



The CENTER
for Christian Spirituality



Overlooked

8:45 a.m. + December 31, 2023 + The First Sunday of Christmas

When the song of the angels is stilled, then the true work of Christmas begins.
Howard Thurman, 20th century

Coming into the Loving Presence

“O Come, All Ye Faithful”

O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant, O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem;

Come and behold him born the King of angels;

O come, let us adore him; O come, let us adore him;

O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord!

True God of true God, Light from Light Eternal, Mary, the Virgin, has borne the Adored.

Son of the Father, begotten, not created;

O come, let us adore him; O come, let us adore him;

O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord!

Christ, for us sinners, poor and in the manger, We would embrace Thee, with love and awe;

Who would not love Thee, loving us so dearly?

O come, let us adore him; O come, let us adore him;

O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord!

The Promised One Comes

from *Hebrews 1*

In many times and many ways in the past, God has spoke to the ancestors in the prophets. In these last days, God spoke to us in a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom also he made the worlds. Who being the Brightness of the Glory and Image of His Presence, bearing all things by the Word of His Power - through Himself having made a cleansing of our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Greatness in the Highest, having become so much more powerful than the Messengers, as he inherited a more excellent Name than they. For to which of the Messengers did he ever say, "You are My Son. Today, I have begotten You." And again, "I will be to him as a Father and he will be to me as a Son"? And when again he brings in the Firstborn into the world, He says, "Let all the Messengers of God prostrate before Him." And to the Messengers, indeed, He says, "Who makes His Messengers spirits and His ministers a flame of fire"? But to the Son He says, "Your throne, O God, is to the Age of Ages, a scepter of uprightness is the scepter of Your Kingdom. You have loved righteousness and despised lawlessness. Therefore, because of this, God has anointed You - God, Your God - with the oil of gladness above Your companions."

The Sign of Divine Love

"Love Came Down at Christmas"

*Love came down at Christmas, Love all lovely, Love divine;
Love was born at Christmas; stars and angels gave the sign.*

*Worship we the God-head, Love incarnate, Love divine;
Worship we our Jesus, but where-with for sacred sign?*

*Love shall be our token, love be yours and love be mine;
Love to God and neighbor, love for plea and gift and sign.*

We Quietly Pray the Psalm (use these words or your own words)

inspired by from *Psalm 143:5-10*

God, I call to mind significant times I have experienced your presence this past year

I give thanks for the beauty I have seen in the created world

I consider what your hands have done in the lives of people I know

I open my hands and lift them wide to you, open and expectant.

Fill my thirsty life with your love, with your compassion, with your mercy, with your justice.

God, don't leave me to my own wiles and manipulations.

*I see so little of what is really **real** that if left to myself I'd destroy my own life and those around me.*

Speak into me your never-ending love at the dawn of this new day.

Show me the first steps of the path into my future,

the steps that will draw me deeper into your heart,

the steps that will draw out of me my most authentic self,

the steps that will lead me to lay down my life for those you love and gave your own life for.

Deliver me from my fear of taking the next risky step. Heal my need to control the future.

The only security I need is your presence.

For my heart's desire is to walk with you into the days ahead. Walk with me and show me how to do that.

Give me your Spirit as a Guide along this path you have invited me to walk.

And when the time comes, give me the grace to soar.

Silence for Reflecting on What Has Been

- ◆ Sit quietly and reflect on your experience of 2023. Ask God to give you clearness of vision to see honestly.
- ◆ As you look back, for what would you give thanks to God?
- ◆ What from this past year needs to be healed in you? In those around you? In the world?

Affirming the Inner Light

"Lord Jesus Christ"

Lord Jesus Christ, your light shines within us. Let not my doubts nor my darkness speak to me.

Lord Jesus Christ, your light shines within us. Let my heart always welcome your love.

Simeon came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and blessed God, saying:

“Lord, now you are releasing your servant according to your word, in peace.

For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples: a Light for revelation to the nations, and the Glory of your people Israel.”

Preparing the Temple of Our Hearts for Communion

“O Come, All Ye Faithful”

O come, let us adore him; O come, let us adore him;

O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord!

Christmas Holy Communion

adapted from Contemplative Invocations

O Holy One, O Light beyond all worlds, Eternal Fire at rest and One within your dazzling darkness. We come as lamps of clay who need Your oil, Your Light, Your burning Fire within. O move to purify and cleanse the soul, to light the wick of mind and heart and so create a space within us, a womb of birth, a place to bring to life Your Eternal Word.

Expectant and in hope we await Your living Presence to move inside our souls. This breath, this rushing wind, this seed of life, to bless these gifts and everything that is offered here, presented here to You.

We are the waiting place of rest, where You are born in us in time, and we in You eternally. This mystery of Christmas is where God and humankind unite as One - one mind, one heart, one body, one breath. One bread, one wine, one thirst, one drink of satisfaction from the cup of life.

Expectant and in hope we grow in You and You in us. We know this secret from within the soul, by listening and by living. By longing for new births along the Way, we sense the Kingdom of God within us, striving to emerge from the womb of our heart.

So now we wait in pain, in joy, in hope, despair, in desperation and in need. In this good darkness we dare to risk Your pregnancy of Light, for You are ever with us from within.

O God, Emmanuel, come near at last to birth us into Light. We fling wide the portals of our hearts. We are Your Temple, Your People, Your Priests to You and to the world. Fill us now with Your Presence and reveal Your Grace and Love in and through us.

Now we take and eat, we lift and drink, in deep remembrance of You whose Way becomes for us the secret that now stirs within, and comes to birth within us as sacrament and Spirit-blessed, new food, new light, a taste that ignites in all the longing to return to You, our True Source and Home.

Silence for Reflecting on What Will Be

- ◆ With what kind of inner stance would you like to move into 2024? What do you desire for your inner life?
- ◆ As best you can discern, what is yours to do in 2024? What is emerging from you?
- ◆ You may want to pray a quiet prayer of opening yourself to God . . . or make some simple gesture that symbolizes your intention with God for the days ahead.

Grace for Unfolding from the Center

from Psalms for Praying, Psalm 132

Enter into the Silence, into the Heart of Truth;

For herein lies the Great Mystery where life is ever unfolding.

Herein the Divine Plan is made known, the Plan all are invited to serve.

Listen for the music of the Holy Word in the resounding Silence of the universe.

May balance and harmony be your aim as you are drawn into the Heart of Love.

Those who follow the way of Love with calm and faith-filled intent,

Know that all is working toward healing and wholeness.

And may the healing power of love lift you

from the limitations of fear and ignorance into the arms of freedom.

May the peace of the Spirit bless you, and lead you on life's journey.

Singing with Simeon

“Nunc Dimittis”

*Let Your servant now go in peace, O Lord,
Now go in peace according to your word.*

Receiving a Good Word



Our Staff

Haley Brown – Ministry Assistant & Director of gastrochurch
Peter Johns – Associate Director

Rev. Rachel Sciretti – Associate Pastor
Rev. Dr. Michael Sciretti, Jr. – Pastor of The Center

*Thank you for worshipping with us today. Please register your attendance.
If you are worshipping online, please text the word center to (844) 474-0707
If you are worshipping in person, please text the word chapel to (844) 474-0707*

For information about The Center for Christian Spirituality and upcoming events, visit: www.TheCenterFCS.org.

Please register your presence in the notebooks in the foyer.

Centering Prayer

Today | The Chapel | after Contemplative Worship

Receiving the Grace of Epiphany: Our January Guided Silent Retreat

Saturday, January 6 | The Anchor House | 9:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

In our January Guided Silent Retreat, after a time of Centering, Michael will give a short presentation on the ancient as well as the inner meaning of the treasures of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Much of the symbolism has been lost but, once seen, will deepen your understanding and experience of this day and how it helps us to both receive and embody grace. As a part of this day, participants will experience extended communal silence, anointing with holy oil, and contemplative communion. For more information and to register, go to: <https://thecenterfcs.org/retreats>

Rafa - An Evening of Contemplative Prayer, Lament, and Healing

Sunday, January 7 | The Chapel | 6:00 p.m.

This is a new Contemplative Worship service that will be offered monthly on the first Sunday of the month that we are calling Rafa. Interestingly, rafa is the sound of two different Hebrew verbs. One means “to heal” or “to make whole,” and the other Hebrew verb means “to relax, sink down, be quiet, let go, be still,” such as in Psalm 46:10: “Be still, let go, and know that I am God.” If you are seeking rafa – wholeness and quietness, healing and stillness – for yourself, for others, and for our world, join us on January 7 for a gathering of Contemplative Prayer, Lament and Healing. Through simple, meditative songs, short reflective readings, extended silence, communal intention, and contemplative communion, we’ll quiet ourselves in body, mind and heart that we might be more open and receptive to the Beloved’s life-giving, healing presence for us and the world. For those who seek it, we will also offer a time of healing prayer with anointing. For more information, go to: <https://thecenterfcs.org/rafa>

Giving to The Center

All of us are part of a never-ending process of giving and receiving. Life is not possible without this organic flow. What we co-create together here at The Center for Christian Spirituality is not possible without our conscious participation in this holy activity of freely receiving and freely giving. In this light, we invite you to financially give to The Center in response to what you have received today or throughout our contemplative offerings. Using the QR code will take you to a page where you can make a one-time offering or recurring gift. Thank you for your contribution and investment.

