

GOOD MORNING... ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **Tues-Wed, night of Dec 31-Jan 1**
Midnight Meditation from 11:30pm to 12:06am, followed by fellowship and snacks in the Monastery
- **Wed Jan 1 Kalpataru Day** observance from 2:30-3:30pm — reading and discussion, followed by a gathering in the Monastery
- **Saturday Jan 4th — Andy Offutt Irwin's Epiphany Show.** House Concert in the Fellowship Hall: Snacks from 6:30-7; performance at 7pm
- **Sun Jan 5 Good King Wenceslas**
w/ Br. Shankara
- **Sat Jan 11 Seva Saturday** from 10am to 2pm. Help “winterize” your Center. Pizza served for lunch at 12:30pm.

No need to stay the entire 4 hours — come when you can, stay as long as you like.

- **Mark your calendars: Swami Harinam-anandaji** will be here on Sunday, Jan 26 to lead a Workshop on the Chandi. The in February, **Swami Nirakaranandaji** of the St Louis center, will be with us on Sat the 15th & Sun the 16th to lead a weekend-long retreat on the teachings, the life & the achievements of Adi Shankaracharya

CHANT • SONG • WELCOME • TOPIC

December has been a month for study of Karma Yoga, a spiritual path leading to the abandonment of selfishness. As a karma yogi, you practice offering your actions and their results, as well as your perceptions, thoughts, and feelings to the Divine Presence.

Even before fully knowing this Presence, you hold firmly to the belief that the Presence is within each person or other

living being that you interact with or serve. Working and abiding in this spirit, you are increasingly able to release attachment to your activities and their results. This is the freedom promised by Karma Yoga.

As Sri Krishna tells Arjuna in Ch. 2 of Bhagavad Gita:

“Even a little practice of this yoga will save you from the terrible wheel of rebirth and death ...”

SONG HERE — RITA MATHEW

Jesus Christ & Sri Ramakrishna

This morning we will discuss why we think of Jesus Christ and Sri Ramakrishna, together, at this Holy Season of the year.

Swami Prabhavananda, my guru, wrote an article titled:

What Christ Means to Me

(Swami Prabhavananda was the founder and head of the Vedanta Society of

Southern California from 1930 until his death in 1976.) He wrote:

“Now let me tell you how I personally became attracted to Christ and Christianity and the teachings of the Bible.

When I was sixteen years old I left the village where I lived and came to nearby Calcutta to enter the university. At that time, I received a present from the YMCA—a Bible. I tried to read it, but, having the impatience of a typical teenager, I never seemed able to get beyond the “begats”! So I did not look at the Bible again for a long time.

Then, several years later, when I joined the Ramakrishna Order, I had an interesting experience. A few days after my admission we held a Christmas celebration at our monastery; Christmas is celebrated at all the monasteries of the Order (though not in Hindu homes).

In one of the large halls the monks had built an altar, upon which was a picture of the Madonna and Child. Seated around the altar were many of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna.

Imagine, if you will, the physical presence of Peter, James, John, Mathew, and so on. This is how we felt, as though the counterparts of Christ's disciples were present before us.

A disciple of Swami Vivekananda, who had dressed himself up as a Christian padre, performed the worship. He offered candles, flowers, and, strange as it may seem, a fruitcake—the kind you buy in a Western market. It was unusual because I don't believe fruitcake existed when Christ was alive!

We also offered a cigar to him. You see, this again was our idea of what a Westerner might like. As the worship proceeded, all of us remained silent.

Then my master, Swami Brahmananda, told us: “Meditate on the Christ within and feel his living presence.” We all felt—suddenly—that a spiritual atmosphere had been created. ... It was in that atmosphere that everyone of us felt that Christ was as much our own as Krishna or Ramakrishna.”

As we read in his *Gospel*, Sri Ramakrishna had direct experiences of Christ’s presence, and believed that Christ is an incarnation of God.

Swami Brahmananda and other direct disciples of the Master also saw and talked with Lord Jesus. The Ramakrishna Order of India was founded on Christmas Eve.

From *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*

M: “How amazing! A similar thing happened with two women at the time of Jesus. They too were sisters, and devoted to Christ. Martha and Mary.”

MASTER (eagerly): “Tell me the story.”

M: “Jesus Christ, like you, went to their house with his devotees. At the sight of him one of the sisters was filled with ecstatic happiness. ...

“The other sister, (Martha) all by herself, was arranging the food to entertain Jesus. She complained to the Master, saying: ‘Lord, please judge for yourself — how wrong my sister is! She is sitting in your room and I am doing all these things by myself.’ Jesus said: ‘Your sister indeed is blessed. She has developed the only thing needful in human life: love of God.’”

MASTER: “Well, after seeing all this, what do you feel?”

M: “I feel that Christ, Chaitanyadeva, and yourself — all three are one and the same. It is the same Person that has become all these three.”

MASTER: “Yes, yes! One! One! It is indeed one. Don’t you see that it is He alone who dwells here in this way.”

As he said this, Sri Ramakrishna pointed with his finger to his own body.

M: “You explained clearly, the other day, how God incarnates Himself on earth.”

MASTER: “Tell me what I said.”

M: “You told us to imagine a field extending to the horizon and beyond. It extends without any obstruction; but we cannot see it on account of a wall in front of us. In that wall there is a round hole. Through the hole we see a part of that infinite field.”

MASTER: “Tell me what that hole is.”

M: “You are that hole. Through you can be seen everything—that Infinite Meadow without any end.”

Sri Ramakrishna was very much pleased. Patting M.’s back, he said: “I see you have understood that. That’s fine!”

M: “It is indeed difficult to understand that.

One cannot quite grasp how God, Perfect Brahman that He is, can dwell in that small body.”

The Master quoted from a song:

*Oh, no one at all has found out who He is;
Like a madman from door to door He
roams,
Like a poor beggar He roams from door to
door.*

M: “You also told us about Jesus.”

MASTER: “What did I say?”

M: “You went into samadhi at the sight of Jesus Christ’s picture in Jadu Mallick’s garden house. You saw Jesus come down from the picture and merge in your body.

...

Among all the forms God chooses for His lila, I like best His play as a human being.”

MASTER: “That is enough. And you are seeing me.”

...

In the article quoted from earlier, Swami Prabhavananda also wrote:

“In the Vedas, the earliest scriptures of India, we find this truth:

“Truth is one, though sages call it by various names.” Later in the Upanishads, we come across a similar statement: “As different streams coming from various sources ultimately flow into one ocean, so do the many religions of the world, emerging from innumerable sources, at long last mingle in the great ocean of love.” In this present age, we have again been taught: As many religions, so many paths. All reach one and the same goal. Thus, from the earliest Vedic times up to our modern age this ideal of harmony and universality has been taught to every Hindu. ...

There is ... another reason why Christ is offered worship at our monasteries. As you might know, Sri Ramakrishna was interested in every religion, actively interested;

for he followed their particular paths to discover the truth of them. And he found that all of them, like streams, mingled in the great ocean of love.

A disciple of his would occasionally read the Bible to him, and then explain it in Bengali. In this way Ramakrishna came to know something of Christianity. One day, while visiting a devotee, he chanced to see a picture of the Madonna and Child. As he was looking at the picture, it suddenly became living to him. His heart was filled with love for Christ.

For a period of three days and three nights he stayed in his room, filled with the presence of Jesus. He even refused to go to the Hindu temple or worship any of the Hindu gods or goddesses. Curious to know how the followers of Christ worshipped their Lord, he was granted a vision of devotees kneeling before Jesus and praying to him.

On the third day, as he was seated outside his room, Ramakrishna noticed a luminous figure approaching him. At once he knew that this was Christ the Savior.

The figure approached and embraced him and entered into his body. And so Ramakrishna came to understand that Jesus was an avatar, a divine incarnation.

Christ has another significance for the Ramakrishna Order. After Ramakrishna passed away in 1886, his disciples took their final vows of sannyasa on Christmas Eve. So you can understand why Christmas Eve is particularly sacred to us, for the Order was really founded on that day.

...

That eternal Christ is not to be found in churches, nor in temples; not in books, nor in scriptures—but within your own heart. Find him there.”

DISCUSSION AND COMMENTS

Regular Closing prayer