



From Advent to Epiphany

A journey into growing light

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In the darkness of early morning, a gradual lightening of the sky indicates that daylight is near. Although the sun has not yet appeared, its coming is promised. Then, as the golden rays burst over the horizon, colour and light and warmth flood back into the world. The sun rises higher in the sky and the light grows in strength and brightness. The promise is fulfilled. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness does not overcome it.

This daily sequence of events mirrors the entry of the Christ light into our world, the event we celebrate in our journey from Advent through to Epiphany. There are four stages of this journey: Advent, Christmas Eve, the Twelve Holy Nights and Epiphany. Each marks a stage on the journey of the Christ to this earth as well as a particular mood of our human souls.

Advent – Waiting for the Light

For all who celebrate Christmas in some way, the Advent season is a time of waiting and of preparation.

It seems that as the inner meaning of Christmas is less understood, the outer wrappings of the season become more varied and voluminous and the spiritual origins of many of our customs are forgotten.

The custom of lighting the darkness in preparation for Christmas is an outward clue that the true light is on its way. Houses, shops and streets blaze with lights – bud lights, icicle lights, flashing lights, lights that explode like fireworks and many more. Lights outline motifs of Christmas – stars and candles, bells and angels and nativity scenes. Hopefully, for some of those who gather to view and exclaim over the effects created, there is a moment of wonder and imagination as an intimation of the advent of the true light uplifts their souls.

In his introduction to *Meditations for the Days of Advent*, Rev Mario says:

Christmas is the Festival of the Birth of Light and thus the motif of light should be used throughout the Advent season to prepare us for the breaking through of that true light into our hearts and consciousness.

We light our Advent candles day by day in expectation and longing. As they burn down, we reflect on the millennia of preparation for the approach of the Christ to the earth. There is a sense that what unfolded then and what is now unfolding in us has its own time frame and cannot be hurried by activity on our part. We can simply move with the rhythm of that unfolding.

Something of the mood of our souls during Advent is expressed in these words of the Psalmist:

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits
and in his word I hope;
my soul waits for the Lord
more than watchmen for the morning,
more than watchmen for the morning.
Psalm 130:5-6

Christmas Eve – Daybreak

Advent comes to a close with Christmas Eve. In ancient times, initiates meeting in caves on this night of deepest darkness intuitively perceived the spiritual nature and activity of the sun. And then, on one such night, something new happened.

That night when all over the world the sages came together in the darkness of their caves and suddenly found the light shining – yet with no light appearing at all – their hearts lifted in utter wonder and they knew that finally the promise was fulfilled. The darkness of this earth had now disappeared. The light shone.

Rev Mario, *Choosing Transformation*, p 1

In the fields of Bethlehem, angel messengers brought the good news of the birth of Jesus, and the glory of the Lord shone around the shepherds who were the first to receive their message. The hopes of the world that earth and heaven would once more meet were focused on this child of promise.

The mood of our souls moves from the stillness of waiting to the joy of recognition. On Christmas Eve, we celebrate his birth with light and singing and joy, acknowledging that this child was chosen and prepared to be the one through whom the Christ light would shine into the world. Such a tiny being to be the herald of the breaking of the day!

Twelve Holy Nights – The Growth of the Light

In our celebration of the Christmas season, Christmas Eve is followed by the twelve days of Christmas, from December 26 to January 6. In esoteric Christianity we speak of the twelve holy nights, which indicates something of the spiritual mood of this time.

We reflect on the life of Jesus from his birth until his baptism in the Jordan river and on what was developing in him through these years to prepare him for his mission in the world. We can perceive the activity of the light as it hovered like a nimbus around Jesus' head through these thirty years.

Life in the outer world often contrasts strangely with this inward reflection. The god of materialism is rampant in the flurry of spending as eager bargain-hunters storm the shops. For us in the southern hemisphere it is also a time for enjoying summer pleasures – outdoor living, holidays, relaxation, a change from the daily routine of the rest of the year. And there is the seeing in of the new year. In the midst of these outer activities, there is the potential for us to be renewed. New resolves can be born in the soul, spirits can be refreshed and restricting patterns broken.

The twelve holy nights, however, have a deeper significance. Esoteric teachings name the

period between Christmas and Epiphany as the particular time of the year when our souls meet with the Christ. During the twelve holy nights, there is the possibility of experiencing a deepening of our perception of the Mystery of Golgotha. During these nights, if we are open to the spiritual impulses the heavens are pouring upon us, we can enter more deeply than ever before into the Christ mysteries.

Epiphany – The Brightness of the Sun

The twelve holy nights end on January 6 with Epiphany, when we celebrate the entry of the Christ, the great Sun Spirit, into human flesh in Jesus of Nazareth. Esoteric teaching distinguishes between the birth of Jesus and the birth of the Christ: the first we celebrate on Christmas Eve and the second at Epiphany.

In the Western church, Epiphany is associated with the coming of the Magi to visit the young Jesus child, as described in Matthew's gospel. Christmas Eve celebrates the birth of Jesus and Epiphany the birth of the Christ.

Our esoteric teachings explain that there were two Jesus children, one written about by Matthew and one written about by Luke, and that over a period of twelve or so years, these two became one entity.

It was to the Matthew Jesus that the Magi came with their gifts. They were students of the teachings of Zarathustra, the great Persian teacher, and of the stars, and their studies led them to the certainty that Zarathustra would be reincarnated. The star was the sign in the heavens of this.

In the Eastern church, the primary significance of Epiphany is the baptism of Jesus by John in the Jordan River. An epiphany is an appearance, a showing forth, a shining forth of something that has been hidden. When we experience an epiphany, we see into the essential nature of something. Its true beingness shines forth.

The coming of the Magi and the baptism were both such moments. When the Magi knelt before the child of whom Matthew writes, that was an epiphany. They looked at a babe and they saw that in this babe their master, Zarathustra, had returned to earth as foretold.

When John baptized Jesus, he saw the heavens opened and the spirit descending upon Jesus and he heard the voice from heaven that said, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." That was a moment of epiphany. He understood who was standing before him.

Some early manuscripts say, "Thou art my beloved son. Today have I begotten thee." This version enshrines esoteric teaching; it says that on that day the relationship of Jesus to the Father became that of a Son. The Christ spirit, the Son, became part of earth life through the man Jesus, and John was the first to whom this was revealed.

Preparation for an Epiphany

These epiphanies, or showings forth, did not happen for the Magi or for John the Baptist in a vacuum. There had been long preparation.

The Magi were dedicated students who were willing to commit themselves to a long and arduous journey based on their reading of the heavens. Perhaps T S Eliot's description is closer to the reality of that experience than the romantic images of Christmas cards:

A cold coming we had of it,
Just the worst time of year
For a journey,
and such a long journey:
The ways deep and the
weather sharp,
The very dead of winter.
Journey of the Magi

For John the Baptist, too, there was a period of preparation. Living the austere life of a wilderness dweller, he turned his back on the normal life of his countrymen in order to concentrate on fulfilling his destiny. He prepared himself so that he would be able to perceive the Christ when he should be revealed.

Light and Darkness

Before the coming of Christ, the aura of the world was dark. Darkness is not simply an absence of light; it is an entity in itself. Light and darkness are spiritual forces or beings. Through the Christ, the forces of light were able to transform the world's aura. and to bring our souls out of darkness.

What so many had waited for with great longing came to reality through Christ. So now when we wait for the Lord, more than watchmen for the morning, we are no longer waiting for him to come to this earth. He is Emmanuel, God with us. What we now wait and long for is for his light to be more fully manifested in us.

Each year at this season, the light becomes a little stronger in us. We experience again what it is to wait with hope and expectation, to know that the light has come and that, though it may not be comprehended by many, it will not be conquered. We contemplate the great mystery of the being of Christ and of his purpose in coming to earth. From the first glimmerings of Advent to the joy of Christmas and on to the brightness of Epiphany, our souls are being prepared for the greater revelation of Christ in us, the hope of glory.

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