



# Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Athens

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## “The Magic and Wonder of Christmas”

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A brief homily delivered on December 24, 2017

At the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Athens, GA

### **Christmas Eve Homily:**

Christmas is the season of magic, miracles, and marvels. It is the time of year when many of us go ‘marveling’, as the Reverend Fred Craddock names it.

You go marveling if you take a walk or get in your car to view colorful Christmas lights and other decorations on neighborhood houses and trees. You go marveling if you listen to joyful carolers singing ancient Christmas songs.

You go marveling if you sit in the dark with a candle burning while you enjoy the simple beauty of its flame softly illuminating your home.

You go marveling if you step outside to gaze up at the stars and moon on a clear, crisp winter night. And, you go marveling if you look upon the faces of children all aglow, impatiently waiting for new toys and special Christmas treats.

The mystery and magic of flying reindeer and a jolly old elf bringing gifts should make anyone marvel.

The miracle of a birth long ago and new life coming into the world today are also reasons to marvel in wonder.

Even coming to a Christmas Eve service such as this, to share the good will and peace shining on faces around you, is reason to marvel.

All these marvelous things make my toes tingle and my heart near burst with joy. There is much to celebrate during the Christmas season.

Early Christian leaders chose December 25 to celebrate the birth of Jesus because they believed Jesus was the light of the world. And in the darkest days of winter when people already were celebrating the return of the light on solstice night or the appearance of a sun god, such as Mithras, Christian leaders simply changed the focus from the pagan festivities to their own divine light, their Son of God. The seasonal merriment and gift exchange of pre-Christian times continues to this day. Those who claim Christmas too pagan can blame early church fathers for easing in Christianity by embracing ancient traditions.

Whether you or I identify as Unitarian Universalist, Christian, Pagan, or something else, we can all marvel at the miracle of being alive and finding joy at being together with family or friends on this magical night in the heart of the darkest season.

Whether we believe that little baby Jesus was born uniquely divine or just as divine as any baby, we can celebrate his birth. Like many wise men before and after him, Jesus grew up to teach us how to live in peace, how to love our neighbor as ourselves, and how to welcome all into our communities, whether rich or poor, able or disabled, gentile or Jew, black or white, brown or red, yellow or any combination thereof. And, had he been born in our day and time, we know he would welcome all who are marginalized by the powerful and privileged.

When my first grandchild was born last winter, I stood ready to blow horns and shout from the rooftops that a miracle had occurred. Hark! A babe was born in Chapel Hill, and unto us was born new possibility, new hope. Like the shepherds, I bowed down in wonder over the miracle of my grand baby's birth. Like the magi, I showered him with gifts of love. Like Joseph and Mary, I felt blessed by his safe delivery. Like the star over Bethlehem, a star of wonder in the night sky led me to his birthplace. Like Jesus, perhaps he will become a bringer of peace, as every child born may become a peacemaker, as each of us may usher in greater peace.

Had Jesus been born in our day and time, I wonder whether we would have listened to the trumpets of angels announcing his birth or the words of peace spoken from his heart. We moderns seem to forget that life is a miracle and that peace and harmony are wished for by all peoples.

Approaching this year's holiday season may have been difficult for some of you, as it was for me. During November my spirit was low. I felt anxious about what the future might hold, what the prophets might foretell.

By recognizing my many blessings during Thanksgiving, I began to emerge from my slump. As December brought me closer to the winter solstice and the eventual return of longer days, my normal optimism began returning. Although the road to peace still feels long, for a time I have put aside my concerns. I've embraced this season of wonder and magic where anything seems possible, even peace on earth.

After all, who would think normally sensible people would bring trees into their homes and hang lights and glittery ornaments on its branches? Any person should smile at that. All our spirits should lift.

Christmas transforms our hearts and the world by its festive lights, colorful ribbons, glittery ornaments, giggling infants, amazing star fields, and even happy adults singing of love reborn and goodwill to come.

May you and I never be too grown up to stop looking up to the sky for Santa's sleigh on Christmas Eve. May you and I never be too jaded to stop hoping the next child born will bring peace on earth. May you and I never cease listening for the animals to speak on this holy night. May Christmas always gladden your heart with its magic, miracles, and marvels.

May it be so.