Sermon: Spokane Friends Church
November 15, 2026
'The Mystery of Faith'
Psalm 139: 7-12
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https://christianity.stackexchange.com/questions/98050/what-is-the-biblical-basis-for-christian-mysticism?newreg=964d95d8557f40e09e7362c59334a152

https://www.pym.org/faith-and-practice/experience-and-faith/the-light-within/

https://thefriend.org/article/images-of-christ-the-presence-in-the-midst

One of the clearest representations of a gathered Quaker mystical experience would be a painting by Penrose called *The Presence in the Midst.* 'James Doyle Penrose was born in Dublin and would marry a Quaker girl from a prominent Quaker family. "He was a well-regarded painter…and had depicted some religious subjects but his two wartime works come from a deeper place. He explained the origins of *The Presence in the Midst* in a letter to the magazine *the Friend* in December 1916, describing a visit he made to Jordans Meeting House one autumn afternoon: 'There seemed to rise before me a picture of the past. The benches were once more filled with those early Friends, the builders of our society… *The idea of showing in some way that this was the secret of their power, the close and intimate connection between Christ Himself and the soul of His humble follower wherever he is,* took hold of me and I determined to try and paint a picture embodying this idea'. "Christ's presence standing in the midst of Quakers in waiting worship is a stunning portrayal of the mystical understanding of Friends belief. Christ's presence is known and felt in waiting worship, in gathered worship, in our life as Friends.

The Quaker movement is considered mystical. We long for, we wait for, we prepare for and are aware of - conscious of - God's presence with us personally and collectively.

Christian Mysticism and mystics have a long tradition, with familiar people and groups named throughout time. The list goes on and on but compared to the list of *all* Christians in history it's not a very long one. Each has their own way of seeing and seeking God, often with meditation as a starting point. Here is a definition I found of Christian mysticism: "that… belief and practice that concerns the *preparation for*, the consciousness of, and the *effect* of a *direct and*

transformative presence of [the Christian] God" (Bernard McGinn). In effect, mystics are those who make real, and experience for themselves, things that many [other] Christians take as theoretical or abstract – for example, the presence of God, union with God, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit."

I so appreciate this posting from Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of Friends: **The Light Within**

> The essential experience of Friends is that of a direct, unmediated relationship with the Divine. Friends have used many terms or phrases to refer to the inner certainty of our faith: the Light Within, the Inner Light, the Christ Within, the Inward Teacher, the Divine Presence, Spirit, the Great Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, that of God in every person, and the Seed. In his journal, George Fox referred to "that Inward Light, Spirit, and Grace by which all might know their salvation" and to "that Divine Spirit which would lead them into all truth." Fox once described his mission as 'to take people to Christ and leave them there, so that they may be taught directly by Christ.'
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> Regardless of the journey that brings individuals to explore the Quaker way, the invitation to enter into an unmediated, inward relationship with the Divine continues to be at the heart of Quaker experience.
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> Through this relationship, each person encounters the Spirit, active in the world, and providing guidance for everyday living. The reality of this spiritual relationship within each worshipper brings the Friends meeting together as a community of faith. Friends understand that faithfulness to Spirit can produce a spiritual energy within their faith community that encourages them to support each other within that community, and most of all, to live in harmony with the Divine.

But this is not all, and gathered worship is not the *only* place where we find God's presence with us. As David sang in Psalm 139, and so many times throughout his life…

Psalm 139:7-12

> 7 Where can I go from your Spirit?
> Where can I flee from your presence?
> 8 If I go up to the heavens, you are there;
> if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.

[9] If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle on the far side of the sea,
[10] even there your hand will guide me,
your right hand will hold me fast.
[11] If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me
and the light become night around me,"
[12] even the darkness will not be dark to you;
the night will shine like the day,
for darkness is as light to you.

David knew, as we have learned and as so many people of faith have taught us… God's presence is with us *always.* It is ours to discover, to open ourselves to, to make ourselves aware of. To clear the din and noise and distraction of life enough to find God waiting for us. God's presence is there – always.

Again, from Philadelphia Yearly Meeting:

Friends find that the Light Within:

- Accompanies, comforts and loves us as we seek Divine truth;
- Reveals who we are, including what we would prefer not to see about ourselves, and leads us out of spiritual darkness or dryness;
- Illuminates, inspires and transforms us;
- Shows us how to live with love, compassion and justice towards others;
- Gives us energy and power to change ourselves and the world in small ways and large;
- Leads us to the right decisions in our meetings for worship with attention to business;
- Provides ongoing revelation of God's truth.

This is one of the mysteries of faith – certainly of our faith as the Society of Friends. God, Spirit, the Divine, is *always present* to everyone. We each have our own unique relationship with God. David had *his* psalm to sing. Each of us has our *own* song to sing of God's life in us, with us. And as we live our lives, our songs change, and multiply. This is the mystery of faith. God *continues* to speak to us, in us, through us. God teaches us. Friends call this continuing revelation – seeing God teach us more and more of what God's intentions are. And one of the blessed mysteries of faith is the joining together of each of our hearts, spirits, and psalms when we are in gathered worship.

Early Friends worship, personally or corporately, was never about waiting *for God.* Friends believed that God was *already there* and as they said, they 'waited *upon* the Lord', in order to give the wind of the Spirit an opportunity to blow where it would. Is this not a mystery? What did God have for them? Must we not listen?

The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit. John 3:8