



A Thrill of Hope

8:45 a.m. + December 21, 2025 + Fourth Sunday of Advent

I say that if Mary had not first borne God spiritually, he would never have been born of her physically. A woman said to our Lord, "Blessed is the womb that bore you" (Luke 11:27). And our Lord replied, "Not only is the womb blessed that bore me: blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it." It is more worth to God to be born spiritually of the individual virgin or good soul, than that he was physically born of Mary.

Meister Eckhart, Sermon 53
(14th century)

Crossing The Threshold

A Day Full of Hope

"Let Hope Abound"

*Christ of the Dawn come bid me arise.
Lighten my day as darkness dies.
See, with the sunrise new mercies grow,
Hope is the fire that fills my soul.*

*Christ of the Morning steady my way.
Come bless the work that fills my day.
Let every action be filled with grace,
Hope is the breath that sets my pace.*

*Let hope be found in me, let hope abound.
Let hope be found in me, let hope abound.*

*Christ of the Noon, my shelter and shade.
Guard every step my feet have made.
When work feels heavy and strength is thin,
Hope is the stream that flows within.*

*Christ of the Evening gather me near,
Harvest my joy and quiet my fear.
As daylight fades and labors all cease,
Hope is the song that whispers 'Peace.'*

*Let hope be found in me, let hope abound.
Let hope be found in me, let hope abound.*

*Christ of the Night my refuge and friend,
Hold me secure as dark descends.
Till dawn returns and shadows all flee,
Hope is the dream that carries me.
Christ is the hope that lives in me.*

Contemplating the Psalms

Psalm 86, 103 Nan Merrill

*Give ear to my cry, Eternal Word, and answer me,
for I am in need of You.
Awaken new life in me, as I yearn to do your will;
dispel the ignorance of my ways, as I put my trust in You.
You are the Beloved; be gracious to me, Heart of my heart,
for with You would I walk all day.
My soul is uplifted, as I abandon myself into Your hands....*

*The Beloved's home is our hearts,
as we discover in the Silence.
Bless the Beloved, O you angels,
you faith-filled ones who hear the Word,
following the Voice of Love!
Bless the Beloved, all you people,
those who abandon themselves into Love's hands!*

Abandoning Ourselves to Love

"Still Still Still"

*Still, still, still, Let all the earth be still.
For all is hushed, the world is sleeping,
Holy Star its vigil keeping.
Still, still, still, Let all the earth be still.*

*Sleep, sleep, sleep, 'Tis the eve of our Savior's birth.
The night is peaceful all around you,
Close your eyes, let sleep surround you.
Sleep, sleep, sleep, 'Tis the eve of our Savior's birth.*

*Light, light, light, Let all the earth be light.
The holy star its news ablazing
Sign of hope for nations raising.
Light, light, light, Let all the earth be light.*

Contemplating the Gospel

Matthew 1:18-23

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found having a child in the womb from the Spirit of Holiness. And her husband Joseph, being righteous and not willing to put her to shame, resolved to release her quietly.

But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which in her is born is of the Spirit of Holiness. She will bring forth a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken through the prophet:

*"Behold, the virgin shall hold in her womb and bring forth a son,
and they shall call his name Emmanuel" (which means, God-with-us)."*

Then Joseph, being awakened from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord directed him and received his wife.

Meditation

Song of Response

"O Little Town of Bethlehem"

*O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by.
Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting Light;
The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.*

*How silently, how silently, the wondrous Gift is giv'n;
So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of His Heav'n.
No ear may hear His coming, but in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive Him still, the dear Christ enters in.*

*Where hearts grow still and open receptive to God's care
And every cry of sorrow finds love already there
Where Charity stands watching, and Faith holds wide the door,
The dark night wakes, the glory breaks, and Christmas comes once more.*

Resting in the Silence

During these 5 minutes of silence, simply rest in God's abiding and loving presence in this moment. Simply be here now. Descend into this Silence. There is nothing you need to do. Just relax. Sense your body. Breathe more deeply than usual. It can help to focus on the region of the heart. You might use a breath prayer to help you descend into this silence at the level of the heart, such as "Fill my heart" (inhale), "with Love" (exhale), or use a sacred word (such as Love, Peace, Abba, Jesus, or Spirit).

Meeting at the Table

"O Little Town of Bethlehem"

*O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray;
Cast out our sin, and enter in, be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell;
O, come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel!*

Holy Communion

Receiving a Good Word



Our Staff

Haley Brown – Associate Director of The Anchor House

Courtney Garrison – Ministry Assistant

Christian Ibanez – AV Production

Peter Johns – Associate Director of Contemplative Worship

Zachary Montasser – Violinist

Nick Cavazos – AV Production

Rev. Rachel Sciretti – Associate Pastor

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

Quartet

Allie Waguespak – Soprano, **Krista Pape** – Alto, **Dallas Gray** – Tenor, **Nathan Holmes** – Baritone

Today's Music

'Let Hope Abound – Peter Johns, *'Still, Still, Still'* – Traditional

'O Little Town of Bethlehem' – Phillips Brooks & Lewis H. Redner

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.

Winter Solstice on the Labyrinth

December 21 | The Labyrinth | 4:00pm – 5:30pm

The winter solstice, the shortest day of the year, can feel like a quiet turning point - a pause in the rush of the year. Even in the deep darkness, there's this sense of hope, as if the stillness is inviting us to pay attention to what's ready to grow next. Come join us for a moment to look inward, to settle, to breathe, and to trust that the small sparks we're tending now will eventually brighten into something new. There will be opportunities to walk the labyrinth outside as well as inside, create a SoulCollage card, or simply sit and bask in the last moments of light on the shortest day of the year with a cup of coffee and a labyrinth cookie! Labyrinth & SoulCollage® evenings are offered as a gift to the community by Cindy Serio and Ginny Itz with no fee. Registration is helpful but not required.



The Service of the Longest Night

December 21 | 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. We will acknowledge our losses and ponder the everlasting hope that shines like a light in the darkness.

Yoga at The Center: A Posture of Prayer

Monday, December 22 | The Anchor House | 6:00 – 7:00 p.m. | \$10 per class

In this course, led by Jonathan Mangrum, we will use the practice of yoga as a lens to explore what it means to embody spirituality. Each class will include time engaging in breath work, meditation, yoga postures, and poses.



Contemplative Communion and Candlelight Christmas Eve

Wednesday, December 24 | The Chapel | 4:00 p.m.

Join us for Contemplative Candlelight Christmas Eve worship service will take place in The Chapel. Through familiar carols and scripture readings we will retell the story of the first Christmas.

Holding One Another in the Light

As our commitment to one another deepens, we want to be able to pray for one another – bearing burdens and joining in celebrations. Here is how to participate:

1. *Make a request for prayer or thanksgiving using the QR link or go to thecenterfcs.org*
2. *Opt in to receive the weekly prayer list by emailing Rachel at rscoretti@chapelwood.org.*



Giving to The Center

We invite you to financially give to The Center in response to what you have received today or throughout our contemplative offerings. Using the QR code will take you to a page where you can make a one-time offering or recurring gift. Thank you for your contribution and investment.



Upcoming Events

January 9-11, "Anchored in The Center" 25th Anniversary Weekend

- *Friday, Jan 9th 6:30 – 8:00pm Conversation and Q&A with Rev. Dr. Michael Sciretti, Jr. & Jerry Webber (via zoom)*
- *Saturday, Jan 10th 9:00am – 2:00pm Guided Silent Retreat with Rev. Dr. Michael Sciretti, Jr.: Contemplative Anchoring in God, to Church, for the World \$35*
- *Sun, Jan 11th 8:45 am Worship and 10:00am Worship Response: Celebrating the 25th Anniversary of the Contemplative Worship Service*

February 20-21 – Enneagram Workshops with Sandra Smith