in our mundane struggles to just get through the day,  
to earn a living and care for our families.

He is hidden where the poor, the lonely, the depressed,  
the abandoned and the victims of violence in all forms  
struggle for the daily bread of kindness and hope. ...

If Christ's light shines through us  
and we make sincere effort to become transmitters of that Light,  
our little corner of the world will be transformed,  
and the darkness will be overcome.

Gerry Straub