

# **You Are the Light...a Christmas Candle Lighting Experience**

**Call to Awareness – 3 Bells**

**Opening Prayer** – Chris will set the intention to create a space for Communion

***Ave Maria*** –performed by Dalton Fitzgerald and Chris Johnson

**Introduction –Rev. Diana**

Good morning. If you are new with us today, my name is Rev. Diana Johnson, Pastor and Spiritual Director of Mystic Heart Spiritual Center, and I want to welcome you to our Christmas Candle Lighting and Taizé Experience.

This morning will be a little bit different than our normal Taizé, as we are celebrating the Winter Solstice and the Christmas holiday with some special music, readings, and a candle lighting ceremony. Our service will be a few minutes longer than normal, but I trust you will find it enjoyable.

Today is the 22<sup>nd</sup> day, and the fourth Sunday of Advent. We have been observing this blessed season of waiting, with its gifts of patience, surrender, presence, compassion, gratitude, humility, and faith. We have given time and contemplation to the Spiritual Qualities of Faith, Peace, Joy, and today we bring our focus to Love, as this is the Quality that the Master Teacher Jesus made central to his teaching.

The Advent begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas and ends on Christmas Eve. It is a time of patiently waiting for what is yet to come...of waiting for the physical light to return...and for what is to be born in us, in our lives, and in our world. I invite you now to get comfortable and settle into the Peace, the Joy, and the Love that are always available, deep within where Spirit's voice is beckoning...where no sound, no thought can disturb...relaxing into this experience, allowing yourself to be filled to overflowing with Presence...every cell, every atom infused with Divine Light...surrounded and held by the Loving Arms of the One.

Letting go of all that you may be carrying...tension melting from your body, falling away...so that your body, mind, and soul are completely at ease...and becoming absolutely still as you allow yourself to be carried by the meditative tone of Taizé...allowing the words and music to wash over you...

Now let's take a couple of slow, deep breaths, inhaling through the nose and exhaling through the mouth, allowing the muscles in your face to relax...settling into an open-hearted state, where Love is the dominant tone, where there is only here and now...feeling the presence of sacred community...feeling the Presence of Spirit.

As we consciously step into the flow of meditation, we acknowledge our connection with all Life. Sense with me now a global web of consciousness, each of us radiant point of Light, each ray melding into the next...all connected across the planet...all beings, who in this

moment, are sitting in meditation or prayer, attending their own sacred services, seeking a direct experience of the Divine...all of us, acknowledging the Presence of Spirit... connected by our common purpose...feeling the collective intention that brought us here...feeling a deep communion with that which is bigger than we are...feeling the Divine Impulse to grow and evolve that's awakening within us...

The celebration of Light, beginning with the Solstice and culminating in the 12 Days of Christmas, offers us an opportunity...it invites us into a time of expectancy, a time of reflection, contemplation, and revelation.

Winter Solstice has been celebrated since the dawn of agriculture among people who depended upon the return of the sun. And closely linked to the Solstice is the celebration of Christmas. We are not taught that these two have common roots. Only that pagans celebrated Solstice, and that Jesus was born to Mary and Joseph in a stable in Bethlehem. But we should know better...everything is connected.

The early Catholic church was in competition with the Pagan holiday of the Romans. What started as a holy mass in Europe, probably at the time assigned to the birth of Jesus (probably April) was moved back to the Winter Solstice by church fathers to serve its own needs. Just a few details to paint the picture...

The church was in competition with the Zoroastrians, which was a favorite of Roman soldiers, and which was devoted to worship of the sun, which comes down to us today in the Christian Sabbath day – Sunday.

During the Dark Ages, northern Europe's pagans were converted en masse to Christianity and the church found it difficult to stamp out pagan practices. And so, many Pagan practices were absorbed into the new Christmas festival.

The Germanic tribes worshipped the *evergreen* ~ a symbol of *eternal life* ~ and the Druids revered the *mistletoe*, which symbolized *fertility*.

The Yule Log had its roots in another Druid custom: rolling a flaming wheel down a hill on Winter Solstice night, to show the sun how to come back.

And it is believed that Santa Claus descends from an actual man, Saint Nicholas, who was born in what is today called Turkey in 3-4 CE. He is thought to have been a Bishop at a time and place where Pagan and Christian practices were still intermingling. Everything is connected...

So, all over the world, human beings who had little to no contact with one another were all celebrating the sun...because their very lives depended on it.

They were celebrating the change from darkness to light, ignorance to wisdom and enlightenment...and they were waiting.

The Pagans waited for the return of the sun...Siddhartha Gautama waited for enlightenment as he sat under the Bodhi Tree for 49 days...

The Hebrew people waited for eight days to rededicate their temple until more oil arrived to light their lamps...

And Mary and Joseph waited for the birth of their precious child, the one who was to fulfill Hebrew prophecy.

And so, during the Season of Advent, we honor the ancient practice of waiting.

I invite you now into the sounds of these ancient times...into the honoring of the Ancient Mother...listen...

### **Musical Meditation – *Ancient Mother* by Robert Gass**

#### **Rev. Diana – Roots of Christmas**

Here we further connect these two celebrations...the meaning of Light in the Pagan tradition is the return of the sun, of the physical light. But in the esoteric teachings, it also stood for the evolution from ignorance to illumination, or enlightenment.

As a parallel, the story is told that on the night Jesus was born, there was a bright star in the sky, guiding the shepherds and the wise men to the stable.

The Christian lore would come to associate this Light with the spiritual evolution and wisdom that the Master Teacher, Yeshua, would bring to the world.

The Gospel According to Luke was written in roughly 85 C.E. By tracing our story from the earliest known times, through the story of the Hanukkah Miracle in 167 BC, and onto the Christmas Story, we can see the progression and evolution of the Jewish faith, and of the human condition. Here is the story from the second book of Luke, the one we are most familiar with:

And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed. And all went to be taxed, everyone into his own city.

And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.

And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.

And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, "Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.

And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child.

And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart.

And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

**Music – *Mary, Did You Know?* performed by in2it**

**10:29 Making New Meaning - Diana**

And so we hear this Christmas story in a new way, a way that is relevant to our lives as we move into 2021...a way that helps us to raise ourselves from challenging conditions as they arise...that reminds us who we are here to be. When we listen through the lens of metaphor, we find that each of the characters represents an aspect of our humanity.

American Philosopher and Spiritual Evolutionary Charles Eisenstein would call the Christian Gospels a *New and Ancient Story*...that is, they tell the story of the origins of Christianity, an evolutionary movement in religious history. The change in mindset that Jesus required to understand his teachings could be called a first century paradigm shift. It required that his listeners change the way they thought about God. In addition to being ancient stories, we find that Jesus's way of living...the example he set...promotes the continual evolution of humanity. Love leads the way. Love...the eternal self-givingness of Spirit, in, through and as

Its creation. In Its image and likeness, we are to give of ourselves, and to change and evolve as we move through our lives.

As we prepare for our Candle Lighting Ceremony, I would like to offer some questions for you to ponder as you move into the remaining days of the Christmas Season...questions that may speak to your heart. Allow your eyes to gently close if you feel comfortable doing so...relax into the deep listening:

What if Mary represents a state of purity in mind and heart? And a state of deep willingness and surrender?

Might we experience the birth of Christ Consciousness...deep Spiritual Wisdom and Knowing, Power, Strength, Courage, and Love...if we kept our minds and hearts pure, and were willing to fully surrender our need for control?

What if we, like the wise men and shepherds, kept our focused attention on the Light, and only the Light...our thoughts, words, and actions reflecting the Divinity that we are...in the image and likeness of the One...moving ever toward all that is Good?

What if we, like Mary and Joseph, made our journey through life with patience, presence, determination, humility, gratitude, and faith?

What if we surrendered our human wants to the Higher Will of God, trusting that our deepest heart's desires are in fact God seeking to express Itself through us?

What if the shepherds quietly following the guidance of the stars are there to remind us to be humble...to look for Divine Guidance and to follow it always?

What if the birth in a stable was meant to remind us that our greatest inspiration can come from the most commonplace of experiences...that God is absolutely everywhere...and that the material aspects of life do not determine who we are to be in the world?

What if the shepherds and the wise men represent the heart and the mind, the feeling and the intellect? What if they are there to remind us that the intellect and the heart, in perfect balance, work together in our journey to know God? One looks to find God in the world...the other looks to find God within.

What if God, in order to lead us to our Divinity, came as a newborn child because...nothing demands more time, attention, and focus than a newborn infant. Is that not true?

What if this story is telling us that in order to discover and live *from* and *as* our God-Self, we must give God our constant and unwavering love and devotion?

There is only One eternal Light, One Consciousness, One Intelligence, One Power... permeating and infusing all that is. I call It God...God Within, God Without...It is the All-In-All...It is the Divine Spark that brings Life into being. I Am that Light; You Are that Light. All that exists, at its very core, is Light. And so I know that the Light of the Christ is inherent in

all beings, in all of Creation, no matter the appearance...and is bound by Divine Impulse to reveal Itself...

I Am the perfect stillness...the Peace of Spirit...and I Joyfully acknowledge the Light of the Christ, in full Faith that it is present within me...in full Faith that it is born in form and experience here and now.

For this I give deep and profound thanks, honoring and celebrating the Light, releasing, accepting, embodying, and radiating the Light of the One...And so it is. And so it shall ever be. Amen!

Welcome to the second annual Mystic Heart Christmas Candlelighting Ceremony. I am overjoyed to share this very special time with you virtually...thank you for being here for our beautiful and prayerful celebration of the birth of the Christ Consciousness here on earth. We bring our prayers to life as we share and witness them together. In this way they, and we, are empowered.

### ***Video - You Are the Light: Christmas Candle Lighting Ceremony***

#### **Candle Lighting for Our Beloved Community**

We are going to continue our ceremony by lighting candles here in our Gathering Place to celebrate the Light within each of our members and friends. We know that each of us is a unique expression of Light in the world. Please accept this Candle Lighting as our prayer of acknowledgment and thanksgiving for who you are, and what you bring to the world.

The five candles in the center represent our Core Council. And the Four you see on your left represent the Practitioner and Ministerial Body. Together we make up the Wisdom Council...the core of strength and wisdom that guides our Beloved Community. Thank you each for your Service. Please light a candle at home when you hear your name, and know that we are connected.

Rev. Diana Johnson, Pastor – and Prayer Practitioners Lucinda Alton, Sherri Dotter, and Chris Johnson

Council Members – Lucinda Alton – Michael Bordeaux - Kris Fortier – Chris Johnson – Ellie Thompson

Each votive candle represents a member or friend of our Beloved Community. I invite you to listen in prayerful gratitude for your Spiritual Family. Again, please light a candle at home when you hear your name, and know that we are connected.

Cathy Aiken – David Aiken – Bob Alton (Building and Maintenance Supervisor) – Kate Bates (and her beautiful family) – Barbara Ciukowski – Phyllis Glass – Sylvia Hamblin – Heidi Hillesheim – Bernadette Kolodziejczyk – Steven Kolodziejczyk – Valerie Lauerma – James Massengale– Laurie Massengale (and Allie and Caleb) – Chris Netto – Dave Netto – Gloria

Newton – Marc Petty – Candace Pourier (and Avery and Bodhi) – Kelly Rhodes – Mechelle Rhodes - Christy Rojas (and Alex, Luca, and Matisse) – Barbee Seiser – Brad Seiser – Russell Silliman – John Simmons – Patty Stevens – Randy Thompson – Doreen Timmons – Duane Timmons – Susan Webb – Barbara Wedan – Jane Wheeler – Cheryl Will – Louisa Wistos – Jeen Wopat – and Michael Wopat

Again, we thank you all...we acknowledge the Light that you are in the world. We know you to be people in service to a vision of a *more beautiful world that our hearts know is possible*. And we are thankful that you have joined our Spiritual Family.

## **Diana**

As we prepare for our offering this morning, I would like to invite you to consider offering a gift of financial support, either on our website using PayPal, or by mailing a check to the Gathering Place. This will ensure a prosperous start to the New Year and assist us in growing this powerful Work. We know that God is the Source of all Good, and that It flows through your generous hearts and hands.

As we prepare for the offering, please allow the words of our Blessing to infuse your heart. As part of the Giving Cycle that is always flowing through our lives, give from a consciousness of absolute abundance, from your heart to the heart of our Beloved Community.

## **Rev. Diana – Blessing for the Offering**

**As I awaken to the God within me and all around me, I see Abundance everywhere I look. I consciously step into that flow of Abundance by this act of giving. I bless this gift, sending it forth to heal and prosper. It is evidence of my deep faith. It does good work in the world and blesses all of Creation. I give from a consciousness of Abundance! And so it is! Amen!**

**Offertory – *Ancient Drum*, by in2it**

**Rev. Diana – Closing Gratitude**

**Sherri Dotter – Benediction**

***Silent Night/ May Peace Prevail*, by in2it**