

GOOD MORNING... ANNOUNCEMENTS

Tonight Midnight Meditation 11:30pm-12:15am, for an auspicious start to the New Year — followed by snacks and fellowship in the Monastery until 1am.

- **Tomorrow** (Monday, New Year's day), there is a Kalpataru Day Observance from 2:30-3:30pm. Join us in the Chapel. For followers of Sri Ramakrishna, Kalpataru Day is an extremely significant occasion. It was on January 1st, 1886 that Sri Ramakrishna revealed himself as 'Kalpataru' (the 'wish-fulfilling tree'), and spiritually awakened a large number of devotees who were present at the Cossipore Garden House on that sacred day. This event is commemorated annually to invoke the blessings of Sri Ramakrishna and to pray for the spiritual awakening of the devotees. Followed by snacks and fellowship in the Monastery, from 3:30pm to 4:30pm.
- **Next Sunday, Jan 7**, we will celebrate Swami Vivekananda's Birthday with a puja from 11am - noon, followed by a potluck prasad lunch in the Monastery.

- **Jan 13** Seva Saturday from 10am to 2pm. Help clean and prepare the Center for the next Sunday's puja. Pizza etc. served for lunch at 12:30pm. No need to stay the entire 4 hours — come for as long as is practical for you.
- **Sunday, Jan 21**, we will celebrate Swami Brahmananda's Birthday with a puja from 11am - noon, followed by a potluck prasad lunch in the Monastery.
- **From Friday, Jan 26 to Sunday morning, Jan 28**, Pravrajika Vidyapranaji will again offer us a three-day spiritual retreat. It begins with her introductory talk from 7-8pm on Friday, Jan 26 (immediately after Arati). This will be followed by a reception and potluck sipper in the Monastery. The retreat will continue with morning and afternoon sessions on Saturday, Jan 27. Her Sunday morning talk will conclude Vidyapranaji's visit with us; she'll leave on Mon, Jan 29.

CHANT • SONG • WELCOME • TOPIC

December has been a month for study of Jnana Yoga (Advaita Vedanta). A jnana yogi practices discrimination, reason, detachment, and *satyagraha* (insistence on Truth). The goal is freedom from limitation (*mukti*). Our teachers say that all miseries in life are caused by seeing inaccurately.

As a jnana yogi, you may break through this delusion and see only the Divine Presence everywhere, in everything and everyone.

Christ the Messenger

What is a Messenger, an Incarnation, an Avatar?

This is from our vespers hymn, “Breaker of This World’s Chain,” by Swami Vivekananda. Singing to Sri Ramakrishna, he wrote:

“How great was Thy sacrifice, freely choosing Thy birth in this prison, our Iron Age, to unchain us and set us free...”

So much about the Master’s life and being are implied by just these few phrases. Yet, for you and me, the key words are set us free.

Vivekananda says an incarnation of God has the power to free us from bondage to ignorance, suffering, and death. Tomorrow afternoon — Kalpataru Day — we’ll talk about a time when Sri Ramakrishna fully revealed his fulfillment of that promise.

Vivekananda believed that to do this work, Divine Mother herself (Nature, Prakriti), is born in our world from time to time — she takes human form as Her daughters and sons.

To awaken us, these extraordinary beings say amazing things. For example, Christ affirmed these lines from Psalm 82 (the Divine Presence is speaking): *“...5 They do not know nor do they understand; They walk about in darkness.. 6 I said, “You are gods, And all of you are sons of the Most High.”* (Explain: Children of the Light ...)

And Jesus Himself promised, *“In the world you will have trouble, but take courage for I have conquered the world.”*

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.”

“For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.”

“Yes I am with you always, until the very end of time...”

In his talk titled **Christ the Messenger**, Swami Vivekananda said: *“... (T)he three years of (Christ’s) ministry were like one compressed, concentrated age, which it has taken nineteen hundred years to unfold, and who knows how much longer it will yet take! ... But mark this giant that came; centuries and ages pass, yet the energy that he left upon the world is not yet stretched, nor yet expended to its full. It goes on adding new vigour as the ages roll on...”*

This morning we will talk about these quotes, and discuss other aspects of the Divine Incarnation we celebrate at this Holy Season of the year.

For example, this is from *The Divine Incarnation or Avatara*, a class in NYC (CW Vol 8) — note that Swamiji was speaking to Christians ...

“Jesus Christ was God — the Personal God become man. He has manifested Himself many times in different forms and these alone are what you can worship. God in His absolute nature is not to be worshipped. Worshipping such God would be nonsense.

“We have to worship Jesus Christ, the human manifestation, as God. You cannot worship anything higher than the manifestation of God ... if you want to have a hold on spiritual life, cling close to God as manifest in Christ ...

“The lowest state of philosophical religion is dualism; the highest form is the Triune state. Nature and the human soul are interpenetrated by God, and this we see as the Trinity of God, nature, and soul. At the same time you catch a glimpse that all these three are products of the One. Just as this body is the covering of the soul, so this is, as it were, the body of God. As I am the soul of nature, so is God the soul of my soul.

You are the centre through which you see all nature ... This nature, soul, and God make one individual being, the universe. Therefore they are a unity; yet at the same time they are separate.

“Then there is another sort of Trinity which is much like the Christian Trinity. God is absolute. We cannot see God in His absolute nature, we can only speak of that as "not this, not this".

Yet we can get certain qualities as the nearest approach to God. First is existence, second is knowledge, third is bliss—very much corresponding to your Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Father is the existence out of which everything comes; Son is that knowledge.

“It is in Christ that God will be manifest. God was everywhere, in all beings, before Christ; but in Christ we became conscious of Him. This is God. The third is bliss, the Holy Spirit. As soon as you get this knowledge, you get bliss. As soon as you begin to have Christ within you, you have bliss; and that unifies the three.” **EOQ**

The Messengers come to find us where we are:

Vivekananda said that Jesus taught, according to the capacity of his listeners, three spiritual paths: dualistic, qualified non-dual, and non-dual.

Vivekananda said: “Suppose Jesus of Nazareth was teaching, and a man came and told him, ‘What you teach is beautiful. I believe that it is the way to perfection, and I am ready to follow it; but I do not care to worship you as the only begotten Son of God.’ What would be the answer...? ‘Very well, brother, follow the ideal and advance in your own way. I do not care whether you give me the credit for the teaching or not ... I only teach truth, and truth is nobody’s property ... Truth is God Himself. Go forward...” — CW Vol 4

Worship of the Personal God — following the ideal that Truth is God Itself — two very different practices. The first is the devotional path, the way of Bhakti Yoga. The second is the way of knowledge, Jnana Yoga. As taught by Sri Ramakrishna, both these paths are non-dual, and lead to exactly the same realization of God, or God Consciousness.

Let’s return to Jesus’ promises: When they are understood, assimilated, they are important reasons for us to worship this manifestation of the Personal God — Emanuel, God With Us — “pleased as Man with Man to dwell:”

“In the world you will have trouble, but take courage for I have conquered the world.”

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.”

“For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.”

“Yes I am with you always, until the very end of time...”

Swahananda story: “We are each called on to be a Christ!” — *His call to manifest that non-duality, the deepest Truth of your Being, **by doing**, by offering up your life, every day, as much and as best you can, for the good of your fellow human beings.*

In the Gospel of Mathew, Jesus says: 25“For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. 26 For what shall it profit you, if you gain the whole world, and lose your own soul?”

DISCUSSION AND COMMENTS

Regular Closing prayer