

02. It is because of his intimate communion with God, because of his prayer, that Jesus knew God and how we are to respond to God.



From his experience of intimate communion with God, from his prayer, Jesus knew that God is Love. He knew, therefore, that a person who is open to this love and welcomes it will live, and can provide for others a space in which they can experience love. If we welcome divine love there is no limit to what it can bring about in our lives.

Jesus' baptism experience

‘When all the people were baptised, and when Jesus also had been baptised and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; in you my soul delights” ’(Luke 3:21-22).



We first meet Jesus when as a young man in his early thirties he joins the crowd who are seeking baptism in the Jordan from the prophet John. They are seeking what everyone is seeking: a communion that refreshes our souls and shows us how to live a life that has more joy than we find when our lives are superficial and distracted. They want to live to the full. So does Jesus.

Jesus was 'praying' (Luke 3:21). There was something quite special about Jesus' prayer that day. He had what we would call a mystical experience: a profound experience of being loved by the One he looked to as the source of his being. This experience proved to be a turning point in his life. We know virtually nothing about him prior to this day. After it, we witness a preacher, a healer, and an extraordinary example of love as he gathers disciples around him and begins a movement that we know as the Christian community.

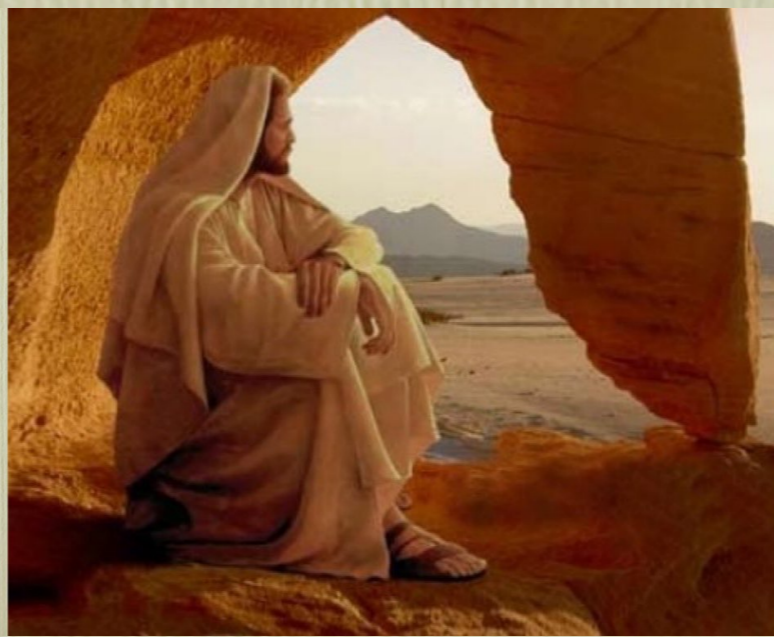
When his disciples looked back on Jesus' experience that day they spoke in terms of God's Spirit descending on him. To guide us in our reflections on this scene they point us to a beautiful song-poem in the Isaiah scroll. It begins: 'Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom my soul delights' (Isaiah 42:1). Jesus was so overwhelmed by his experience of being loved that he had to go into the wilderness to discover in silence its significance for him and for others. The poem continues:

I have put my spirit upon him;
he will bring forth justice to the nations.
He will not cry or lift up his voice,
or make it heard in the street;
a bruised reed he will not break,
and a dimly burning wick he will not quench;
he will faithfully bring forth justice.

He will not grow faint or be crushed
until he has established justice in the earth;
and the coastlands wait for his teaching.

Thus says God, the LORD,
who created the heavens and stretched them out,
who spread out the earth and what comes from it,
who gives breath to the people upon it
and spirit to those who walk in it:

I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness,
I have taken you by the hand and kept you;
I have given you as a covenant to the people,
a light to the nations,
to open the eyes that are blind,
to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,
from the prison those who sit in darkness' (Isaiah 42:1-7).



Jesus' disciples found in this song a description of Jesus' life and mission! In the silence of the desert Jesus came to see that everyone needs to experience what he experienced that day at the Jordan. The source of our being, the one who sustains us in existence says to each of us, 'You are my son/my daughter. I love you. In you my soul delights.' Jesus believed that he was being invited 'to be a light to the nations', to draw everyone to know that God's desire for us is that we know how loved we are. Set free in this way, we would find our unique capacity to welcome and respond to love by sharing Jesus' belief and by loving as Jesus loves. We would indeed be 'in God's image and likeness'.

Alone with his Abba

After a busy day and night of reaching out in love to the sick, ‘at daybreak Jesus departed and went into a deserted place’ (Luke 4:42).



‘He would withdraw to deserted places and pray’ (Luke 5:16).

‘Jesus went out to the mountain to pray; and he spent the night in prayer to God’ (Luke 6:12).

‘Jesus dismissed the crowds and he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone’ (Matthew 14:23-24).

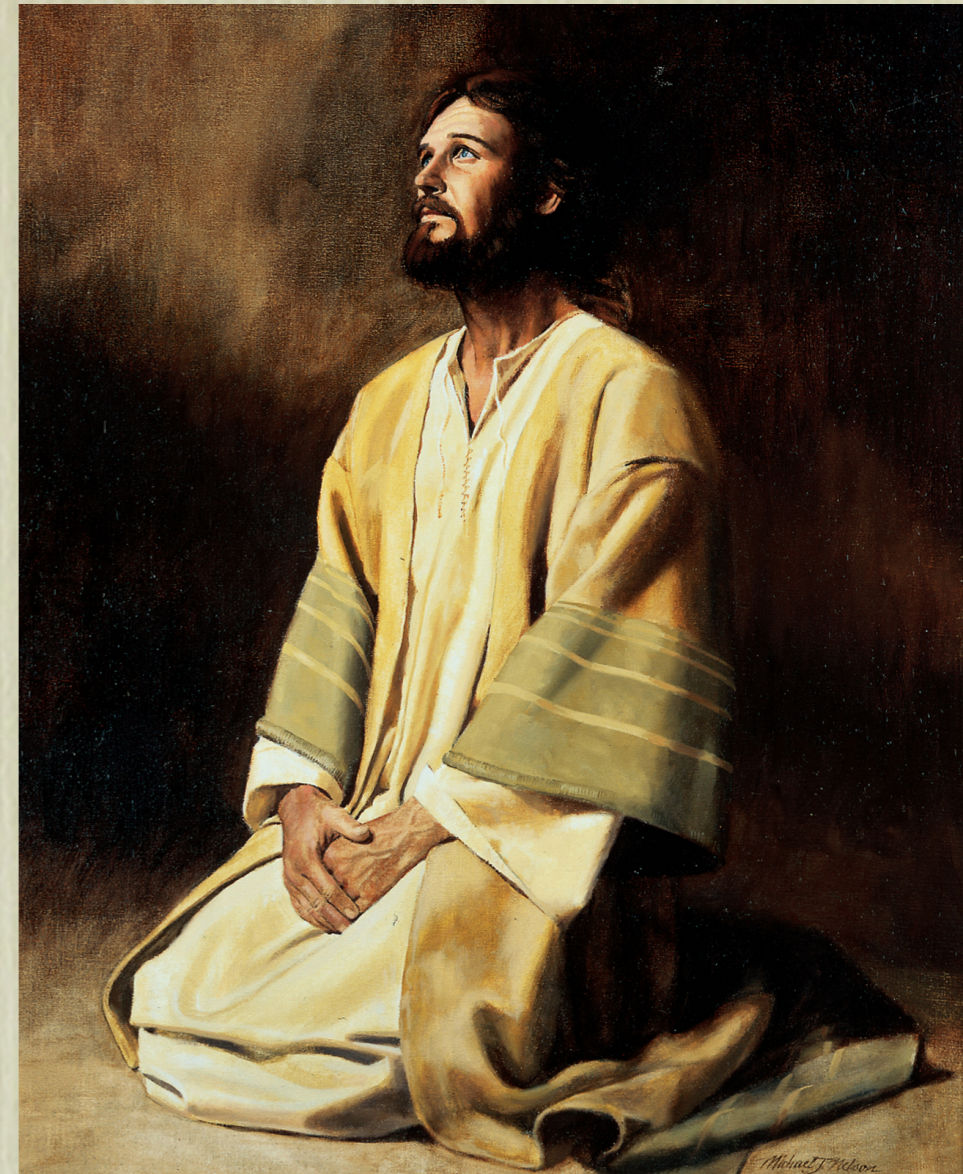
Jesus' disciples could see that there was something very special about Jesus' prayer: 'He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray"' (Luke 11:1).



They came to realise that it was in prayer that Jesus experienced the communion with God that he was inspired to share with them. It was in prayer that he discovered God's will: 'In the morning, while it was still very dark, Jesus got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. Simon and his companions hunted for him. When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you." He answered, "Let us go on to the neighbouring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do" (Mark 1:35-38).

Transfiguration

At Caesarea Philippi Peter acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah his people had been longing for. They needed to unlearn much of what they had been taught to expect from the Messiah, so Jesus begins to speak about the suffering which he, and therefore they, would have to face. There could not comprehend what Jesus was telling them, so 'six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white' (Matthew 17:1-2).



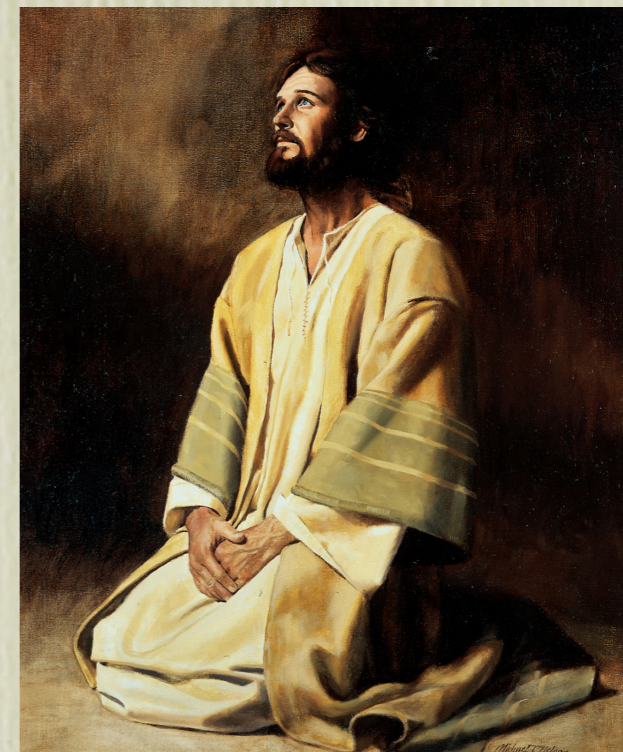
Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. Then Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, “This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!” When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, “Get up and do not be afraid.” And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone’ (Matthew 17:3-8).



In this dramatic portrayal of Jesus' prayer on the mountain, the gospel-writers recall Mount Sinai and God's gift of the Torah through Moses and his intimate communion with God 'for forty days and forty nights' (Exodus 24:18). They recall also the prophet Elijah who encountered God in the silence (1 Kings 19:12).

Then Moses and Elijah disappear and there is 'only Jesus, God's Beloved Son'. We are to 'listen to him.' In Jesus the Law and the prophets are fulfilled. They have achieved their purpose. They have brought us to Jesus.

It is in sharing Jesus' prayer that we share his divinity and enjoy the communion with God that is the goal of our existence.



Jesus Prays

Jesus declared: 'No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him' (Matthew 11:27). Jesus is using the word 'know' in its rich biblical sense. It is not knowing about, nor is it a logical conclusion formed by scrutinizing one's experience. Rather it is a knowing that comes from intimate communion. Jesus is speaking of the intimacy of his communion with the God in whom he places his trust, an intimacy that he invites us to know. We are offered a rare insight into the content of Jesus' prayer: 'I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have revealed these things to infants; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will' (Luke 10:21). Jesus looks on God as his Father (Abba). He identifies as a child (a son), and asks us to be like him, to be totally dependent on our Father.

Last Supper

The religious leaders were determined to hand Jesus over to the Roman procurator, and to do so before the Feast of Passover, lest there be a riot. Jesus was aware of their plans so he decided to celebrate the Passover with his disciples on the evening before the feast. Luke records Jesus' prayer for Peter: 'I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when once you have turned back, strengthen your brothers' (Luke 22:32). The gospel-writers tell us also of Jesus' promise at the Last Supper that whenever they came together to share a meal he would be with them. Death removes us from the kind of physical presence that we experience in this life, but not from loving communion with God in Jesus. Jesus promised that he would be with us, giving himself to us as we share bread and drink from the cup. He will never stop loving us. He will never stop nourishing us. He will never stop pouring out his life for us. 'I will be with you to the end of time' (Matthew 28:24).



‘While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins’ (Matthew 26:26-28).

Reflecting on the Last Supper and preparing his readers for Jesus' crucifixion and death, the Beloved Disciple has Jesus say to his disciples (and so to us): 'Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God. Believe also in me' (John 14:1).

We can share in Jesus' communion with God, for we experience Jesus' own Spirit in our hearts, the Spirit who is the love binding Jesus and his Abba. Jesus promises to pray in us.

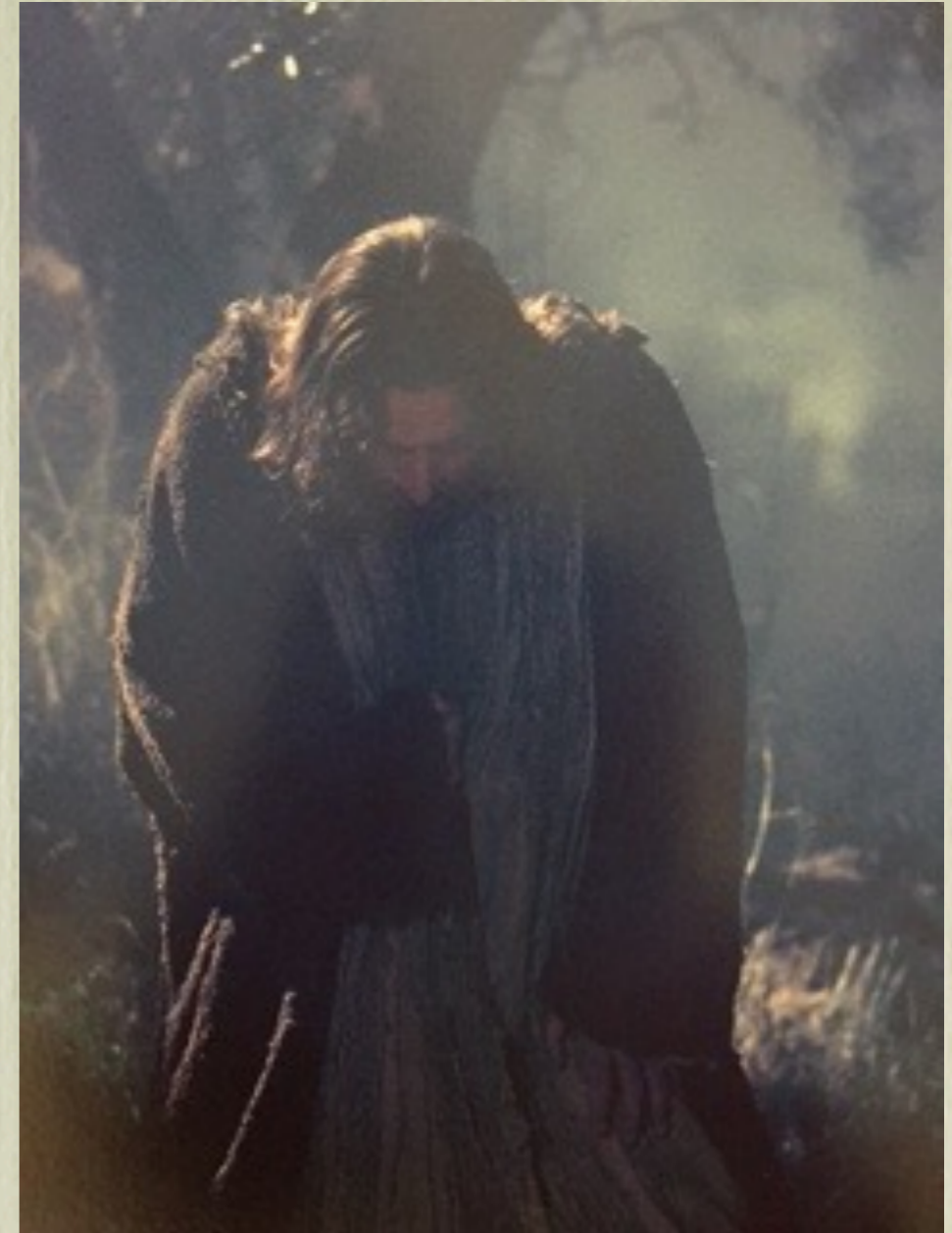
Experiencing his prayer we will experience his intimate communion with God (John 14:16-23). Jesus speaks of himself as a vine. We are like branches. It is the sap of his love that will bear fruit in our lives (John 15:1-5).

With a broken heart, Jesus said to his companions: 'You will be scattered, each one to his home, and you will leave me alone' (John 16:32). He went straight on to speak of his intimate communion with God: 'Yet I am not alone because the Father is with me'.

The whole of John chapter seventeen is a prayer. Jesus thanks God for his mission to give eternal life 'to all you have given me' (John 17:2). 'Father, the words that you gave to me I have given to them and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me' (John 17:8). Jesus wanted only one thing: to share with people what he had come to know about God. His beautiful humanity was such that he drew people to him, but only so that he could get them in touch with God who was gracing them to 'live to the full' (John 10:20). He wanted people to know that he was on a mission from God. He wanted to share with everyone his divinity: 'As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us' (John 17:21). 'You have loved them even as you have loved me' (John 17:23). Jesus prays to his Father: 'that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them' (John 17:26).

Jesus' Agony

From the supper Jesus went with his disciples to Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives: 'He said to his disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated. Then he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me." And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want" (Matthew 26:36-39).



Clearly Jesus does not want to die. He said once: 'I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!' (Luke 12:49). He had been faithful to love, but to what effect? The religious leaders stubbornly resisted his message. The crowd was as fickle as ever. There was no apparent change in the Roman occupation and the resistance to it. Jesus' disciples weren't ready to carry on his mission. Whatever grief Jesus was experiencing and whatever was agitating him, he came, through his prayer, to a place of peace: 'not what I want but what you want'.

Whatever the religious and civil powers would do, Jesus knew what he would do. He determined to carry out his mission, to do his Father's will, come what may! He would continue to embrace sinners. He would continue to reveal God as a God of love. He would continue to challenge those who stubbornly resisted God's love for themselves and for others. He would continue to believe in the God whose love he experienced at his baptism and throughout his ministry.

Jesus on the cross

In the light of their experiences of Jesus after his death the Christian community came to look on Jesus dying on the cross and to see him there as the final revelation of his love, and so the revelation of God as Love. As Paul wrote to the community in Corinth: 'I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified' (1 Corinthians 2:2).



Jesus on the cross

The crucifying of Jesus was a terrible crime. Jesus was a victim of an injustice perpetrated by the Roman occupiers, pressured by the Jewish leaders. Jesus was crucified because he refused to abandon his mission. He refused to stop loving. It was his loving that attracted his disciples to him and his love was never more convincing than on the cross. In the words of the Beloved Disciple: 'the light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it' (John 1:5).



The darkness penetrated to n the depths of Jesus' soul, even to his feeling abandoned by God: 'My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?' (Mark 15:34). But still his response to those who were responsible for his death was, as always, a response of love: 'Father, forgive them. They do not know what they are doing' (Luke 23:34).

When one of the men crucified with him sensed Jesus' innocence and mysterious power he pleaded with him: 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.' Jesus responded: 'Today you will be with me in paradise' (Luke 23:42-43).



From the cross Jesus entrusted his mother to the care of the Beloved Disciple (John 19:27).



He continued to believe in his Father's love: 'Father, Into your hands I commend my spirit' (Luke 23:46).



‘Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom’ (Mark 15:37-38). The temple curtain veiled the inner sanctuary. It symbolized the impossibility of our ‘seeing the face of God’. Contemplating Jesus on the cross, the veil stopping us from seeing God is torn. We can now see God revealed, and revealed as unconditional Love. The only thing that can stop us experiencing the intimacy of communion with God that Jesus experiences is our stubborn refusal to open our hearts to the love that never stops being offered to us.



May we be able to pray with Paul: ‘it is no longer I who live. It is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, loving me and giving himself for me’ (Galatians 2:20).

Jesus' Eternal Communion with God and with us



‘I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lamp stands, and in the midst of the lamp stands I saw one like the Son of Man clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash across his chest’ (Apocalypse 1:12-13).

Apocalypse 1:14-16

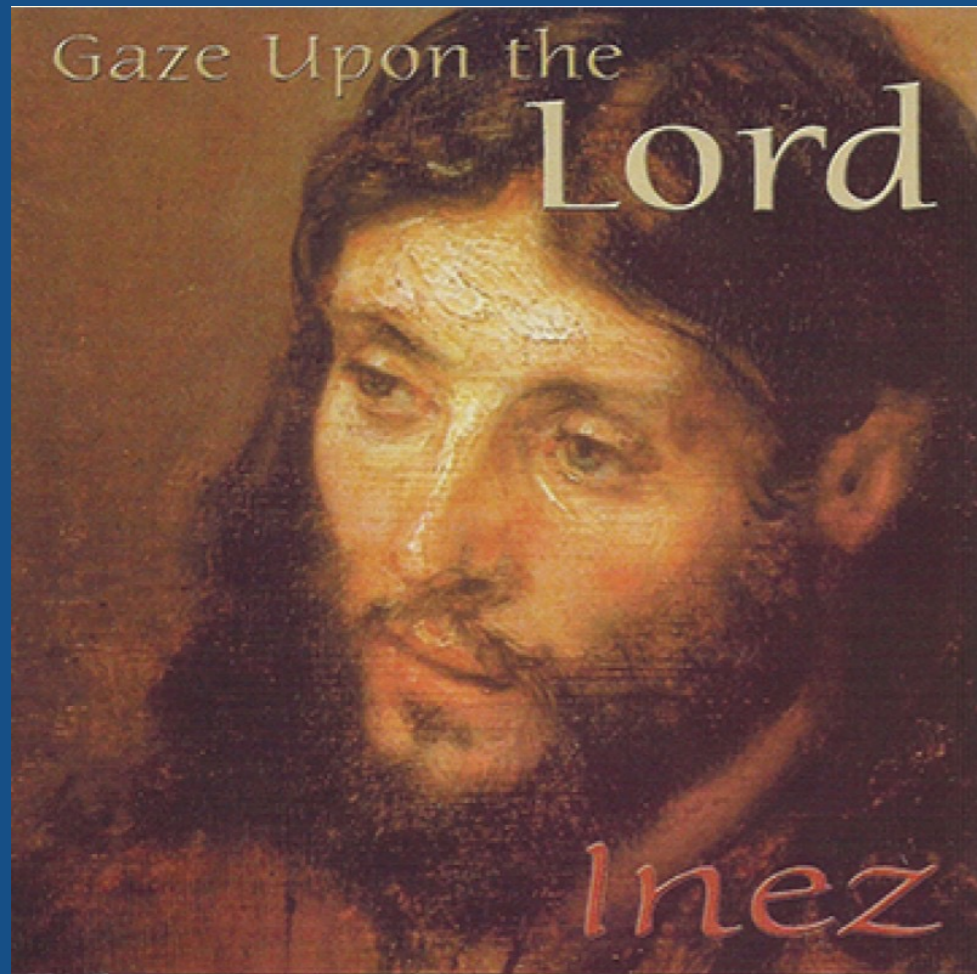
his head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow;
his eyes were like a flame of fire,
his feet were like brass, refined as in a furnace,
and his voice was like the sound of many waters
In his right hand he held seven stars, and
from his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword
and his face was like the sun shining with full splendour.

‘Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world’ (John 17:24).

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‘He is able for all time to save those who approach God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them’ (Hebrews 7:24, 25).

‘Christ did not enter a sanctuary made by human hands, a mere copy of the true one, but he entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf’ (Hebrews 9:24).



Gaze upon the Lord
Clare of Assisi

Woman's Song of God
Songs inspired by the writings
of Women Mystics

Briege O'Hare osc and Marie Cox rsm

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