

Perspectives

September–November
2023



Michaelmas

Contents

For Michaelmas	3
<i>Ioanna Panagiotopoulos</i>	
The deed of life and death	5
<i>George Dreissig</i>	
The sea of love	11
<i>Nataliia Shatna</i>	
Birthing the fire of love	15
<i>Lory Hess</i>	
All Souls	19
<i>Cindy Hindes</i>	
Women in the life of Christ	25
<i>Louise Sofair</i>	
Reviews	31

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Perspectives

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How can we meet the challenges of our time? So many things that concern us seem to surpass any individual's capacity to meet them. War, divisions in political and social life, the changing weather—wherever we look, we may feel confused and overwhelmed. In the face of such huge problems, it can seem incredible that we could make a decisive difference.

What a shift in perspective happens if we bring the thought to life within us that there is a source of help which is waiting for human beings to allow it to flow into their world. There are good reasons why the angelic world doesn't force itself upon us—what value would there be in our decision to turn to the good, if it did?

Many people imagine their angel as a being who is close to them and brings help in time of need. We can extend this thought to the archangels, who guide our communities, and the Spirit of the Age, who sees the same challenges that we see, not as obstacles but as opportunities for growth, learning and self-giving love. We gain an inkling of this in times of crisis, when the barriers that divide us

fade away as we face the common challenge. In such moments, we can imagine that a disparate group of strangers has been united under the leadership of an angelic being.

Just the thought that this help is at hand can make a huge difference, helping us to overcome our paralysis and act. How much more powerful can this be, when we join with others as we pray to overcome the mental habits that cut us off from the spiritual world. At Michaelmas, the seasonal prayers in the Act of Consecration of Man make our true calling clear: to join with Michael and the angels in the work of transforming the challenges that we face into creative opportunities.

TOM RAVETZ

For Michaelmas

Ioanna Panagiotopoulos

And an exalted sign was unveiled in the world of spirit: a woman clothed with the sun, the moon under her feet, her head adorned with the crown of the twelve stars. And she was with child and cried out in the labour and pain of giving birth. And a second image was revealed in the heavens: see, a great fiery-red dragon...

Revelations 12: 1–3

The woman clothed with the sun is full of promise. She stands before our imagination, a potent source of life that can be birthed and brought to earth. She carries radiance and truth, a spiritual ideal that is longing to become a reality. Standing before her image, we feel ready to do anything to bring this radiance and truth into our lives. So much so, that we can forget the inevitability of the dragon's approach.

For the moment we attempt this speech of truth; the moment we attempt to reveal the radiance of the unseen at work in life; the moment we try to bring it to birth within the context of an earthly venture, we are beset with resistance, hindrance, with anxiety and even attacks.

The child of the spirit is threatening to the adversary because it brings change to the human condition. It brings the possibility of experiencing freedom; it brings the possibility to grow to love. It brings this possibility because it comes from the heart of the sun, who gives of its warmth and light so that human beings can be free; so that human beings can partake in the true mystery of love.

Do we find ourselves comfortable in life, or are we beset with resistance, challenge, anxiety and attack for the potent ideals that long to become realities within earthly life?

Feeling ourselves beset with these struggles can mean pain, but it can also mean that one is called to the Michael quest—the quest to overcome the powers of darkness. In life it can take the form of the struggle to protect human thoughts from becoming spirit-less;

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the struggle to protect human feelings from becoming soul-less; the struggle to protect the human will from falling into the dormancy of matter.

The mark of a true spirit-imbued purpose shines with radiant soft light and is pregnant with spiritual power that immediately draws the attention of the powers of darkness.

This darkness may be tormenting; it may bring conflicts amongst fellows; it may bring illusions, misunderstandings and betrayals.

And yet, the woman with radiance and truth is ever present in the workings of human destiny. We are sure of her presence, because the adversary is never present if there is nothing to overthrow. Are we standing in darkness? The woman must be there too.

When we feel her power, the sun-light—the Son-light—is born within us as a power that can live for evermore in the human soul; that can even shine in darkness.

The Christ power has made the darkness of earth his home. So that there, in the darkness, the Christ-sun is always shining, always weaving radiant threads of light. Within the human battles with darkness of thought and deed, one can remember that Michael has gifted humanity with a capacity to become one who brings to birth ideals of radiance and truth. Through him we can encounter the One who weaves spiritual threads in the dark, lost, banished moments of human destiny.

The deed of life and death

George Dreissig

Images of the crucifixion and the image of the seed

We try to grasp what happened on Golgotha every year anew, and in this attempt we are completely in harmony with the will of Michael, the prince of the angels. He beckons us, as we hear in the Michaelmas epistle, to follow him to ‘higher divining of the deed of life and death on Golgotha’, so that its light can flow into earthly life. When we speak of ‘divining’, it means that we enter into a relationship with a reality even before it appears in clear contours before our inner gaze.

One obstacle to understanding what happened on Golgotha is that the images presented to us in the Gospel accounts only depict what people did to Christ out of evil intentions. They do not describe what Christ himself is going through inwardly and how he is the agent and leader of the events, even as he appears powerless.

Christ himself gave a surprising image of this side of the events on Palm Sunday. John delivers the words of Christ: ‘The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds’ (John 12:23f).

Christ knew what was going to happen. Three times he announced that he would suffer, the third time he even predicted his crucifixion (Matt. 20:19). Nevertheless, he goes to Jerusalem, although his disciples warn him against it. He even asks them to follow him.

Christ knows that the shameful death on the cross awaits him—and he speaks of sowing. His last words on the cross, ‘It is accomplished!’ (John 19:30), underline that he dies fully aware that he has done a deed that he was commissioned to do, that he wanted to complete and that he brings it to completion on the cross.

In this article, I will try to feel into what Christ intends and achieves in his death, by taking his image of the seed that must fall into the earth and die, as a guiding image.

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How we experience death

What will we ourselves experience inwardly when our own death is close? The memories that rise up in us in view of the approaching end of life are no longer bound to time and place: they are all present at the same time. Childhood experiences are just as close to us as what happened yesterday. A colourful kaleidoscope of places, experiences, feelings and impulses, what we have gathered in this earthly life and what now fills our soul, spreads out before our inner gaze. In particular, however, what we have experienced with people for whom we had a special responsibility comes alive in us: children, partners, friends. All of this comes to mind, lights up again, and is completely filled and saturated with feelings of the most diverse kind: joy and sorrow, gratitude and happiness, guilt and failure. Above all this, however, the incomprehensible, iron word resounds: 'No more.' You will have to let go of the great fullness that you are experiencing now in one or two or three days.

But something else is added to what has been: the consciousness of the possibilities that have lain dormant in what we remember but which have only been partly realised and partly left fallow. The past is joined by a sense of what could have become of it, of a possible future that will now no longer be possible. This is increasingly coupled with the new longing: 'Oh, if only I could finish everything!' We might find it particularly painful to become aware of what we have failed to do in our relationships with the people connected to us.

The past, and the future which lies dormant within it—all that goes into death without having come to be—all this flows together in the moment of dying and concentrates into one point in the face of our death. We could also say: a whole human life is compressed as if into a seed. Is this the seed Christ spoke of on Palm Sunday? What soil could receive it, so that it might develop new life?

What Christ does in dying

What might have lived in the consciousness of Christ as he was dying on the cross?

For Christ, the crucifixion is not the end but the turning point of his work. Here too, the mystery of the seed can be found: what seems to be the end of the life of the plant in fact prepares a new becoming. But

Christ's death is a human death. He does not flee from the incarnation, as a Greek god would have done, and he does not perish like an animal; he dies as a human being in full, waking consciousness of what he is suffering.

It is not fantastical to think that at the moment of dying, Christ's consciousness extends further than his memories of childhood. Space and time, the beginning of the world and the goal of the world merge, and interpenetrate in his heart. At the moment of the crucifixion, Christ's heart is the centre of the world: primal origin and final goal.

The Gospels do not describe how Christ experienced the places where he stayed and what he remembered about them. But we hear many details of the fates of people with whom he connected and to whom he often gave a new direction. We can imagine how these people may now shine out again in his consciousness: Mary Magdalene, the woman possessed by seven demons who anointed him; Judas, who betrayed him; Peter, who cut off the ear of the servant of the high priest; the adulteress whom he admonished to sin no more; the young man at Nain whom he called back to life; Lazarus, who was standing under the cross... Which of them would not be present in his consciousness! In his death, too, the common encounters and experiences shine forth, connected with the latent potential in these human lives; with what had been achieved in their destinies through Christ's help, and beyond that, with all that remained unfulfilled, which was saturated with longing and perhaps forlorn hope—and finally, with all that reveals itself in death as false, untrue and unwholesome.

The crucified one carries the whole wealth of seeds of concentrated human destinies in his soul at the moment when he becomes fully human in death. On the cross, these destinies resound together with his world goals, those goals that gave us the impulse to take up an earthly life before birth. In the heart of the crucified one, we find ourselves again in the essence of life itself: our participation in the creative work of God.

And now it becomes clear: What shines forth in the consciousness of the One who suffers a human death on the cross is by no means an experience of 'no more', in contrast to what we ourselves will go through when we die. In the awareness of his heart, Christ remains connected

with all these destinies beyond death. Indeed, the unfulfilled longings and hopes, the failures and aberrations, are most precious. They are the open places, the germination points, where Christ can reach these human seeds and saturate them with his willingness to give and to serve, with his clarity and readiness to take responsibility, just as the sun saturates the seed with its warmth. He opposes the ‘no more’ of death with a stronger power: the power of resurrection. The experience of ‘not I’ flows into the other: ‘Christ in me’.

The cross at the centre of the Act of Consecration

When does our Act of Consecration take place? We find it in the church programme, or in our diary: that is when and where it will be celebrated. But we can also feel that in the sacrament, time and space flow together in a holy point in which the Christ event is just as present as what we are currently going through in our life. When we bring the offering, our situation is similar to where we will be at the moment of death: we are at the end of a process of becoming, summing up what we have acquired, ready to give it away. In this process, we consciously immerse ourselves in the nature and work of the risen Christ, and act with him.

It is the same with the event of Golgotha itself: it can become present at every time, in every place.

In the centre of the Act of Consecration, we hear that ‘with this word’ the divine is given again to human beings. However, this statement is not preceded by words, but by signs: the three crosses that are drawn over the substances of bread and wine in the Transubstantiation. On the cross, human beings regain their share in the divine, because Christ takes our mortal part—in this context we can also say: what we have offered up—into himself and keeps it, preserving its seed-nature. The consecration of the human being calls these germinating powers that emanate from the human being the ‘new confession’ and the ‘new faith’.

The ‘higher divining’ of the ‘deed of life and death on Golgotha’, to which Michael wants to lead us, can consist in our repeatedly making our confession of belief in the being of Christ, who in his death makes his confession to us, demonstrating his belief in us—not merely symbolically, but as a deed in the here and now. In our divining, we try to

feel how this confession and this faith open us to his presence, which enters us like the sun, warming his seed and making us receptive for the good and restoring our germinal power to become.

Every time we make the sign of the cross, we enter into the event of Golgotha. Eternity and the moment, space and time, the widths of space and the closeness of the earth always coincide in the here and now: Now is the time, here it shall happen; through me, but now not through me but through Christ in me. I am the seed which the Christ sun can awaken to life and to becoming—in death, in resurrection.

The Fish

I am a poem.

You are the Word.

I eat you and drink you.

Who calls you, my Lord?

I fish in the darkness.

You answer in Time:

I am the love-bite,

You are the line.

No words can catch you,

But still, they must try.

I am the sunlight.

You are the eye.

Nothing divides us

But language like this,

Figures and letters.

I am the fish

And you are the fisherman

Wounded but strong.

Still, I eat you and drink you

And make you my song.

SEAN BYRNE, HOLYWOOD



The sea of love

Nataliia Shatna

A few days ago I visited a person in hospital who had had an accident. He asked me whether the accident was a sign of the end of his life. This situation had made him think; it put him in a serious mood and made it possible for him to ask the question. How often does that happen, that a situation disturbs the flow of life and brings a quality of seriousness with it, as well as new questions? What does seriousness do to us, to our soul? It wakes us up, like a pinch of pure salt: we come to ourself, we become focused on what is essential, on what is important now, on what is timely. Each of us has certainly had the experience of hearing a question that led to such seriousness, either from another person or from the inner voice. The heart is addressed directly, not the intellect, and the inner being is called upon.

A few years ago I experienced a situation in my life in which I experienced the question, resounding in my heart: What is the meaning of my life? What am I burning for? What do I want to work for? The questions were so powerful that I could not hide from them. I knew that I should seriously consider what my next steps should be and that I should change my life. I felt responsible for the answer. Where it would lead was unclear. What was clear to me, however, was that I should have the courage to give my life a new direction, to follow my inner call.

In such situations, it is very easy for fear to creep in: fear that makes us ask why we have to do something new and leave our 'comfort zone'. Where there are changes to be made, there are also obstacles, trials that want to lead us away from ourselves. We need to deal with such fears if we are to move forward and follow the promptings of our inner self. Mascha Kaléko, a Jewish poet of the twentieth century, expressed it wonderfully in her poem 'Recipe':

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Paula Modersohn-Becker,
Self-Portrait Nude with Amber Necklace, 1906

September–November 2023

Recipe

*Chase away the fears
And the fear of fears
For these few years
It may all be enough
The bread in the box
And the suit in the closet*

*Don't call it 'mine'
It's all just borrowed
Live on borrowed time and see
How little you need
Make yourself at home
And keep your suitcase ready*

*It's true what they say:
Whatever will be, will be
Don't walk towards sorrow
And when it's there
Look silently into its eyes
It's as temporary as happiness*

*Expect nothing
And anxiously protect your secret
Even your brother will betray you
When it's down to 'you or him'
Take your own shadow
As a travelling companion*

*Sweep your room well
And exchange greetings with your neighbour
Serenely mend the fence
And the bell by the gate
Keep that wound inside you awake
Under the roof in the here and now*

*Tear up your plans. Be wise
And stick to miracles
They have long been laid out
In the great plan
Chase away the fears
And the fear of fears*

The inner questions that confront us in difficult situations help to open us up, to enlarge us, making us more generous. The questions want to lead us to ourselves. We cannot open up if we do not learn to love the questions, and also learn to love what we are looking for, even if we do not yet know what it is. Because each of us longs deeply to find meaning and the importance of every situation in life. We long to find trust and to love what we are looking for and will find. Each of us is on a quest for meaning; sooner or later the question of meaning will be put to us either from outside or from within. We are guided in life by both directions—by external events and situations as well as by inner questions, by our feelings and desires.

In the Confirmation service, the children are told that the Christ spirit guides their spiritual aims, the powers of their souls and the forces of their lives through the joys and sufferings of life. They hear these words when the priest lays hands on their heads in blessing. During the preparation for the Confirmation, we need to place into their hearts the conviction that they are not alone in life, that there is someone who walks beside them and is always ready to help, who wants to guide them in life, through all its joys and sufferings. What an encouragement, what a consolation and a blessing lives in these words, not only for the children but also for the parents and the whole congregation that accompanies the sacrament: there is one who is interested in us, who wants to open up to us and accompany us—lovingly, unconditionally and selflessly. And between joys and sufferings, everyone goes their own way, seeking and finding themselves. When we meet people who have found themselves, we are deeply touched and can be happy for them. Because they radiate light, they radiate love, a wide and deep love and warmth. We are touched by what they do and how they do it, because they do their work with love and are happy to radiate and pass on this love, not keep it to themselves. For they know the secret that one should spread love, let it radiate out to the horizon of one's own doing and even further. This is how you can touch and give gifts to the souls of other people. They are touched by it in turn and carry it within themselves, bearing a flame of light and warmth that has been passed on to them. Then they in their turn become a part of the sea of love that encircles the whole world.

Love is perhaps the most important inner force that can move our world forward. Love for other people; compassion; love for the world and for everything that surrounds us, and love for what one does. Love has its source in gratitude—for what comes my way in life, for the wonderful world that surrounds me, even if it is not perfect; for all the people I meet on my path in life. Through love, we can give our life and also the world a direction that leads to the source of life. Our inner orientation can change and guide the orientation of the world.

Recently I heard about an Englishman who has been making pizza and delivering it to hungry people on the border between Ukraine and Poland for months. He left his home and family in England for an indefinite period, bought a couple of pizza ovens and took a large group of volunteers to cook for the people in need. His gift is love, because the pizza embodies his love for the people whom he feeds. In the current emergency situation, this act means a lot to the hungry people. It is vital that someone is there for you, takes an interest in you and helps when you are in need.

So love can take different forms and you can be amazed at what and how it can be. Whether it is baking a pizza or tending the garden or working in a hospital, everyone has chosen or found their task, because it makes sense to do so. We as human beings are the instruments for love to flow into the world through our thoughts, feelings and deeds. It comes through us when we have found ourselves and are true to ourselves—because then we are free to give, not only to take, but also to give. This is possible when we create a balance and are in the midst of life, because we have found the middle in ourselves; the middle between the joys and sorrows of life, the guiding middle. From this centre we learn to love and to be active for the good in the world. From this centre we come to ourselves; this centre makes us true human beings—those who can love. For without love, as St Paul says, we would be nothing and our life would have no meaning.

Birthing the fire of love

Lory Hess

In the middle of the sacrament of Consecration of the Human Being, words ring out that have always struck me with their power. As smoke rises from the censer, the priest speaks of the birthing of a creative fire, the fire of love. This is the central offering toward which we are to form our minds and hearts, symbolized by the altar and the substances that have been prepared upon it: an offering of love, our love. As transformational as the smouldering charcoal that turns a crystalline substance into fragrant vapour, this love will change everything if we can only allow it to come to life within us.

Love is spoken of again as the offering is taken up in the Transubstantiation, which invokes once more the threefold soul capacities of thinking, feeling and willing. Two successive statements define the nature of the offering and of the soul that is making it. Central to this, once more, is love: our loving human hearts, with which we would offer up love to God.

Finally, after stating that the offering is being made by the 'Christian Communion', the priest prays for the Christ offering to live in our offering, and names Christ as the one whose entire being is love.

Love was a mystery I wrestled to comprehend in the older rituals that surrounded me, as I grew up in the Episcopal Church with its rite based on the Book of Common Prayer. At the opening, there was the impressive collect, 'Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your holy spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name, through Christ our Lord. Amen.' The very idea of 'loving perfectly' was intimidating, an impossibility that seemed doomed to failure. And there were still lots of dark corners in my heart that I was ashamed to share openly with God, or with anybody. I wasn't ready for the unilateral proclamation of complete openness, that left no room for my personal assent.

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In the General Confession of sin, we spoke of love in the negative, of not having loved God with our whole hearts, nor our neighbors as ourselves, while in the General Thanksgiving, we thanked God for his immense loving-kindness, his 'immeasurable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ'. There followed the enactment of the deed of love, the remembrance of the Last Supper and the crucifixion. This was what we were to be thankful for, the eucharistic mystery, the death that gave us life.

The ritual as a whole impressed me with its invocation of the might and wisdom and glory and mercy of God, but made me feel, as a human, small, weak and powerless. God knew everything, but I knew nothing, not even how to love God or my neighbour. God could do everything, but the little I could do was insufficient to bring about needed change in my life. I liked the resonant, rhythmic words that I heard; they bore the ring of conviction, of truth. And yet they seemed to distance God from me and my personal frailty, my feeble heart. In this ritual I could say prayers, but I didn't learn from them how to pray.

This form of the eucharist closes with a prayer based on the words of Paul: 'The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his son Jesus Christ our Lord' (Phil. 4:7). Beautiful as they were, these words seemed like a contradiction. How could something that passed all understanding bring me to the knowledge of God? And how could love be born in me for something I didn't know?

One of the great transformations that may be wrought by living with the Consecration of the Human Being in its new form is the placing of human love at the centre, in union with Christ. Our weakness is acknowledged, our strayings and denials, and yet it is still asserted that our souls can offer something up to our creator that is worthwhile, that is pure and holy and uncorrupted. The purpose of the ritual is not for us to merely witness the pure and perfect offering of Christ, but to make our own offering, with Christ's strength as our support. We unite with Christ through recalling what he did on Golgotha, his total self-giving in love, which was not done in substitution because we are unable to do as he did, but as a prophetic precedent, so that we can.

In the renewed sacrament, the offering of love is also explicitly connected with our ability to think, and our faculty of will. Through their alchemical joining, we gain the potential not to be just passive recipients of the almighty wisdom and goodness of God, but to actively make ourselves into vessels for the holy fire of love to burn in us, too. We are to form ourselves so that the sacrifice does not merely work on us from outside, but begins to 'think in us', that remarkable formulation that brings something so vitally necessary for modern times into the old ritual.

Permitting our most intimate reality, our thinking, to be shaped by a divine being requires a step of trust, of making ourselves vulnerable. Rather than defending ourselves with opinions and fixed ideas, we have to become open to the possibility of everything that defined us up to now being shattered by a new revelation. And knowledge, in this sense, is closely linked with love. To love is above all to become vulnerable, to be willing to undergo change, to die. The old world dies when the new one is born. And love is always a giving birth, always a transforming fire.

Hearing of an omniscent God, an 'Almighty God to whom all hearts are open,' left no room for me to open up in trust; but without the free choice to trust, faith loses all its power. If faith is determined and dictated from above, it cannot open up the space through which we implant spirit into an earth that has fallen away from its origins. The truth is that God allows us to close off our hearts, lets us fall away and become dark and impenetrable, so that our opening up again can be completely free. Our dark, closed-off thoughts are the seeds that we plant, so that they may die and bear much fruit.

I don't discount the necessity for the old rituals to preserve something through many centuries, for which human minds and hearts were not yet fully prepared at the time of Golgotha. I am grateful for much that I gained through living with the Eucharist in its former incarnation. The seeds of love were there, even if the shell had become somewhat impenetrable. The very frustration of trying to hack through that shell was what led me to recognize a more complete, more satisfactory unfolding of the same flower in the Consecration of the Human Being.

The enlivening of our capacity to love is the source of life. It brings us the eternal life that the ritual promises, not as a prolongation of earthly

life, but as participation in the eternal dance of which each single life in material existence is only a fragment. For a long time, it may have been the most we could do to witness, over and over again, the enactment of the divine deed of self-giving love. But now, the times require more of us. They require us to place ourselves into the fire.

Today, more and more people are turning away from the dead seeds of the past, from rituals that no longer speak to them, from coercive, authoritarian spiritual streams, and from religious leaders whose unethical, abusive actions betray their high position of trust. But people will never stop needing love, both human and divine love. They will never stop needing to trust and be vulnerable, no matter how often they have been betrayed. The seed will still grow, when it is planted in good soil.

Our sacraments can become that soil, even for people who have been betrayed and violated, because they create a place where one can meet Christ in complete freedom. In this place of freedom, all compulsion removed, I became aware of how much God is trusting me to make the loving choice, the choice to die and become. I found that I could offer my thoughts, my feelings and my deeds to God, and receive life in return.

So the creative fire, long smothered and suppressed, could awaken again. What will come to life through that?

All Souls

Cindy Hindes

Even though we human beings are not plants, we have roots. And even though we aren't birds, we have wings. What do I mean by that?

In the process of being born, beginning in our mother's womb, we take on matter and build our bodies as housing for our spirits. The material body gives us roots; our body grounds our spirit on the earth, in our earthly lives.

At the same time, as we are living, we are also continuously involved in the process of dying. This continuous dying is the process of shedding; it means letting go of old, worn-out, no longer useful things, aspects, and instruments. Children, for example, naturally and unconsciously lose their baby teeth so that their permanent teeth can emerge. They outgrow their clothes and need new ones. As we grow older, we may start to lose our hair, even our so-called permanent teeth. In old age, our bodies naturally de-materialize and shed matter as the dying process intensifies. Dying, shedding gives us wings to move on to the next phase of life, to give birth to the new. Spiritually, it is this same process of bodily de-materializing that underlies our ability to be conscious, to be aware of others and of ourselves.

The mystic Jacob Boehme said: 'Whoever does not die before they die perishes (fades away) after they die.' What this suggests—dying before we die—is that as adults, we can consciously engage in this practice of dying, shedding and letting go of worn-out, no-longer-useful things and aspects in our environment and lives. We can consciously grow our wings. Especially for us elders, intentionally letting go of the material things that no longer serve us can strengthen us. This process helps us review our past and make space for the future. It helps us grow our wings.

Now, every night when we fall asleep, our soul and our eternal self, our I, leave the body and visit with our guardian angel. With our angel, we review our day

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a priest of The
Christian
Community in
Los Angeles.*

from a higher, more objective, longer-range perspective. And with our angel, we form resolves for the next day based on what will bring us and the world forward.

When we wake up in the morning, we will have forgotten that nighttime activity. Remembering is replaced by our freedom to choose for ourselves what we will do. At the end of each day, it is good to consciously look back to review the day and note the important moments. This intentionally chosen spiritual activity strengthens us for our nightly meeting with our angel.

Bringing order into our lives and possessions is also a daytime form of spiritual activity. The reason for this is that the eternal spiritual part of our being, our I, is not a thing; it is an activity. Our I expresses itself in our ability to pay conscious attention, to focus, and to decide—yes, no, keep or let go. The spirit creates order. This activity of the I, this consciousness in focusing and deciding, is a part of us that survives death.

Christ said, ‘Where your treasure is, there your heart will lead you’ (Matt 6:19–21). An important practice, especially for those of us who are older, is to consciously take up the practice of ‘dying before we die,’ of letting go, so that our hearts will lead us unencumbered into the company of spiritual beings. ‘Dying before we die’ can mean letting go of the material ballast that burdens us and binds us to matter. Cultivating this as a conscious practice while on earth helps our being not fade after we die.

Even when we are younger, we can make a practice of gradually going through our things, remembering how and why we acquired them, and if we are no longer using them, thanking the elemental beings associated with them for their service and passing them on so that they can serve others. There may be a pang of grief, a little sadness in letting go, since our possessions are often tied to our earthly identity. Yet calmly sitting with that feeling and enduring it, walking through it, quickly resolves into a feeling of growing lighter as we send those objects out into the world to serve others. Our wings begin to unfurl, and grow stronger. We are also doing a service to those around us by relieving them of the burden of dealing with all of our stuff. Letting go of things even creates more physical light in our surroundings.

Whoever does not practise shedding, letting go, and growing wings while on earth is doubly burdened with that task after death. ‘Where our treasure is, there our heart leads us.’

In November, we celebrate the festival of All Souls, *all* souls, both the souls of those of us on earth and of those who have died. Our hearts are leading us to our loved ones across the threshold and their hearts to us. And I have said so much about the process of dying before we die because that process is similar to the one that the souls of our departed loved ones are undergoing now after death, just as we will one day.

Those who have died have first shed the most important material possession gifted to them—their invaluable precious physical body. They have let go of it and given it back to the earth. For some three days after they died, they reviewed the objective images not just of their day, but of their entire life, like looking at a living photo album stored in their life body. It was a process akin to the daily waking review and the nightly review with their angel. Then at the end of three days, they let go of the substance of their life body and offered it back to the living universe.

Since then, they have entered yet another realm of existence. The content, the meaning of their life, has inverted itself, turned inside out, and now how their life affected others comes back toward them to meet them. On a soul-spiritual level, our deceased loved ones have begun to reap what they have sown. How they were has become a landscape that their soul-body and consciousness must walk through for about as long as a third of their lifetime. Their soul and spirit are undergoing yet another review—in addition to experiencing how they affected others, they are reviewing their nightly meetings with their guardian angel. Day by day and night by night, they relive their life on earth in reverse from death to birth for about the amount of time they slept while on earth. This process helps them make resolves for the future.

The purpose of this process is, first of all, one of spiritual purging. We have all incorporated much into our souls and spirits that simply has no place, no relevance in the spiritual realms. After death, we must let go of our burning earthly desires, our likes, and dislikes, our wishes, our attachments to material things. After death, the soul recognizes that it has come *home to the place it belongs and is loved*, but that it is, so to

Speak, inappropriately attired. It must change, shed the old. Although this process of letting go, of purification, can be painful, the soul undergoes it gladly and, in the process, strengthens its wings for further progress. It is easier for the soul spirit if it has practised this process of review and shedding while on earth.

For those of us still on earth, it is our task to support our loved ones who have died. Our task is to uplift them. We still love them. They still love us and want to be included in our lives. But they can only be effective in a helpful way in our lives if we *remember* them and try to form an appropriate kind of relationship with them in their new form of being.

We can forgive them for any of the hurts they may have caused us. Forgiving means that we let go of any need to be karmically recompensed in the future for what they may have done to us. Forgiving is a selfless act of love on our part that removes a karmic burden from our loved one. Our forgiveness strengthens their wings and creates a free space for their angel to work creatively for the future. Even our difficulties with them we can perhaps think of as trying to teach us something.

We can express to them our gratitude for having had and continuing to have them in our lives. For they do indeed continue to exist, to love us, to be with us. They want to work with us and inspire us. When in their review, they must experience in retrospect the coldness of their own being coming toward them, our love warms them. When they experience the heat of their own passions, our calm objectivity helps cool them.

We naturally feel the pangs of grief at the loss of them on earth. But we must understand that a desire to have them back in our lives *in their previous material* form is a tremendous burden to the deceased. We cannot hang on to them in a selfishly grieving way. We need to reach toward them, so to speak, not with a desperate grasp, but as we would hold a butterfly, with an open hand. It is up to us to form a new kind of non-physical, non-bodily relationship with them—self to self, heart to heart.

In quiet moments of contemplation, when we think of them in gratitude and love, we can offer them our support. We can perhaps say to them, in the words of Rudolf Steiner:

For One Who Has Died

*May my soul's love strive toward you
May my love's meaning stream to you
May they bear you
May they hold you
In the heights of hope
In the spheres of love.**

When we remember our deceased loved ones, when we offer them our support, we strengthen their wings. We help to lighten them. We can experience them in the way that Rudolf Steiner describes them and say:

*Let us hope that you [the loved one] light our lives
Far and near, unlost
A soul star in the spiritual firmament.***

* Rudolf Steiner, CW 261/268

** Rudolf Steiner, in *Staying Connected*, CW 261, for Fritz Mitschner

Let Yourself

*Let yourself be held in the Grail Cup,
as Heavenly Host, somehow,
a bright red offering
of sinews, bones,
star stuff,
sunlight,
radiant beyond belief.
You, warmth of the world,
the stained glass through which
love glows.*

JANET CLEMENT
Fellowship Community, Spring Valley



Women in the life of Christ I

Louise Sofair

Emil Bock came to the remarkable conclusion that Christ incarnated in stages: into the ego, astral, etheric and physical sheaths of the man Jesus.* Friedrich Rittelmeyer's profound proposition was that the ego of the Christ being was revealed in his I AM sayings.* So, the ego of Christ entered into Jesus in stages. Each I AM proclamation was an awakening for Christ himself, to the fact that his divine ego was incarnating progressively into an earthly existence.

We read in the Gospel of St John that most of the I AM sayings were preceded by an encounter between Christ Jesus and a woman. These meetings were concerned, on a deeper level than has perhaps hitherto been acknowledged, with the incarnating process of Christ on earth. His Word spread outwards into the world via the male apostles. By contrast, Christ's entrance into earthly life was assisted by the women he met. A 'feminine' guiding force was at work which expressed itself through the questioning, challenging and supportive attitude of women. Christ responded to this by performing divine deeds or proclaiming his divine ego. With each of these responses, his being incarnated more deeply into the earthly man of Jesus and he gradually became clearer and surer about his true nature and mission.

To understand this better, we might compare the process of Christ's incarnation with the development of every human being. Great wisdom lies in the fact that a human being is not a full-fledged, adult person at birth but rather develops in stages until maturity. We can describe a person as growing up, as they go through the developmental process of physical, mental and emotional change and also as 'growing down' from a higher pre-birth existence into transient, earthly life. By the late twenties a human being generally has an individual, is a competent personality to which one could ascribe their own ego.

Paula Modersohn-Becker,
Self-portrait on the sixth wedding anniversary, 1906

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a member of the
London
congregation.*

Thus it was as an ego-endowed thirty-year-old that Jesus made his way to be baptised by John in the River Jordan. The Baptism was the momentous event when Jesus relinquished his ego in a near-death experience and his 'ego-sheath' began to be filled by a more divine entity. So began an unprecedented process in the whole history of humanity, which took three years altogether to complete. The incoming divine ego had to 'grow down' as it were, from an eternal existence into the temporal life of a human being. Guided by the great spiritual wisdom to which we are all subject, the being of Christ had perforce to incarnate in stages, so that the human being (Jesus, at the Baptism) would not be consumed too quickly by the entrance of his powerful ego.

When a child is born on earth it is a soul who recently had its existence in the spiritual world. This is the most vulnerable time of its earthly life and conscientious parents will endeavour to protect the soul in a peaceful atmosphere, especially for the first forty days. It is beneficial to picture angels around the head of the baby and to pray to the child's guardian angel.

After Christ made his initial connection with the earthly Jesus at the Baptism, it was beneficial for him to abide in a quiet place. He was 'guided by the Holy Spirit' (Luke 4) to a desert environment where he remained alone. The descriptions of the spirits of temptation, who presented him with the very real possibility of foregoing an incarnation altogether, indicate that this period of forty days was a dangerous time. The Gospels relate that Christ-Jesus was supported by angels who helped him, so that the divine-earthly incarnation could proceed.

After his initial forty days in the wilderness, when he then entered society and had chosen his disciples, Christ stayed close to the Temple and the 'mother community'. He was able to heal those who were close at hand with the forces of the new life-aurea which enveloped him. Almost immediately, he was asked to attend the family home of Peter, where Peter's mother-in-law was ill. This often overlooked scene tells us how Hebrew society was structured two thousand years ago. It was the responsibility of a Jewish man like Peter to support and protect his wife, family and also his wife's female relatives such as a mother or sister, if they had lost a husband or father. Additionally, we hear that the mother-in-law followed the protocol of serving the menfolk (Jesus and

his disciples) as reciprocation for the healing she had received. Many Jewish women tried to emulate the example of 'the virtuous woman' as described in the Old Testament in Proverbs 31. Women generally followed a path of service to their husbands and children but had authority over providing, producing, buying and selling for the benefit of their households as well as for others.

Jewish women were highly respected for their innate wisdom and virtuous qualities. Christ was an exemplary advocate for this, praising a woman who donated all she could to the Temple and defending the woman who expressed love by anointing his feet. The service which was freely given, for example by Peter's mother-in-law and Martha, the sister of Lazarus, was imitated by Christ himself when he washed the disciples' feet. He was also deeply moved by weeping women who suffered bereavement, for example the widow of the youth of Naim, Mary and Martha, and Mary Magdalene who discovered the tomb devoid of the buried body of her Lord. In all these cases, Christ was so affected that he was able to bring about a resurrection from death.

Men, on the other hand, were responsible for the education of their sons, the upholding of the law of the scriptures, carrying out rituals and the maintenance of the Temple, finance and jurisdiction. At first, Christ surrounded himself with a small group of men who considered him as their Jewish leader with a special mission to save the Israelite people from spiritual error.

We have evidence that Christ's consciousness was limited during his first stage of earthly existence to this narrow characterisation because he said to a 'foreign' woman of Greek birth, who asked him to heal her daughter: 'I have been sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel' (Matthew 15:22).

The woman's response to this comment awakened his ego to the idea that his mission was, in fact, for the whole earth and to all human beings. At this meeting, Christ used 'bread' as a metaphor for his healing power: 'It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs.' The woman countered this with a metaphor about breadcrumbs: 'Yes, Lord, and yet the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table' (Matthew 15:26). It was after this encounter that Christ performed his miracle of feeding four thousand men as well as women and

children with seven loaves and a few small fish. And, when the festival of Passover was approaching, Christ provided enough food from five loaves of bread and two grilled fish to feed five thousand people. Later, when his disciples had no bread, he upbraided them for their lack of faith and reminded them of his feeding of the four thousand and the five thousand. He contrasted these life-giving, spirit-filled miracles with the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees which had become life-less for the soul.

Many people now followed Christ and he explained to them about the bread which comes from God, descends from heaven and gives true life to the world. He then proclaimed his ego-being: *I am the bread of life* (John 6:35).

This, the first of the seven 'I AM' sayings which form a special sequence in the Gospel of St John, was a wonderful revelation which began when the foreign woman begged for 'the crumbs under the master's table.' That meeting between Christ and the woman was the impetus which was like the bubbling-up of a spring. A healing stream flowed from it and gained the strength of a divine, blessing force.

What was the 'maternal', guiding influence which worked to ensure that the Son of God should go through the stages necessary to become truly human and fulfil his purpose on earth? Why did this 'guardian being' work particularly through women?

To understand this, objective spiritual investigation into the evolution of humanity is a help. Aeons ago, according to the spiritual-scientific research of Rudolf Steiner, human beings were not yet endowed with individual egos but were very closely connected within a soul-community. Humanity was one, undifferentiated family which had a well-developed 'feminine' consciousness of the whole, rather than a separate self-consciousness. Neither was humanity yet separated from its spiritual home in the cosmos, nor from higher, angelic beings who nurtured it with a kind of maternal protectiveness. This early stage of evolution took place before the development of our earth itself, within the spiritual planetary sphere known in occultism as Old Moon (not to be confused with the physical moon which is visible to us now). The God or highest spiritual being, which had the overall leadership of this cosmic phase, was named the Holy Spirit.

Yahweh or Jehova was the Jewish God of the early stage of earthly evolution, who was an expression of the breath or *ruach* of the Holy Spirit. The *ruach* was the spiritual force which was capable of creating the world and all people: 'The Lord God breathed into the nostrils of the human being the breath of life; and the human being became a living soul' (Gen. 2). The memory of being part of a united community embedded within its spiritual home was adhered to faithfully within the Jewish religion. Culturally, Hebrew women continued the traditions which reinforced the close bond between members of the same family. This fell to women in particular because of the ancient connection between the feminine aspect of humanity and the Holy Spirit.

For long ages of time, human beings on the earth looked back with a devout remembrance at their former heavenly home and an existence which was united with the hierarchies of angels and God. Earthly communities were originally matriarchal due to the longing inherent in human nature to feel part of an inseparable, safe, community. Even as the earth became the planetary sphere where the ego was to develop within humanity, and human beings necessarily became more and more individual and free, it was still recognised that women retained something of the feminine consciousness that had prevailed in former times. The physical reproductive organ of women and the monthly cycle, which follows the cosmic rhythm of the moon, gave substance to this idea.

As we shall see, Christ intuited that guidance was being offered through his encounters and the gentle persistence of women during his life on earth. Accordingly, we can surmise that the guardian spirit which was guiding Christ to take each appropriate step in his incarnation was none other than his counterpart, the Holy Spirit. While Christ could have guided this process with his own divine ego, the great sacrifice he made was to give up this possibility and become truly human.

This is the first of three articles.

**The Three Years, Emil Bock*

**Meditation, Friedrich Rittelmeyer*

Redemption

Christ's Resurrection and the Future of Humanity

Michael Kientzler

Floris Books 2023, 64 pages

£12.99, \$19.95

Review by Louise Madsen

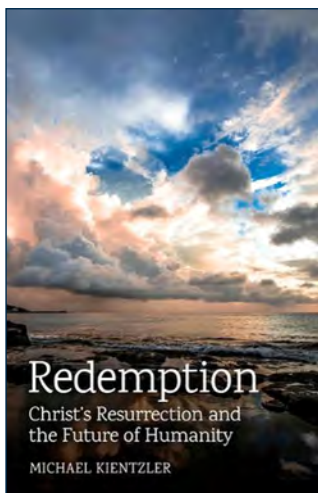
The death and resurrection of Christ is regarded as the central event of Christianity. And this occurrence was already lucidly expressed by St Paul in the fifteenth chapter of his letter to the Corinthians.

In this small book, which is based on some of his lectures, Michael Kientzler explores why this event is so very important, even crucial, for the further development of humankind. Kientzler contends that human consciousness and individuality are possible because we have a physical body which is separated from the spiritual realm. In order for human beings to develop further we have to reconnect with the divine world, and for this to happen the human body—not only our soul and spirit—needs to be redeemed. That this, in the course of time, may come about is due to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ who redeemed his body from the power of death. Right away he acknowledges that this is a task for which there will be no ‘satisfactory ending’, and he hopes that his efforts will be complemented by others in the future. Kientzler

opens his wide-ranging exploration by asking why in the resurrection it is necessary for the body to be redeemed and not only the soul or self. Here the reviewer wished for a note to clarify that he is not talking about a physical-material body but that body which was visible to the disciples after He had risen. Later on (p.12) the difference between material and physical is convincingly described and we see how essential it is to distinguish between the two. The central theme of attaining individuality as the goal of our ‘current human spiritual evolution’, can only be achieved through the human ‘I’ living and developing in a material body. On the path towards that aim, the fall into the ‘sickness of sin’—and its consequences—a series of separations took place. Those separations, which are integral to the whole process of development, make it possible for self-awareness to come about. However, we are also endowed with seed-like qualities that help us to overcome these separations. Kient-

zler distinguishes three aspects of the self or individuality: the ego, the self and the higher self in which these qualities lie, and he portrays each of them and their functions in a vivid and lively manner. I would suggest that these passages are worth reading solely for their own sake.

Kientzler shows that it was Jesus Christ who first



achieved the redemption of the body through the unique nature and constitution of the man Jesus. These thoughts may be quite new and possibly strange to a reader not particularly familiar with this subject, but on careful reading they may realise just how much such ideas give credence to the complex story of the incarnation of the Christ and the salvation of humankind. The narratives of the birth of Jesus given by Matthew and Luke, as well as the 'virgin' birth are looked at with a fresh eye and originality. And the nature of the Resurrected One, and the thoughts needed to come to some understanding of it, and how through Him the human being is redeemed, is all entered into in a down-to-earth yet profound way.

The incarnation of Christ, as Paul indicates in his letter to the Ephesians, started with a 'divine blueprint of evolution.' 'The 'becoming flesh' is not only the moment of the baptism of Jesus; rather, it includes the whole of evolution from the very beginning.' When all the continents of the earth were still bound together in one landmass called Pangaea, the centre of the earth was what then became the Holy Land. The physical evolution of the earth and of humankind belong together: the significance of the uprightness of the human being and the few unique specialisations of the human body that allow us to be human permit the evolution of consciousness to be an inner expression of our physical uprightness and balance. It is a joy to find these questions addressed in a straightforward, original and lively manner, which in no way detracts from their profundity. There are moments, inevitably, when one wishes for a few more words to elucidate a point: for example, near the

end (p.58) when Kientzler states that after forty days, 'Christ vanished into the clouds. This was the moment when he went to the Father, uniting with the atmosphere of the earth...' The connection between [God] the Father and the atmosphere is not very evident and possibly not too clear to all readers. However, taken all in all, this slim volume makes a valuable contribution to these matters, demonstrating, as it does, how taking a comprehensive view of the subject gives enhanced credence to its separate parts.

Tone and Speech Eurythmy **Elena Zuccoli**

Steiner Books, 128 pages
£19.65, \$24.95

Review by Nicole Nair

The 'new art' of eurythmy, 'encompassing the whole of the human being, has its origin in the spirit and was preordained from the beginning of time in the plan of evolution.'

The innovative dancers at the turn of the twentieth century wished to 'rejuvenate dance.' 'They all felt the impulse of the time but remained fettered to the sensory element of nature.'

'Rudolf Steiner...had the capacity to grasp the spiritual origins of the mobility of the human form and was able...to unite the physical body of the human being with the original forces out of which it was fashioned.'

In 1911 Lory Maier-Smits was the first eurythmist, the first to bring into being this new art. Rudolf Steiner gave her tasks, and through her devoted practice she was 'to awaken the experience of the fundamental forces that are necessary in order to practise the art of eurythmy. ...The etheric body follows what the human being

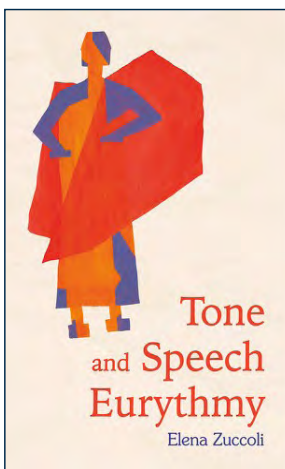
perceives in the tone, speech, sound, or mood, and does not follow the physical gesture.' The gestures were being developed through a process with Rudolf Steiner, and other eurythmists joined the work.

In 1915 Rudolf Steiner gave the first indications for 'visible singing' (tone eurythmy). During the time of the First World War, he was giving many lectures to the artists working in Dornach and creating the first Goetheanum. On the stage of the carpentry shop eurythmy was often performed.

In the autumn of 1922, the first training centre for eurythmy was started in Stuttgart, and the classes were visited weekly by Rudolf Steiner. Elena Zuccoli (1901–1996) was born in Milan, Italy. She was a student in that first eurythmy school, when she was twenty-one. That following New Year's Eve the beloved Goetheanum burned down. She was part of the group of dedicated individuals who 'took hold of the work with renewed strength of will'.

At the Christmas Conference in 1923/24, Elena gave a solo performance. She was asked by Marie Steiner to stay in Dornach and to join the eurythmy work at the Goetheanum. In February 1924 she was one of the participants of the Tone Eurythmy Course, which 'took place in the eurythmy room of the Glass House. The mood was intimate...' Then she attended the Speech Eurythmy Course in the summer of 1924, in the carpentry shop, where 'one felt that Rudolf Steiner's words were imperishable realities.'

Elena Zuccoli shares with us in this book the fruits of her journey to come



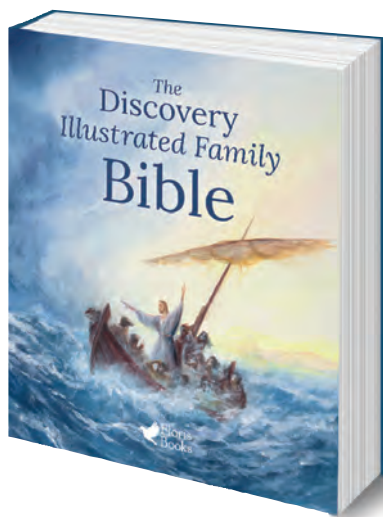
to know eurythmy, and her insights won out of decades of experience of teaching and performing eurythmy. She reveals the first impulses of eurythmy and describes the new foundations of tone eurythmy: 'Rudolf Steiner thus led us to an experience of the polar conflict between the spiritually living impulse in the *Motivschwung* (the breath) and the rigidity of the bar line. Both

are 'intervals of a different kind' to be found beyond space and time, and they stand in the greatest contrast to each other, like life and death. The bar line is lifeless weight, while the *Motivschwung* is the force of will that grasps the incarnating motif'.

Elena shares her experiences and her insights of the birth of the first eurythmy school, the tone colours, the eurythmy figures, and speech eurythmy. 'Thus, we learn from the very beginning to be aware of our inner perceptions so that we can master the differentiated starting point of a single gesture. The audience perceives the inner mood in the starting point of the movement and not in the outer gesture of the eurythmist.'

Tone and Speech Eurythmy was first published in German in 1997, and this is the first time it is made available in English. With a foreword by Dorothea Mier, it is translated by Dorothea Mier and Clifford Venho in such a way that I could feel touched by the spiritual background of the work. This small book is for all eurythmists, musicians, artists and anyone interested in Rudolf Steiner and the development of those early years.

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Gospel Readings 2023–2024

Advent

Sunday, December 3 Luke 21:25–36
Sunday, December 10 Luke 21:25–36
Sunday, December 17 Luke 21:25–36
Sunday, December 24 Luke 21:25–36

Christmas

Monday, December 25
Midnight Matthew 1:1–25
Dawn Luke 2:1–20
Morning John 21:15–25

Epiphany

Saturday, January 6 Matthew 2:1–12
Sunday, January 7 Matthew 2:1–12
Sunday, January 14 Luke 2:41–52
Sunday, January 21 John 2:1–11
Sunday, January 28 John 4:46–54

Sunday, February 4 Matthew 20:1–16
Sunday, February 11 Luke 18:18–34
Sunday, February 18 Matthew 4:1–11
Sunday, February 25 Matthew 17:1–13

Passiontide

Sunday, March 3 Luke 11:14–36
Sunday, March 10 John 6:1–15
Sunday, March 17 John 8:1–12

Holy Week

Palm Sunday, March 24 Matthew 21:1–11
Maundy Thu., March 28 Luke 23:13–32
Good Friday, March 29 John 19:1–15
Holy Saturday, March 30 John 19:16–42

Easter

Sunday, March 31 Mark 16:1–8
Sunday, April 7 John 20:19–31
Sunday, April 14 John 10:1–16
Sunday, April 21 John 15:1–27
Sunday, April 28 John 16:1–33
Sunday, May 5 John 14:1–31

Ascension

Thursday, May 9 John 16:24–33
Sunday, May 12 John 16:24–33

Whitsun

Sunday, May 19 John 14:22–31

Wednesday, May 22 John 4:1–26
Sunday, May 26 John 4:1–26
Sunday, June 2 1 Cor 2:9–16
Sunday, June 9 Romans 8:18–27
Sunday, June 16 John 3:1–17
Sunday, June 23 1 John 4:1–16

St. John's Tide

Monday, June 24 Mark 1:1–11
Sunday, June 30 Mark 1:1–11
Sunday, July 7 Luke 3:7–20
Sunday, July 14 Luke 7:18–29
Sunday, July 21 Mark 8:27–38

Sunday, July 28 Matthew 7:1–14
Sunday, August 4 Luke 15:11–32
Sunday, August 11 Luke 9:1–17
Sunday, August 18 Luke 18:35–43
Sunday, August 25 Mark 7:31–37
Sunday, September 1 Luke 10:1–20
Sunday, September 8 Luke 17:5–24
Sunday, Sept. 15 Matthew 6:19–34
Sunday, September 22 Luke 7:11–17

Michaelmas

Sunday, September 29 Matthew 22:1–14
Sunday, October 6 Revelation 3:14–22
Sunday, October 13 Revelation 12:1–12
Sunday, October 20 Revelation 19:11–16

Sunday, Oct. 27 Revelation 4:1–11
Sunday, Nov. 3 Revelation 5:1–14
Sunday, Nov. 10 Revelation 14:1–12
Sunday, Nov. 17 Revelation 21:1–8
Sunday, Nov. 24 Revelation 22:1–11

Advent

Sunday, December 1 Luke 21:25–36

There is a basic annual pattern for these readings within which can be local variations.

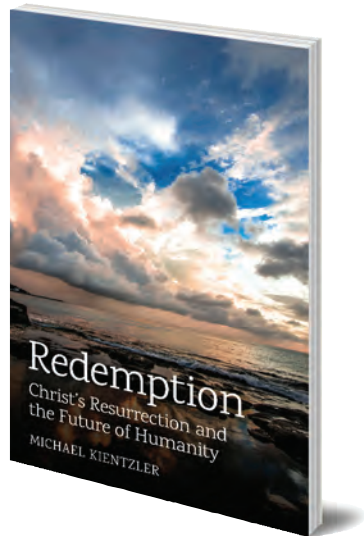
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