

December 4, 2022

Advent blessings,

Old stories speak fresh truths when we allow our imaginations to enter the deeper reaches of our own and the world's 'soul journey'. As a global society, or perhaps a kind of global 'culture,' we have been and are stuck in a dense fog of mechanistic and utilitarian thought systems. What we think of as 'reality' today was boosted and eventually solidified during the industrial revolution when 'rationality', and head-without-heart, became the operating paradigm of political, economic and even religious constructs. The limitations of that lived experience can be seen in the increasing anxiety and despair of modern and post-modern life. The Rev. Matthew Wright, a writer and Episcopal priest serving St. Gregory Church in Woodstock, NY, delivered a sermon recently which he begins by saying: "Modern human beings live in a severely diminished reality, often leading atrophied existences with atrophied hearts. We live with the constant underlying anxiety that perhaps there is no coherent or ultimate meaning to the stories in which we live. And we fear that any story we tell, that attempts to bring coherence and meaning to our lives, is really only the imaginings of a desperate and fearful mind." [The Rev. Michael Wright, 'Sermons from St. Gregory's' 9-30-22 <https://soundcloud.com/stgregoryssermons/st-michael-and-all-angels>]

As we make our way through Advent, preparing to celebrate the Christmas story, Wright's words (and his sermon about angels in the above link, which I recommend) raise the issue of what we believe 'reality' actually is. There have been, and continue to be, so many scholarly attempts to explain the stories embedded in Scripture in materially relevant ways. For the most part this has meant deconstructing the symbols, relativizing the meaning, and eliminating the mystery, the mystical truths, those stories were endeavoring to convey. The 'imaginal realm,' Wright says, is not a modern equivalent of 'make believe'. The imaginal realm is the source and conveyor of creativity, of mystical encounter, of vision, insight and genuine wisdom. Seeing Advent through that lens allows us to re-enter the perennial story of pregnancy, of waiting, of preparing for an inevitable birthing experience fraught with both danger and hopeful anticipation. It also reflects back to us, as in a mirror, the place we stand in this historical moment filled with anguish, deep uncertainty, polarized divisions, and hearts torn by shredded loyalties, beliefs and practices that can no longer support life.

Something awesome and amazing is happening deep within the Earth's soul, and within the human spirit, that we are incapable of seeing now. As with pregnancy, or with the seed lying in the cold, hard ground, all we can know is that what is forming, beyond our capacity to recognize or even understand, will change everything, and is already changing us. For those with faith in the process initiated by a Cosmic Hand, who recognize the 'signs of the times' as labor pains, this Advent is a time to align hearts and minds with the Spirit of the Great Mother, the Ancient One, Who ever brings forth new life from forms that are passing away.

We wait at the empty manger, holding hands for strength as we bear these painful contractions, and reassure each other that embracing this confusing reality is exactly what we are called to. It is our duty now, as disciples of a birth-death-resurrection faith, to stand right here in prophetic witness to the birthing of a new paradigm signified by a recognition of the light (the Divine, the Christ) within us, and within all created things. We need to embrace the darkness, where all life takes form, and remember we are God-bearers learning to live into the Light of our being. It is the work of Advent to "prepare the way."

**Readings for Liturgies** can be found on the USCCB website at <http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/>.

## **Upcoming Events:**

### **Online Mass Schedule for December**

**Mass via Zoom** will be Saturday, **December 10**, at **5:00pm**. Our Masses are online every 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday-of-the-month.

**Christmas Eve via Zoom** will be Saturday, **December 24**, at **5:00pm**.

### **Zoom Invitations for December Liturgies**

If you have regularly participated in Sophia Christi liturgies or have recently requested a Zoom invitation to our online Masses, you will automatically receive a Zoom invitation this month for our liturgy on the 10<sup>th</sup> as well as for the Christmas Eve liturgy. Invitations will be sent Friday, December 9, and Friday, December 23. If you have not been involved in the past but would like to participate in the online liturgies, let Toni know by responding to this email no later than Wednesday, December 7.

### **No Sophia Christi Zoom Get Together in December**

Sophia Christi Zoom Get Together Social Will Resume in January. Since we will celebrate Christmas Eve Mass the last Saturday in December our next Zoom Get Together Social will be in January. Happy holidays! --Josie

## **Pastoral Update**

### **November 22 Council Meeting Summary**

*The Parish Council met on November 22 for our Annual Meeting, during which we approved a budget for the upcoming year. We also made plans to resume our monthly prayer vigils in January, responsive to whatever needs/concerns emerge in the new year, and to begin using Mailchimp for our monthly newsletters. During the summer we had formed a Sabbatical Committee to prepare for the time when Pastor Toni is on sabbatical in 2023; at the Nov 22 meeting the Committee shared proposals and we discussed a variety of ideas for continuing our monthly Zoom liturgical gathering on the second Saturday of each month during Toni's absence, as well as creating other gatherings to support our community life. We welcome everyone's input as we generate new opportunities for involvement in Sophia Christi's growth and outreach. - Rachel Wheeler, Parish Council Secretary*

### **Staying Connected – Zoom Gatherings and Facebook Options**

In addition to our monthly Masses and social gatherings over Zoom, we also have the Sophia Christi Facebook page. You can join the page and check for postings about online courses and other offerings, as well as post information you would like to share. FB also provides the option of hosting a private group discussion in one of its meet-up rooms. If anyone would like more information about this resource, or if you are interested in facilitating a discussion with other Sophia Christi members please contact Anna Lankutis [lankutisa@gmail.com](mailto:lankutisa@gmail.com), or Rachel Wheeler [rastonwinchel@hotmail.com](mailto:rastonwinchel@hotmail.com).

### **Care Team**

If you are interested in being a part of the Care Team or have a need that the Care Team might respond to, please contact Kathleen Glover [gloverconnection@yahoo.com](mailto:gloverconnection@yahoo.com) or Pastor Toni.

## Council Member Reflection

### *The Path I Was Directed to Walk*

A few years ago, not long after my confirmation in Eugene, I traveled to Sacramento to visit family and stayed at the home of a dear friend who's known me for over 30 years. While we were talking and catching up I shared with her about my confirmation, which resulted in her jaw hitting the floor. "The Catholic Church?!", she asked. Yes, I replied, and that was it until later that evening when we went for dinner at a favorite Thai restaurant. Midway through our meal she asked, "So are you now ok with the Church's stance on certain issues?" My reply to her was simply, "This is the path I was directed to walk." We left it at that.

I am a feminist lesbian who's married to a woman and who believes in reproductive freedom and equality for all people. How in the world did I end up embracing a rigidly patriarchal, socially conservative religious tradition? I don't believe it would have happened if another dear friend (who went on to serve as my confirmation sponsor) hadn't introduced me to Sophia Christi. Through Sophia Christi I fell in love with a Catholic faith reflective of my own spiritual values, a beautiful, sheltering faith-home that is Christ centered and Spirit guided. I will always identify as Catholic, and when the teachings of the Catholic Church conflict with the truths of my Catholic Faith, I will continue to follow the path I was directed to walk, trusting that each step I take is guided by God's freely given, boundless love. -- Josie Miranda

## Member's Corner – Sharing Reflections

This space in the newsletter is available for sharing our stories, insights, and experiences. Consider sending a short paragraph of your own for inclusion in next month's edition. Deadline is March 28 for the April newsletter.

## Website

Outreach has always been part of the mission of Sophia Christi and our website is an important aspect of that mission. The web address is [www.sophiachristi.org](http://www.sophiachristi.org)

**A continuing pastoral invitation**—In the normal course of life I have the opportunity to meet with you personally when a pastoral issue arises, or you want/need spiritual support. But we are somewhere outside the range of 'normal' now. Please let me know if I can assist you in this strange time we are living through. I am still available by phone (503-286-3584) and you can still reach me through this email address. Feel free to use either one.

The theme of the Third Sunday of Advent is "Rejoice." Isaiah says that the wilderness "exults" and formerly silent tongues will "sing for joy." Mary says that her "spirit rejoices" as she sings her praise to God in the presence of her cousin, Elizabeth. I wonder how many of us have trouble feeling joyful, let alone actually 'rejoicing' as we celebrate yet another Christmas under the escalating rise of new viruses, system breakdowns, and the daily news of targeted, as well as random, threats and eruptions of violence. Christmas is a joyful holiday, but we tend to forget that it is also the darkest time of year in the northern hemisphere. Perhaps that should be a warning to those of us in the 'dominant' West that we cannot ignore or deny the demand life makes on all of us to face what we fear, to embrace the danger lurking in our own and the world's shadows, and to make peace with the yin and yang of darkness and light. How can we face into the darkness of what we see happening on the world stage if we can't face our own shadow? And how do we face our shadow with compassion and self-forgiveness if we continue to hold the weakness and limitations of others against them? Paul's letter to James next week urges us not to complain about each other, but to learn how

to persevere patiently, especially when things are hard. This is how we strengthen those muscles that allow us to embrace hope when things are falling apart around us.

Advent is a time of waiting, but it is not a time of idleness. I notice that how I 'wait' these days is often by pulling out my phone. Too often I 'wait' distractedly, not contemplatively or prayerfully, not paying attention or noticing others around me in any meaningful way. Waiting feels like 'dead' time because I'm being trained, as all of us are, to be ever alert to incoming messages and contrived 'demands' for our attention. Spiritually exhausted, I/we barely know what to do when not focused outside ourselves on email, a game app, or today's news. But 'holy waiting' is what we are called to this season. Waiting contemplatively. Waiting openly and expectantly for the Spirit of our inner divinity to fill us so completely that it overflows as Divine Light freely given to others and to this restless world.

Advent seeks to engage our soul, to invite us into the underworld of a dark, inner liberation utilizing the mystical powers of the imaginal realm to call us home—to who we are in the eyes of God. It calls us to prepare by standing by the empty manger and waiting in silence, in awe, as the mystery of our newborn Spirit arrives to change our world from the inside out.

May the Christ within you bless you and your family this Advent/Christmas and always,

Toni