

National Unitarian Fellowship

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and Free Christian Churches

Viewpoint



Celebrating Christmas

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Introduction

Welcome to the December *ViewPoint*.

Many of the readings I used at Christmas time services over the years came from 'Celebrating Christmas - an Anthology' Edited by Carl Seaburg. The copyright is held by the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association and I am grateful to them for permission to use five pieces from the anthology.

My copy of the book has so many 'post its' sticking from the pages, it almost looks like a paper porcupine - so choosing the five was a bit tricky !

Otherwise the contributions are from here and there - some from the internet and some from my bookcase.

I hope you enjoy the read and on behalf of all of the team who keep the NUF on the go, I wish you all a happy Christmas and a peaceful year to come.

tony mcneile

A Mood of Expectancy

The earth has turned once more in its accustomed way.
And again our footsteps quicken,
Our voices are raised in familiar chorus:
The sights and sounds of Christmas
Greet our eyes and ears.
Almost as if we had never seen or heard them before.

There is a mood of expectancy,
What we are to expect we do not know.
The least surprises are hidden beneath the bright paper
and graceful ribbon.

The great surprises are the magic that happens
Whether we will it or not.

There is a mood of expectancy.
And the beauty is we do not know what to expect.
Tomorrow is an open door.
An untraveled journey.
An untouched feast.

Christmas is like that - it is a mood of expectancy.
For out of the birth of the humblest babe
May come one of the great prophets of the human spirit
And out of each of us, proud or humble,
May yet come truth and beauty and goodness we
cannot now imagine.
Christmas is a mood of expectancy.

Richard Gilbert
'Celebrating Christmas'

THIS IS THE SEASON

This is the season when the child in the heart of all of us awakens and the embers of long forgotten dreams are blown into flame.

The ramp of the Legions is stilled; the Caesars lie in dust, but the light from that humble stable shines warm and bright.

Something old and almost lost amid the clutter of the years is calling from the skies and across the fields of snow.

The night winds are stilled and in the darkened heavens the stars foretell of lengthening days and the birth of spring after the winter's cold.

This is the sign that the light of hope, which shines in the dimness of our broken dreams, will never fade or die.

O stretch your hands and with the simple trust of the child, grasp another's hand and walk the way together.

Though the darkness press in upon us and the promise of Christmas comes like the echo of music upon the wind, let our hearts remember that loveliness, that light.

*Jacob Trapp
'Celebrating Christmas'*

CHRISTMAS EVE AT DINGLEY DELL

A happy party they were that night, and it was a pleasant thing to see Mr Pickwick in the centre of the group under the mistletoe, now pulled this way and then that, and first kissed on the chin, and then on the nose, and then on the spectacles, and to hear the peals of laughter which were raised on every side; but it was a still more pleasant thing to see Mr Pickwick, blinded shortly afterwards with a silk handkerchief, falling up against the wall, and scrambling into corners, and going through all the mysteries of blind man's buff, with the utmost relish for the game, until at last he caught one of the poor relations, and then had to evade the blind-man himself, which he did with a nimbleness and agility that elicited the admiration and applause of all beholders..... When they were all tired of blind man's buff, there was a great game of snap-dragon, and when fingers enough were burned with that, and all the raisins were gone, they sat down by the huge fire of blazing logs to a substantial supper, and a mighty bowl of wassail, something smaller than an ordinary wash house copper, in which the hot apples were hissing and bubbling with a rich look, and a jolly sound, that were perfectly irresistible. 'This,' said Mr Pickwick, looking round him, 'this is indeed, comfort.' 'Our invariable custom,' replied Mr Wardle. 'Everybody sits down with us on Christmas Eve, as you see them now - servants and all; and here we wait until the clock strikes twelve, to usher Christmas in, and beguile the time with forfeits and old stories. Trundle, my boy, rake up the fire!'

Charles Dickens

LITTLE LIGHT

As I look at this lighted candle, I think of all the people I have read about who lit up the world with their love. I think of Jesus and Buddha, St Francis and Schweitzer, Clara Barton and Martin Luther King. And I know in my heart that I can light up the world with my love too.

As I look at this glowing candle, I think of all the people I have known in my life who lit up my world with their love; parents who gave me birth, teachers who taught me in schools; people who walked with me for a while. And I know in my heart that that I can light up the world with my love too.

As I look at this bright candle, I think of all the people I know now who light up my world with their love; my partner and my children; my colleagues and my friends; people who are with me now, others who are absent, but with us just the same. And I know in my heart that I can light up the world with my love too.

Loved ones, friends, strangers I pass this light to you. Take it and let it brighten up the darkness. Let its glow sparkle around your eyes and lighten your face. And know that by sharing our love, even in little ways, we touch others with our light and our world becomes brighter.

It all began many years ago when one light lit up the midnight sky. It has been passed on to us by saints and prophets, parents, teachers and poets, and all the friends and lovers of humankind.

Take it, pass it on - tonight, tomorrow and whenever you see a shadow or a dark place your love can lighten. No one is ever too old. No one is ever too young. Each of us can touch someone by our love and inspire them with our light.

*Charles A Gains
'Celebrating Christmas'*

CHRISTMAS EVE

Christmas eve is a time for candlelight.

It is a time when one desires nothing more than family and soft music. Who can say what passes through our hearts on Christmas eve?

Strange thoughts, indefinable emotions and sudden tears.

All this and more, unbidden, come without reason.

And we burn our candles for this is Christmas eve.

Christmas eve is not a time to be merry but quietly glad.

It is the proper time to wish upon a star.

It is a time to watch children with excited happy eyes troop off to bed to await the miracle of dawn.

It is a time of wonder, of thankfulness that life is still being created anew out of darkness.

It is a time of quiet awakening to beauty that still lives on through the strife of a war torn world.

And we burn our candles for this is Christmas eve.

Christmas eve is a time of heartbreak,

When those who are not at their own fireside are most missed.

Christmas eve is a time of blessing when all the heartbroken world gives thanks for the quiet beauty of rest,

When one is closest to ones companions and is not then enemy of any person.

And we burn our candles for this is Christmas eve.

Christmas eve is a time of memory,

When one remembers past happiness and love

And often sighs for the good that might have been.

Peace on earth and now comes the memory of the story of the first Christmas, so old and yet so new.

We lose ourselves in legend and dream of storybook people; Tiny Tim and the other Wise Man live again in the memory of human hearts.

And we burn our candles for this is Christmas eve.

*Tracy Pullman
'Celebrating Christmas'*

Merry Christmas

It's time to give praises to God,
Let us sing together in one chord,

For Christmas has come after a year,
Christmas comes now, at last,
Christmas comes, like in the past,
Christmas comes after such a long wait,

Christmas comes and it will be great
Christmas is all about giving,
Christmas is all about love,
Christmas is all about peace,

Christmas is all about joy,
Closing my eyes & dreaming of a White Christmas,
Forgetting the world around me, minding my own business.

Listening to the lovely sound of
Christmas songs around me,

Singing and dancing to the brilliant
melody.

Watching the beautiful & divine
snowfall outside,
May the sadness and gloom in your life be replaced,
with never ending happiness and cheer
Smile my dear, for the season of Christmas has finally arrived here
Let's show our love to everyone, near and dear

SWETA LEENA PANDA

Christmas Eve

When the shops closed on Christmas Eve we opened our Chapel
door. We said the hustle and bustle has finished - time for reflection on
what it is all about.

Those who came sat in a circle by candle light. We talked about past

Christmases we remembered, of the special presents we'd received. Some brought a poem to read, or a story about Christmas. Some remembered absent loved ones and friends and lit a candle for them. We talked about the origins of Christmas - the Roman Festival where master and servant changed places for a day - that gives us pantomimes; the midwinter feast with log fires that gave us the yule log; the country persons customs of decorating the house with holly and ivy; the tradition of giving a thank you gift once a year to all who had helped us be comfortable. The Victorian Christmas tree and cards.

All this and then the Christian story of the journey to Bethlehem, the baby born in a stable, gifts from the three Persian magi - shepherds, and angels singing on the hill top.

At a time of year when the night is longest, the winter is deepest and we yearn for spring and the warm weather.

It feels that this is the day when heaven and all that is good has descended to be very close to the earth. We dimly see through the veil that separates these worlds that life can be a celebration - of joy and goodwill and peace.

tony mcneile

THE OTHER LETTER TO VIRGINIA

Dear Virginia

You knew all along that there was a Santa Claus. Santa as a phantom of your delight sparkled with truth from your very first encounter with life. You were born to a community of care and concern. A place was made for you. Your needs were provided. The world welcomed you and accepted you with the certainty that all life leaves on the mark of its renewal. This acceptance, in its way, is another name for love. Santa's other name is love too.

What you should know, what you need to know is that there is a Scrooge. Scrooge wears many masks, and in the long days of your becoming, you will find him many times. You must know who he is. Unless

you know the masks of Scrooge, unless you know his meaning and can learn to greet him at a proper distance, you too can be such as he! You might become a Scrooge.

The Scrooge of fiction is a familiar character of Christmas telling. To cheer and bright greetings, he has but one reply - 'Bah humbug!'. He keeps his accountant, Bob Cratchit, on a miserly dole. He counted out the coal lumps for the feeble heating stove. His vision of life, and its purpose followed a miserable narrow track - indeed life had no joy and grinding toil was meat enough for any person. Neither did he spare himself. To be sure, as his tale of Christmas unfolds, he has menacing dreams and frightening visions. He awakened a changed and reformed man. But the Scrooge that lives amongst us, still awaits the healing of visions and dreams.

I pray that you will recognise the masks of Scrooge. His is the mask of cynicism. He feeds on the sorrow of unrealised dreams and ever seeks to remind you that there is no profit in dreaming; that dreams and expectations of better things, or a better you, are foolish fantasy. Reality is hard and unrelenting.

Scrooge wears the mask called despair. The frowns of the cynic are graven more deeply. They never give way to smiles. This mask mocks you with the certainty that everything good will be worse. The motto on the portals of Dante's Inferno is appropriated for the living: 'All hope abandon, ye who enter here'.

Scrooge wears blinkers. This mask is a curtain that keeps you from looking out to the company of others on life's journey. Blinkers that keep your purposes narrow, make all dreams private property and deny you the thrill of community achievement and the sharing in another's joy. Scrooge wears a mirror. This mirror is a mask that tells you that you alone are of value. Purposes end with the fulfilling of yourself. The whole world is your own reflection. The selfish solitary concern of your whole life is your own well-being.

These words about Scrooge are a warning of the perilous. You need real-

istic hopes and not just idle dreams. Keep your eyes open. Polish up your stars and visions, but please keep a sharp eye open for Scrooge - that he you not become.

*Richard M Woodman
from Right to Hope in Celebrating Christmas*

AN OLD TESTAMENT BIRTH STORY

There was a certain man of Zorah. His wife was barren. The woman came and told her husband, “ A man of God came to me and his appearance was like that of an angel of God, most awe-inspiring. I did not ask him where he came from and he did not tell me his name, but he said to me, ‘You shall conceive and bear a son, so then drink no wine or strong drink, and eat nothing unclean, for the boy shall be a nazirite to God from birth to the day of his death.’

The man said to the angel of the Lord, ‘Let me detain you and prepare a kid for you. And what is your name?’

The angel said, I will not eat your food, but if you want to prepare a burnt offering, then offer it to the Lord. Why do you ask my name ? It is too wonderful.’

The man prepared the burnt offering. When the flame went up toward heaven from the alter, the angel of the Lord ascended in the flame of the alter while the man and his wife looked on.

The woman bore a son and called him Samson.

From the Book of Judges

GNOSTIC ACCOUNT OF THE BIRTH

In the three hundred and ninth year of the era of Alexander, Augustus put forth an edict, that every man should be enrolled in his native place. Joseph

therefore arose, and taking Mary his spouse, went away to Jerusalem, and came to Bethlehem, to be enrolled along with his family in his native city.

And having come to a cave, Mary told Joseph that the time of the birth was at hand, and that she could not go into the city; but, said she, let us go into this cave. This took place at sunset. And Joseph went out in haste to go for a woman to be near her. When, therefore, he was busy about that, he saw an Hebrew old woman belonging to Jerusalem, and said: Come hither, my good woman, and go into this cave, in which there is a woman near her time.

Wherefore, after sunset, the old woman, and Joseph with her, came to the cave, and they both went in. And, behold, it was filled with lights more beautiful than the gleaming of lamps and candles, and more splendid than the light of the sun. The child, enwrapped in swaddling clothes, was sucking the breast of the Lady Mary His mother, being placed in a stall. And when both were wondering at this light, the old woman asks the Lady Mary: Art thou the mother of this Child? And when the Lady Mary gave her assent, she says: Thou art not at all like the daughters of Eve. The Lady Mary said: As my son has no equal among children, so his mother has no equal among women. The old woman replied: My mistress, I came to get payment; I have been for a long time affected with palsy. Our mistress the Lady Mary said to her: Place thy hands upon the child. And the old woman did so, and was immediately cured. Then she went forth, saying: Henceforth I will be the attendant and servant of this child all the days of my life.

Then came shepherds; and when they had lighted a fire, and were rejoicing greatly, there appeared to them the hosts of heaven praising and celebrating God Most High. And while the shepherds were doing the same, the cave was at that time made like a temple of the upper world, since both heavenly and earthly voices glorified and magnified God on account of the birth of the Lord Christ. And when that old Hebrew woman saw the manifestation of those miracles, she thanked God, saying: I give Thee thanks, O God, the God of Israel, because mine eyes have seen the birth of the Saviour of the world.

The Arabic Infancy Gospel of the Saviour
<http://gnosis.org/library/infarab.htm>

BIRTH OF THE BUDDHA

About ten months after her dream of a white elephant and the sign that she would give birth to a great leader, Queen Maya was expecting her child. One day she went to the king and said, "My dear, I have to go back to my parents. My baby is almost due." Since it was the custom in India for a wife to have her baby in her father's house, the king agreed, saying, "Very well, I will make the necessary arrangements for you to go."

The king then sent soldiers ahead to clear the road and prepared others to guard the queen as she was carried in a decorated palanquin. The queen left Kapilavatthu in a long procession of soldiers and retainers, headed for the capital of her father's kingdom.

On the way to the Koliya country, the great procession passed a garden called Lumbini Park. This garden was near the kingdom called Nepal, at the foot of the Himalayan mountains. The beautiful park with its sala trees and scented flowers and busy birds and bees attracted the queen. Since the park was a good resting place, the queen ordered the bearers to stop for a while. As she rested underneath one of the sala trees, her birth began and a baby boy was born. It was an auspicious day. The birth took place on a full moon (which is now celebrated as Vesak, the festival of the triple event of Buddha's birth, enlightenment and death), in the year 623 B.C.

According to the legends about this birth, the baby began to walk seven steps forward and at each step a lotus flower appeared on the ground. Then, at the seventh stride, he stopped and with a noble voice shouted:

"I am chief of the world,
Eldest am I in the world,
Foremost am I in the world.
This is the last birth.
There is now no more coming to be."

After the birth of her baby son, Queen Maha Maya immediately returned to Kapilavatthu. When the king learnt of this he was very happy, and as news of the birth of the long-awaited heir spread around the kingdom there was re-joicing all over the country.

Buddhanet

Christmas Spirit

Put up a splash of Christmas spirit
Put in a dash of love
Stir up the sounds 'till you can hear it
Sing out to those you love

Christmas, Christmas, you can fill me
Up with Christmas cheer
Christmas, Christmas, you fulfil my
Spirit every year

Toss up a mash of extra magic
Toss in a batch of love
Let up the lights with random logic
Look out for sleighs above

Santa, Santa, can I have it
Please I've been so good
Santa, Santa, please I beg you
Please oh if you would

Get up a clash of Christmas colour
Get in a catch of love
Set up and show the shiny decor
Shout out with Christmas love

Listen, listen, you can see it
Spirit everywhere
Listen, listen, you can do it
Spread it out and share

Put up a splash of Christmas spirit
Put in a dash of love
Stir up the sounds 'till you can hear it
Sing out to those you love

Christmas, Christmas, you can fill me
Up with Christmas cheer
Christmas, Christmas, you fulfil my
Spirit every year

Paul Moosberg

EPILOGUE

One word ere yet the evening ends,
Let's close it with a parting rhyme,
And pledge a hand to all our friends,
As fits the merry Christmas time

As fits the solemn Christmas tide,
As fits the holy Christmas birth,
Be this, good friends, our carol still -
Be peace on earth, be peace on earth,
To all of gentle will.

Thackeray

Comments -

We welcome your comments on this issue. With your permission your comments might also be included in the NUF Newsletter.

Please send your comments to the editor,

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