

## *Christmas Eve 2018*

Bellingham Unitarian Fellowship ~ www.buf.org

Rev Paul Beckel

### **CAROLS**

#246 *O Little Town of Bethlehem*

#245 *Joy to the World*

#225 *O Come, O Come Emmanuel*

#259 *We Three Kings*

**PRELUDE**    *Little Drummer Boy/Peace on Earth*

### **INVOCATION**

**Paul:** The cold of December is all around us. The winter chill has set in. Darkness comes swiftly each night, and the bright stars are mere pinpricks, millions of miles away. The moon's glow is cold, and even the sun seems unable to warm the icy dawn.

**Tessie:** Within this winter-chill, Christmas comes. Perhaps it is because of winter that we must have Christmas. We must have Christmas to warm our hearts, just as the logs of ancient bonfires warmed other communities long ago.

**Paul:** We must have Christmas to light these flickering candles. Candles that not only make winter's gloom a little cheerier — but perhaps, through some miracle, they may kindle a great blaze in our souls.

**Tessie:** Christmas reminds us to celebrate the mystery of love, which — as it mingles with mist, and dust — brings forth new life.

**Paul:** And a child born in the lowliest circumstances might become a model of wisdom, and integrity, and love for all the world.

**CHOIR**                    *Go Tell it on the Mountain*

### **LIGHTING THE CHRISTMAS CANDLES**

**Paul:** The weeks leading up to the great Christmas celebration can be a time to practice waiting. Breathing. It can be a time to prepare ourselves for joy: by NOT anticipating, by letting go of any expectations we may have - that everything turn out a certain way. It's a time to practice gratitude for whatever miracle each next day shall bring. In whatever form it takes.

**Tessie:** From time immemorial, leading up to *this* Christmas, many gifts have been prepared for us, including joy, hope, love, and peace.

We light this candle now in recognition of the eternal presence of joy. May it shine for all who will find delight even in the midst of challenge and struggle.

*Dancer lights*

**Paul:** We light *this* candle in recognition of the eternal presence of hope. May it shine for all who recognize resilience in themselves, and abide with others while they discover their own resilience.

*Dancer lights*

**Tessie:** We light this candle in recognition of the eternal presence of love. May it shine for all who wish to give freely of their hearts.

*Dancer lights*

**Paul:** We light this candle in recognition of the eternal presence of peace. May it shine for all who would plant seeds of peace in this world by living with integrity, practicing civility, and working for justice.

*Dancer lights*

**GATHERING SONG** # 253 *O Come, All ye Faithful*

**LIGHTING THE FLAMING CHALICE**

**Tessie:** Every time we gather here, we bring flame to this chalice, representing our commitment to the mission of this religious community ...

and representing the covenant among Unitarian Universalist congregations everywhere to affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of all people ... and respect for the interdependent web of creation of which we are a part.

**Paul:** Tonight we light this chalice from each of these other candles, to acknowledge that we draw upon many sources, and many traditions, for our light and inspiration.

*Dancers put the four candle tips together to light the chalice*

**CHOIR** *Let There be Peace on Earth*

**RESP READING** #530 “Out of the Stars”

**VAN UKER TRIO** *Break Forth O Beauteous Heavenly Light*

**CAROL** #237 *The First Nowell*

**SERMON** Paul

Sing that we live. For out of the stars in their flight, the stars that mark this very night, we have come into being. We were not the first. And we will not be the last. For since time immemorial life has been born into the material world. The miracle of birth, again and again, as stardust, mingling with time and space, mystery, and mist, has come together in the form of newborn babes that will take in, and pass along, the spirit of joy, the spirit of hope, the spirit of love, the spirit of peace.

*All of these gifts — which have come from nowhere, and everywhere — through the alchemy of mystery, from the mud and the fire, have delivered you and I into being.*

So anyone could be the one who holds the divine spark. Look around this room; is it one of us here? Consider the hungry and the mighty around the world; is it one of them? Nay, it is all of us. Born into this world with gifts / almost / unfathomable.

Almost.

Still, even if they're never completely fathomable, we *can* get glimpses into our unique gifts. Shake 'em, tear away just a little bit at the seams, ask for a few hints ... and y'know what? We can get some pretty good clues about our gifts, and even what to do with them.

Take some time tonight to ponder these things in your heart, ask: what gifts flow through me, cycle through me, whirl and dance through me? How might I be an embodiment of joy, an embodiment of hope, an embodiment of love, an embodiment of peace?

Within the harshness of this life, the fear, the disillusionment ... in what form do I bring light into the world?

And in the days to come, in the interest of assisting one another to fathom the bounty, and the beauty of their own gifts — still wrapped, fully unwrapped, or somewhere in between — consider letting one another *know* of the light that you see in them.

Let one another know what you see within them as gifts of light. And consider too, letting someone know that their light is of infinite value. Perhaps with just the simple phrase: I love you.

**RESPONSIVE READING** #617 “The Nativity Story”

**OFFERTORY** for the Interfaith Coalition homelessness services

**CALYX QUARTET** *Winter's Night*

### **CANDLELIGHTING CEREMONY**

**Tessie:** This is a season of joy, hope, love, and peace. But it is also the darkest time of the year. So in this dark time we will call upon light, even as we remember darkness.

**Paul:** In darkness, we light candles to remind ourselves that love exists, that hope abides.

**Tessie:** In darkness, we light candles which, just like the stars, make the darkness glimmer.

**Paul:** On Christmas Eve we remember the dark — the darkness of winter, of animal stable, of the womb.

**Tessie:** Let us enter the darkness now for a few precious moments. Feel the darkness around us, and listen to its music.

*All lights off*

*Piano solo, two minutes in the dark*

*First Candle Dancer lights own candle from first candle, and says: Into the darkness, we bring our light.*

*Second Candle Dancer, same, third, fourth*

*Candle Dance to tune #249 On This Day Everywhere*

**Tessie:** The darkness is powerful. But so is our light. A candle is a small thing. But even with one candle, the darkness is shattered.

**Paul:** Just imagine the power of many lights ... When one heart kindles another.

*Silent Night Chords*

*Dancers walk down aisles, passing the light slowly while the speakers continue*

**Tessie:** Silent Night is one of the world's most famous Christmas carols, and tonight we celebrate its 200th anniversary. Its origins take us back to a small town in the Austrian countryside, to the parish of St. Nicholas in the town of Oberndorf.

The song's lyrics were originally written in German just after the end of the Napoleonic Wars by a young Austrian priest named Joseph Mohr. Mohr's congregation was poverty-stricken, hungry and traumatized, so he crafted a set of six poetic verses to convey hope that there was still a God who cared.

The song's fundamental message of peace, even in the midst of suffering, has bridged cultures and generations. Great songs do this. They speak of hope in hard times and of beauty that arises from pain; they offer comfort and solace.

So, happy anniversary, "Silent Night." May your message resonate with us tonight, and may it continue to resonate across future generations. Tonight we'll sing 2 verses, hum a verse, and then sing the final verse.

### *Silent Night*

**Tessie:** These words from Howard Thurman bless us as we move from darkness toward the light:

**Paul:** When the song of the angels is stilled, When the star in the sky is gone, When the kings and the shepherds are back with their flocks,

**Tessie:** The work of Christmas begins:

**Paul:** to find the lost,

**Tessie:** to heal the broken,

**Paul :** to release the prisoner,

**Tessie:** to rebuild the nations,

**Paul:** to bring peace among all peoples, and to make music in the heart.

And now, as we go forth on this splendid night, take one last look around, and trust that the lights we have lit tonight will continue to shine in our hearts – even as we return this room to light once again.

### **BENEDICTION**

**Tessie:** May we leave here with the song of the angels in our hearts, committing ourselves to living so that peace may truly come to all the earth.

### **POSTLUDE**