

The Twelve Holy Nights

Unrevised lecture by Willi Sucher

The nights that we call the twelve Holy Nights were already commemorated in pre-Christian times. However, we must take into account certain differences of the calendar year. The ancient calendar was Ptolemaic and based on the orbit of the Sun, the solar year taking $365\frac{1}{2}$ days for the Sun to complete its orbit. Since that time, the Moon phases have been observed for their yearly calendar, for the Moon was easier to observe. They did not have all the modern instruments that we have today, and it was not easy to observe the movements of the Sun. Unfortunately, the Moon calendar does not fit into the solar year, and thus the two rhythms are different, though the solar calendar is important for the observations of the seasons. What is called the sidereal month of the Moon is about $27\frac{1}{2}$ days. This is the time that it takes the Moon to make a complete orbit through the Zodiac and return to the same place. The synodical month is the time that it takes for the Moon to meet with the Sun from one time to the next, which takes about $29\frac{1}{2}$ days, or New Moon to New Moon, or from Full Moon to Full Moon, when the Moon is opposite the Sun and takes its full reflection. Because the rhythms of the Moon and the Sun are different, they cannot coincide on the calendar. Therefore, to the ancient peoples the Full Moon represented a rhythm of $29\frac{1}{2}$ days, which made a lunar month and that does not coincide with our solar year, though the Hebrews still use that calendar. Thus to these ancient peoples, their whole year contained twelve Full Moons. However, the synodic year does not exactly fit into our solar year; for $29\frac{1}{2} \times 12 = 354$ days, whereas our leap year represents 366 days, which is then a difference of twelve more days in our calendar.

We have to remember that the Moon holds profound secrets and is an immense factor in the universe. But the Moon calendar of the ancient peoples is twelve days shorter than our solar calendar, and these twelve extra days represent the twelve Holy Nights that we are now commemorating. These twelve Holy Nights come in the heart of the winter for their celebration, when the visible Sun is at its lowest point, but when the inner spiritual Sun at the center of the Earth, which was united with the Earth, is at its most powerful. Therefore, at this very time, there comes into arrangement a deep interconnection between the Sun and the Earth. When the physical Sun is at its lowest, it has the least effect, but the spiritual Sun is then more radiant, according to the ancient Mysteries.

During these twelve Holy Nights, a part of the Earth is turned away from the physical Sun, but it is turned toward the spiritual Sun shining through the Earth from within.

At such a time as this, Christianity join forces the birth of Jesus, which we, as anthroposophists, celebrate as the birth of the Jesus Child of the Luke Gospel.

There are no external documents of the life of Jesus or of Christ Jesus, but I have a personal conviction that these days were truly historical. This time need not only be a Festival of commemoration, but it can also be a time of great spiritual confidence gained from the writings of Rudolf Steiner.

Let us consider more deeply the symbology of the Christmas tree. If we really look at that fir tree, we can see it as a pure symbol of the world. The pyramid of the tree was the picture of the world to the ancient peoples, and to the Egyptians the Pyramid represented the perfect picture of their universe. Now, if we should think that we have advanced in knowledge since then, let us consider that perhaps they knew more than we do. For the square base of their pyramids had four corners that rose to a triangular apex. This three that rises from the four, the triangle springing forth from the square base, has always esoterically represented that subtle symbol of the sevenfold human being, the sevenfold universe, and with the four earthly aspects and the three heavenly aspects. And this tree, as the one that stands before us now, bears upon it the planetary symbols, the alpha and the omega, and at its foot lies the crib, which represents that cave or stable in which the Light Child was born in the depth of the night. This must become more the Festival Birth of a Being experienced during

those twelve Holy Nights, the Birth of an invisible Spiritual Being, of etheric and astral nature and reality. To experience this Birth is the great comfort that a real experience of the deep truths of Christianity can bring to humanity.

In the future, we have to experience this as a reality, of a purely etheric or astral nature, connected with the starry world and yet shining forth from the Earth as well. It is connected with that spiritual stream which brings down the forces of the cosmos and reawakening them in the thinking, feeling, and willing of all people, so that the star may become a radiating star; for this Earth is still the dark planet of the universe. This new realization of human beings can bring into being this star world for the sake of the universe, for the Earth shall no longer receive, but the cosmos awaits that Sun-force streaming out from the cave and the crib in the midnight hour, out into the far spaces of the universe.

The Moon forces remain silent on these twelve Holy Nights, because the Moon year has ended, and the pure Sun Being is wanting to stream out into the universe to the waiting cosmos of stars. The real Being that is born can be experienced by us on these twelve nights, and He lives on into the future, as He accompanies humanity as their silent Brother, deeply concerned with human destiny.

The twelve Holy Nights throw open the gate of necessity into the realm of the real, for the Moon in slipping back and the Sun forces are temporarily unopposed. This twelfefoldness connects the Earth with the Zodiac in its events. The path of the Sun and Moon and stars are each concentric rings around the Earth, as a kind of crude conception, which are marked by the constellations of the Zodiac. Instead of our usual imagination of the spiritual forces streaming down upon the Earth from the Zodiac, let us see it during these twelve nights as the inner spiritual Sun of the Earth streaming forth into the universe to illuminate one constellation each night in turn.

The Zodiac represents that spiritual periphery beyond the Earth from which stream the great archetypes, with which we dealt the other night. I have done many years of research and observation, which goes much deeper than simple comparisons. Let us take them in turn, realizing that the first night is that period from Midnight on 24 December to midnight on the 25th. Therefore, we have:

25 December - Virgo:

The Virgin constellation. We can contemplate the spiritual events of that night and let them light up the Virgin constellation for us. This night was dedicated to the birth of Jesus, and it holds within its chalice the great Mystery of the Virgin Birth. This constellation can be lit up and interpreted by what happened on Earth. The ancient peoples symbolized it as an Angel with a sheaf of corn. However, for the Christians, we have the Virgin carrying the Child, and in the Apocalypse, the woman in heaven giving birth to the Sun.

26 December - Libra:

This is St. Stephen's Day, and full of a very deep wisdom, which was at work within the Christian calendar of the Saints, and which called up the imaginations appropriate to the Festival. St. Stephen was the first martyr, and through him, Saul became Paul. Stephen's manner of meeting death, with absolute conviction, caused something to happen with Saul, which led him to receive Christ later at Damascus. Stephen's death throws a mighty decision into the world. If he met his death differently to that dramatic sureness of the Resurrected Christ, Saul would never have become Paul, and we are all aware that Christianity would have suffered irreparably thereby.

27 December - Scorpio:

This sign was once perceived spiritually as the Eagle. It is also the Day of St. John the Evangelist, who was always represented by the Eagle, and that is expressed as both the power of the new Christianity and its wisdom of great beauty in the Gospel of St. John and in the Revelations. He was the Apostle of the great Christian vision. The Eagle can be lifted high in the air to the Sun, and it can see the world with a bird's eye view, in a spiritual sense. For now we have moved from the rhythm of the Moon to the sacred Sun realm.

28 December - Sagittarius:

This is also the day of the Murder of the Innocents. They were the souls who had died as innocents by Herod's hand and thus safeguarded and prepared the path for Christ. Rudolf Steiner has pointed out that it means that when the souls of children, and even babies, return to the spiritual worlds too soon, for their etheric forces are not used up and they return unladen to the spiritual worlds without sin and in purity of life, and it is these stored up forces that later on help to bring about the great and significant spiritual deeds of the Earth. Their death served the Child who was to bear the Christ, and their sacrifice prepared the path and filled the cosmos with a power of spiritual youth to make possible the Events of thirty years later in the Ministry of Christ. Also, the Archer represents the centaur, with the upper part being human and the lower part an animal. This is closely connected in cosmic imaginations with the process of human evolution toward that fulfillment of the "I", or ego that is our destiny. Thus we have that thread from the dim past through the present to the dim future. The centaur aims at the future with the arrow. All human evolution depends entirely on sacrifice, for all sacrifice creates progress for others, and even the sacrifice of life and health may be required. This is a fundamental law, and forms the background of a gigantic imagination, this deep, deep secret of sacrifice. Golgotha was the Supreme Sacrifice, and it opens up deep secrets. All spiritual accomplishments come from sacrifice.

29 December - Capricorn:

This is connected with the Prophet Nathan, who was the son of David and deeply connected with the prophecy of the Christ Events. He was a personality to whom the heavens lay open. The ancient name for Capricorn was the Gate of the Gods. Nathan saw through this gateway, and he took an active part in the preparation of the physical body for the Christ.

30 December - Aquarius:

This is connected with David (the star of Waterman). David lived a strange life. He could not become a King because of Saul, but lived in caves, often in danger of death. He gives us the impression of a man swimming in a stream whose waves carry him along, hence also his failures, though he is at times guided by cosmic powers to prepare the way for the physical body of the Christ. He is guided at times by a spiritual illumination, and this constellation is connected with human existence in the past, when people were as selfless as a plant. David was not selfless, but even so, he was an instrument used by destiny to bring about this coming event.

31 December - Pisces:

This day is the end of the year and a day of destiny; for most people think of both past and future and feel the weight of destiny, their own destiny as well as that of the world and humanity. This is the Day of St. Sylvesterus, an early Pope of Constantine the Great, who was actively involved in making Christianity a state of religion of the Roman Empire. This time was the time of darkness for Christianity, because it then lost much of its esoteric nature and became exoteric and externalized, making it an instrument of power. We can be interested in Raphael's cartoon in the Victoria Albert, which portrays the calling of Peter. Christ called Peter three times and Peter felt it as a reproach, you may remember, and when he enquired about John's destiny, he was told that it would come to the fore later, which it did in Revelations.

1 January - Aries:

This is New Year's Day, and the Baptism Day of the Jesus Child—The Names-giving Day. This conjures up mighty Christian Imaginations. The Child was named Jesus, and the naming of the Child then was a much deeper event than it is now. Much had been perceived supersensibly by Mary at the Annunciation. It was this Jesus who was later the bearer of the Christ. Then it was John the Baptist who cried out, "Behold the Lamb of God", as Jesus advanced to the Baptism at the Jordan, when he was prepared to receive the Christ Ego. In Hebrew he would be called the "Ram of God", and it is this event and knowledge that illuminates the constellation of Aries for us.

2 January - Taurus:

I have to move more quickly now, because I have overstepped my time, and can only say that these next three Nights represent the Three Kings. This Taurus constellation represents Melchoir, for it is the constellation of the Bull, which symbolizes that mighty kingly nature that is associated with gold.

3 January - Gemini:

Here we have Caspar with the Frankincense, which is an earthly substance that has also that duality, in that it also rises to the heavens as smoke, and then it becomes a quite different substance and consistency. There is that twofoldness within it that we associate with this sign.

4 January - Cancer:

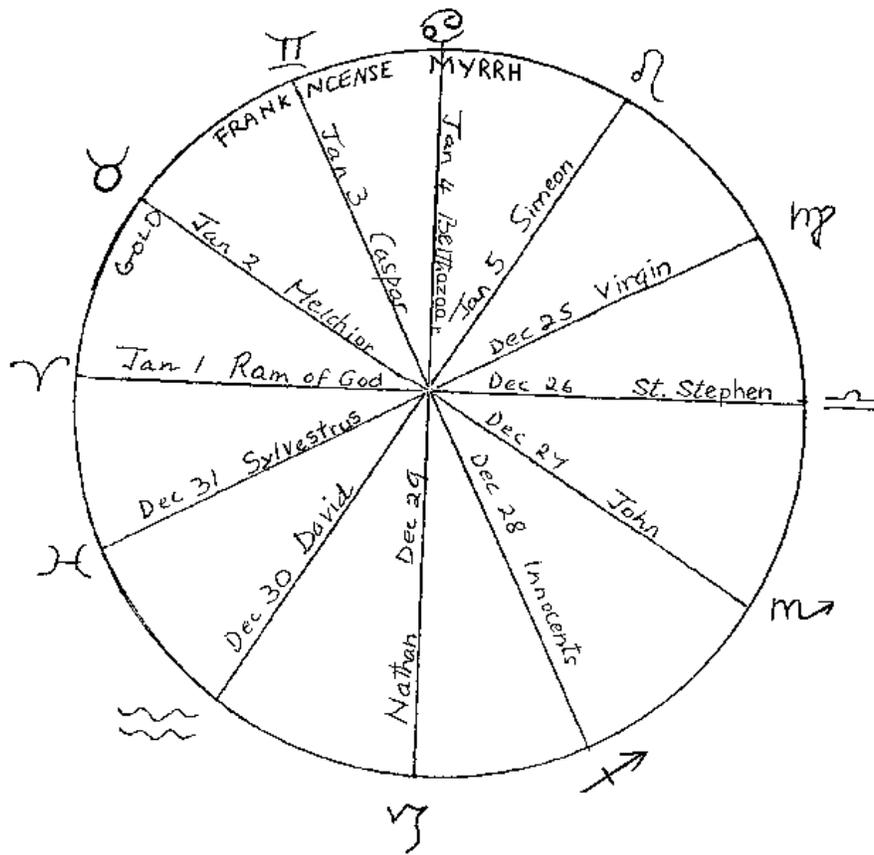
This represents Belthazaar, who brought the myrrh, which sign has within itself a certain bitterness of Earth and yet a heavenly sweetness at times. In some connections, it has been associated with the beehive.

5 January - Leo: Here we have Simeon's Day, when Jesus was brought to the Temple and Simeon cried, "All is fulfilled. Now I can behold the One Who is the Bearer of the Sun." This brings us a new, rich imagination of the constellation of Lion, as the place of the Spiritual Sun of the universe.

Now, what of the 13th Night, 6 January, you may ask? This is Epiphany, and it commemorates the Baptism of Christ, as Christ entered the corporeal being of Jesus. But this happened 30 years later. Therefore, Epiphany has a special quality in that we commemorate what happened 30 years previously. At this Epiphany, we may also go back to 30 years previously when another spiritual Being was born on the 13th Holy Night of Epiphany. This will become for us the real Festival of the Baptism of an ethereal Being that comes metaphorically to Its Spiritual Jordan and receives into His Being the Being of the Great Cosmic I Am.

Looking back to 1920, and the whole year that followed, we will realize that Rudolf Steiner gave his most important lectures then, and at Michaelmas, the Goetheanum was opened under that heading as its aim: The unity of Science, Art, and Religion. This belongs to that Being born at Christmas 1920. At that time, Rudolf Steiner gave his lecture on the "Search for the New Isis" (the Divine Sophia). To me this lecture has been continuously illuminating in my studies, and has become almost as a gospel, in fact.

What we have to contemplate with great gravity is that Being Who was born then approaches the end of the thirty years that prefaces the Ministry and approaches the Jordan for Baptism, by which we may experience and be endowed with the power of the I Am of the universe.



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