



The 13 Days of Christmas

Celebrating the Wonder and Awe of Birth

Alexander John Shaia

©All Rights Reserved

www.quadratos.com

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Inscription

Dedication

A Word from Alexander John 7

I Origins, The Celts & Today's Re-Imagining 11

Three

A New Calendar

The Winter Solstice & Christmas Day

II Leading to The 13 Days 18

Celtic & Christian New Year: Omega to Alpha

The Deepest Dark: Advent / November & December

The Great Tree: Celtic & Christian

The Christ Tree: November to June

Blessing The Christ Tree

III The 13 Days of Christmas 34

Winter Solstice – Mid-Winter Sun – Dec 21/22

A Solstice Night Prayer

Winter Solstice Until Sunset of December 24

The Green Man Meets St. Nicholas

Origin of The Carol: The 12 Days of Christmas

The Red & Green of Christmas

Feast of Adam & Eve

1st Day: The Great Feast of Christmas

The Four-Gospel Journey of Christmas

Why A 13 Day Festival?

2nd Day: Wren – Feast of Stephen / Sacred Masculine

3rd Day: Grape-Ecstasy-Oneness – St John's Day / Sacred Feminine

4th Day: Protect the Child – Holy Innocents

5th Day: Feast of Fools – Simeon & Jesus

6th Day: Bringing in the Boar – Holy Family

7th Day: Hanging the Mistletoe – Bless One's Home

8th Day: Wassail/Apple Tree – 8th Day Co-Creation

9th Day: Snow/Sand Day – Basil & Gregory

10th Day: Evergreen & Oak – Genevieve

11th Day: Distaff-Grumble Day

12th Day: Preparation Day

13th Day: Feast of The Epiphany

Three Gospels of The Epiphany

Arrival of the Magi

(Gospel of Matthew)

Jesus' Mikvah Bath

(Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke)

Wedding Feast at Cana

(Gospel of John)

IV Season of The Epiphany, Magi & One's Royal Nature 78

13th Day to the Opening of Lent

V Epilogue – A New Vista 81

VI Resources 84

*In darkness
I remember that it is not knowledge
to which we most deeply belong
but mystery.*

*And I sense in the mystery of night
a beauty that exceeds
even the great and notable beauties
of the daylit world.*

John Daniel
In Praise of Darkness
from the book
Let There Be Night

for

Annie Sempill

&

my great nephew and great niece

Luke Alexander Shaia

&

Adeline Kim Shaia

A Word from Alexander John

Dear Friends,

Thank you for purchasing this not yet completed work of "The 13 Days of Christmas." I decided to release a good enough draft because I would like your help. In this time of tremendous change and growth, I believe collaboration is the best way to move forward.

This text is not the last word on re-imagining Christmas. Rather it is the first word of what I believe is a new era. Re-rooting Christmas in its ancient traditions, while re-imagining the feast for today and tomorrow. I hope you will accept my invite to begin this work, and to begin it together. Let's do this for ourselves, and for the generations that are coming after us.

On January 7th, you will receive an email with a link to an online series of questions. Having read *The 13 Days*, I will ask you questions like: what was beneficial or inspiring; what was of least value; what was confusing; what would you like to see expanded, what ideas did you try, and with what effect etc.?

Sharing your experiences with me will be an incredible help in finishing this book. And by answering these online questions before January 31st, you will receive a 20% discount on pre-ordering the book, set for release next Autumn.

Like for many of us, Covid-19 has meant a financial downturn for Quadratos. Please do not pass this PDF to others outside your household. Ask them to support Quadratos and purchase a copy. Thank you!

This work is a guide to celebrating the Deepest Dark (Advent), The 13 Days of Christmas and the Season of Epiphany until early February. Helen Keller (born deaf and blind) said, "The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched, they must be felt with the heart."

I offer this work not as a proof for your mind, but with the hope that something here will touch your heart, and inspire you to wonder – anew. We have an ancient truth to live again. This truth was a secure foundation for our first Christian ancestors. That truth? *The deepest dark is the womb of radiance and the place from which The Christ is born anew.*

If you live in the Northern Hemisphere, this book can be a guide from November to February, the months of Celtic Winter. If you live in the Southern Hemisphere, this work might offer you reflections from May to August. Please use your creativity in applying this material to your winter season, wherever you live, and however you experience winter.

In thinking of your winter season, consider learning the winter ways and rituals of indigenous peoples near you. The indigenous are deeply connected to the cycles of nature. Their celebrations are intricately connected to earth, the seasons and their bodies. So too, I believe, was early Christianity. And the indigenous can offer us great wisdom as we seek to restore our Christian feasts to their experience of nature's seasons and our bodies wherever we may live.

However, as we invite the indigenous to be our teachers, please do not 'steal' their rituals. Their ways are not for us to use without their permission. Honor indigenous wisdom by allowing it to inspire our own creativity. By our re-learning what Christian tradition has forgotten, and knowing that The Christ is present with us, we will discover fresh and radiant ways for a Christianity of today and tomorrow.

Christmas is a beloved feast, if not our most beloved. Yet our experience of this time is varied. For many, these are magical days filled with a depth of love, generosity, friendship and the very meaning of life. What is it about a decorated tree, a favorite carol or a candle burning in the dark that can bring such wonder and joy?

For others, this season plunges them into the depths of loneliness, cynicism and despair. Others' expression of joy with friends and family can take them to a place where they feel like an outcast wandering in a land of grief and personal failure.

Still others, in increasing numbers, are searching. The beautiful stories and traditions of yesterday are empty. The joy and wonder in them have been lost. The season's never-ending commercialism seems oppressive. They want a deeper root to the Feast. Are there fresh understandings that might restore the season's radiance and joy?

And without exception, most of us arrive at the 25th of December, believing it to be the final day of Christmas. Advertising has taught us that the “12 Days of Christmas” are days that precede the 25th. By Christmas afternoon, we are bombarded with notices for ‘after-Christmas sales’, trees begin to be placed outside for rubbish collection, and the radio stops playing carols.

But in spiritual tradition, the feast has only just opened. December 25th is the first of thirteen days to celebrate and experience the mystery and lessons of a birth that happens in the deepest dark.

This restoration of The 13 Days is an invitation to come home to the earth and our bodies. Earth and body *know* something about birth. The 13 Days are not about hope for tomorrow. Hope is an emotion tinged with doubt and mental anxiety.

When Christianity met the Celts, the Celts were a people of “hope” at the Winter Solstice. Their rituals were built on the concern that unless they were faithfully conducted, the sun would not be re-born, thus ending their life in the cold climate of Northern Europe. The Celts were hoping for the sun’s re-birth.

Christianity offered a different answer. Christians knew an embodied truth. Christians knew that an interior darkness is a womb – and from that dark womb the fresh radiance of Christ is ever born anew.

The Celt’s were hoping. The Christians knew. So it was a small step for the Christians of that time to craft the Feast of Christmas – joining an inner spiritual truth to that embodied in nature, that at the time of the deepest dark the sun is re-born.

In our spiritual journey, we begin with hope. Yet hope is not the golden rose of Christianity. Hope is where we begin. Knowing is where we are headed.

Christmas teaches us to be a people who *know* that in every deep dark of our lives, the Christ IS born anew and ever more.

This is a personal work. In these pages are many of my own traditions. Look through this PDF. Note what calls to you. Experiment with some of the ideas and practices. See which ones have meaning for you, your family and community.

The key to any re-imagining is a willingness to explore and experiment. As you do, please note what does not inspire you. And then pass it by and let it go. Equally, find what draws you, and linger a while.

We are taking first steps on a new journey. And while it may be thrilling, it will also be arduous. We are restoring parts of our tradition that have lain hidden for at least thirteen hundred years.

Let us be *grateful* for each other. And let us be *patient and generous* with each other. The era that is now passing away was about uniformity. The emerging era is about many streams that flow from and toward the same source.

I invite you to a daring and courageous act. Let us re-wonder the days from November to February, allowing ancient tradition to sing with new *imagination*.

Gratitude

Patience

Generosity

Imagination

It is True. It is True!

Alexander John Shaia

Santa Fe, New Mexico, USA
Feast of St Nicholas
06 December 2020

I

Origins

The Celts

&

Today's Re-Imagining

Three

Have you ever considered the significance of the number three?

In the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, the number appears 467 times.

Some of its most noteworthy uses are:

Three Patriarchs before the Flood
Abel, Enoch and Noah

Noah has three sons.

Three Patriarchs after the Flood
Abraham, Isaac, Jacob

Three angels visited Abraham and Sarah.

Moses asked Pharaoh if the Hebrews could leave and go into the wilderness for three days.

The Hebrews brought the sacrificial animal (lamb or goat) for Passover into their house for three days before it was slaughtered.

The Hebrews walked three days to Marah, a place of bitter water.

Mount Sinai was a three day journey from Egypt.

On the third day, Yahweh came down to Moses on Mount Sinai.

Jonah was in the belly of the whale three days.

Hebrews were told they would cross the Jordan and enter the Promised Land in three days.

There are the three temptations of Jesus.

Jesus takes three disciples up mountain for the Transfiguration.

Lazarus was in the tomb three days before Jesus arrives.

In The Gospel of John, Jesus says,
“Destroy this temple and I will raise it in three days.”

Jesus takes three disciples with him to pray on the Mount of Olives.

Peter denies Jesus three times.

Jesus is placed on the cross at the third hour.

Jesus dies at the ninth (3x3) hour.

In The Gospel of John, three women are near Jesus as Jesus dies.

Jesus is in the tomb three days.

In The Gospel of Mark, three women go to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body.

In The Gospel of John, the resurrected Jesus asks Peter three times:
“Do you love me?”

AND

Today there are three days between the Winter Solstice
and Christmas Day.

The three day span between the two feasts is not an accident.

But there is much more to this story.

A New Calendar

In 1582, Pope Gregory XIII introduced the *Gregorian Calendar* which was needed to correct a significant error in the *Julian Calendar* that had been in use since 45 BCE.

[Due to the animosity between the Anglican and Roman Church, Britain and its colonies – including what would become the US - did not make the change from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar until 1752, some two hundred years after most of Europe.]

The Julian Calendar had a 362 day year which meant it was three days short in marking the days it took the earth to circle the sun each year. Over the calendar's use for some 1600 hundred years, this error resulted in the planting season and the sun cycle being disastrously out of synch, i.e. December had become a summer month etc.

The Gregorian Calendar corrected the error by adding three days to the year, bringing a year to 365 days and adding an extra day (leap day) each fourth year. The result of adding three days to the year created a great dilemma for Christianity. All the major Christian feasts (except Easter) had been created in the fourth century using the Julian Calendar's sun cycle.

The 'three day' divergence between the two calendars had a large effect on the entire Christian year and its cycle of feasts. But determining the date for Christmas was the greatest dilemma. As centuries passed, December moved from a winter month to the springtime and eventually summer. With this progression, Christians eventually forgot that Christmas was intended to be a feast in the depths of winter and specifically aligned with the Winter Solstice.

With the Gregorian Calendar, December was restored as a winter month. And Christmas would again be a winter feast in the Northern Hemisphere. But would the feast resume its connection with the Winter Solstice which on the Gregorian calendar was now Dec 21/22? Or would the feast remain on December 25th which had been the date for 1200 years, and that many considered (though erroneously) to be the historical date of Jesus' birth?

What to do? How could this dilemma be solved?

The Winter Solstice & Christmas Day

Obviously, Christianity's answer was to retain Christmas Day on the date of December 25th. But why? There are a number of threads to this radiant fabric: nature's cycle, a spiritual truth and a body sensation.

First, why was Christmas Day – in the fourth century - originally set to be the day of the Winter Solstice? The first connection is because the Winter Solstice was an essential ritual and spiritual practice for the Celtic peoples. Christianity needed to explain Jesus the Christ to them in a way that connected to their culture and practices. The Winter Solstice marked the sun's re-birth, and the Feast of Christmas would mark Jesus' birth.

But there is a greater truth here. In nature, it is precisely at the deepest dark when the sun is at its weakest power (December in the Northern Hemisphere) that a reversal happens and radiance is re-born. Christianity understood nature's truth as also proclaiming a spiritual truth and the truth of Jesus the Christ. It is at the time of one's own inner deep darkness, that new radiance is born - that the grace of Jesus the Christ is born anew in each of us.

Christianity, not knowing the historical date of Jesus' birth, chose to tell that truth by matching it to nature's truth. At the Winter Solstice – the moment of the deepest dark – the sun reverses and begins to grow again. In the human heart – at a time of personal and collective darkness – the strength of Jesus the Christ is born in us anew.

As we have explored, in both Hebrew and Christian scripture, the number three is a number that often is used to refer to a journey of transformation. For Christians, its most significant use is Jesus' three days in the tomb between death and resurrection. Jesus being in the tomb for three days is one building block to explain the three day span between the Winter Solstice (21/22) and Christmas Day (25) on the Gregorian Calendar.

However, when the Christian cycle of feasts were initially developed in the third and fourth centuries CE, a theological perspective for a feast was not enough to set its date. Each feast needed to be anchored in a bodily experience connected to nature.

[Remember: In the first centuries, Christianity stayed with her Jewish mother's use of moon cycles. In essence, we continued to be a 'moon' tradition, following a 28 day cycle from new

moon to full and back again to new, along with the sensate experience of each 24 hour period that opened past sunset, moved through the dark to dawn, and back again to nighttime. These cycles worked well as long as Christianity remained primarily in the Mediterranean basin where the phases of the moon were more dramatic than those of the sun.

However, when Christianity went north of the Alps, we met the Celtic world which followed a 12 month sun-cycle. Living in a cold climate, the Celts depended upon the sun, and their Winter Solstice rituals which they believed insured the sun's re-birth.

For the Celts, the Winter Solstice was a 13 day festival dedicated to rituals that they believed were critical to birth. And day-by-festival day, the Celt's experienced the sun's resurgence. This reliance on the sun's re-birth, and the sensate experience of its increase through the days of the Winter Solstice Festival, became the 'incarnational' anchor to the Christian feast of Christmas.]

In the 16th century, and its implementation of the Gregorian Calendar, what would be the physical bodily sensation that would confirm having a three day span between Solstice night and Christmas morning?

Let's understand the meaning of the word *solstice*. The term is comprised of two separate Latin words. *Sol* means sun, and *stetit* means still. Literally, solstice means the sun stands still. Why? Because to the naked eye – at the winter and summer solstice – the sun appears to neither increase or decrease.

How long does this phenomenon last? Three days! At the Winter Solstice, the naked eye cannot perceive that the light of the sun is increasing until the third day. And using the Gregorian Calendar, what is that third day when every human can actually perceive the sun is 're-born' (growing in strength again)? Christmas Morning!

There is our answer. In nature, at the deepest dark, on the third morning past Winter Solstice night, the human eye can see that radiance in the world is re-born. On the third morning after Jesus' death, Jesus rose. And on the third morning after Winter Solstice night, Christians chose to celebrate a spiritual truth of the Christ that lives everywhere.

Rooted in our physical experience of nature, the Christ teaches us to stay on the journey. The sun is reborn at the moment of the deepest dark. And in our personal and cultural times, when we are at the deepest dark, the Christ's radiance will born anew in our lives. Do not fear the dark.

Darkness is not how the world ends.

Darkness marks the time of beginning - again.

Is there any greater truth

that our hearts

need to know

today?

II

Leading to The 13 Days

Celtic & Christian New Year Omega to Alpha

31 October– 01 November – 02 November

A long time ago, when Christianity met the Celtic world, the two traditions intermingled and mutually shaped each other. The Celts changed Christianity. And Christianity changed the Celts.

[At this moment, the Celtic world was rife with tribal conflict. Christianity offered them a more vital life and one lived with greater harmony.]

In meeting the Celts, Christianity left behind its Jewish 28 day moon cycle, and re-imagined its feasts through the Celt's 12 month sun cycle. We may ask why?

A personal sadness is that Christians today have forgotten that our ancestors wished our feasts to have a bodily sensation that matched a spiritual or theological story. Whether the moon calendar of Judaism, or the later sun calendar of the Celts, Christian feasts were joined to the sensory truths of earth and sky. Truly, our ancestors wished us to be a practice of incarnation experiencing the Christ in nature and our own body sensations.

Slowly this essential integration between feasts and nature, devolved into theological statements. Even more tragic, this devolution came to teach Christians that a Christ expressed through Nature was a degradation.

I believe the time has come for us to remove the husk of theological statements, and return our feasts to their root in nature and in our bodies. While not denying the theological statements, the Greater Story is telling of how the Christ is incarnate in the Cosmos and each one of us. By restoring Christianity as an eco-spiritual practice, we will aid worldwide human efforts to living sustainably.

Similar to the Jewish and Christian tradition of three sacred days, the Celts observed a three day passage between the old and new year. The daylight hours of 30 October marked the end of Autumn and the old year. And the new year began after sunset on 2 November. The three in-between-days, the Celts described as a *thin* space that existed outside of time. These were the days of Samhain.

Over 72 hours, the Celts experienced the veil between this world and that of the spirits being open. The disappearance of time allowed them to commune with past ancestors as well as future descendants. Past, present and future became an eternal now.

Not only did the New Year begin at nightfall on 2 November, but this night marked the arrival of Celtic Winter, named the Deepest Dark. *(For more on this, see the next section.)*

Christianity now reshaped its new year to this Celtic practice. Just past sundown on 30 October was the day of preparation, followed by two days known as the Feast of All Saints and Feast of All Souls.

Christianity already had a sacred three days in the Springtime (Easter). Now they added a second. This Autumn *triduum* (Latin for three days) became the Omega (end) and Alpha (beginning) of the Christian Year. Subsequently Advent opened with nightfall on 2 November and lead to the Winter Solstice and Christmas Day.

The ancient Greeks saw time as linear and gave us a phrase like, Alpha and Omega – believing time moved in a straight line from a supposed beginning to an end. However, for the Celts and early Christianity, time was circular. The Feast of Samhain, along with All Saints and All Souls, proclaimed that every ending leads to a new beginning.

Christ is Alpha and Omega.

Christ is Omega and Alpha.

Beginnings and endings are an unbroken circle.

The arrival of the deep dark is not how life ends.

Darkness is how life begins again.

The Deepest Dark / Advent November & December

Once Christianity met the Celtic world, the Christian new year opened just past sunset on the 2nd of November. For the Celt's the time that we name as November and December, they called *Dumannios* (The Darkest Depths) or *Riuos* (Cold Time).

For Christians these months became the eight weeks of Advent. By different names, both traditions emphasized the same truth: the arrival of darkness signals newness and a beginning time.

For the Celts, the weeks of The Darkest Depths culminated at Mid-Winter or the Winter Solstice Festival. For the first Celtic Christians, these weeks became "Advent" culminating in The Christmas Festival, the tradition's re-shaping of the Winter Solstice.

Later, Christianity lost its incarnational anchor in nature. When a theological statement overtook its integration with nature, four tragic mistakes were made that changed the character of Advent. These mistakes continue today.

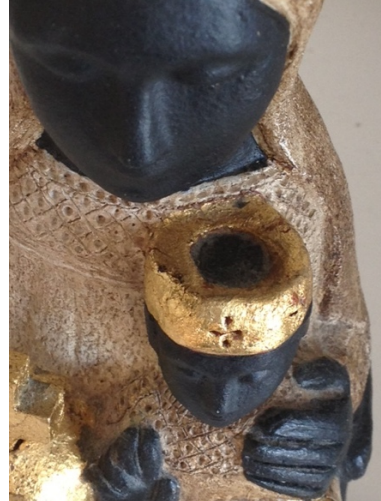
First, Advent was given a penitential focus like that of Lent. Christmas became the second moment in the year to baptize. Easter was the first.

Secondly, the season was shortened from 8 weeks to 4 weeks. The concern was that Advent not compete with Lent. Making the season shorter severed the natural connection between Advent and the arrival of the deepest dark that becomes physically evident in early November.

Making Advent a penitential season like Lent, also changed its color from a dark or midnight blue to that of purple. This mistake is seen today in the Advent wreath with its 4 candles (rather than 8) colored purple and pink rather than natural or dark blue.

The original focus of Advent was the prayer of holy darkness. Thus these weeks were a season of praying with a dark face of the Madonna as an expression of Spirit's dark fruitful, womb.

In this prayer of womb time, we light candles to decorate the dark, remembering the dark has a particular type of radiance that indicates God is reknitting us. The radiant darkness of Advent is beautifully expressed in this particular black Madonna with child wrapped in gold.



How appropriate it is for us to begin to restore Advent to its earliest foundation. One gift will be to heal the split we have placed between Spirit and nature. But perhaps even more important, by once again hallowing the dark, we will take another step in lifting the wound that we have placed on those with darker skin tone.

Hallowed Be Our Advent

a radiant darkness

the holy face

of God's

fertile womb.

The Great Tree Celtic & Christian

There is a belief by some that the Great Tree of Christmas is not a worthy Christian symbol because of its roots in the Celtic world. This is hardly the case. Christianity at its best sees symbols found in world cultures as yet another way to tell the story of an eternal, universal and ever-present Christ.

Moving north of the Alps**, Christians met the Celtic world with its emphasis on the Great Tree as a primary way of experiencing Spirit. To help the Celts understand Jesus the Christ, Christians showed how the World Tree was an outer expression of the universal Christ. Rather than impoverishing either tradition, The Tree and The Christ were woven together to make a radiant fabric.

Celtic: The Great Tree was an image of the world axis, connecting the three worlds: Upper, Lower and Here (the middle world).

Christian: The Christ is the axis holding together past, present, future, all dimensions above, below and here, present in every place across the Cosmos.

Celtic: The god Odin, sacrificing himself to gain wisdom, hangs on the World Tree to die.

Christian: Jesus the Christ died hanging from a wooden pole made sacred by this death.



Celtic: The Oak was their original sacred tree. After the oak forests of Europe were decimated, the fir or evergreen became the sacred tree. Both oak and fir were known to draw lightning strikes, resulting in their limbs being set ablaze. From such burning branches, the Celts harnessed fire—one of the greatest of all gifts for people in these frigid winter lands. Because these trees were “fire-bearing”—they became sacred, for fire was for them the very essence of life.

** The Celtic culture at its height spanned from Ireland to Turkey but did not extend below the Alps.

Christian: Jesus the Christ is the fire-bearer of love and generosity which is essential for all relationships to thrive.

Celtic: During their most sacred festivals, the Celts would give thanks to the Spirit world by creating bonfires, setting ablaze the wood of their sacred tree. The Winter Solstice was the most important of these festivals. At this moment, the Celts believed they were obligated to gift back to the Spirits - the great gift the Spirits had given them – fire harnessed from the limbs of the sacred tree. Burning this wood as an offering they intended to insure the sun's re-birth.

Christian: Understood that Jesus the Christ's birth is an eternal moment that happens again and again in each human heart in every age. We need not fear. Christians make fires in the night (or 'light' a tree or a candle) to proclaim a great spiritual truth: the time of the deepest dark is the moment when fresh radiance is born anew.

Celtic: During the daylight hours before the night of the Winter Solstice, one Celtic tradition was to decorate the village's sacred oak tree, by hanging fruits (apples and pears) in its limbs from that year's harvest or dried fruits from past years. This decorating of the barren oak honored the tree's believed re-birth at the Winter Solstice.



Christian: Seeing the Celts decorate their sacred tree with fruits during the daylight hours of December 24, Christians recognized this ritual as a restoration of the Tree of Life at the center of the Garden of Eden as described in the *Book of Genesis*. So Christians took up decorating The Tree with fruits on the 24th. They called this day the Feast of Adam and Eve, and celebrated that in the presence of the Christ, *The Garden* of Eden is opened again to all. Over the centuries, what began with apples and pears being hung in the limbs of the Tree, eventually became what we see today, trees decorated with all manner of ornaments.

The Christ Tree November to June

For eons, each village had had its ‘sacred tree’ located in the town square or near the parish church. The emphasis was on the one community tree, honored in various ways during the year. And if a feast called for a fire made from sacred wood, boughs were cut from the village tree. Or boughs that fell from that tree during the year were collected and saved for upcoming festival fires.

We still have the custom of a community tree, like the one at Rockefeller Plaza in New York City, the White House or other such grand and governmental places around the world. But today, the popularity of personal and family Trees at home have overtaken the practice of a community Tree.

It appears that the practice of having a Tree at home rapidly developed during the Victorian era with the rise of a more affluent middle class and a growing emphasis on personal over that of village or community.

Today, we are beginning a reverse journey as the emphasis on the individual joins with the values of harmony and community. While, it is too early to tell what our future expressions of Christmas may be, early signs point to a dramatic shift. Many today are concerned about conservation of natural resources as well as the financial outlay on “Christmas.” As a result, the popularity of having a cut Tree at home is diminishing.

As we peer toward tomorrow, here are some considerations. If the idea of a communal tree, appeals – one suggestion is to plant a “sacred” Tree outside in the yard of your home, a shared communal space or on the grounds of your church. Oak and fir are sacred to the Celts, but which might be yours?

For my family, it would be a Cedar of Lebanon. However, these Cedars grow an inch or two a year and live for a thousand years or more. And it takes forty years to produce its first cones. Planting one today would be a gift to your descendants decades or even hundreds of years from now.

Perhaps you already have a tree in your yard that has special significance for you? Some cultures, plant a tree at a child’s birth. The Maori of New Zealand bury the placenta after childbirth at the foot of a special tree, believing that the tree and the child will grow together.

If you have a personal or communal Tree, or if you wish a cut tree or a bough, here are suggestions for how the Tree may be used for wonder, celebration and as a prayer focus from November to June.

Cutting a tree or a bough from a tree means that you are inviting a living being into your home and heart – to die in your presence. May the Tree's sacrifice open within you the gifts of wonder, generosity and the aroma of life in the midst of the deep and the dark. As the Tree is giving its life so that you may have more life, please treat its death with honor and respect. When the time comes to 'take it down,' consider ways the wood of The Tree may be used rather than disposing of it as rubbish.

If you have chosen to have an artificial tree in your home, let your creativity flow. Its presence with you is still an invitation to wonder, generosity and the aroma of life. Perhaps you might also have a chosen 'sacred' Tree outside. Or consider cutting a bough from a 'sacred' Tree and placing it near your artificial tree.

I look forward to hearing your ideas and creativity. On January 7 2021, you will receive an online survey. Please share how you have used these ideas and your creativity with an artificial Tree. I plan to learn from you, and incorporate more ideas into the final edition of this book.

Here is the calendar I keep, making the Great Christ Tree a significant spiritual piece in my home for many months. Again, I share these ideas to spur your own reflection and creativity. I do not offer my calendar as a model to follow, but rather to offer new thoughts and possibilities.

What's the purpose of such traditions? For me, they are a way to bring intention and mindfulness to the cycle of night and day, cold and heat, and to deepen my experience that everything in creation is alive, has a consciousness, and opens me to know The Christ.

The use of sacred objects for prayer and meditation is one of two royal ways to engender a deep stillness of mind and heart. This way is named *kataphatic* prayer. Its twin – which does not use sacred objects - is named *apophatic* prayer. Both are

wondrous paths of equal value and depth, using different practices, to arrive at the same source.

It is likely that each of us has a clear preference for one style over the other. Practicing the style opposite from one's preference – at least for a while - can stretch you and bring rich growth. A beneficial result will be an intertwining of the two practices into one's own personal recipe. Beware of any teaching that says one of the two forms has more value than the other. There is no 'one' royal road to the center. Oneness will always be a dialogic integration of two seeming opposites.

As you review this calendar, I hope that you will find a piece or two that awakens a freshness in your own life. Again, this calendar is not intended to be a model to follow but rather a catalyst to your own creativity. What does not call to you, please pass it by! But what does call to you, linger a while in your thoughts and notice how your own creativity may open.

November 2 (sunset) to December 20/21 (day before the Winter Solstice)

My work is about restoring the Christian feasts of the Northern Hemisphere to their intended cycle of nature. I pray that Christians in the Southern Hemisphere will use their creativity and reflection to discover how to set the feasts in their cycle of nature and bodily experiences.

Advent originally began with sunset on November 2nd and continued until Christmas Evening (sunset of December 24th). Restoring Advent to its nature rhythm as the 'holy dark' between All Saints/All Souls and the Feast of Christmas allows the weeks of November and December to be the time that we might bring the Tree to our reflection, prayer and celebrations.

From our earliest days, who has not felt the wonder and grace of a decorated Tree regardless if it stands in a central place inside our home, in every room of our home, in a town plaza or in the great wild? A decorated Tree seems to hold a numinous presence that is perhaps hardwired in our DNA. Tree (and a wood burning fire) can be potent elements of warmth, levity and wonder in the midst of our dark seasons.

In the midst of today's busy lives, we tend to put up the Tree when we have the time or feel the need. A bit counter-cultural, but another way of honoring the Tree is by having a set day on your annual calendar to acquire and/or set up your tree.

Make it an annual holiday, including special foods for the day. Also, you may wish to acquire your Tree in early November with the beginning of Advent, or you may wish to do it in later December. My suggestion is to choose the date with intent, and make the date an annual tradition.

I use one of three feast days to acquire my Tree. Each has a personal significance and are connected to my Advent prayer. By acquiring the Tree on one of these feasts, I make an intention that the Tree's presence will help awaken me – aid me in be more mindful of certain virtues. Over the years I had the Blue Door Retreat in Santa Fe, our Christ Tree was a 12-15 foot Noble Fir that stood in the Great Room with its 20 foot pitched roof. *(See photos in the text about December 25th.)*

Dec 4 – Feast of St Barbara: she lived in 4th century Syria. Her father imprisoned by her in a tower, and eventually beheaded her because she would not recant the oneness of all people in The Christ.

Dec 6 - Feast of St Nicolas: he lived in 4th century Turkey. As bishop of Bari, his life exemplified care and generosity for the poor. Nicholas was known for his special care of girls in providing them a dowry so that they would not have to be sold into slavery. (This practice is the genesis of the custom of placing candy in children's shoes, after bedtime, on the night of Dec 5 as the Feast of St. Nicholas begins.)

Dec 12 - Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe: the dark, pregnant Madonna who reminds me that dark times are potentially Spirit's pregnancy within us.

Dec 21/22 - during the days leading to the Winter Solstice, we carefully trim the boughs of the Tree (creating space between the tips of the boughs) as they will hold lit** beeswax candles on Solstice Night.

Then during the daylight hours leading to Solstice Night, we carefully wrap the boughs (tip to trunk and back out) with some 2,000 white electric lights in what is an otherwise unadorned tree. Then we clamp some 50-75 small candle holders to the tips of specifically chosen boughs. Each tin clamp - shaped like a pine cone holds one lit candle on Solstice Night. At the Tree top, is a straw, 6 pointed Star of David. This star has personal and sentimental meaning. It was a gift from a dear friend long deceased. I place it each year with a prayer that all opposites - within and amongst us - will be joined in new harmony.

***Careful (!) There is a labor intensive process in making a cut tree safe for burning real candles in its boughs. Please email annie@quadratos.com to contact Quadratos and learn how to safely do this.*

Winter Solstice (nighttime) a small community gathers near sunset. We have a simple meal of a hearty soup, salad and bread. After the meal, we take 20 minutes of quiet reflection as we write prayers for the world and ourselves on parchment paper. The ancients believed that prayers offered on the nights of the Winter and Summer Solstice have a particular spiritual power.

Each person rolls the paper, ties it with a red ribbon, lays it on a bough of the Tree, lights a nearby beeswax candle and then speaks (if she or he wishes) some piece of their prayer. Candle by lit candle, a soft radiance gradually fills the room.

After everyone's prayers are placed in the Tree and candles lit, we listen to Mary Chapin Carpenter's song, "The Longest Night of the Year" on her album *Come Darkness, Come Light*.

Then we sing carols as the candles burn. Once they have burnt down, we extinguish the candles, hold a moment of quiet in the darkness and then illumine the Tree's with its 2,000 white lights. In the full light of the Tree, we offer toasts in honor of The Christ's radiance, the gift of all peoples and for each other.

The evening concludes with a personal tradition since 1982. In my best Louisiana accent, I read *The Cajun Night Before Christmas* where Santa's skiff is drawn through the bayou by 12 alligators.

Dec 24 (daytime) during the daylight hours a few friends and I place ornaments in the Tree.

Dec 24 (nightfall) – as the Great Feast of Christmas begins, we light the now fully adorned Christmas Tree and sing or play a particular Carol that I have avoided playing (or hearing) during the Advent Season. (For me, the song is Mahalia Jackson's version of Hark! The Herald Angels Sing.)

Dec 25 - after being lit at sunset on the 24th, the tree remains lit through the night, and all the way until bedtime on the 25th. This is only one of two times when the Tree remains lit for 24 plus hours.

Dec 26 to Jan 5 (sunset) relight the Tree each evening. In its radiance after dark each night, reflect on the celebration of the particular day – of The 13 Days –that is just beginning.

Jan 5 (daytime) remove Christmas ornaments from the Tree along with red and green decorations. Replace with images of wisdom, radiance and one's royal nature along with "Mardi Gras" decorations – the colors green, purple and gold - or the colors of your country's royal family.

Jan 5 (sunset) light the Tree now adorned for the Epiphany/Magi Season. In my tradition, the Tree remains lit through this night and the next day until bedtime on January 6.



Epiphany Season / Weeks of January – one night each week of January celebrate one or two members of the family gathered around the Epiphany/Magi Tree. Name each one's giftedness, talents and inner radiance. Perhaps serve her/his/their favorite meal or desert. Consider having a crown (of their choosing) for each to wear on their special evening.

Jan 31 (evening) spend time expressing gratitude to The Christ for this Tree's life and the grace of wonder and love it has imparted in its dying. Then with mindfulness and feeling, turn off the Tree's lights for the final time.

Some prefer to keep The Epiphany-Magi Tree decorated until shortly before the opening of Lent.

Feb 1 (daytime) remove all ornaments and lights from the Tree. Gather together the prayers written on Solstice Night, place them in a basket or bowl. Remove the Tree from the house. Place it outside in a secure space. Cut a few branches from the tree to be the wood for the St. Brigid-Candlemas Day fire.

Feb 1 (sunset) Set the St. Brigid-Candlemas-Imbolc fire (Celtic ritual for the opening of Spring) with reflection and thanks for the gifts received over Celtic winter and your prayer for Celtic Spring, Feb 2 through April 30.



Feb/March (before Lent opens) – strip the branches from The Tree trunk. Choose the largest branch, and nail it to the trunk to make a Lenten Cross for your home.

Burn a branch/bough to make the Lenten ash for anointing. Bundle the remaining branches for wood to burn in the Easter, Pentecost and Summer Solstice fires.

Bring the Tree Cross into your home as a prayer focus for Lent and Easter. Place the basket/bowl holding the Winter Solstice prayers at its foot.

Place a second bowl with the Lenten ash, from the burned branch, near the Tree Cross. Consider repeated anointing with the ash (one of the earth's most nutrient rich substances for growth) throughout Lent as part of one's prayer for deeper awareness and increased willingness to grow in oneness.

Opening The Three Days of Easter: Good Friday, Holy Saturday, Easter Sunday (sunset) use wood from the sacred tree to set the Easter Fire after sunset on Thursday.

To know more about Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday as The Three Days of Easter, see my work, "Gateway to Oneness."

50 Days of the Easter Season – decorate the Tree Cross with fresh flowers – changing them often. When replacing flowers, save the ‘dead’ flowers to add to the Pentecost Vigil Fire.

May 1 (daytime) celebrations with the flower strewn Tree Cross as Celtic Summer (May 1 to August 2) begins. In the Celtic cycle this is the Feast of Beltane. In the Christian cycle, it is the Feast of St Joseph.

Pentecost (after sunset on Saturday) use wood from the sacred tree and remains of the Easter Season flowers to set the Pentecost Vigil Fire.

June / Feast of St John & Summer Solstice (evening) – use the remaining wood from the sacred tree, including the Tree Cross itself for the St John Day or Summer Solstice fires. This is the moment to burn the prayers that were written on Winter Solstice Night.

You could also write Summer Solstice prayers, place them in a bowl/basket and pray them for the next six months. Then at the Winter Solstice, these prayers would be burned in the Solstice Fire.

So - we continually move between the re-birth of radiance at the Winter Solstice (Feast of Christmas) and the re-birth of the holy dark at the Summer Solstice (Feast of John the Baptist).

May the rhythm of the dark

becoming light

becoming the dark ...

ever hold us.

Ah'mein!

Arrival & Blessing The Christ Tree

Traditions and rituals can be a way to practice mindfulness. Their use helps me slow down and feel more the sacredness of each moment and all of life. I share my traditions in the hope that they may spur your own reflections and creativity.

During the many years I had the Blue Door Retreat, a cut 12-14 foot Noble Fir would arrive on one of the December feasts I noted. I chose to have a cut live Tree because every part of it would be used to spur prayer over the next six months. For me a Noble Fir was aptly named. Its sight instilled a sense of royal presence.

Having acquired the Tree, it would stand outside in the courtyard until a few days before the Winter Solstice. In a usual Santa Fe winter, the Tree would be covered in snow, keeping its limbs moist. Cut fir trees take in more moisture through their needles than through the trunk. In a dry winter, I would hose its boughs every few days, as well as stand the trunk in water.

Depending on the day the Tree arrived (Feast of Barbara, Nicholas or Our Lady of Guadalupe) the Tree would be dedicated to her/his memory and virtues. As the Tree stood outside I would spend time listening to hear his or her name. The Tree usually bore the name of a friend, family member or cultural figure who had died in the past year. The attributes of the deceased formed part of our prayer across the months that the Tree, in its various stages, would be with us.

Soon after bringing the Tree into the house and placing it in its permanent stand, friends and I gather around. I would begin a time of dedicating the Tree by playing – for the first time this season – the song: “Alfie: The Christmas Tree” recorded by John Denver and The Muppets’ on their album, *A Christmas Together*. My eyes get very wet.

Then softly caressing its boughs, we offer spontaneous prayers of gratitude for the Tree’s life, for the honor of its presence with us, our wish that we do not take its life for granted, and that the Tree’s service – as the Tree dies in our midst – may awaken us to greater care for others and increased wonder and awe for all life.

III

The 13 Days of Christmas

Winter Solstice – Mid-Winter Sun December 21/22

View two brief films at www.quadratos.com/alexander-john/videos about the connection between the Solstice and Christmas: *The Fresh Radiance of Christ*, and *God's Grace Comes to Us*. Many thanks to The Work of The People for producing these films and making them available at no cost.

Nature Practice

Go outside at midday beginning on December 21 until January 6. Stand at the same spot each day and have another mark the length of your shadow. Keep a note of each day's difference. You will "see" the pattern of falling and rising arc of the sun. It seems a paradox. One's shadow is longest on the day of the Winter Solstice. The next few days there is no discernible difference. Then your shadow gradually shortens as the arc of the sun rises, and daylight hours lengthen.

The Ancient Celts had varied practices for Solstice Night. Their reliance on the sun meant that the Winter Solstice was of critical importance. Many believed they had to sacrifice something of value to the gods so that the sun would return. Their rituals included making bonfires of oak wood as an offering to the gods, bonfires to entice the Green Man to return to earth, sexual rites to aid the earth's greening, and decorating a barren Oak with fruits, then dancing around it in honor of its coming re-birth.

In **Christian Tradition**, how might you observe this night of the deepest dark? Will you consider this as tomb time with Jesus or womb time with Spirit?

In whatever way you choose, make this night about honoring the deepest dark and coming to know (more than a hope) that the dark is the place from which each of us is re-born to life with greater vitality and radiance.

Beware of a cultural trap. The West tends to honor the light and demonize the dark. As a result there is a great spiritual error in the way many speak of Solstice Night – describing it as the moment light has returned to conquer the dark. The Winter Solstice is not about any supposed victory of light over the dark. This night is about the holiness of the dark that births the light. (As the Summer Solstice is about the holiness of light that births the dark.) Removing the dark is to remove the womb from which new radiance is born.

Personal Solstice Night Ritual

During the years at the Blue Door Retreat, a small community would gather just as the sun set. We began with a simple meal of soup, salad and bread. After the meal, we observed about 20 minutes of quiet reflection during which we wrote prayers on thick paper for the world and ourselves.

The Celts and other ancient peoples believed that prayers offered on Winter and Summer Solstice Nights have greater spiritual power. For me, these two nights hold the power of heightened intention, and thus our prayers may have more effect.

After writing, each rolled their paper into a small tube, tied with a red ribbon. Then she or he laid it on the Tree, lit a beeswax candle near the prayer and then shared aloud (if she or he wished) a portion of their prayer.

Lit candle by lit candle, a soft radiance gradually filled the darkened room. After everyone's prayers were placed in the Tree and candles lit, we listened to Mary Chapin Carpenter's song, "The Longest Night of the Year" from her album *Come Darkness, Come Light*.

Then we sang carols while the candles burned. Once they had almost burnt down, we extinguished them, held a moment of quiet in the dark room, and then illuminated the Tree's 2,000 white lights. Now in full light, we gave toasts in honor of The Christ's radiance, the gift of all peoples and of each other.

The evening concluded my best attempt at a bayou accent, reading the classic, *Cajun Night Before Christmas*, a story of St Nick with his skiff that is drawn by 12 alligators.

A SOLSTICE NIGHT PRAYER

Gather with family and friends after sunset. Dim the lights.

Leader: We have now entered the 72 hours when the light of the sun seems to stand still – neither increasing nor decreasing. I invite you to sit for a few minutes in this dark time, and in a few minutes to share (if you wish): What are your thoughts, feelings, and/or sensations as you sit in this darkness?

Opening Prayer:

Be Still

Be in this Hallowed Darkness.

Be in this Deepest Dark

that we have traveled since November.

We pray to Know

That This Darkness

can be the Womb from which Christ's New Radiance is Born.

Now light a candle (full beeswax if possible) and/or the Christmas Tree.

Question: (choose one of the various forms)

What is the interior gift or inner birth you wish to receive:
between now and Candlemas (2 Feb)?
(or) between now and the Summer Solstice (June)?

What is the spiritual practice or virtue you are committing yourself to practice between now and Candlemas, or between now and the Summer Solstice?

Write your wish or commitment on a piece of special paper. Place that wish or commitment in the Christmas manger (in place of baby Jesus) or place them under the manger.

Conclude by singing together a favorite Carol, reading aloud a favorite Christmas poem or story and then perhaps a meal, like a special soup that you only serve on Solstice Night.

WINTER SOLSTICE NIGHT UNTIL SUNSET OF DECEMBER 24

How will you mark the time between Solstice Night and Sunset on the 24th?

I am curious about your suggestions for these in-between days. Do you have any set practices or rituals? How are you experimenting?

For me, my desire (sans family) is to have more quiet reflective days between Solstice Night and sunset on the 24th. So, I do my best to finish all shopping, gift buying etc. before nightfall on the Solstice.

The in-between days I take for quiet reflection on holy darkness, reading favorite poems, visiting with friends by Zoom (or in person when possible) walks in nature, looking at the night sky, and of course, prepping to place ornaments on the Tree during the daylight hours of the 24th.

THE GREEN MAN MEETS ST NICHOLAS

and becomes Santa Claus

Did you know that Santa Claus used to primarily wear Forest Green or Midnight Blue until Coca Cola clothed him in their company colors of red and white?

(to be completed)

THE RED AND GREEN OF CHRISTMAS

(to be completed)

ORIGIN OF THE CAROL

The 12 Days of Christmas

-the carol is ancient –
probably back into the mists of human history.

You can forget all that poppycock about it being
originally composed to teach Christian dogma.

(to be completed)

Feast of Adam and Eve

sunset on the 23rd to sunset on the 24th



Eden Restored & Our Radiant Tree of Life

We only have a few hours now till the Great Feast of Christmas that opens just past sunset on the 24th.

How will you spend these final hours?

A Middle Eastern tradition is to spend the daylight hours of the 24th placing ornaments on the Tree. (And the Tree remains decorated till Jan 6 or Feb 2.)

Decorating the Tree on the 24th reprises an ancient Christian tradition, marking this day as the Feast of Adam of Eve, and celebrating that in the Feast of Christmas, Eden is restored. Rather than the first Garden, where fruits were taken from the Tree, now we place 'fruits' on it. On this day, the radiant Tree of Life is open to all.

Regardless of the day you decorate your Tree (from early November to Dec 24) think of it as the Feast of Adam and Eve, and your opening The Garden of Wonder for all people.



How will you mark the arrival of Christmas Evening just past sunset on the 24th?

One possible practice is to recapture the beautiful name of *Eve*. Our culture has corrupted its original meaning. *Eve* is shorthand for evening. In spiritual tradition, the daylight hours of December 24th are *not* Christmas Eve. Christmas Eve is Christmas Evening that begins with nightfall on the 24th.

This meaning of *Eve* helps us understand why in Christian tradition most images of the Madonna have been dark to black. The darkness is not meant to portray Mary's ethnicity. Rather, she is dark because she represents the darkness of womb and earth in which we all have our beginning. By losing the meaning of *Eve*, we have lost our knowing of the dark as a holy feminine face of the divine.

And in losing sunset as the day's beginning, we have lost the truth that Christmas Evening moves through the night to Christmas Dawn, then to Morning and eventually back again to the evening. Restoring outer nightfall as the day's beginning will help us *know* that every inner nighttime is a place of new beginning. And each 24 hour period gives us life's essential map if we will but not forsake the journey: every inner darkness will move to dawn, to full day and back again to nightfall.

Our bodies *know* this truth. However, the overgrowth of western culture and ego-mind would keep this truth hidden from our deep knowing. The cycle of the Winter Solstice and Feast of Christmas can become antidotes to western blindness, helping us awaken to what we already truly know: **All life begins in darkness.**

O Christmas Evening. O Blessed Eve. O Holy Night!



The Four-Gospel Journey from Christmas Evening

GREAT FEAST OF CHRISTMAS

1st DAY

sunset on the 24th to sunset on the 25th

The Four-Gospel Journey of Christmas

In ancient tradition The Great Feast of Christmas was the telling of our journey – four gospel passages paired to the time of sunset, night, first light and full day. Nature was used to tell the story of our journey with The Christ – a journey both Cosmic and personal at the same time.

- I. After sunset: Matthew's Genealogy - proclaiming that personal and collective dark times are beginning times. God is with Us. (1st Path)
- II. In the Night: Luke's account of the Angel/s – in the Night - announcing to Shepherds in the Field that a radiant birth is occurring. (2nd Path)
- III. First Light: Luke's account of the Shepherds journeying through the night, arrive at the manger and “see” (dawn) with their own eyes that the birth is true. And they adore! (3rd Path)
- IV. Full Day: The Prologue from The Gospel of John - The Christ flows from the One Breath - Alpha and Omega - has always been and will always be, and we are ever in service. (4th Path)

The four passages tell the cosmic and personal story of the four-path journey of each and all. Spirit and Matter are One – have always been and always will be – One. The Great Truth of Christmas is that in every beginning - God breathes God's very Self into every cell of the cosmos. God breathes you and I.

Incarnation Is. Spirit and Matter are One. Alleluia!

Which of the four gospel passages of is your favorite this year? Share the story.

Suggestion: Give four symbolic gifts. Each gift is paired to one of the four gospel stories. Open each gift when that gospel is read.



... the Journey to Christmas Day.

Christmas Day – 1st Day Prayer

O Radiant Love
Born Anew in the Deepest Dark
Hold Us in Knowing Your Truth.

And if Today is Not the Day of Your Re-Birth within Us
Give Us the Joy of knowing it is on The Way
And Patience to Stay the Journey
Until Your Dawn Arrives.

A Different Nativity Scene

Christmas Day not only proclaims that Jesus is born, but that Jesus is born in us. Whenever I set up my Nativity Scene, I leave the manger itself empty until after sunset on the 24th. In that first hour of Christmas Evening, I will place something in the manger but it is not a figure of the baby Jesus. Such a concrete figure takes my reflection backwards to literal history. So what do I place in the manger?

Some years I place a lit tea light for the new radiance I pray is happening within the world and within me. Other years, I place a picture of a situation somewhere in the world that I pray may come to know greater peace and justice. Still other years, I place a photo of a newborn in my family or my friends, or a photo of all my family. Then again, I may place a piece of paper with my written intent to practice a particular virtue this year etc.

Also, I have come to think of the nativity as a Christian expression of a mandala. Rather than a literalization of a scene from Bethlehem, I create a three dimensional mystical icon with a symbolic expression of the Christ Child at the center in the manger.

Around the manger, I “play” with images of both masculine and feminine principles (Mary, Joseph, Shepherds, Magi etc.) animal & instinctual energies with higher angelic ones, earth (mineral and stone) with sky, etc.

How might you arrange your Nativity scene?

And what might you place in your manger this year?

Why A 13 Day Festival?

How did Christianity come to have a 13 Day Christmas Season? I trust that at this point, it will not surprise you to know that the 13 days come from the Celts.

The Celtic Winter Solstice festival celebrated birth and re-birth. One of the primary focuses was “the Mother” or “the Goddess” from whom comes birth. And her sacred number was thirteen, thus a thirteen day festival.

Assuredly, Christianity wished to maintain the festival as it was an essential one for the Celts, but Christians may have not wanted to keep the association with the Goddess. Rather than emphasize the number thirteen, the festival came to known as Christmas Day followed by the 12 Days of Christmas.

On the other hand, Christianity might have been following the pattern already established with the 50 days of Easter. Easter Sunday stands alone. However it is followed by the 49 days of Easter, making for a 50 day season that culminates on Pentecost (which literally means 50th). These 50 days restated our mother Judaism’s 50 days from Passover to Shavuot.

As Christianity changed the 13 Day Winter Solstice Festival of the Celts into the 13 Days of Christmas, it kept the number of days but changed the focus of each day from outer ritual to the work of one’s heart. For the Celts, each day involved an outer practice to assure the sun’s re-birth and the earth’s greening. Christianity kept the general focus of each day, but changed the practice to one that engenders a re-birth and greening in one’s heart.

The Celts saw this greening and birth as a joining between masculine and feminine focused on generativity and generosity. They employed various metaphors for the this joining throughout the 13 Days. Christianity took the Celt’s focus on the joining of the feminine and masculine and crafted the mystical Holy Family of Mary, Joseph and the Christ Child.

As we move through the remaining 12 days, I will summarize each day giving the Celtic background and the Christian re-statement. More detail and activities will be included in the finished edition. I look forward to your thoughts and suggestions in January via the online questionnaire.

The key to the 13 Days is to remember that each day teaches us about a necessary element in giving birth (outer and inner). As we learn, let us also celebrate that particular element.

**The 13 Days are
about the
wonder, power and lessons
of birth.**

Let us

Dance

Sing

&

Play!

2nd DAY

sunset on the 25th to sunset on the 26th

THE WREN



Greetings on 2nd Day In Honor of The Sacred Masculine

Celts: Boys Killing a Wren

Christian: Stephen's Feast, also known as Boxing Day

In Celtic practices this was the day that men took boys out to ritually kill a wren and pour its blood into the earth. Why was the object a bird and specifically the wren? In Celtic lore, birds were associated with *phallos*, one who brings the seed to the earth. (This same connection is seen in the image of a partridge in a pear tree.) But the wren was considered the King of Birds because it was so fertile. In the killing of the wren, boys participated in a symbolic circumcision, understanding that phallos is also about blood sacrifice.

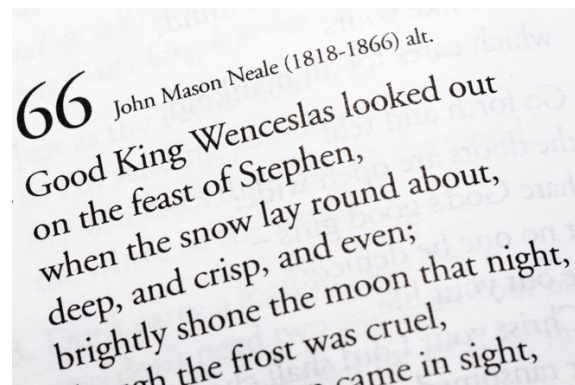
As girls become young women they come to know that shedding blood is necessary for birth. The flow of blood is an inescapable truth. A boy does not have this truth in his body. He has to learn it in another way. For this reason, in ancient adolescent rites of passage, boys were taught to kill in a sacred manner and to learn the value of shedding blood for the sake of life. In the Celtic lore of 2nd Day is a remnant of this ancient rite of passage.

Christianity, meeting the Celtic world, wanted no part in the killing of a phallic fertile wren. However, Christians understood a truth underneath this ritual. The day would become about the mature sacred masculine that would give of its metaphoric blood – give of its heart - so that others may live. And Christianity had a story from its history that matched this lesson.

2nd Day became the Feast of Stephen, the first martyr whose blood was shed for love (Jesus the Christ). Rather than spilling the blood a phallic wren, men took boys on this day to collect food, clothing and money for the poor, widowed, ill and shut-in. Thus, the day became known as "boxing day"- as men and boys boxed items to take to those in need. On this 2nd Day of the Festival how might we teach boys about the value of sweat, and shedding the blood of their heart for those who are less fortunate.

Assuredly today, sing the carol and tell the story of “Good King Wenceslas.”

<https://youtu.be/cYLuA9xHcsQ>



On this day, we honor the mature sacred masculine principle. While 2nd Day is couched in a gender image, it does not need to be. The sacred and life-giving masculine lives within all of us. This is a day to tell stories that inspire us to live for others, that challenge us to give our very selves so others may simply live.

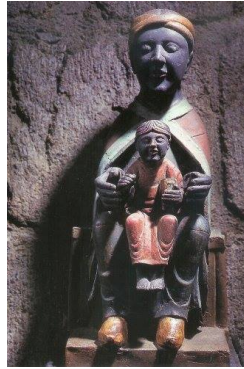
On 2nd Day, we no longer shed the blood of phallic bird. Rather, we are inspired to give of our sweat and the metaphoric blood of our own hearts.

What stories or movies inspire you in selfless giving? Do you have a favorite children's story with these themes? Please share your ideas with me that I may share them with everyone.

2nd Day Prayer (to be completed)

3rd DAY

sunset on the 26th to sunset on the 27th



ONENESS ~ DARK ECSTASY ~ WINE

Greetings on 3rd Day

In Honor of The Sacred Dark Feminine

Celts: Honoring the Ecstasy of Great Mother and Mother Night

Christian: Feast of John the Evangelist

On 3rd Day, the Celts reveled in the mystical ecstasy of the Great Mother and Mother Night, the womb from which all are born.

Christians understood this same reality as being held in the mystical text of John's gospel. As a result, 3rd Day became the Feast of John the Evangelist, whereby Christians experience ecstasy, oneness and that Matter (Mater) and Spirit are joined.

John's vision soars as he gives us the first pan-tribal sacred text, helping everyone experience the One Breath from which we all come, The Mother – the womb of everything, and every-woman, a vessel of birthing (See my books: *Radical Transformation* and/or *Heart and Mind*.)

Both the Celts and Christians have a like icon of ecstasy. A cluster of grapes - beautiful, full and luscious – are an expression of a type of holy ecstasy that comes from the press. In the grape become wine is seen a likeness to the oneness of Spirit and Matter, and the sacred dark feminine giving birth. To this icon, Christianity added one table around which all are invited to drink of the elixir from the one cup.



In art, John the Evangelist is often portrayed holding a cup that contains a coiled snake inside. In mystical understanding, we are called - in love - to drink of the world's poison and bitterness, and by the grace of The Christ to transmute such wounds into greater harmony, reconciliation, compassion, justice etc.

Reflect today on how 'everything and everyone' belong in the Embrace of The Christ. Who is someone 'strange' to you? In your imagination, if not outer life, invite them to sit at your table as an honored guest. Ask them to tell you about their life.

What movies and stories help you touch a mystical maternal experience of oneness? Are there favorite poets or authors who convey the experience to you? Make time today to savor their poems and writing. And as a deep experience of the maternal, consider watching the 2020 Netflix movie, *My Octopus Teacher*.

3rd Day Prayer (to be completed)

4th DAY

sunset on the 27th to sunset on the 28th

BLESSED BE THE WARRIOR WHO PROTECTS BIRTH & CHILD



Greetings on 4th Day

Celts: Protecting Childhood

Christian: Feast of the Holy Innocents

For the Celts, 4th Day was about the difficulties in being a child, and the necessity to protect. It is an odd ritual. But on this day, parents ‘lightly’ beat their children with evergreen boughs. They believed that this symbolic punishment protected their children from more violent aggression the rest of the year.

I wonder how much the Celts may have viewed this ‘beating’ as imparting to their children the qualities of an evergreen, including the wish for long and healthy life?

In the Christian cycle, 4th Day is the story of Joseph, who having been warned in a dream to immediately leave his home, protects the child and his mother by fleeing to Egypt. Thus they escape the killing wrath of King Herod.

This day also tells of Herod's horrific order to kill all boys under 2 years of age, so as to ensure his continued right to the throne. On this day, we see two different fathers. One is self-emptying, beneficial and protective (Joseph), while the other is self-protective, destructive and devouring (Herod).

How are we to understand this day in the Christmas Festival?

The guiding principle of the 13 Days of Christmas is that each day teaches and celebrates a necessary element for birth to happen. These elements are required in the birth and development of a child, as well as what it takes to bring an idea or concept to birth and then to maturity.

On a journey of transformation, we need to know our own inner wounds (i.e. our place of being internally imprisoned, like an outer Egypt for the Hebrews). The adequate warrior knows himself or herself and does not flinch from feeling one's wounds. Only in our knowing and feeling our own impoverishment, can we be a good enough parent to a child or a project, offering beneficent protection. For the sake of Mary and the child, Joseph did not hesitate to return to his heritage's place of enslavement. He offers us wise counsel.

Likewise for birth, we must give our all to the ONE right thing. We cannot dissipate our energies in a thousand tasks. It may seem horrific, but a hundred possibilities must be put aside so that our best energy is available for that which is most important.

Adequate parenting has an aspect of being a blessed warrior who knows herself / himself and is able to contain one's own wounding so as to offer another effective protection.

This is also a day to marvel at a child, remembering how quickly they develop, having to master interior and exterior changes so rapidly.

What movies, stories, songs etc. inspire you to be a blessed warrior for your child or a project?

4th Day Prayer (to be completed)

5th DAY

sunset on the 28th to sunset on the 29th

FEAST OF FOOLS



Greetings on 5th Day

Celts: Feast of Fools

Christian: Simeon & Jesus: Holy Fools

In the Celtic cycle, today is the Feast of Fools, when we reverse the normal order of things. Certainly, I do not suggest in any outer way cutting off the branch on which you are sitting. But it is a graphic image of reversing inner thinking and preferences. For the Celts this was a day to celebrate all foolishness, to play with an outer stance or appearance that was different from your habitual ways.

In the Christian cycle, today's is the story of Simeon from The Gospel of Luke. Simeon holds the child Jesus and gives God praise. Then Simeon blesses Joseph and Mary and says: "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed, and a sword will pierce your own soul too." (Luke 2: 34-35)

Christian practice is the Path of The Holy Fool which allows The Christ within to reverse our habitual behavior and understanding. Yes, The Christ as Fool reveals our inner certitudes and preferences.

Christian spirituality today, in my belief, is reaching once again for wholeness over perfection. Wholeness is the concept that everything *belongs* in right relationship. And on this path of restoration, it will be Christ the Fool who will aid us in letting go of the cognitive death grip that classical Greek and contemporary European dualism has had on our tradition.

On 5th Day, The Christ asks us to play with the unplanned life; asks us to stand at an inner crossroad and look down each path and what it might hold without any sense that there is only one path or one direction that is the *correct* one. Whatever your usual personality and thinking style may be, on this day lighten up and play, allowing a reversal of your usual or habitual preferences.

If you are more a 'rational' person, play with your more irrational or intuitive side. If you are more an intuitive, irrational person, try on a more rational, logical side.

Whatever you do (keep it legal and kind) try to step out of character. And/or seek out someone whose style or opinion is the opposite of your preference. Listen to them, consider their perspective and see how it might offer you rich growth.

One of these holy reversals may actually become the key to a surprising birth in you and an unexpected path of growth over the coming year.

What movies, stories, songs etc. inspire you on this path of being a holy fool?

5th Day Prayer (to be completed)

6th DAY

sunset on the 29th to sunset on the 30th

THE WILD BOAR



Greetings on 6th Day

Celts: Bringing in The Wild Boar

Christian: Feast of the Holy Family / Star of David

The Celtic cycle celebrates the Wild Boar on this day, as memorialized in the English Carol of the Boar's Head: <https://youtu.be/jVwr5B6VQZk> The carol sings of a meal eating a boar's head. Recall the belief in those days that eating an animal was a way to attain its desired qualities.

I found this description of the wild boar and its qualities:

The [wild boar](#), with its swift feet and sharp tusks is a surprisingly shy, peaceable animal, and generally tries to avoid humans. However, it can be a formidable beast if cornered, and has come to symbolize courage and ferocity in many cultures.

Many stories revolve around the boar being hunted – a situation in which their temper would naturally be provoked. In contrast, within Druidic lore

the female, or sow, symbolizes generosity and the nourishment of the Earth. To watch a sow lavishing care on her young, it is easy to see why!

Celtic and Anglo-Saxon helmets bearing boar-head crests have been found in a number of places; the crests were supposed to give protection to the warrior. Beowulf, in the Anglo-Saxon epic bearing his name, went into battle with a boar-head standard which was symbolic of his power as a leader.

Dan Puplett, www.treesforlife.org.uk

All symbols are ambivalent, containing seeming opposites. So too the Boar for the Celts. Its protective ferocity along with the sow's generosity to her young are qualities honored in this festival about birth, and its power, mysteries and lessons.

Have you had a personal experience with a boar? As you look at this picture, what feelings and thoughts arise? Is there another animal you would honor on this day for her/his qualities of ferocity and generosity? For me, elephant comes to mind.

6th Day in Western Christendom is commonly known as the Feast of the Holy Family. However, this feast did not come into Christendom until the 17th century. But in some synchronicity or Spirit's greater knowing, the Feast matches the Boar's qualities: peaceable, ferocious protection, self-giving and generosity. In the Feast of the Holy Family, we can see Jesus as the mature intermingling of Mary and Joseph's energies.

6th Day harkens back to the Sixth Day of Creation in the Book of Genesis, when Yah'weh created us "female" and "male" in Yah'weh's image. I restate this image beyond mere biology.

In depth perspective, each of us is created as a unique blend of two energies: yen and yang. Beyond gender stereotypes, consider how your inner life and outer family is best sustained by a flow between yang energy (assertive, thrusting) and yen energy (nurturing, receptive).

This blend of energies is captured in the Jewish six- pointed Star of David, composed of two interlocking triangles. One triangle pointing up (yang energy) and one pointing down (yen energy).



6th Day may be the most significant practice of the entire 13 Day Festival. Our work today is to honor the distinct energies of yang (perhaps the sacred masculine) and yen (perhaps the sacred feminine) and then move beyond each into the space where the two energies join in a mutual, ongoing dance.

In your life, who has been a model of beneficial yang energy, of yen energy, and of the intermingling of the two? Spend time today reflecting on your teachers. As able, contact them and let them know how they have impacted you. If appropriate, express your gratitude.

What movies, stories, songs etc. inspire you on this path of being of honoring the place where the two energies join in a mutual dance?

6th Day Prayer (to be completed)

7th DAY

sunset on the 30th to sunset on the 31st

HANGING THE MISTLETOE



Greetings on 7th Day

Celts: Hanging the Mistletoe

Christian: Blessing one's Home

European mistletoe has white/yellow berries and was considered by the Celts to have mystical and protective powers. Mistletoe growing in the Oak was considered to have even greater healing and mystical powers. On this day Druid priests cut mistletoe out of Oak and brought it into the home as a blessing.

On this day, before the beginning of civil New Year, mistletoe was hung over a home's front door. It was believed that the plant cleansed the home from any untoward spirit that might have taken up residence in the house over the past year.

The Celts considered anything that was brought into the house this day (final day of the civil year) came with added power for good or ill. Thus, hanging the mistletoe was intended to provide good fortune and health for all in this house in the New Year.

Today it continues to be a Christian custom, throughout the Mediterranean and many parts of Europe, to invite the parish priest to visit and bless a home, room by

room, with baptismal water. This blessing usually takes place between the 8th Day (January 1) and 13th Day of Christmas (January 6).

Have you considered the need to spiritually cleanse your home? What energies have been present there over the past year? How might you bless and re-dedicate your home on this day? Some go room to room with blessed water. Some place a lit candle throughout the house. Others simply pray in each room, inviting holiness and all beneficial spirit to be present over the year ahead.

What movies, stories, songs etc. inspire you on this path of blessing one's home, hearth, and family?

7th Day Prayer (to be completed)

8th DAY

sunset on the 31st to sunset on the 1st

WASSAIL / BLESS THE APPLE TREE



Greetings on 8th Day – Civil New Year's Day

Celts: Wassail! (Waes Haeil / Good Health) Blessing the Apple Tree

Christian: The 8th Day – Alpha/Omega - Co-Creation & Naming of Jesus

On this day, the Celts poured a mulled apple cider on the roots of an apple tree or another venerated fruit tree. Alternatively they would place a cake or bread soaked in the cider in the limbs of the tree. The cider was intended to draw the Robin back to the tree.

The Robin (harbinger of Spring) was considered a guardian spirit of fruit trees and of all life. In Celtic lore, many birds are associated with the principle of the phallos. And fruit (especially apples and pears) is associated with the principle of the vulva. Again, we have an image of masculine and feminine joining, like the interplay of yin and yang.

The cider would be brewed in a carved apple bowl, and villagers would carry it house to house, sharing the drink, wishing each other good health, and collecting money for the poor. Listen to the Wassail Carol: <https://youtu.be/JfncJavzoB8>

For Christians, this civil new year day is the 8th Day of the Christmas Festival. And the concept of the 8th Day has large significance. Christianity's first ancestors altered their Jewish tradition very little. One of the first new additions was creating the 8th Day of the week.

The 8th Day is Sunday, the Day of Resurrection. And this 8th Day is both the last of the old week and the first day of the new week. This is an 8th Day that represents Omega and Alpha.

Going beyond the 7 days of creation, the 8th Day reminds Christians to be a people who practice Resurrection, who live both in time and beyond time. Through the power of the 8th Day, we are given the responsibility to co-create our world with The Christ. The Celts on this day blessed the Apple Tree, seeking the Robin's return. On the 8th Day, Christians assume the role of the Robin, to be a herald of the eternal pattern (life-death-life) and a guardian for all creation.

On this the 8th day of the Christmas Festival, we celebrate, that the fresh radiance we first witnessed with the naked eye on Christmas morning, has now grown to be the radiance that leads us into co-creation across the days of this new civil year.

What movies, stories, songs etc. inspire you on this path of fresh radiance, and wishing every one good health and wellness?

8th Day Prayer (to be completed)

May your radiance burn bright.

May your radiance burst –

regardless of hardship and outer circumstances.

May your inner torch be ablaz

May your radiance ignite others' talents and passion -

- so that all who cross your path will be blessed.

Ultreia y Suseia (onward and upward with joy)

9th DAY

Sunset on the 1st to sunset on the 2nd

SNOW / SAND DAY



Greetings on 9th Day

Celts: Snow / Sand Day - Unique & One

Christian: Basil the Great & Gregory Nazianzen / Soul Friendship

On 9th Day, the Celts celebrate Snow. Recall that no two snowflakes have the same pattern, yet each one is made of the same properties. In this way, snow is an apt metaphor for every element of the cosmos. Each of us is a unique recipe like the uniqueness of each snowflake. And at the same moment, we celebrate our oneness.

If there is no snow where you live, celebrate sand as each grain, like each snowflake, is unique yet made of common properties.

For Christians, 9th Day is the Feast of Basil the Great and Gregory Nazianzen. Both were Bishops and Doctors of the Faith, living in Turkey in the 4th Century. This day celebrates a type of soul friendship that is an incredible gift and support for birth.

These men described themselves as two bodies but one spirit.

Gregory writes of his friendship with Basil:

Such was the prelude to our friendship, the kindling of that flame that was to bind us together. In this way we began to feel affection for each other. When, in the course of time, we acknowledged our friendship and recognized that our ambition was a life of true wisdom, we became everything to each other: we shared the same lodging, the same table, the same desires the same goal. Our love for each other grew daily warmer and deeper ... We seemed to be two bodies with a single spirit. Though we cannot believe those who claim that everything is contained in everything, yet you must believe that in our case each of us was in the other and with the other.

The two scholars, devout Christians and deep friends formed a body of work that guided Christianity through the tumultuous theological disputes of the 4th Century.

To read more about these two friends and scholars:

<https://www.crossroadsinitiative.com/media/articles/sts-basil-and-gregory-two-bodies-one-spirit/>

What movies, stories, songs etc. inspire you to a soul friendship built on the other's distinct qualities yet you are bound in a deep mutual respect that is life-giving?

9th Day Prayer (to be completed)

10th DAY

sunset on the 2nd to sunset on the 3rd

EVERGREEN & OAK – THE SACRED TREES



Greetings on 10th Day

Celts: Evergreen & Oak – Deep Rooted Sacred Trees

Christian: Genevieve

For the Celts, 10th Day is in honor of the sacred trees, Oak and Evergreen. Initially Oak was the sacred tree for the Celts until its European forests were decimated. At that point, the Fir/Evergreen became the sacred tree. Both Oak and Evergreen are known to draw lightening. The Celts believe they harnessed fire from the burning

Springtime. These two trees are the great gift of Spirit. On 10th Day, they are honored.

For Christians, this is the Feast of Genevieve, patron of Paris. She is often shown with a loaf of bread, representing her generosity toward those in need. This woman of the 5th Century was known for her tireless works for the poor and needy, and is said to have saved Paris by diverting the Germanic Huns away from the city.



Genevieve

On this day, celebrate the sacred fire-giving presences in your life (literal and metaphoric).

Who or what provide you roots, shelter or stability in times of storm, and nourishes your body, emotions and soul? If you have a "Genevieve" in your life, celebrate her or him on this day.

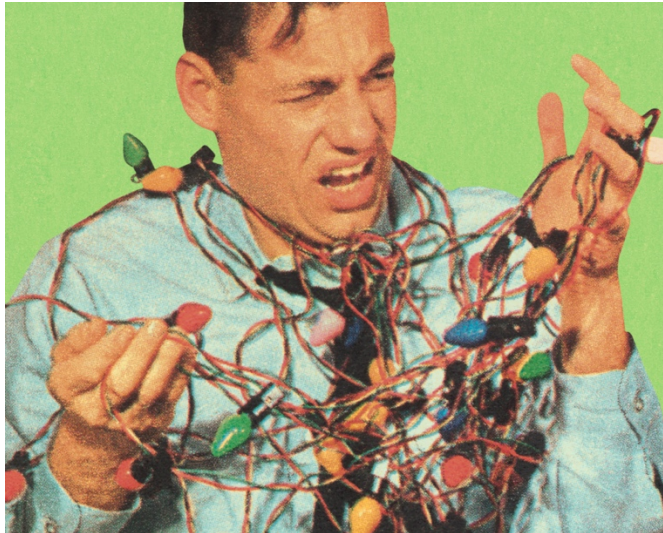
What movies, stories, songs etc. provide you a sense of rootedness, stability and nourishment?

10th Day Prayer (to be completed)

11th DAY

sunset on the 3rd to sunset on the 4th

DISTAFF - GRUMBLE DAY



Greetings on 11th Day

Celts: Distaff - Grumble Day!

Christian: (?)

Distaff or Grumble Day is one of my favorites in the Celtic Festival.

On this day, most Celts returned to usual work as the Festival neared its end. To mark the day, you were to grumble and grouse. The Celts show a wise understanding of human nature. After days of merriment, people will naturally feel down, a bit dispirited and out of sorts. Why not make it part of the festival?

This day is about raising empty feelings and a sense of *blah* to high art and spiritual practice. Consider having a contest at home, work or school to see who can grumble and grouse in the most creative fashion? If yes, what will be the prize for the winner?

The Pueblo Peoples of the U.S. Southwest, have the role of sacred clowns that arrive near the end of a festival. Their work is to create havoc, jarring the people from any sense of reverie. The clowns spit watermelon seeds, laugh, fart or belch in your face and engage in other impolite ways. In this way, they help their people return to their bodies. The sacred clown reminds all of us that we are in a human body with all of its frailties and cannot yet go over to the spirit world.

Tragically, the Christmas cycle does not contain this day of grumbling or the work of a sacred clown. But we can remedy this omission by dreaming the Festival forward. Let's create this tradition.

Who would be a Christian figure or story of distaff? What traditions might we create around this day?

What movies, stories, songs etc. inspire you to creatively and productively grumble?

11th Day Prayer (to be completed)

12th DAY

sunset on the 4th to sunset on the 5th

PREPARATION DAY



Greetings on 12th Day

Celts: Preparation Day to Conclude the Festival

Christian: Preparation Day for Feast and Season of The Epiphany

For the Celts, 12th Day continued the return to routine life. It was a day to clean the house and prepare to conclude the Solstice Festival the next day.

In Christian tradition, it is a day of preparing for the next day - Feast of The Epiphany. Epiphany means 'radiance made manifest.' And 13 days past Christmas Morning (Northern Hemisphere) the increasing radiance of the sun is manifest. This physical sensation becomes the keynote to celebrating the inner and outer truth that The Christ's fresh radiance in us emerges from our times of the deepest dark.

The Feast of The Epiphany is like every Sunday as the 8th Day that is both Omega (end time) and Alpha (beginning time). The Epiphany ends the 13 Days of Christmas, and simultaneously opens the Season of Epiphany that spans until the beginning of Lent.

So 12th Day is one of transition preparing to end one season and open another. The Christmas ornaments and decorations are taken down. And house and Tree are now re-decorated for The Epiphany Season.

The red and green of Christmas changes to the colors of your country's royalty, or whatever colors for you express the royal nature of each and all. The most famous colors for this Season come from the French who decorate their homes in the historical colors of the French royal family: Green, Purple and Gold.



Foods for the feast will also be prepared. This is the day to make the first King Cake of The Epiphany Season. The King Cake is a pastry decorated with icing in your chosen colors for royalty. Hidden within the pastry is either a small plastic baby or a coin with the face of a queen or king. Traditionally, this pastry is served for the first time after sunset on the 5th.



When the cake is served, the person who receives the slice containing the baby or coin is then obliged to prepare the next week's King Cake and/or party. (No peaking is allowed.) We come to know that one's royal nature is made for service.

Weekly King Cake gatherings continue until the final day of the season near the opening of Lent. In French tradition, the final day is known as Mardi Gras.

What is not generally understood is that “Mardi Gras” is not simply one day or a weekend. Mardi Gras is a season that begins on the Feast of The Epiphany and extends until the opening of Lent.

In New Orleans, this is well known. On January 6th, every bakery in the city begins to sell King Cakes. And on Epiphany Night are the first three Mardi Gras parades and balls. Between Epiphany and Mardi Gras Day, there are some 70 parades and balls. The festival covers as many weeks as there are between Epiphany and the opening of Lent. The season’s activities start slow and gradually build to a frenzied end on Mardi Gras Day.

In whatever way you prepare, may this 12th Day be a blessing upon your hearth, and may your heart be ready to receive the outer and inner radiance of 13th Day.

What movies, stories, songs etc. inspire you to live as a more radiant and royal person?

12th Day Prayer (to be completed)

13th DAY

sunset on the 5th to sunset on the 6th

FEAST OF THE EPIPHANY



Greetings on 13th Day

Celts: Celebrate the Sun's Increasing Light

Christian: The Christ's Radiance is made Manifest

The Celts on this day celebrate the sun's increasing light. Having made the journey from Solstice Night to this day, it is evident that the sun's power has been restored and its light again increases. This day brings together all the celebrations and rituals of the 13 day festival, giving honor to the Great Mother who has been a vessel of the sun's re-birth, restoring life to all.

For Christians, this day opens a season of celebrating The Christ's radiance and each one's royal nature. Beginning this day and continuing until Lent, we see, reflect, name, call forth and celebrate the royal radiance of Christ that lives within each person and experienced as their talents and gifts.

THE THREE GOSPELS OF THE EPIPHANY

Over the many centuries of Christianity, The Epiphany has been celebrated under three different gospel passages. Certainly, the passage most known today is the arrival of The Magi, who have travelled from the East, to bring gifts in honor the Christ-Child.

However, there are two more gospel passages that are equally treasured texts of The Epiphany. Obviously, the feast is not about a particular story but about an inner reality that is expressed in each of the three gospel passages.

The Epiphany is a visceral experience of The Christ's radiance made manifest. And of course, the feast is perfectly timed to the manifest increasing light of the sun in the Northern Hemisphere.

The Three Gospels

I. Arrival of The Magi in The Gospel of Matthew

Arrival of The Magi, bringing gifts to the Christ Child.

On this day, we are asked to acknowledge our gifts and talents as a reflection of The Christ's radiance made manifest.

If the Magi is your preferred account for the Feast, note that nothing in Matthew's gospel speaks of "three" Magi. At times in Christian tradition, the number has been imagined as 144 (12 x 12). 144 is the number of the New Jerusalem that welcomes every tribe, all people, to sit at one table.

The gifts of the Magi have symbolic meaning. Gold is for the Christ's royal nature. Myrrh is an element used by a physician to heal. And Frankincense is the aroma of prayer and sacrifice offered by the priest.

One age-old Epiphany custom is to bless the front door of your home, writing in chalk the initials of The Christ, The Magi and The Civil Year.

In the Mediterranean as well as the Balkan and Russian regions, a woman goes in search of The Christ-Child, and brings a gift to each child in the hope that one of them is The Christ.

Perhaps today, we might give every child a gift - realizing that each child is an expression of The Christ. What gift/s might you give a child on this day?

And each year, Jan Richardson, author and poet, publishes "A Woman's Christmas" with ideas on how to use The Epiphany to celebrate women and their gifts.

We must follow the star.
Even on godless nights
when there is no star
we must follow the star.

John Moriarty
from *Turtle Was Gone A Long Time*

II. Jesus' Mikvah Bath in The Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke

At Jesus's Mikvah Bath (Jewish Baptism) in the Jordan River (water of deep anxiety) a voice from the Heavens announces that Jesus is The Beloved.

PLEASE note these passages do not describe Christian baptism. Jesus is receiving the Jewish ritual of a mikvah bath, which in those days went by its Greek name, "baptism." Christian baptism and Jewish baptism each have a distinct character. We do a disservice to both traditions by lumping them together.

On this day, each of us is asked to hear Spirit say: "You too are beloved. You too are of a royal nature."

III. The Wedding Feast at Cana in The Gospel of John

At this mystical wedding, each of us recognizes we are a stone vessel that is filled with water. In time and by the Christ's radiance, the water of our lives may be transformed into an elixir of joy that we offer to others.

Which of three stories of an Epiphany moves you this year?

And which movies, stories, songs etc. inspire you on the path of knowing your own inner radiance?

Prayer for 13th Day (to be completed)

Blessed Thirteenth Day of Christmas.

Blessed Feast of The Epiphany

May we Joyously know Increasing Radiance.

May this Epiphany Be a True gift

A Gift to our Self

And may we be gift to each other.

Sing and Dance.

IV

SEASON

of

THE EPIPHANY

MAGI

&

ONE'S

ROYAL NATURE

The Season of The Epiphany, Magi and Each One's Royalty



Celts: January and February were called *Anagantios*: Stay-Home Time

Christians: The Season of The Epiphany and Candlemas Day

For the Celts the Feast of Imbolc (“Ewes Milk”) on February 2nd is marked by setting a series of large bonfires. Then people with their livestock run between the fires to burn off germs that may have built up over the winter months. Imbolc is the opening of Celtic Spring and the time when new lambs are born.

This early February time is also know for the Feast of Brigid.

In the cold climates of Northern Europe, people used this time to gather, tell stories, mend tools and clothing and in general prepare themselves to return to the fields in the Springtime.

For Christians, the expanse between the 13th Day and the opening of Lent was traditionally known as The Epiphany Season or Season of The Kings.

Also February 2nd is The Feast of Candlemas - 40 Days past Christmas Day – which at times in our tradition has been considered the conclusion of the Christmas Cycle. Candlemas is the Christian re-statement of the Celtic Imbolc and Feast of Brigid. February 3rd is the feast of St. Blaise with its ritual of the blessing of throats using two lit candles in the shape of a cross. This feast is a re-statement of the bonfires used by the Celts to burn off diseases.

In Christian tradition, the time between 13th Day and the opening of Lent were weeks filled with storytelling and merriment as all played at being a member their country's royal family. However, this play had a deeper meaning. Through it, each touched an inherent sense of one's royal nature. It is precisely this deep memory that each of us is 'a Christ' that prepares us to enter the Great 100 Days (Lent to Pentecost).

Sadly, our traditions have dispensed with The Season of Epiphany and its rituals. Instead, these weeks are called either "After Epiphany" or "Ordinary Time." Like creating a contemporary Distaff Day, I suggest that we restore the earlier tradition, and call it something like The Season of Royalty. Then over these weeks we can mark and celebrate our true, authentic and royal nature.

V

EPILOGUE

A New Vista

(to be completed)

We have an immense work ahead. But our ancestors have given us the treasured key.

We can perceive the sweep of time from The Feast of All Saints through Christmas and Lent/Easter to Pentecost as an annual telling of theosis Christianity (rather than atonement).

Theosis Christianity understands that each of us is created in the image of the Divine. And that each of us is in a gradual, life-long, on-going process of transformation to be who we truly are.

We are created in blessing - not sin.

Please see my work, *Gateway to Oneness*, and *The Great Hundred Days*. These days follow upon the span from All Saints to the opening of Lent.

The Great Hundred Days open with the Sunday of Transfiguration (prior to the Rite of Ashes) and closes at Pentecost. These 15 Sundays were crafted in the second to fourth centuries of Christianity as a way to renew and deepen diverse community and communion.

“Resurrection” was understood as a present moment re-vitalization of Body of Christ in the local community. The focus of the Great Hundred Days was to heal divisions and strengthen ministerial service in the world.

Every Pentecost was to be the culminating moment of spiritual practice since the Feast of All Saints. Pentecost is each community’s birthday – when a community knowing its deeper harmony amidst a treasured diversity, is now ablaze with renewed desire to serve others, to serve the world.

The sweep of the Christian year has two halves. From The Feast of All Saints to Pentecost – with its various feasts as the sun dies, is re-born and comes to its Zenith - we remember our royal nature as a Christ.

From Pentecost back to The Feast of All Saints, as the sun burns bright and then begins to dim again, the year focuses us on the labors for which we have been called and sent.

I have never been more excited for Christianity’s future. Truly, we have a long work ahead in this re-imagining. I also believe we have a clear direction as we assume this labor. Christianity is intended to be a tradition of eco-spirituality where earth and sky hold a present moment experience of Jesus the Christ.

We have a great work to begin. And I am ever grateful to walk with your kind, generous and wise counsel.

Together with Each Other

Together with The Christ

Let Us Move Forward

Ah-mein!

PLEASE & THANK YOU!

Thank You for Reading,
And Beginning this Re-Imagining

&

Please Take the Time to
answer some Questions.

I need your honest, gentle responses.

We have an immense new vista ahead of us.

But we cannot move toward it
without our honest sharing and wrestling
with each other and these ideas.

On January 7th, you will receive
by email - an online questionnaire.

Please respond by the last day of January.

If you are able, for your time, effort and heart -
you will receive a 20% discount on the finished book
when pre-ordered next Sept-Oct.

VI

RESOURCES

(to be completed)