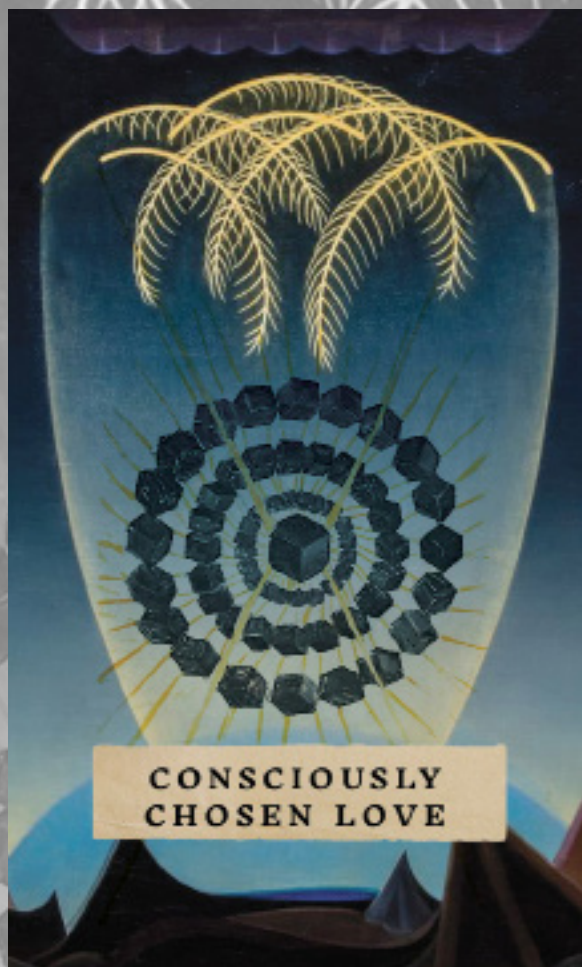


December 2020
Volume 32
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THE MARK

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



DARK NIGHT, CHRISTMAS LIGHT

BY PETER HAAS

If I say, 'surely the darkness shall hide me, and night shall be my light,' for you darkness itself is not dark, and night shines as the day. Psalm 139:12

Psalm 139 is a prayer that helps me remember the Presence and its paradoxes.

Darkness is a motif of human experience. It represents our feeling of thinking we are separated from our self, from God, and from others. It is a feeling we often try to avoid. The darkness is a way we use language to describe parts of the spiritual journey where we feel unclear, or feel contained and uninspired, and even the absence of God.

While the moments of darkness that we experience may feel like tombs, those tombs are often our wombs, which birth us into new, more complete ways of being – nurturing us, if we let it, into more fullness of life.

We're learning that most of the universe is dark. It seems to possess a necessary quality that the light needs, a kind of quantum blackboard upon, in and

through which everything appears. In a way, darkness and light are mutual second-forces to each other. The darkness is a second-force to the light, and the light is a second-force to the darkness.

Sometimes we can't see a way through a situation. We feel there is no clarity, no vision, only darkness. Some choose to panic or make hasty decisions. We might try and wrest control from the darkness, creating our own kind of light from the friction of the struggle.

Another way is to simply and quietly light a candle in the early morning and sit in the silence. Accepting the situation or experience, knowing we don't need to see in order to be safe. Faith in the Presence turns the darkness into light. In the sphere of silent and still faith, it matters not what is unseen or seen. The gift is in discovering who we are through the journey, and most of all – who, what and how the Presence is within. Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ, including the darkness of our human journey.

Love is a fierce darkness

underneath the embers of creation. They twin together in Christ. Like cross beams, they carry the tears of all the world's nights, lifting them up to the sky that turns dark at the appointed hours, until tombs crack open and the stones roll away, and the emptiness is revealed to be just another womb of light.

During Advent, let's keep the faith, be of good cheer, and let Love-energy keep doing its thing, fiercely.

To help us further connect with the wonder and possibility for our spiritual development this Advent and Christmas season, let's look to the words of English poet William Wordsworth (1770-1850). On a visit to the ruins of an ancient monastery, he had a vision, as if waking from a dream. Wordsworth intuits,

“I have felt a presence that disturbs me with the joy of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime of something far more deeply interfused, whose dwelling is the light of setting suns, and the round ocean and the living air, and the blue sky, and in the mind of man: a

motion and a spirit, that impels all thinking things, all objects of all thought, and rolls through all things. Therefore am I still a lover of the meadows and the woods, and mountains; and of all that we behold from this green earth”

Earth is the shrine of encounter with God’s presence. Consciousness is the throne room, that sacred thalamus, where we meet the world in partnership with perception.

Whatever you are doing today, Advent urges us to be still in the silence and to remember and also experience the Presence here and now: this, here, now is the abode of God; a gateway to heaven. Yet we so often do not know (see) it this way. The “this, here, now” contains something to resist not accept. Perhaps a reality or situation that opposes what we long for. So rather than being attuned to the Presence of what is, we experience incongruity between our longings

and reality. In a word, suffering, as our Buddhist friends say.

Let us be the something more interfused and sublime. Enter into the silence, the stillness of your heart-prayer and be the lover of the One who indwells everything by love; the magnetic force hidden beneath the forms and functions of all things, calling us deeper into the Way of light, life and love. Fire, Seed, Stream: waking from Covid culture dreams, becoming Christmas light. ☸

DECEMBER SERMON SERIES

Nov 29	The First Sunday of Advent	Joseph: <i>Dreams of Possibility</i>	Matthew 1
Dec 6	The Second Sunday of Advent	Herod: <i>Dreams of Guidance</i>	Matthew 2
Dec 13	The Third Sunday of Advent	Zechariah: <i>Dreams of Fulfillment</i>	Luke 1
Dec 20	The Fourth Sunday of Advent	Mary: <i>Dreams of Becoming</i>	Luke 1
Dec 24	Christmas Eve	<i>Dreams of Waking Up</i>	John 1
Dec 27	The First Sunday of Christmas	<i>Dreams of the Way</i>	Colossians 3
Dec 31	New Year’s Eve Taizé	<i>Dreams of Wishing</i>	John 1



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BOOK LOOK

ATTENDING TO THE WAY THAT DRAWS US DEEPER IN ADVENT



Ian McGilchrist's *Ways of Attending* is a very brief read on the importance of where and how we give our attention, and how this attention shapes our brain, lifestyle and culture. It is a summary introduction to his larger masterpiece *The Master and His Emmissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World*.



Also, Advent is a meaningful time to take advantage of a daily reader. The bookstore has several contemplative readers to suggest, including *The Advent Remedy* by Peter Traben Haas, which helps us prepare for the Light in deeper and deeper places within us.

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.

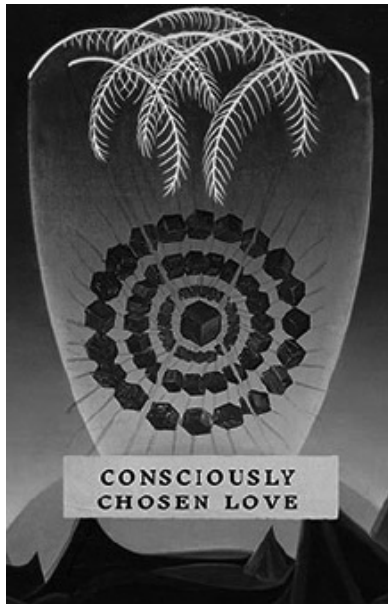
GUIDELINE 35

Obedience is the unconditional acceptance of God as He is and as He manifests Himself in our lives.

God's will is not immediately evident.

Docility inclines us to attend to all the indications of His will.

Discernment sifts the evidence and then decides, in the light of the inward attraction of grace, what God seems to be asking here and now.



I am the way, the truth and the life. John 14:6

ANNUAL AIM: THE WAY DRAWS US DEEPER

CONSCIOUSLY CHOSEN LOVE

DIVINE LOVE BY Valerie Maddox

There is an absolute Divine Love
at the heart of life,
a wholeness of Love
completely centered, irresistible,
and attractive.

This Love is the life force
of unity and deeply vested
in what life becomes.

To wake-up to this Divine Other
at the heart of life is to admit that
reality is relational;
nature is relational
and we are relational
because love is relational and
God is Love.

As the mystic travels
into the inner universe
through the stages
of consciousness,
the separation between
self and God wears away so that
at the highest stage
of luminous darkness,
there is one conscious unified reality,
grounded in love.

Ilia Delio, A Hunger for Wholeness

God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God.

1 John 4:16

This Love that has captured my heart is the most kind, compassionate, merciful, healing, creative, miracle working, amazing, wildly fun, mysterious Presence and friend I have ever been blessed to be with.

I was twelve years old when I said the sinner's prayer and asked Jesus to come into my heart. I was spending the night with a friend and she led me to the Lord. I didn't at all understand or realize that I had just been awakened to receive by faith the most mysterious occurrence of my entire life, nor that I had just chosen love. I was not raised in a Church, yet my mother would send me to church

occasionally with my relatives who lived across a rural field in Idalou, Texas. Looking back, nothing at that time appeared unusual within myself nor was I expecting it to be. I vividly remember that the church had a "feel" to it, like "Shhh.... be quiet, don't make a sound." It was as if you might disturb someone who is sleeping. As I understand now, I was being surrounded by Presence and Divine Love.

I moved from Idalou at thirteen years of age to Lubbock when my mother needed to divorce my father. I hardly recall any interactions with him. I grew up not knowing him and without all the things you hope

a father will be for you and teach you. Without that sense of love my little heart so desperately needed, eventually I started consciously searching. As I have pondered over the years, what was my heart craving and yearning for? Two words have always been at the forefront of my heart and mind: Kindness and Love.

There was something innate within me, a deep hunger to live in kindness and a real knowing that a true love exists. I had to have it! Where was it? Who had it? I still was not choosing church life at this time. I always felt I had a sense or awareness about God in some way. In time, I met a heart of kindness and we eventually got married.

Fourteen years later, I was led to a job with a roomful of Christian women. Divine Love had ingeniously set me up and my life was never the same! One of the women invited me to an evangelistic drama titled “Heaven’s Gates & Hell’s Flames.” At the altar call, I felt I was being drawn, pulled up to the front as if by something moving me forward. What was this calling my heart, beckoning me to come? I just said “Yes,” consciously choosing to be open. I didn’t yet understand it was

Divine Love drawing me. *I drew them with gentle cords, with bands of love.* (Hosea 11:4) A woman shared, “Your face, I’ve never seen someone so serious about something.” Well I had just encountered something that enlivened me and sought out a church the very next day! I landed in one of the largest churches in Lubbock. I was so overtaken by the music, songs and worship that I found myself raising my arms up to heaven with silent tears streaming down my face, giving myself to some “Thing,” some “One.” I wondered why everyone else didn’t have their hands raised in adoration to this mysterious Love I had found. Then my arms began to move in a way I had not experienced before. I didn’t fully understand then, but they were moving with vibrations that were around me and within me, as if I were telling a story. I was dancing in front of my seat, eyes closed, gloriously worshipping with my heart and spirit lifted up to God. For the first time, I heard the Holy Spirit speak to me, *Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.* (Mark 12:30). Yes, that’s it!

I became lovesick for the man

Jesus and hungry for the things of God! I had to discover what was occurring to me. I deeply wished to love God with all of my heart and to know Him. I wanted to give all of my attention to the Scripture from Mark that was alive inside of me! Although I didn’t understand much about Christ at that time, my attention was fully on God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. I was soon led to a Sunday School class that offered baptism. *He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.* (Matthew 3:11) My teacher explained what this was and I said, “Yes!” with childlike faith. They laid hands on me, and prayed for me to receive more of the Holy Spirit. That experience opened up a whole new spiritual dimension – what had taken hold of my center was completely irresistible and I gave my life and heart to this Divine Other.

Next, Divine Love drew me to Kansas City, Missouri to experience a 24/7 Harp and Bowl (music and prayer) ministry with prophetic gifts grounded in one of God’s greatest love stories to His Beloveds – the book of Song of Solomon. I never looked back. I met consciously chosen love again. My heart and spirit had been captivated by this

Divine Other, this extravagant Love. What was all of this? I had to know, so I continued to explore for about four years within that particular ministry and follow the guidance within my heart. As I studied the book of Song of Solomon, I entered into a deeper relationship with Jesus' love for us, which quickly turned into a friendship. I had met the most beautiful, kind, gentle, loving man in the whole world – He truly stole my heart! *I will show my love to those who passionately love me. For they will search and search continually until they find me.* (Proverbs 8:17) I could perceive Jesus in the form of a man in the Spirit that would speak to my spirit and heart. I talked with Him and God just like you would with a friend. That did not mean I heard back from the Spirit immediately or at all, it was simply a friendship and in my childlikeness I called Him, “the Beautiful man or my Beloved.”

I am so grateful for the way the Spirit led me into a strong intimate relationship with God and Jesus because soon I would have to end my many years of marriage. Divine Love had now led me into uncharted waters. Years earlier, Spirit told me to name my dog Myrrhy as one of

the Biblical meanings is to deaden the pain. The unconditional love, joy and companionship with my dog helped me through my divorce. Tragically, the time of my precious Myrrhy's life was coming to an end. I had to put my beloved dog down all by myself. It took at least two years for the beautiful man to heal the trauma in my heart. Yet, in God's wisdom, it was perfect timing as God was leading me by blind faith to move to an unknown land. I would not be able to have a dog in this season of my life.

Within three years, I had divorced, moved four times, lost my dog, had no job and only one friend when I arrived in Austin on a very hot June day in 2013. This is when one night a Presence of love and goodness took me deeper and Jesus came to me as the beautiful man, but this time he had blue eyes. I could feel the color of his eyes as he intently yet gently stared into my being and penetrated my heart with Presence to bring much needed healing to my soul and spirit. Divine Love had showed up once again. I had truly met Kindness and Love in a most profound way. Also during this time, I noticed a shadow of a shepherd's staff on my bedroom

wall one night. I got up to see what could be casting the shadow, but there was nothing. I pondered it and went back to bed. Night after night, the shadow cast itself upon my wall. After many nights, it left. *Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me. Your rod and your staff protect and comfort me.* (Psalm 23:4)

Unbeknownst to me, a big change hit – The Dark Night of the Spirit. I found myself in a scary, uncertain, and unusual season for many long, hard, difficult years. I had just enough teaching on John of the Cross to recognize this was where I was at spiritually and even in the physical, as I was all alone, except for working with the elderly as a caregiver. *I looked for my Beloved, but could not find him.* (SOS 5:6 The Message). Jesus' presence had disappeared. I remember intuitively knowing that I was barely a trunk, as if all of my limbs had been cut off. I was being pruned and emptied out. Although I was growing in deeper ways of blind faith, at times it was so dark, I could not see or hear anything new. I could only hold on to promises spoken within my heart and past experiences, the Scriptures and my faith to

remind me that God had me and will never forsake me. I kicked, screamed, and pleaded with God to let me out of this place, but heaven was quiet. I had to go through this intense, necessary season.

By July 2017, I was no longer drawn to the kind of churches I had been taught in and grounded in. I remember sensing “a wall came down” beside me and I knew it was time to leave my church. I stayed home on Sundays for the next two months praying and asking God, “Where are my people? Where do I fit and belong?” The Holy Spirit guided me to research churches in Austin; about the fourth listing was The Church of Conscious Harmony. The intriguing name drew me in. I went to the website and read their beliefs. I told my brother, “I have to go see what this is!” On Sunday, September 3, 2017, I walked on the path of intention, stepped into the courtyard and walked through those sanctuary doors. In a place of awe, I gazed at the unique wooden architecture and I knew immediately I was home!

Divine Love had just kissed my heart and tremendously blessed me with this amazing gift of like-minded, like-hearted friends who genuinely love God and desire to be transformed into Christ as

Light and blessings for others and all creation. I had no idea what treasure chest was about to be opened for me. I became eager to understand more about Christ and new dimensions of God. That desire is being met and the flame within is being stoked through my Centering Prayer practice, partaking in the Eucharist, The Journey School, The Work of Inner Christianity, Gurdjieff Movements, and various other teachings that are offered at CCH. I am continuing the wish to

grow and be fascinated in loving God with all the parts of my heart. There are not sufficient words to describe the Presence I have encountered at times and that has been imprinted into my being. All I really know for sure is in the deepest recesses of my heart there is a conscious desire to love and be kind, because Love is loving me and showing kindness to me always. This Love is relentless and still calls, “Come away my Beloved, come away with me.” “Yes, my Beloved, I am here.” ☺

SEEDS OF LOVE

Our Community Reading for 2020, *The Monk Within* by Beverly Lanzetta, has a chapter devoted to Divine Love. Related to this month’s theme on Consciously Chosen Love, these excerpts are worth reading slowly with the ear of the heart:

“We love God because love is the first prayer, the first passion; love poetry gave birth to us.”

“When we love purely, without motive, with our whole being, and without desire for love in return, we co-create and participate in the flowing out of love.”

“The miracle of love is that even if we have never received unconditional love from another person, we have the capacity to be the home of love.”

“The prayer of the heart seeks to love how the divine loves – to love without condition – in this way, you become a conduit for the Living Spirit.”

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

LIVING THE WORK OF INNER CHRISTIANITY IN DAILY LIFE

EXTERNAL CONSIDERING BY NATHAN JONES

Work Idea: Two fundamental, yet connected, ideas in the Work of Inner Christianity are External Considering and Internal Considering. Internal Considering is the act of making accounts against another person and always being concerned with yourself. It is both easy and mechanical. External Considering is a conscious movement—in seeing yourself in the other person’s position, imagining you are the other person. Deliberating on what it means to act from their circumstances as if you had the same difficulties, job, family, money issues (be it too much or too little) or frustrations.

Self-Observation, seeing how we truly are, is a critical tool for right External Considering. How demanding and how challenging we can be. When we know this, we are better able to see it in others. It is necessary to catch the different parts you play in different company. It can be a wildly different side of yourself that shows up to church

than to a house party. You must see that the talker, the thief, the gossip, the impatient one, the lazy one are also inside of you. By seeing this, you neutralize your negative thoughts toward the other when one of these is manifested in them. Further, you understand them. The evolution of External Considering leads toward the second part of a great teaching: Love your neighbor. It is not an empathetic love, nor an intellectual love rather it is a fundamental love.

Work Source: “Externally Considering demands listening internally and finding the same thing in yourself – that is, if you have sufficient self-observation and self-knowledge. You cannot understand others if you do not know the other person in yourself.” *Commentaries*, p. 1025

Application: When I don’t slow things down, they tend to speed up. There is a franticness that accompanies this feeling. It is hard to catch. Long ago, I never

even knew it was there. When interacting with others during these moments, I fill the silence with words, e.g. recycled stories that allow me to engage for a set amount of time. Not too short as that would be rude, but never too long. My mind, identified with events of different things it feels I must do, is rehearsing the next two or three steps in my day. Sometimes I position my body toward the exit thinking they will unconsciously pick up on the subtle cue. I frequently do not remember a single thing that’s said in these interactions. When I slow things down (which looks like employing the tools offered by the Work) I interact and listen. I can be in this moment completely and consciously. If the person with whom I am speaking is rushing about, I understand. I have seen that in myself. I understand so fundamentally that occasionally I can even catch them and slow them down too. This movement of

A YEAR IN REVIEW: THE WAY DRAWS US DEEPER

External Considering, this way of looking in the mirror so to speak, is a unifier and a neutralizer. This week, can you forgive the talker or the gossip for they know not what they do? Perhaps, they may forgive you too.

Further Resource: External Considering leads to another teaching: *Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.* Remember this is not a call to transaction, a “this for that” teaching. After all that you have seen in yourself in all of your less than pretty and perfect ways, when the sun is setting, don’t you wish for understanding from your people? A space to say that flash of anger was not me. The thoughtlessness is not me. Don’t you occasionally want to just whisper, “I am doing everything I can...” and hope it is heard? You are not alone. Listen for the whispers of others. Give them that space, hand, forgiveness, understanding, ear to be heard. In this way, give to them what you wish is given to you. Offer them what you wish to be offered to you. Do unto them as you would have them do unto you. Using Work ideas, we stitch together these fragments of Jesus’ teachings to bring to the surface that He taught a way of life, a way to live. He spoke of practical, realizable ideas and actions that are available to us; that move us toward a life of peace in God, an interconnected conscious life. His teachings never demand, nor want obedience. They simply offer a Way. ☸

In 2020, all were invited to move ever deeper together as a community of intention, practice and devotion in the annual aim: “The Way Draws Us Deeper.”

“Christ never pointed out a path, taught any how-to’s, or left any rules. He didn’t even tell us to follow him ... Instead he said, “I am the Way.” But how can a person be a “way?” What does this mean and how does it work? What it means is that: the “way” it went for him is the “way” it goes for us. Thus, it means we have to recapitulate or re-live his own human spiritual journey, to live and experience life with God just as he did. This is a “way” of transformation into Christ. So just as Christ gave his whole life over to the Transcendent – whom he called his “Father” – so too do we. We are to live in oneness with God-Immanent, what he called his “Spirit.” Like Christ, we are to love God with our whole heart, mind, soul and body, a path of love requiring a total giving of self, even unto death. Anything held back is self; anything given, is God’s. Thus, as we decrease, God increases – the more empty of self, the more room for God. Our journey, then, is one of ever-changing proportions: less self, more God, until in the end there is no self at all; it has been replaced by Christ and all he is.”

Bernadette Roberts, “The Spiritual Journey Recapitulates the History of Religion,”
The Christian Contemplative Journey, Essays on The Path

January	One Work
February	Life as Teacher
March	Where We’re Most Vulnerable
April	Know Thyself
May	God Manifesting in Us
June	Real Aim
July	Into the Fullness of Omega
August	Something Higher Than Ourselves
September	Inter-Being
October	Metamorphosis
November	A Path Toward Center
December	Consciously Chosen Love

I am the way, the truth and the life. John 14:6

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

CHRISTMAS SEASON EVENTS

The Glorious Impossible Christmas Program

Dec 17 7:00 pm (online)

Enjoy the enduring tradition of The Glorious Impossible as a montage of past shows, narrated by sacred music.

Taize

Dec 20 7:00 pm (online)

The teens of CCH will be offering a live, online Taize Service for the community over Zoom. Join us for an hour of prayer and contemplation through chanting and sacred readings.

Christmas Eve Service

Dec 24 6:00 pm (online)

Celebrate this Gift of Love in our lives in this sacred service.

New Year's Eve Taizé Service

Dec 31 7:00 pm (online)

Online New Year's Eve Centering Prayer Service

Dec 31 11:30 pm-12:05 am (online)

Office closed and no weekday services or classes Dec 25-31.

Please go to www.consciousharmony.org to find more information and accessible links for these events.

THE JOURNEY SCHOOL

The Church of Conscious Harmony offers a school of study and devotional practice aimed at spiritual transformation. If you wish to study and practice with Mary Anne Best as your abbess and you wish to work with other faculty and students in a community of devotional practice, you are invited to learn more about The Journey School on the Church website. Registration for The Journey School program offerings re-opens in January.

DECEMBER CALENDAR

For more details, visit
consciousharmony.org or call 512-347-9673

SPECIAL EVENTS

Online Advent Retreat

Dec 4-7

Register through the website. \$60

One-Day Online Centering Prayer Retreat

Dec 12 9am-3pm

Register online

MONTHLY

Caritas Donations

To continue our long standing partnership, please consider making a donation of food or money directly to caritasofaustin.org

*Godly Play Parable Cartoon Show

Dec 12 11am

WEEKLY

Sundays

*Centering Prayer & Lectio Divina 8-9am

*Intercessory Prayer 9am

*Worship Service 10-11:30am

**Youth Program 1pm

Wednesdays

*Contemplative Worship Service 6:30-7:15pm

*Minister's Book Study 7:30-8:25pm

Thursdays

*The Journey School Class 7-8:30pm

Fridays

*Mystics of the Christian Tradition 12:30-1:15pm

Saturdays

*Scriptorium 11am

*Compline 9-9:15pm

DAILY

*Centering Prayer Service 7-7:35am

*Please join these services, groups, and classes via online video conferencing. Contact the website for accessible links and more information.

**All our youth are invited to participate. Contact youthdir@consciousharmony.org for details.

Recordings of services are available online at www.consciousharmony.org



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*In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.*

*He was in the beginning with God, and
without Him nothing came to be.*

*What came to be
through Him was life,
and this life was the light
of the human race;
the light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness has not
overcome it.*

*... And the Word became flesh
and made His dwelling among us,
and we saw His glory,
the glory as of the Father's only Son, full
of grace and truth.*

John 1:1-14

CHRISTMAS



“To everyone who received Him,
He gave power
to become the children of God,”

that is, to know
their Divine Source ...

Now is the time
when the whole
of the divine mercy
is available.

Now is the time
to risk further growth ...
The divine action may turn
our lives upside down ...
Readiness for any eventuality
is the attitude
of one who has entered
into the freedom of the Gospel ...
Our inmost being opens ...

Thomas Keating,
The Mystery of Christ