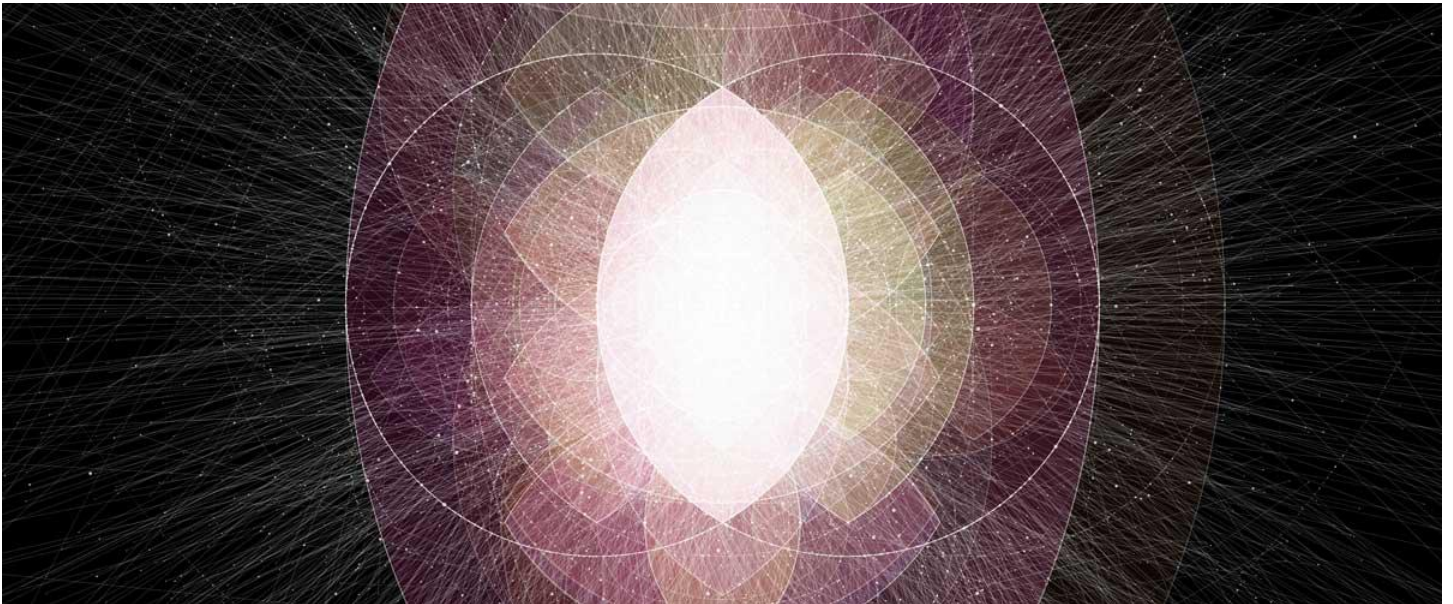




The In-Between Way: Return

8:45 a.m. + December 8, 2024 + Second Sunday of Advent



*Don't go away, come near
Don't be faithless, be faithful.
Find the antidote in the venom.
Come to the root of the root of your Self.*

*Molded of clay, yet kneaded
from the substance of certainty,
a guard at the Treasury of Holy Light—
come, return to the root of the root of your Self.*

*Once you get hold of selflessness,
you'll be dragged from your ego
and freed from many traps.
Come, return to the root of the root of your Self.*

*You are born from the children of God's creation,
but you have fixed your sight too low.
How can you be happy?
Come, return to the root of the root of your Self.*

*You were born from a ray of God's majesty
and have the blessings of a good star.
Why suffer at the hands of things that don't exist?
Come, return to the root of the root of your Self.
Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi (13th century)*

Crossing the Threshold

Singing our Welcome

"Veni Immanuel" (O Come, Immanuel)

***Veni, veni, veni, veni, Immanuel;
Veni, veni, veni Immanuel.***

Lighting the Advent Candle

The prophet Malachi calls us to watch for the messenger God will send us, a messenger who burns with a passion for God's coming salvation. "For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap; he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the LORD in righteousness" (Malachi 3:2b-3).

In a world driven by a passion to maintain the status quo, we choose to live with a passion for God's peace, to listen to those who call us to return to God, and to submit ourselves to God's grace, that we might be refined and purified until we reflect God's love throughout the earth.

We light this candle of peace as a sign of our commitment to turn to God and passionately pursue the work of making peace in our hearts, our families, our communities, and throughout the earth until God's kingdom comes on earth as it is in heaven.

Singing our Welcome

"Veni Immanuel" (O Come, Immanuel)

***Veni, veni, veni, veni, Immanuel;
Veni, veni, veni Immanuel.***

Contemplating a Psalm

a contemplative adaptation of Psalm 51 (Nan Merrill)

*Forgive all that binds me in fear, that I might radiate love;
 cleanse me that Your Light might shine in me.
Create in me a clean heart, O Gracious One,
 and put a new and right spirit in me.
Enfold me in the arms of Love,
 and fill me with the Holy Spirit.
Restore in me the joy of Your saving grace,
 and encourage me with a new spirit.
Then I will teach others Your ways and prisoners of fear will return to You.
Deliver me from the addictions of society, most Gracious One.
O keep me from temptations that I may tell of Your justice and mercy.
O Gracious One, open my lips and my mouth shall sing forth Your praise.
For You do not want sacrifice. You delight in our friendship with You.
A sacrifice most appropriate is a humble spirit,
 a repentant and contrite heart, O Merciful One, is the gift You most desire.
Let the nations turn from war, and encourage one another as good neighbors.
O Most Gracious and Compassionate Friend, melt our hearts of stone.
Break through the fears that lead us into darkness,
 and guide our steps into the way of peace.*

Offering Ourselves

"The Power of Your Love"

***Lord, I come to you, let my heart be changed, renewed.
Flowing from the grace that I've found in you.
And Lord, I've come to know, the weaknesses I see in me,
Will be stripped away, by the power of your love.***

*Hold me close, let your love surround me.
Bring me near, draw me to your side.
And as I wait, I'll rise up like the eagle.
And I will soar with you, your spirit leads me on,
In the power of your love.*

*Lord, unveil my eyes, let me see you face to face,
The knowledge of your love as you live in me.
And Lord, renew my mind, as your will unfolds in my life.
In living every day, by the power of your love.*

Contemplating Scripture

Luke 3:2-6

*A word of God came in John, the son of Zechariah, in the wilderness.
He came into all the region around the Jordan,
proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the deliverance of sins,
as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah,
"The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
'Prepare the Way of the Lord;
make his paths straight.
Every valley shall be filled,
and every mountain and hill shall be made low,
and the crooked shall be made straight,
and the rough ways made smooth,
and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'"*

Meditation

Song of Response

"Joy To the World"

*Joy to the world, the Lord is come. Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare him room,
And heaven and nature sing, and heaven and nature sing,
And heaven, and heaven and nature sing.*

*No more let sins and sorrows grow, nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make his blessings flow,
Far as the curse is found, far as the curse is found,
Far as, far as the curse is found.*

Silence

During these minutes of silence, simply rest in God's abiding and loving presence in this moment. You are in God and God is in you. Just be and relax. Center your attention in your heart and imagine your breath flowing in and out from your heart area. If it helps you to center, use a sacred prayer word such as Jesus, Abba, Spirit, Light, or Love.

Moving to the Table

"Veni Immanuel" (O Come, Immanuel)

*Veni, veni, veni, veni, Immanuel;
Veni, veni, veni Immanuel.*

Communion

Receiving a Good Word



Our Staff

Haley Brown – Associate Director of The Anchor House

Courtney Garrison – Ministry Assistant

Peter Johns – Associate Director of Contemplative Worship

Zachary Montasser – Violinist

Rev. Rachel Sciretti – Associate Pastor

Rev. Dr. Michael Sciretti, Jr. – Pastor of The Center

Today's Music

"Veni Immanuel" – John L. Bell, *"The Power of Your Love"* – Geoff Bullock

"Joy to the World" – Isaac Watts & G.F. Handel.

For information about The Center for Christian Spirituality and upcoming events, visit:

www.TheCenterFCS.org.

Please register your presence in the notebooks in the foyer.

If you have a prayer request or seeking support, please contact Rachel Sciretti, rscoretti@chapelwood.org.

Minaret Foundation: Angels and Messengers

December 12 | Houston Congregation For Reform Judaism | 6:30 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.

Join us as we embark on a journey of discovery, exploring the nuances of Christian, Jewish, and Islamic beliefs. Through thought-provoking discussions and open dialogue, we hope to inspire a new appreciation for the rich tapestry of faiths that enrich our world.

Advent Community Gathering

December 15 | The Anchor House | 10:00 a.m.

Join us for some good food and fellowship with friends from our contemplative community after worship in The Anchor House. Make a favorite Christmas treat and bring to share. Your treat can be sweet or savory, we just ask that it not need to be refrigerated or kept warm. The Anchor House will be open before worship so everyone can drop their treat off on the way to the Contemplative Worship Service if you would like. We hope you'll join us and invite a friend or family member.

gastrochurch fundraiser: Hogwarts Christmas Feast

December 21 | Westminster United Methodist Church | 7:00 p.m.

You are invited to the 8th Annual Hogwarts Christmas Feast benefiting gastrochurch. This fundraiser is vital to the work gastrochurch does of feeding people physically and spiritually across Houston, as it usually raises half of the gastrochurch annual budget. Opportunities to attend, volunteer or become a sponsor can be found using the QR code. We hope you'll join us as we gather around these magical tables for a time full of light, love and joy!



The Service of the Longest Night

December 22 | The Chapel | 6:00 p.m.

The Service of the Longest Night is held on the Sunday evening closest to the Winter Solstice, the longest night of the year. The "longest night" has also become an expression for the spiritual journey of grief and loss. Our time together will be especially appropriate for those who have experienced a significant loss this past year. In this time of worship, you are invited to quiet refuge of prayer, music, remembrance, and Holy Communion.

Contemplative Candlelight Christmas Eve Service

Sunday, December 24 | The Anchor House Grounds | 6:00 p.m.

We will sing carols, hear the Christmas story, reflect on its meaning for us today, and light candles to celebrate the coming of Christ. It will be a lovely way to mark Christmas Eve.