

Nourished by the Darkness

Rev. Diana Johnson, with Prayer Practitioner Sherri Dotter RScP, and music by **in2it**.



A Beloved Community
Practicing the Possible Through Prayer

Call to Awareness – 3 Bells


Opening Prayer – Sherri

Introduction – Rev. Diana

Good morning. My name is Rev. Diana Johnson, Pastor and Spiritual Director of Mystic Heart Spiritual Center, and I welcome you Home to our Beloved Community... and home to your own Mystic Heart. It is so good to have you here with us this morning for our Sunday Celebration. Would you please stand if you're able and join me in celebrating the Spirit of Life through musical prayer...you'll find the words on the screen.

Opening Songs – **in2it**

 **Welcome to the Mystic Heart**, written by Rev. Diana & Chris Johnson

 **One Big Family**, written by Gary Lynn Floyd & Robin Hackett (Take a moment to welcome and honor one another.)

 **In the Stillness**, written by Karen Drucker

Rev. Diana

Music is a powerful form of prayer. By singing together we have shifted the energy in the room...in each one of us...and to a small degree, on the planet. Let's take a moment to experience and celebrate our Oneness with the global Community... knowing that each of us is of the Essence and Substance of God...there is nothing else...and that each life is unfolding by Divine Expression.

Trappist Monk, Thomas Merton, spoke to our honoring one another in this way:

And it was as if I suddenly saw the secret beauty of their hearts where neither sin nor knowledge could reach, the core of reality, the person that each one is in the eyes of the Divine. If only they could see themselves as they really are, if only we could see each other all the time, there would be no more need for war, for hatred, for greed, for cruelty. I suppose the big problem would be that we would fall down and worship each other.

We begin this Celebration with Global Connection, celebrating our Oneness, our Interconnectedness, our Divinity. Closing the eyes for just a moment, beginning right where we are...I invite you to hold this Vision as your own.

In this Sacred Moment, I embrace the Whole of my being, beyond any ideas or opinions I may have of myself, making room for myself to be exactly as I Am...making room for this moment to be exactly as it is...no labels, no judgment, just a human being sitting here, somewhere along the trajectory of my life.

Embracing all that I Am, secure in the Light that I Am, I extend my Embrace to my human family...to all people everywhere...past, present, and future...honoring their being...radiating caring, wishing them well, acknowledging our Divine Connection...and then reaching out to the more-than-human Life...to Nature and Its beauty...to the creatures that share this beautiful planet with me, sensing the Light in each one...expanding my Embrace to include the plants and rocks, the sand, the soil, and the water. I allow my Embrace to extend, my Light to shine, into the heavens, and I realize that the clouds, the stars, and the galaxies are all radiating the same Divine Light...all part of One Eternal and Omnipresent Intelligence...inextricably connected.

Feeling our Connection, we share a heartfelt intention for our time together. We acknowledge our responsibility to Life Itself, in every form that it takes; and we commit to getting comfortable with darkness, to looking for the Nourishment and Blessings there.

In setting this prayerful intention, our Work here is empowered. We are investing our Life Energy in Peace, Love, Compassion, Abundance, and Freedom. In the silence, we feel the Power of our collective consciousness...and Wholeness is being revealed.

As we commit to living more mindfully, *Practicing the Possible through Prayer* and Intentional Living, we leave a positive imprint on the world. Together, we create a ripple of Kindness and Caring that leads to great transformation. (Pause) Go ahead and bring your awareness back into the space if you'd like...and begin to think about what it means to be *Nourished by the Darkness*. We'll circle back around to that in a minute.

Rev. Diana

Today is the eighth day, and the second Sunday of Advent. As we said last week, *The Season of Advent* begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas and ends on Christmas Eve. It offers us an opportunity...it invites us into a time of peaceful waiting, a time of reflection, contemplation, asking, and deep listening. Each week of Advent calls our attention to a different quality of Spirit. Last week, we lit a candle of Faith, bringing awareness to how and where we direct out Faith. This week we Light a candle of Peace. As Sherri lights this candle, we take responsibility for holding Peace within...Peace cannot come into our world until each of us is living peacefully.

Spiritual Teacher Sathya Sai Baba says it beautifully: “If there is righteousness in the heart, **there will be beauty in the character**. If there is beauty in the character, there will be harmony in the home. If there is harmony in the home, there will be order in the nations. When there is order in the nations, there will peace in the world.”

You can also see that our Menorah is lit this morning in celebration of Hanukkah. Tomorrow at sundown will mark the eighth and final day of Hanukkah. Jewish people all over the world are in the celebration of the Festival of Lights. I will have more to share about this holiday at our Candle Lighting Celebration the evening of December 22nd. (Make your reservations now. Seats are already filling up.) The main thing to know for now is that this holy day signifies *enoughness*; it reminds us that God’s Abundance is ever-present. There is enough for everyone to have all needs met. And this miracle of light speaks to us on a personal level. It asks us to shine light on the dark places in ourselves and in our world, even when we think we cannot. It asks us to continue to shine when there seems not enough. The Hanukkah Miracle speaks of a faith that is steadfast in times of apparent lack or difficulty; and to the blessing that comes from waiting patiently for whatever is happening to unfold in God’s perfect timing.

We celebrate Hanukkah because it speaks to us of God’s infinite abundance and reminds us that all of life is a miracle, and that what seems impossible is possible when we have Faith.

In every culture, there seems to be tradition and ritual around the Celebration of Light. Sometimes in New Thought traditions, we take it a little too far...there is a tendency to deny the darkness. In learning to break negative thought patterns and emotional habits, we are told to give attention to what we want to experience more of... that by turning from the condition, we allow it to shrink back into nothingness.

And it is true that positive thinking and uplifted emotional habits are healthy, and that the Law of Attention is always at work, giving us more of what we are interested in, or attending to. But there is a fine line between redirecting our thoughts and not wallowing in negativity and full-out denial of things that need to be dealt with. There is a clear difference between healthy, affirmative thinking and Spiritual By-Pass. Life is a balance between darkness and Light. Both are present, both are required for Life to continue. The sun must rise and shine to give energy to plant and animal life; and it must set to allow time for that energy to be converted to food. The energy present in Light is transformed into nourishment for the physical form.

We are Spiritual Beings having very human experiences. Like other animals, we required this cycle of Light and darkness for our physical existence. But we also experience mental and emotional Light and darkness. Pain, illness, depression, and other unpleasant experiences have their purpose in our lives. They are here to help

guide us. They are pointers to situations and conditions that need our attention. They are effects that have grown from deeper causes.

If I choose to ignore an effect, I am missing the opportunity to reveal and heal the cause. It can get a little tricky, because an effect *may* actually disappear from neglect, if the cause is not addressed, but other effects...potentially even more painful ones...will eventually surface. Darkness is a friend. We need to learn to get comfortable in the darkness, to trust its gifts, to receive its nourishment.

We are a comfort-focused culture. If it makes us uncomfortable, we tend to want to fix it, to immediately make ourselves more comfortable. Not all human societies are as comfort-centered as we are. It serves us well to learn to be with discomfort, to be with darkness, without reaction, without needing to label or judge it, without any response at all. It serves us well to be able to notice discomfort without comment.

Has it ever occurred to you that all life began, and continues to grow out of darkness? At some point in time, it is believed that our sun and the planets of our solar system were born, in darkness.

In order for a seed to germinate, it must be placed in the soil, in darkness. The procreation of humans and other animals happens inside the body of a host, in darkness. Life is literally nourished by the darkness.

As humans, thanks to our amazingly complex brain structures, we live lives of duality. This is the nature of our perception in the physical realm. Hot and cold, up and down, black and white, yin and yang. We compare and analyze, drawing lines of distinction and separation everywhere we look. But is it true that we are actually dealing with opposites? Or is that simply our belief, our perception? Couldn't I just as easily decide to look at hot and cold as two ends of one continuum, two aspects of what we call temperature? And isn't there a range between the two? Where does hot end and cold begin? Isn't that different for each of us?

And so what about darkness and light? Don't we have different perceptions about these, as well? One might look at the breakup of a relationship as the darkest, most distressing time of one's life, or as an opportunity for new beginnings. I might see getting fired as a frightening experience filled with uncertainty and limitation or as being set free from a job that was sucking my soul dry. The point is, we are always at choice. We have the capacity to notice and change our perceptions. I may not get to choose whether or not my partner leaves, or whether or not I lose a loved one, a house, or a job. But I have absolute choice over how I will respond, how I will experience the darkness.

John 1:5 of the Christian Bible says that "the light shines on inside of the darkness, and the darkness will not overcome it." Within every circumstance, Infinite Intelligence

is at work. The Loving and Lawful Presence of God is there. And no circumstance or condition that we are experiencing, no matter how challenging, can change that. Will I hold this Spiritual Truth close as life brings its inevitable ups and downs? Or will I become forgetful and impatient with the darkness, letting my human perception and emotion run away with me?

Father Richard Rohr reminds us that:

Christian wisdom names the darkness as darkness and the Light as light and helps us learn how to live and work in the Light so that the darkness does not overcome us. If we have a pie-in-the-sky, everything is beautiful attitude, we are going to be trapped by the darkness because we don't see clearly enough to separate the wheat from the chaff. Conversely, if we can only see the darkness and forget the more foundational Light, we will be destroyed by our own negativity and fanaticism, or we will naively think we are *completely apart and above the darkness*. Instead, *we must wait and work with hope inside of the darkness, even our own*—while never doubting the Light that God always is, and that we are too. (Matthew 5:14)

Music – *in2it* – *Get Ready, My Soul*, written by Daniel Nahmod

Rev. Diana

Have you ever noticed that it takes a little time for your eyes to adjust when the lights go out? But they do adjust. The pupils adapt and open, and if you're patient, you will slowly be able to see in the dark. This is the invitation today...not to deny that darkness exists, not to abolish the darkness, but to see more clearly in the darkness...to acknowledge that there is nourishment to be found and to wait for the Night Vision to kick in. Not to panic, but to stop, breathe, and wait. And then, when the dark vision kicks in, pay attention. What do I notice in the dark that was not obvious in the Light?

The nice thing about darkness is that it forces us to slow down. Have you ever been out in nature at night, maybe camping? Walking to the bathroom in the darkest part of the night and your flashlight goes out? Instant mindfulness! Suddenly I'm paying attention like never before.

In a Community like ours, we gain access to so many tools to help us stay mindful...meditation, prayer, journaling, study, mindful eating, Lovingkindness Practice, forgiveness, non-judgment...and many more. The thing is, like any tool, it does no good sitting on the shelf. You have to use it.

It is interesting working with people in classes. In our society, we have been trained by our school system to get the grades, to pass the test, and to cram if necessary. We may have been guilted or shamed into performing. We have learned to catch up at any cost, and to make excuses and maybe beat ourselves up for not giving it our

best. There is a tendency for people to apologize to “the teacher” for “getting behind” on their “assignments,” or for not doing their Spiritual Practices. And we were taught that learning happens five day each week – then comes the weekend, a break from the formal learning process.

What we were not taught, but would do well to learn as Spiritually maturing humans, is that there is no cramming Consciousness. The Universe is a perfectly just system...we get back what we put in. There is no guilt or shame involved. There is no right or wrong. There is no such thing as not doing enough or getting behind. We all do what we do (or don't do) and in that instant, our lives adapt accordingly. This is a completely impartial system.

Most importantly, there is no time off on the Path of Spiritual Evolution. What I do and don't do *always* matters, *always* makes an imprint...on myself, on my loved ones, and on the planet. This is a hard one...and it's not meant to bring guilt or shame. It is simply Spiritual Truth. And it serves us well to remember. It makes our lives better...more Peaceful, Joyful, Abundant, and Free when we remember.

Rev. Diana – Moving into Practice

I'd like to offer a tool that you might consider using as you are getting comfortable with the darkness. I have already suggested that we stop...breathe...and wait. But what do we do while we're waiting? You might try moving into Inquiry. There is a Deep Wisdom within you that holds every answer to any question you could ask. The secret is to refrain from listening to the answers your brain has already determined, and to open to hearing something new.

If it helps to think of asking God, or an Infinite Intelligence for Its input, moving through your heart and mind, fine. Or you might address the Higher Knowing within you. Here are some questions you might try:

1. (Spirit (God, Higher Self, Inner Wisdom), what is it about this circumstance that is uncomfortable?
2. When faced with this circumstance, what was my first inclination?
3. Why or how does my human mind believe that this response would alleviate the discomfort?
4. What is the discomfort trying to tell me?

Perhaps the process of Inquiry will shed some Light on your discomfort, pain, or difficulty. Maybe it will allow you to be Nourished by the Darkness.

Remember that in the dark interior of the acorn lies the full potential of the mighty oak. Within the body of every female animal lies the seed of potential that may become its offspring, the next generation, the continuation of the evolution of Life

Itself. This potential is contained first in the darkness. And with enough time and nourishment, with the proper conditions met, the seed of potential grows and thrives so that ultimately, it reaches the Light of Day.

Music – *in2it* – *This Little Light of Mine*, written by Harry Dixon Loes

Rev. Diana – Moving Into Prayer/Love-Soaked World

Let's take a moment to shine our collective Light. We close in prayer this morning, using the Power of our Word and the Power of our Vision to create the more beautiful world our hearts know is possible (Charles Eisenstein).

Hold these words as Powerful and True in your own life as I speak them into form.

In this sacred moment, grounded in the Truth of our Oneness, I accept and affirm that there is only One Thing going on here. And that One Thing is Infinite Intelligence, by whatever name we call it, alive and well...expressing and experiencing Itself as all of Creation. It is pure Self-Givingness, operating through Law, forever in a process of becoming. It is the Life Energy that both infuses and completely surrounds all that is seen and all that is unseen...all that is known and all that will never be known. This Life is forever with me and within me, living Its life AS my life. It surrounds me as people, places, sights, sounds...It fills me and inspires the life within me.

I am so completely surrounded and filled to overflowing with the Presence of Spirit and I know it...I give thanks for it...right here and now. I bask in the Infinite Presence of Spirit showing Itself as True Community this morning...and together, we extend our Vision, helping to create a *Love-Soaked World*.

Knowing that each of us serves as the hands, feet, heart, and voice of God, we take this time now to move our world toward the experience of Peace, Joy, Abundance, and Freedom. Knowing that Peace exists, that Love is real, we feel and know our world as a Peaceful place...where all beings practice loving kindness, compassion, and generosity with each other...where all humans respect and care for our planet as a cherished Home...where all beings have everything needed to experience fullness of life...nourishing food, the safety and comfort of home, medical care and education, healthy relationships, right livelihood, creative contribution, and a sense of belonging.

We feel and know a world without greed, where there is abundance in having *enough*...where every being, as a precious creation of God, is deserving of all the blessings life has to offer. Take a moment to bask in the feeling of living in such a world...

As we consciously place our faith in the consistent givingness of God, offering our heartfelt Vision, the world will never be the same. The entire planet is shifted, is lifted in consciousness...and for this knowing, I give thanks.

I am so grateful for each one who is here today, in community, in communion, in celebration of this beautiful life.

I give thanks for all who came together to make this time of celebration possible.

And I Am profoundly grateful to the One Life that I call God...for all of the blessings of this and every day.

By this act of prayer, and from this place of gratitude, *I Look for the Good*, fully expecting to find it. I release my Word, in deep faith that it is being moved into form by the One that responds by corresponding, reflecting this Vision back into form and experience in our world. And so I simply let it be...calling it done...And so it is! Amen!

Please repeat after me as together we affirm... *There is Power in our Prayer...There is Power in our Vision...Together, we are looking for the good...changing the world...calling it forth...here and now... And so it is! Amen!*

Music – *in2it* – The Circle of Fire Prayer, written by Cari Cole & Don Miguel Ruíz

Rev. Diana – Blessing for the Offering

Each Sunday, we offer you the opportunity to share your financial Good, in support of the Work we are doing in the world. If you are at home, you can go to **mysticheart.org** to use our Donate Button or to find our mailing address.

We also have a Gracious Giving Program for those who would like to make a heartfelt monthly commitment of support so that we can more effectively plan for our growth and our monthly spending. I would be happy to give you more information.

As we move into this time of giving, please know the Power and Depth of these words, and know how much we appreciate your gifts:

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!

We'd like to share a couple more songs with you this morning, just because we can. Feel free to sing along or get up and dance if the Spirit moves.

Offertory Music – in2it – *We Let It Be*, written by Rickie Byars (arranged with a special thank you to Journey!)

Sherri & Rev. Diana – Gratitude Prayer

Rev. Diana - Brief update on the 12 Days of Kindness/Thank you, April.

Repeat the Thomas Merton quote:


And it was as if I suddenly saw the secret beauty of their hearts where neither sin nor knowledge could reach, the core of reality, the person that each one is in the eyes of the Divine. If only they could see themselves as they really are, if only we could see each other all the time, there would be no more need for war, for hatred, for greed, for cruelty. I suppose the big problem would be that we would fall down and worship each other.

Sherri – This Week’s Invitations


 **Thursdays, 3-5 pm – *Metaphysical Bible*** (on-going, drop-ins always welcome)


Looking Ahead...

 **Praying in Color w/ Ellie Thompson – *Christmas Greeting* - Saturday, December 11, 10 am – 1 pm.** Join Ellie in prayerfully creating beautiful, personalized Christmas Cards. Contact Ellie for more information. Please RSVP.

 ***Mystic OAKS Adventure Group: Redding Lights at Turtle Bay, Thursday, December 16 from 7:00 – 9:00 pm.*** Contact Rev. Diana for more information or to make your reservation. Tickets are \$9 for seniors, \$12 for adults, and \$6 per child 5-15 years with our membership discount.

RSVP/payment in advance is required.

 ***The Two Christmas Stories: A Mystical Look at the Nativity*** with Chris Johnson, **Saturday, December 18 from 10 am – 3:30 pm.** Did you know that the Christian Bible tells two very different Christmas stories? Join Chris in this mystical exploration. Lunch will be provided by Rev. Diana. Contact Chris for more information and registration.

 ***You Are the Light: A Christmas Candle Lighting*** on **Wednesday, December 22 from 7 – 8:30 pm.** Please join Mystic Heart as we honor the world’s winter traditions and celebrations, each of which invites us to prepare for the return, or the revealing, of the Light. Dalton Fitzgerald and Judy Preble will be joining us in offering Special Music. Reservations are required, as we have 30 seats.

And to start off the New Year...



Tuesdays, 3-5 pm – Michael Bordeaux’s Book Club will return on January 4th. The next book is *Church of the Wild: How Nature* by Victoria Looz. This will be a 10-week study with an amazing movie to wrap it up. Order your books on AmazonSmile, from our local Barnes and Noble Book Seller, or download onto your Kindle.



Rooted in Spirit: The Six Pillars of a Spiritual Life, Part 2: Wednesday Classes Return January 5th, 2:00-5:00 pm in Suite I. Join Rev. Diana Johnson in a 10-week foundational journey of Spirit. This class *is appropriate for all New Thought Students*, no matter whether you are a beginner or have been studying for many years. You will learn the interesting and diverse history of the New Thought/Ancient Wisdom tradition. You will have the opportunity to expand your Practice of Sitting in the Silence, and to deepen your prayer life through guided study and Practice. There is more information in your Bulletin and on our website. Contact Rev. Diana with any questions.

If you’d like prayer support, we have prayer request cards and envelopes on the fireplace. If you would like to meet with a Prayer Practitioner in person, I am available for a quick prayer after the service. Or contact one of the Mystic Heart Practitioners for a full Session during the week. Our contact information is listed in the bulletin and on our website, as are all of the Mystic Heart events and activities.

To continue the celebration, there is food and fellowship next door immediately following the service. So let’s stand and sing our closing song.

Closing Song – *in2it* – Love Be with You, written by Lainey Bernstein, RScP & Gary Lynn Floyd

11:15 Close of Service