

Church of St. Francis

CHRISTMAS 2007

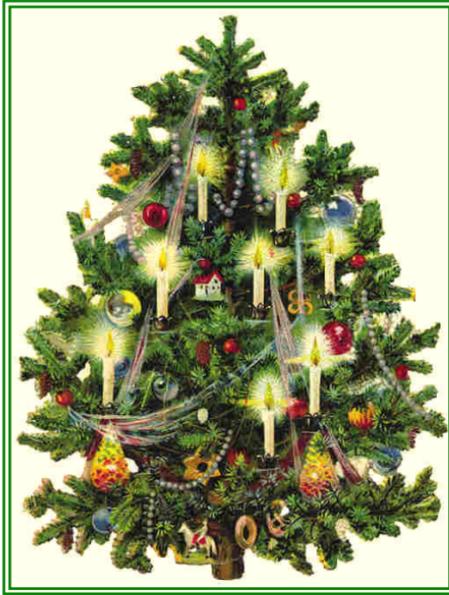
LEGENDS OF THE CHRISTMAS TREE

The Christmas tree, Yule tree or *Tannenbaum* (German: *fir tree*) is one of the most popular traditions associated with the celebration of Christmas. It is normally an ever-green coniferous tree that is brought into a home or used in the open, and is decorated with lights and colorful ornaments during the days around Christmas. The most popular tree topper is the angel, followed by the star. The tree topper usually signifies the Star of Bethlehem or angelic hosts which proclaimed the news of the birth of Jesus to the world on the eve of his birth.

The Christmas tree is often explained as a pre-Christian tradition and ritual surrounding the Winter Solstice (see diagram on next page),

which included the use of evergreen boughs.

The phrase "Christmas tree" is first recorded in 1835 and represents an importation from the German language. The modern Christmas tree tradition is believed to have begun in Germany in the 18th century though many argue that Martin Luther began the tradition in the 16th century. One story holds that Martin Luther was walking through the forest on Christmas Eve. As he walked he was awed by the beauty of the stars



glimmering through the branches of the evergreen trees. So taken was he by this beautiful sight that he cut a small tree and took it home to his family. To recreate that same effect of starlight twinkling, he placed candles on all its branches.

CHURCH OF ST. FRANCIS

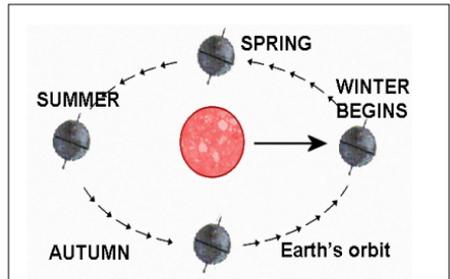
LEGENDS OF THE CHRISTMAS TREE (CONTINUED)

Another legend tells of a poor woodsman who found a lost child on Christmas Eve. Though very poor himself, the woodsman gave the child food and shelter for the night. The woodsman woke the next morning to find a beautiful glittering tree outside his door. The lost child was really the Christ Child in disguise and he created the tree to reward the good man for his charity.

Others feel the origin of the Christmas tree may be the "Paradise Play." In medieval times most people could not read and plays were used to teach the lessons of the bible all over Europe. The Paradise Play, which showed the creation of man and the fall of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, was performed every year on December 24th. Apples were hung on evergreen trees because real apple trees were bare in wintertime.

Another legend talks about German families who allowed their animals to come inside and view the Christmas trees on Christmas Eve. Because the Christ Child was born in a stable, they felt that the animals should take part in the Christmas celebration. But spiders weren't allowed because the housewives didn't want cobwebs in their clean houses. The spiders were unhappy about this and complained to the Christ Child. He felt sorry for them and decided that late at night He

would let them in to see the trees. The excited spiders loved the Christmas trees and all night long they crawled about in the branches, leaving them covered with webs. On Christmas morning the housewives saw what the spiders had done. But instead of being angry, they were delighted. For in the night the Christ Child had turned all of the cobwebs into sparkling tinsel. A Merry Christmas to All!



The **winter solstice**, occurring either on December 21 or 22, marks the longest night of the year. The sun is at its lowest point in the sky, and its noontime elevation appears to be the same for several days before and after the solstice. The origin of the word solstice comes from Latin *solstitium*, from *sol*, "sun" and "*stitium*," "a stoppage."

On December 25, we celebrate the birth of Jesus. May we also bring the birth of the Christ Child into our hearts and increase His light in our life for all the days of the New Year.

CONFIRMATION, ORDINATION, CELEBRATION



At the ordination ceremony, from left to right at the altar: Fr. Jeffrey Forth, The Rt. Rev. William Downey, celebrant, Deaconess Julie Hamilton, Deacon James Ascareggi. Kneeling in front is the ordinand Daniel Provost.

On Saturday evening, September 15th, Regionary Bishop William Downey conferred the Sacrament of Confirmation to Rabecca Collin, St. Francis' organist, Joshua Novak and Daniel Provost.

During the Holy Eucharist on Sunday, September 16th, Daniel Provost was raised in minor Holy Orders to the office of Reader. Many attended the service, including Daniel's mother, his

children and close friends. A reception was held after the service, in the church's basement fellowship hall, where the guests and congregation enjoyed vegetarian pasta dishes, green salad, fresh fruit, muffins and a cake decorated for the occasion.

We thank both the Rt. Rev. William Downey and our Rector, Fr. T. Metz for taking time out of their busy schedules to work at the altar for these sacramental gifts.



CHURCH OF ST. FRANCIS

ST. FRANCIS AT AUTUMN THEOSOFEST

Our church hosted a table displaying various brochures about St. Francis and The Liberal Catholic Church, Province of the USA, at TheosoFEST, on Sept. 8, 2007, in Wheaton, Illinois.

TheosoFEST, organized by the Theosophical Society, (<http://www.theosophical.org/>), celebrated its commitment to open-minded inquiry into world religions, philosophy, science and the arts in order to understand the wisdom of the ages, respect the unity of all life, and help people explore spiritual self-transformation. The festival was held from 10 am to 5pm, featuring

speakers, exhibitors, vendors and vegetarian food. Held on its beautiful 42-acre campus, it featured presentations on the chakras, meditation, Qigong, Tai Ji, mandalas, Zen Buddhism, healing, walking an outdoor labyrinth and a drumming circle. The sunny weather encouraged many visitors to come to the festival.

We thank the volunteers who spent time at the church's table and greeting visitors, including Charles and Ann Bermingham, Rebecca Collin, Vicki FitzMaurice, Fr. T. Metz and his wife Lorijo, and Gerald and Marian Schulte.



Tending the booth at TheosoFest, from left to right is Rabecca Collin, Lorijo Metz and Vicki FitzMaurice. Rabecca made the beautiful table cloth.

2007 ANNUAL CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

Our fiscal year 2007 runs from 10-1-06 until 10-1-07. Due to scheduling challenges of the Rector, the Vestry agreed to postpone our Annual Congregational Meeting until November.

The past year has been memorable and includes some of the following highlights:

- We averaged slightly more people each Eucharistic Sunday, with 793 attendees compared to the 779 the prior year.
- 810 Holy Communion were shared but the average Sunday participation increased from 13.7 to 15.0 year over year.
- Other Services included ten Healing Services, Prime, and four Baptisms (ie, Kiefer Daniel Provost, Daniel Joseph Provost, Alex Conley, and Abena Benewaa Debra),
- Dan Provost was raised to Cleric, Doorkeeper, and Reader by the Rt. Rev. William Downey.
- Rebecca Lynn Martha Collins, Joshua Alan Novak, and Daniel Joseph Provost were also confirmed by Bishop Downey during a very special week-end of services.

In 2006 our Special Services included two baptisms, two marriages, and two Requiem Eucharists (i.e. Irene Watson and Dimpna Clarin-Smith).

Midnight Mass was mystically special and solemn this year for the 28 people who attended; up from 25 in 2005, 19 in 2004, and 17 in 2003.

Special thanks was given to Becky for her role in providing music, Dawn for monitoring the pews and tabletops and fire extinguishers, etc, and Father Jeffrey for so ably filling in for the many times that the rector was forced to be away on Sunday morning throughout the year.

In addition to all of you who receive my unspoken thanks, please extend a special courtesy to these three people who have helped to make St Francis a haven of peace and a respite from the storm.

-Fr. Terrence, Rector

Church of St. Francis Vestry 2007-08

James Ascareggi -
Vice President

Ann E. & Charles Bermingham

Rabbecca Collin – *Secretary*

Vicky Fitzmaurice -
President, Ladies' Guild

Jeffrey Forth

Julie Hamilton

Lori Jo Metz – *Treasurer*

Daniel Provost

Marion & Gerry Schulte

THE INNER SIDE OF CHURCH WORSHIP

by Geoffrey Hodson

CHAPTER III

Thoughts on Church Worship

I. THE WORK OF

THE CONGREGATION Part 2

Self-preparation should always precede participation in ceremonials. In olden days ceremonial ablutions preceded attendance at all services; meticulous care was taken in order to ensure perfect physical cleanliness, both of the body and of the special clothing worn. In like manner we should prepare our subtler bodies by learning to cast aside at will all our personal problems, anxieties, and difficulties so that we may enter the church as free from these limitations of personality as it is possible to be. Our auras will then appear fresh, bright, and pure, instead of dull and impure, as they often are in these difficult times.

We may, of course, bring our difficulties, lay them at the feet of our Lord, and ask for His guidance and help, but He will be able to help us far more effectively if we have first done our utmost to overcome them, and if we approach Him in an attitude of detachment from all personal considerations.

We receive much help towards self-preparation from the Church herself. At the sacrament of baptism an angel is given us to be our guide and helper throughout the remainder of our lives; this occurs at the prayer: "May His holy angel go be-

fore thee, and follow after thee; may he be with thee in thy down-sitting and thine uprising, and keep thee in all thy ways". Thenceforward when we enter the church and endeavor to compose our minds in preparation for the service, our guardian angel begins to help us to purify and refine our emotions. He liberates within our auras a measure of the forces placed in his hands at our baptism - forces for which he is the intelligent agent - and uses them to produce the results at which he aims.

In addition to this interior assistance, we are sometimes met by one of the angel attendants of the church who greets us and offers his help. He sees our needs and begins to work from the outside to prepare us for the service; He tries to eliminate the dull and discolored areas from our subtler vehicles, and to help us in the spiritualization of our personal consciousness.

When, before taking our seat we kneel in reverent adoration of Christ's presence in the Reserved Sacrament and make the sign of the cross, His power rays forth upon us, and illumines and blesses us. It is important, therefore, that as we make the sign of the cross we try to throw our whole nature open to Him, and to call out the Christ principle within ourselves, so that our response to Him may be as full and perfect as possible. If, however, we

come completely self-prepared into the presence of the Lord and His angels, all the power which is expended in this work may be used to help us to gain elevation of mind and an expansion of consciousness. As a next step we may then endeavor to achieve mental and spiritual unity with our fellow worshippers. By steady practice we should soon be able to expand our consciousness to include every member of the congregation, both visible and invisible, as well as the angelic ministrants. As we live in natural unity with them all in our ego consciousness, it will be helpful if, both in our public and private worship, we try to lift ourselves into a realization of that higher self.

One of the underlying principles which govern success in any work is that the higher the level of consciousness from which the work is done, the greater the power behind it. This is especially true of all spiritual endeavors. Therefore it would be extremely valuable if the congregation undertook a definite system of self-training, with the object of developing its capacities in this direction to their highest degree of unfoldment. Our preparatory meditations should therefore be directed towards gaining expansion of consciousness, and developing the ability to work from the higher levels of the inner worlds.

The "Shining *Augoeides*" or immor-

tal principle in each one of us is a being of great splendor; his life of power and bliss is in marked contrast with the limitation and self-centeredness which so often characterize us in the personality. If we can rise into our higher consciousness, therefore, we shall in all our work obtain results incomparably greater than any which we can achieve in the lower consciousness even with the entire concentration of our mental and emotional powers. An essential part of our self-preparation for the performance of ceremonial worship, therefore, is to contact our highest principle so that we may release and employ our highest powers and faculties.
(to be continued)

Augoeides is a term that has had various definitions within Western occult tradition over the past two thousand years. The Greek Neoplatonic writers of the late Roman period first used it to refer to the *Body of Light* or the transformed spiritual body worn by the initiate who had overcome the materialism of the physical world.

In classical Greek, the *Augoeides* is the "self-glittering one." In current occult literature *augoeides* is used as a synonym referring to the Holy Guardian Angel.

<http://www.themystica.com/mystica/default.html>

*Join us in celebration with song and prayer
Monday December 24*

Christmas Eve

10:30 p.m. Carols & Refreshments

11:30 p.m. Holy Eucharist



Tuesday December 25

Christmas Day

10:00 a.m. Holy Eucharist

Open Communion

*“Christ is within every one of us, and the whole
of our spiritual life is an effort to bring the
Christ within into full activity that it may be
one with the Christ without.”*

From *The Christian Gnosis* by Charles W. Leadbeater

<http://www.stfrancisvillapark.org/>