

Interfaith welcome for Rev. Stephen Karcher



Fr. Stephen Karcher performing Divine Service at St. Anthony Greek Orthodox Church PHOTO St. Anthony web site

A reception to welcome the new pastor of Saint Anthony Greek Orthodox Church, the Reverend Stephen Karcher, was held by the Reno-Sparks interfaith community on March 14, 2011, at the India Kabob & Curry Restaurant. Approximately 35 clergy and other religious leaders attended. Bishop Gene Savoy, Jr. was asked to speak on behalf of the community in welcoming Father Karcher and his wife, Olga, to Northern Nevada. All those in attendance were welcomed as guests by the restaurant's owners.

Regional Interfaith Seminar held in California



More than thirty interfaith leaders from four western states came together for a two-day conference in the California Bay Area.

The Western Regional Interfaith Leaders Conference held March 7-8, 2011 at San Damiano Retreat, Danville, California was a gathering of presidents and directors of interfaith movements in California, Nevada, Arizona, and Utah. The aim of the conference is to improve dialogue between organizations and to share information and insights, as well as to provide time for leaders to describe the various projects being undertaken in their respective areas. Emphasis was on ways and means of improving communication between interfaith organizations, including reaching out to youth, funding, and increasing activity online and in virtual reality formats. Bishop Gene Savoy, Jr., president of the Nevada Clergy Association (NCA), focused in his presentations on the interreligious activities, services, and events that NCA promotes.

This year's participants agreed to meet again in 2012 at the San Damiano Retreat Center. The 2011 gathering was the second to be held. The first such gathering was held in Phoenix, Arizona in 2010. Bishop Savoy accepted the invitation to serve on the planning committee for the 2012 conference.

Rev. Rebecca Willis Appointed Prioress



PHOTO Stephan Fuelling

The Reverend Canon Rebecca E. Willis was appointed Prioress of the Steamboat Springs Priory on February 19, 2011 by the Right Reverend Gene Savoy Jr. This act was committed with the consent of her predecessor, the Reverend Canon Gary Buchanan.

The letter of appointment reads:

“Together, we will work towards setting a new direction at Steamboat to bring clarity and purpose to your role, as well as to all those who reside at the Priory. The primary purpose of your office is to bring unity, community and harmony within that branch of the Order of the Holy Child which you represent.

Your appointment has an initial term of three years, after which we will assess and determine extension, modification or reassignment. May God and the Angels of Light continue their blessings over you as you continue your important work in the Second Advent.

Christmas-Epiphany Vigil



PHOTO Stephan Fuelling

Pannuches Meal Rite

The 59th Pannuches Meal Rite was held Saturday, November 13, 2010 at 6:00 PM. Jubilee Sunrise Divine Service was held in Sanctuary Sunday, November 14, 2010.

The 60th Pannuches Meal Rite was held Saturday, January 1, 2011 at 6:00 PM. Jubilee Sunrise Divine Service was held in Sanctuary Sunday, January 2, 2011.

Christmas-Epiphany Vigil

The Twelve days of Christmas are observed by tradition in the Second Advent Church. Beginning Saturday, December 25, and continuing through the morning of Epiphany Eve, January 5, Sunrise Divine Services were scheduled to be held in consecrated sanctuary each morning at the Church of New Epiphany during these days of special blessing. On the thirteenth day, January 6, which is Epiphany Day, a special morning service at sunrise was held at the Consecrated Sanctuary

The traditional Christmas Day Service of Communion, Candle

Lighting and Remembrance was held on Saturday, December 25, at 11:00 AM in The Chapel of The Holy Child. Members of the congregation were asked to bring a bouquet of flowers to place beneath the communion table prior to the service and a loaf of bread to place on the communion table for special blessing.

Remembrance of The Child

A special "Remembrance of The Child" Service was held on Saturday, January 29, 2011, at 6:00 PM in the Chapel of The Holy Child. Sunrise Divine Service was held the following morning, January 30, at the open-air Church of New Epiphany.

"Christianity in China"



Christianity could become one of the macro forces shaping Chinese culture, say experts like Dr. David Aikman, author of *Jesus in Beijing*:

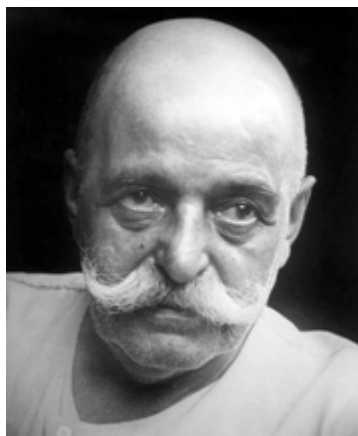
If the Chinese become Christianized ... which doesn't mean you have a majority of people who are Christians, but it means about 25 to 30 percent of people in positions of influence,

in politics, in culture, in the media. If you have that component of a major power that accepts Christianity enthusiastically as a guide to life, that is going to change the world view of the leaders of China.

[Read the entire article online at Fox News.](#)

Post submitted by Jim Elliott

Gurdjieff as Herald of the Coming Good



This short treatise and selection of essential concepts and ideas declared by Gurdjieff is an announcement of the “Herald of the Coming Good” from the International Community of Cosolargy, an authentic Essene Brotherhood, to all the students and practitioners of G.I. Gurdjieff’s “Way” or “Fourth Way.” (Quotes are drawn primarily from his magnum opus, the magisterial book *All and Everything* in the 1950 edition, the only edition authorized by Gurdjieff himself.) The brief statement I am providing here exhumes the dog along with the bone (as he so humorously put it), which he buried deeply and consciously in the text, in a calculated and predetermined way, to be unearthed at this hour in the spiritual destiny of mankind.

The cosmic clock is nearing the hour of completion of a major

cosmic cycle that will allow more light into the consciousness of humanity to enable them to fully awaken from aeons of deep sleep that has hampered and blocked humankind from achieving their potential to become the Sons and Daughters of God—their stolen birthright.

Mr. Gurdjieff says:

“‘Yes . . . my dear friend, if only the teaching of the Divine Jesus Christ were carried out in full conformity with its original, then the religion unprecedentedly wisely founded on it would not only be the best of all existing religions, but even of all religions which may arise and exist in the future.’”

(All and Everything, 1950 authorized edition, p. 1009)

Another “prophetic” statement by Gurdjieff¹:

“I advise you, my dear Hassein, not to put such questions to yourself yet. Do not be impatient. Only when that period of your existence arrives which is proper for your becoming aware of such essence-questions, and you actively mentate about them, will you understand what you must do in return.

“Your present age does not yet oblige you to pay for your existence. The time of your present age is not given you in which to pay for your existence, but for preparing yourself for the future, for the obligations becoming to a responsible three-brained being.

“So in the meantime, exist as you exist. Only do not forget one thing, namely, at your age it is indispensably necessary that every day, at sunrise, while watching the reflection of its splendor, you bring about a contact between your consciousness and the various unconscious parts of your general presence. Try to make this state last and to convince the unconscious parts—as if they were conscious—that if they

hinder your general functioning, they, in the period of your responsible age, not only cannot fulfill the good that befits them, but your general presence of which they are part will not be able to be a good servant of our COMMON ENDLESS CREATOR and by that will not even be worthy to pay for your arising and existence."

(All and Everything, pp. 77-78)

To All and Everybody that have begun their enlightenment by studying and practicing The Fourth Way, the Esoteric Christianity of the Lost Teachings of Jesus—knowledge that was introduced to the West by G.I. Gurdjieff and through the writings of his most popular student and associate, P.D. Ouspensky, in his book *In Search of the Miraculous*—we offer you a new (and very ancient) body of knowledge.

The International Community of Cosolargy has been released from many years of secrecy and can now make available to you the long-hidden source and the vital information needed to provide you with the superabundant energy required to feed and grow the elusive "True Self" that slumbers restlessly inside you and to accelerate the "awakening" and help you to finish the work you have started.

All students and practitioners of G.I. Gurdjieff's still esoteric and subterranean light-bearing insights and divine wisdom, the epitome of lost knowledge encapsulated and deeply buried "like the dog," as he put it in *All and Everything*, are well aware of his deepest personal struggles and sufferings and heartfelt desire described in his life's work:

"FIRST SERIES : To destroy, mercilessly, without any compromises whatsoever, in the mentation and feelings of the reader, the beliefs and views, by centuries rooted in him, about everything existing in the world.

"SECOND SERIES: To acquaint the reader with the material required for a new creation and to prove the soundness and

good quality of it.

“THIRD SERIES: To assist the arising, in the mentation and in the feelings of the reader, of a veritable, non-fantastic representation, not of that illusory world which he now perceives, but of the world existing in reality.”

(All and Everything, p. v)

What lies *hidden* behind these words in Gurdjieff's amazing book?

In a conversation with a prospective pupil (found in the essay “Glimpses of Truth,” which is included as the first chapter of the book *Views from the Real World*), Gurdjieff advises: “Try to fix your interest and attention . . . on what lies hidden behind the words, on the inner content.”

In the year 1916, Gurdjieff said that some things, such as “types” and the “forty-eight laws” “... cannot be defined in ordinary language, and the language in which they could be defined you do not as yet know and will not know for a long time.” (*Fragments*, p. 246)

We have finally reached that time.

In studying Gurdjieff, Ouspensky, and Ouspensky's chief student (the person he chose to update all his writings for our generation) Rodney Collin, and the many other commentators of The Fourth Way, we have learned that we are “asleep”; and we have learned that in order to wake up we have to catch a glimpse of our essence, our “True Self,” for a moment; and that discovery is only possible in the “present” to give it birth; then forever after that epiphany, we have to “Self Remember” to feed our elusive, sleeping but truly “authentic” Self or, in religious terms, our Soul. Once the True Self is discovered we have the potential to “work” on it to develop it and to awaken it. By doing the “work” we are on “The Way.” To some practitioners of Gurdjieff's system it is called “The

Fourth Way." It is the Way taken by a person to develop the true "objectivity" and a true "conscience" that slowly enables us to tell the difference between our outer "mechanical" and slumbering personality—made up of our thoughts, feelings, bodily needs, and our many other machinelike multiple inner moving parts, our manifold eyes or "I"s, our many identities or our thought-life rampaging within, under little or no supervision—and the "master" I, the "foreman" or "steward." This is the genuine "gnosis" that Gurdjieff brought to the West. He called it "The Terror of the Situation."

There is a well-known story about Gurdjieff that he was once asked by a traveling companion on a train what business he was in. Gurdjieff replied that he was a salesman. "Of what? Asked the traveling companion. "Of solar energy," Gurdjieff replied. He was referring to the "higher" energies of essence needed by our soul, which belong to the sun and pass through the sun. But he might also have replied that he was a salesman of the secret knowledge of how to "wake up" our sleeping True Self from the dreams, fantasies, programming, and delusions of life.

What is so easily overlooked are the occasional reminders and clues scattered here and there throughout his amazing book that refer to his "Divine Teacher," as he calls him, Jesus Christ, the illustrious but easily dismissed source of his wisdom teachings. Gurdjieff also once described his life's work as "Esoteric Christianity," the lost or hidden Teachings of Jesus. These Teachings are overlooked by the seekers of lost or hidden knowledge because of the slipshod and unrighteous behavior of the so-called Christian Churches since the Roman usurpation of the early Church in the fourth century. The declaration by Emperor Constantine that made Christianity a state church gradually drove out anything truly Christian of The Master's intention, as well as His essential and sometimes even secret Teachings, from the public arena and forced the authentic Gospel found in Christ's Teachings, his

hidden, “oral” Teachings, underground, where they have been existing only in the form of scattered fragments. Or, according to Gurdjieff himself, they still exist in their entirety as a secret system guarded to this day by its custodians, within an Essene Brotherhood located near Jerusalem. Gurdjieff whispers to the reader, in his clever way, of “burying the dog” that he learned from his “Divine Teacher” by way of His messenger the Holy Spirit. Gurdjieff here describes what happened to the “essence” of the True Teachings of Jesus:

“But thereafter they began gradually to ‘strip’ also this religious teaching based on ‘resplendent Love,’ and transformed it into something also ‘resplendent,’ but already, as our dear Mullah Nasser Eddin says, into a ‘resplendent-Terasakhaboora from the fairy tale ‘Kasoaadjy.’

“In the case of this great religious teaching, indeed, it also happened among them, that its followers divided themselves, on account of exterior details of small importance, into various sects, and came to be called not just ‘Christians’ as all the first followers of this teaching called themselves– but ‘Orthodox,’ ‘Sevrodox,’ ‘Ypsylodox,’ ‘Hamilodox,’ and various other cognomens also ending in ‘dox.’”

(*All and Everything*, p. 702)

(I personally think of the -dox word as *box*, like the closed and confined minds that cling blindly to half truths, legalistic doctrines, and outright lies—all of which prevail in what we nominally call “Christianity.”)

Then Gurdjieff reveals what happened to the authentic Teachings of his “Divine teacher,” Jesus Christ, after the Teachings had been tucked away and guarded for almost two thousand years by a small community of brothers ... until today:

“By the way, I may tell you here that among a rather small group of terrestrial beings the teaching of Jesus Christ was preserved unchanged, and, passing from generation to generation, has even reached the present time in its original form.

“This smallish group of terrestrial beings is designated ‘the Brotherhood of the Essenes.’ The beings of this brotherhood succeeded at first in introducing the teaching of this Divine Teacher into their own being-existence, and subsequently in transmitting it from generation to generation to later generations, as a very good means for freeing themselves from the consequences of the properties of the organ Kundabuffer.”

(All and Everything, pp. 703-4)

Gurdjieff goes on to say quite clearly and emphatically:

“‘Yes, my dear friend, if only the teaching of the Divine Jesus Christ were carried out in full conformity with its original, then the religion unprecedentedly wisely founded on it would not only be the best of all existing religions, but even of all religions which may arise and exist in the future.’”

(All and Everything, p. 1009)

Gurdjieff continues:

“And therefore at the present time, in place of the teaching of the Divine Teacher Jesus Christ, in which among other things was revealed the power of the All-lovingness and All-forgivingness of our CREATOR, suffering for beings—it is now already taught there that our CREATOR mocks the souls of those who follow this teaching.”

(All and Everything, p. 703)

Gurdjieff goes even further in affirming that all the matters of the universe are found in man: “We have in us the matter of

all other worlds." Man is, in the full sense of the term, a miniature universe; in him are all the matters of which the universe consists. We can interpret this as meaning that what is being described is the Gurdjieffian version of the "Christian" mystery of the Eucharist, a symbol in fact of the Sun.

The big question that hovers above his book and his legacy is, What did Jesus teach him by His Holy Spirit, and what are the lost oral teachings of Jesus that Gurdjieff was searching for most of his life?

As we can see from every effort to read and digest his books, primarily *All and Everything*, that the gist of Gurdjieff's teaching is very complex, and we have only touched on the most essential intentions of Gurdjieff's lifelong efforts to share the vast, deep, and wide discoveries he made in his personal quest, primarily in the Near and Far East, starting with his life as a young seminary student in the Greek Orthodox faith, then into Tibet, Turkestan, Syria, Egypt, Afghanistan, Germany, and God only knows where else, for enlightenment. Gurdjieff was a master of all the major religions and a few secret ones, certain dervish and Sufi orders, in order to synthesize all the major truths of all the disparate but similar religions into a unitary whole. But make no mistake about it: Gurdjieff's concepts have multiple aspects, most of which totally escape the methodology of modern understanding and what passes for "reality," since they concern, rather, the inner alchemy, the truly unlimited human potential of a fully awakened, fully perfected, fully "conscious" man or woman.

All and Everybody that take seriously Gurdjieff's life's work are familiar with his constant references to the Sun as a manifestation of God—his "The Most Holy Sun Absolute"—a very distant, almost unapproachable Supreme Being that is behind Everything we consider reality. Our sun is an outward manifestation only, His agent, His luminous physical emissary

of His divine supernal light, which He has created to represent Himself to us in our much lower form of existence, in our dream world, within which we are working in our efforts to awaken.

Almost unnoticed in Guerdjieff's big, fat, twelve-hundred-plus-page book are some simple and easily overlooked clues to his amazing, totally original recovery of the Lost Teachings and his deeply personal struggles and revelations to share the fruits of his lifelong labors. He struggled and single-mindedly strove most of his often hazardous life—working, exploring, studying, suffering, and sometimes narrowly escaping the hazards of the twentieth-century's social, political, and religious revolutions—in order to discover, recover, and fathom, then reconstruct, rewire, and explain in detail, the inner workings of our sublime soft machine, the cosmic or universal laws inside and outside of each of us.

Finally, at the end of his life, he published his book, his “gospel,” as he put it, in order to share with us all the objective views he so laboriously fathomed about our unique status as “three-brained beings” stuck on this planet with its peculiar history of constant warfare and our peculiar, often warring religions that in their original form are supposed to assist us in the “awakening” we need to accomplish as a collective family called humanity.

We are now immersed in the final struggle between the forces at work in our planet's evolution, that battle between the Children of Darkness and the Children of Light. The prophetic calendar has finally arrived at the critical point in time when we can help advance the efforts to stimulate, alert, educate, and bring into the Light mankind—to be awakened to “consciously” serve His Most Holy Sun Absolute and His Christ manifesting through the sun.

Consociates of The International Community of Cosolargy are an authentic Essene Brotherhood with spiritual roots deeply

buried under layers and centuries of secrecy and guardianship of the Sacred Teachings of Light. We have modernized the ancient forms of the Teachings into a new life science called Cosolargy. We have been quietly preparing individuals to be emissaries and teachers and harbingers of a long-propheesied Solar Age, where the light from our sun will increase in its manifestation of the Powers of God, the Sun behind the sun, "The Most Holy Sun Absolute," as the long-awaited spiritual renaissance is initiated for a spiritual revolution in the minds and hearts of all that desire His pure Light and His Consciousness to grow strong within our mortal coils.

Through our living, neo-metaphysical System, all of God's created and divined religions will be transformed into their original pure intentions, the intentions they had before this world so radically corrupted and weakened them from their pristine teachings of how to *literally* look to the Sun as our primary source of spiritual food for our malnourished souls.

Together, as the human family, we are experiencing the final days and times, as we reach the end of an age on the cosmic calendar and the beginning of a new Solar Age, long-predicted in all the major religions—Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Christianity, and Buddhism. They all foresee in their sacred scriptures an ending of the times of Darkness and the entry into the Worlds of Light.

Come join us in this "final adventure of Enlightenment" as we beat back the already gathering and coalescing forces of Darkness. They have a head start, but we have the *Head* of the entire enterprise leading us and illuminating our "Way."

by Robert DeFord

1. The statement is delivered by the person of Beelzebub to his grandson Hassein, who asks his grandfather why he personally has all the comforts he now has and what obligation

he is under for having them.

Martin Luther King Jr. celebrated



King
giving
a
lecture
in 1964

The Northern Nevada Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Committee and the Nevada Clergy Association jointly presented the annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Celebration events for 2011.

An interfaith memorial service was held Sunday, January 16, 2011 at 3:00 PM at Reno First Methodist Church in downtown Reno. The theme of this year's event was "Remembering the Dream, Fulfilling the Mandate." Owing to the efforts of the Reverend Onie Cooper of the Second Baptist Church, this event was originally brought to fruition and has continued for decades. It is now up to the Nevada Clergy Association to join the Holiday Committee to help "keep the dream alive." Both the Nevada Clergy Association and the Northern Nevada Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday Committee are presently headed by Bishop Gene Savoy Jr.

On Monday, January 17, a memorial caravan, beginning at 10:30

AM at the Second Baptist Church in Reno, followed the twenty-six miles of the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Highway along US 395.

Epiphany Eve Banquet Held



The annual Epiphany Eve Banquet and festivities took place at the Rectory-Abbey on Wednesday, January 5, 2011, from 6:00 PM to 9:00 PM. Members of the Community, their families, and special guests of the Bishop were invited to attend this special seasonal banquet.

Annual Children's Tea and Blessing Held



The annual Children's Tea and Blessing was held at the Rectory-Abbey on Sunday, January 2, from 3:00-5:00 PM. The children, parents, and other members of the Community gathered for the sharing of the gingerbread chapel, the breaking of the piñata, and other festivities for the children.

Christmas Message December 25, 2010



On Saturday December 25, 2010, Bishop Gene Savoy Jr. delivered a Christmas message during the traditional holiday Communion of Fellowship Service at the Chapel of the Holy Child. A slightly edited version of the message is provided here:

Good morning and Merry Christmas!

Those of us gathered together in this Chapel dedicated to the service of God are drawn together from many faiths, but we are all one in the family of God.

We celebrate today as the birthday of the man Jesus. For twelve days, we of the Second Advent Church celebrate the Christmas Season, which culminates on the thirteenth day—January 6—the Day of Epiphany.

Epiphany comes from the Greek, meaning “manifestation” or “appearance,” and in the early Church, January 6 was the day that commemorated Jesus’s baptism at the Jordan by Saint John. The day celebrates the “shining forth” [another meaning of *epiphany*] or revelation of God in human form in the person of Jesus Christ, his manifestation as the Son of God to the world—the Word of God incarnate in Man. The date of Epiphany on January 6 was very early fixed, and ancient liturgies speak of *Illuminatio*, *Manifestatio*, *Declaratio*: Illumination, Manifestation, and Declaration. The Gospel of Matthew [3:13-17] says:

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, ‘I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?’ But Jesus answered him, ‘Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in

this way to fulfill all righteousness.' Then he consented. And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.'

And the Gospel of Luke [3:21-22] says,

Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased.'

But a very important line has been deleted from both Matthew and Luke—one which is substantiated by other ancient scriptures more authoritative than Matthew and Luke. The line reads:

Today, or this day, I have begotten you.

So, let us read this again:

*You are my son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased. **This day I have begotten you.*** [Emphasis added]

In the ancient Christian Church, just as in Buddhism, this divine event—this “appearance” or “epiphany”—was a manifestation of Jesus’s immortal nature. The day commemorated the incarnation of Jesus as Christ, the moment when God appeared in Divine Light and ordained Jesus His son in Spirit. Thus, Jesus was given a new birth by God the Father. So we know that Jesus was not “born” the Son of God, but *became* the Son of God when the Word, the Divine Logos, incarnated within him, giving him new life of spirit. This was a fundamental concept in the Messianic or First Advent Church: that Jesus *became* Christ. And this is why Epiphany and the Christmas-Epiphany Season is so important to us, because it represents

and symbolizes the birth of spirit—the epiphany of the Conscious Soul.

I made the reference to Buddhism because while Buddhists celebrate the birthday of Siddhartha Gautama on April 8, the day of his “enlightenment”—the day when he became the Awakened One, Bodhi Day—is honored on December 8 at sunrise. And, of course, we do this in the Second Advent Church. We honor the birth of the man Jesus on December 25, the old Roman festival of the Unconquered Sun, but more importantly, we celebrate Jesus’s spiritual birth—the day when the Word of God entered into him and he assumed the Holy Office of Christ. This we do on January 6 as a promise of the spiritual rebirth we are all heir to in the Second Advent of God’s Appearance.

In hellenistic times, an epiphany of the divine in a person was a common theological concept. The celebration of Epiphany originated in the ancient Church, where it later included a commemoration of Christ’s physical birth in the Eastern Church. In Rome, however, by the middle of the fourth century, Christ’s physical birth was being celebrated on December 25, according to the Philocalian calendar.

A winter festival was the most popular festival of the year in many cultures. Reasons included the fact that less agricultural work needed to be done, as well as the expectation of better weather as spring approached.

The twenty-fifth of December was the Roman festival marking the “birth of the Unconquered Sun,” the *natalis solis invicti*, which celebrated the winter solstice and the lengthening of days. This celebration allowed several solar deities to be worshipped collectively, including the Syrian sun-god *Elah-Gabal*. It was also observed as the birth date of the god *Mithras*, the “sun of righteousness” and patron god of the emperors, who, five hundred years before the birth of Christ, was born of a virgin in a cave. We know that it was also connected in the Roman world to the *saturnalia*, a time of

merrymaking and the exchanging of gifts. Charity was also emphasized as part of the Roman New Year.

The festival was placed on the date of the solstice because this was the day that the sun reversed its southward retreat and proved itself to be “unconquered.” Several early Christian writers connected the rebirth of the sun to the birth of Jesus. John Chrysostom wrote, “They call it the ‘Birthday of the Unconquered.’ Who indeed is so unconquered as Our Lord?”

Northern Europe celebrated a winter festival called Yule, held in late December and early January, and its traditions had a major influence on *Christemasse* or Christ’s Mass.

In the old Christian calendar, November 28 through January 6 was observed as the Festival of Lights, a vigil for the birth of the Cosmic Christ. Japanese Shintos honor the sun goddess *Amaterasu* on December 22. In ancient Egypt, December 21 to December 25 was the festival commemorating the birth of the god Horus by the goddess Isis; and in the Hopi nation, December is celebrated as a time of purification and renewal. So we can see that this time of year is universally recognized as a time when we come out of the darkness into light.

The contradiction between the Greek and Roman Churches led to a great debate in the fourth and fifth centuries, which culminated in the Eastern Church accepting the twenty-fifth of December as Christ’s birth and the Western Church celebrating Epiphany as the day the Magi visited the infant Jesus.

In the Second Advent Church, we honor both days and celebrate the Christmas-Epiphany Season from December twenty-fifth through January sixth. We commemorate Christ’s birth in physical form, but, as we have said, more importantly, we solemnize his spiritual rebirth.

Therefore, the message of the season is life of spirit. That was the essence of Christ’s teaching. And this is what the Christmas Season represents: Life, Birth and Rebirth – the

cycle of renewal.

The lights and trees we display this time of year have always been symbols of everlasting life. In ancient Egypt, China, Israel, and the Celtic lands, evergreen trees, wreaths, and garlands were symbolic of eternal life. To us in the Second Advent Church, they also represent the True Light of God and the Tree of Life.

In the Middle Ages, Christmastide, or the period from the night of December 25 through the morning of January 6, was a period of continuous feasting and merrymaking. Twelfth night, or Epiphany Eve, as we call it, was forever solidified in popular culture when William Shakespeare used it as a setting for one of his most famous stage plays. In those times, Christmas was overshadowed by Epiphany.

British colonists to America brought their version of the Twelve Days over from England and adapted them to their new country, adding their own variations over the years. The modern-day Christmas wreath, for example, originated with these colonials. A homemade wreath would be fashioned from local greenery, and if fruits were available, they would be added. Making the wreaths was one of the traditions of Christmas Eve; then they would be hung on each home's front door on Christmas Day, the First Day of Christmas, through the morning of Epiphany, when a special Epiphany cake was baked and all the remainder of the edibles from the previous twelve days consumed.

As said, this was a time of feasting, merrymaking, and otherwise celebrating the season. Sometimes gifts were exchanged each of the twelve nights and a candle lit each morning of the Twelve Days. And the evening before Epiphany was celebrated as the biggest night for dancing and gift-giving.

However, after the Revolution, Christmas and the Twelve Days

fell out of favor in America because it was considered an English custom. It was not until the 1820s, when anti-British sentiments were fading, that people began to worry that Christmas was dying out. Writers, including Washington Irving and Harriet Beecher Stowe, imagined Christmas in Tudor days as a time of heartfelt celebration, and efforts were made to revive the holiday. Charles Dickens's book *A Christmas Carol* played a major role in reinventing Christmas as a holiday emphasizing family, goodwill, and compassion, as opposed to communal celebration.

Latin nations also have various forms of celebrations for the Twelve Days of Christmas, the most popular being the cooking of traditional foods to celebrate Epiphany. In Hispanic America, a *rosca de los reyes* – a king cake – is baked. In France, a *galette des rois* is baked with a small china figure of the Christ-child inside. In some countries, children polish and leave their shoes by the doorstep, bed, or tree, ready for presents, before going to sleep on the eve of January 6. And in Italy, the tradition of La Befana, whose name is taken from the word Epiphany, is the bringer of gifts who arrives on the eve of Epiphany.

With the onset of more Americanized and secular traditions throughout the past two centuries, the traditions of the Twelve Days of Christmas have been largely forgotten. Indeed, contemporary marketing and media tend to espouse the erroneous belief that the Twelve Days end on Christmas, rather than begin on it. However, we of the Second Advent Community have held to our own favorite ways to celebrate the Christmas-Epiphany Season.

We are all both mortal and immortal beings. And as we feed our physical bodies we must also feed our spiritual bodies. Listen to the message conveyed by these words from the Odes of Solomon [Ode 38] that we recite at Christmastime.

I rested in the spirit of the Lord: and the spirit raised me

on high. And made me stand on my feet in the height of the Lord, before His perfection and His glory, while I was praising Him by the composition of His songs.

The spirit brought me forth before the face of the Lord: and although I was a son of man, I was named the illuminate, a son of God. For according to the greatness of the Most High, so He made me: and like His own newness He renewed me, and He anointed me from His own perfection.

And I became one of His neighbors; and my mouth was opened, like a cloud of dew. And my heart poured out as it were a gushing stream of righteousness.

And my access to Him was in peace; and I was established by the spirit of His kingdom. And I went up to the light of truth which preserved me. And it became to me a haven of salvation and set me on the arms of immortal life.

Love begins in our family life, reaches out to our friends, and embraces our neighbors. Like a seed it must be planted before it can grow. **Also, like a seed, it must be watered if it is to grow. A seed unwatered for many years will still grow many years later if it is given that precious and vital resource.** If we can express love as we do at Christmastime throughout the whole year, we will begin to live the life exemplified by Jesus.

So let us each examine our hearts. The world and our flawed mortal natures take away our ability to love one another at times. This inability harms the spirit. Each one of us should strive to rise above the limitations of the physical world and embrace the spirit, which is expressed by love. By so doing, God comes to each of us, adopting us as His son or daughter; for we are all Children of God.

That is the message this Christmas Season. Let us make a commitment to each other today to love one another however unable we may have been able to previously express that love.

We need to too. Let us make a commitment to forgive the transgressions of those we love and to make amends to those whom we may have transgressed upon.

In lighting the candles today in remembrance of those who have gone on to another life, let us place our trust in God who is the author of our spirit and soul. When death claims our physical bodies, it is the spirit and soul that endure and go on to a higher world if we can but experience the rebirth of spirit the we celebrate on January 6 . But if we not love – even if that love is not accepted – our spirits fade like a flame, ultimately going out. Love kindles and brightens the spirit and the soul. By loving we are made eternal, for God is Love. Love binds us to those departed, to those about us while we live, and it binds us to God. For if we do not have love, compassion, and kindness in our hearts, how can we ever hope to know God? There is no enmity so hard that goodness cannot melt.

Therefore, on this day commemorating the birth of Jesus, let us make a renewal to exemplify what he taught. This, I believe is the message of the Christmas Season: to open our hearts, forgive the transgressions of our loved ones/brothers and sisters, and love one another.

Allow me to close this Christmas message with these words from the Gospel of John:

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love.

If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.

I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have

loved you.

No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.

You are my friends if you do what I command you.

I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.

[John 15:9-15]

I wish you all a very merry Christmas, a happy Epiphany, and a joyous New Year, filled with God's many bountiful and beautiful blessings. Let us go forth from this place with renewed resolve to take the message of the Second Advent to all the world in greater power and glory, each of us shining like the Sun of Righteousness and striving to exemplify Christ in our daily lives.