



CHRISTMAS EVE 2018

CHRISTMAS MEDLEY

WELCOME

Good evening and Merry Christmas!
Peace and joy be with you and with your spirit!
It is the best of times for some;
it is the worst of times for others.
But a spirit of understanding and caregiving lifts the hearts of all.
And the spirit of Christmas is the spirit of understanding and caregiving.
It blesses us now with thanks
and blesses our future with hope.
This eve together in this vast stable,
may our spirits grow in understanding and in caring
with lessons and carols from the Christmas story,
which some call the greatest story ever told.

*** CHALICE LIGHTING** – from The Gospel of John
While Reverend Alisun lights our chalice,
let's rise in body and/or spirit
and join in unison
in the words from the Gospel of John
celebrating the birth of the beginning of all things:
In the beginning was the light and the light is the life of the world.
Whoever will receive the light, to them is given the power of life.

LESSON *Found to Be with Child* - Matthew 1: 18-23

And this is how the Christmas story begins:

“When Mary of Nazareth was engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child. Joseph, being a righteous man, but unwilling to expose Mary to public disgrace, resolved to dismiss her quietly. But an angel appeared to him in a dream and said, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a child, and you are to name the child *Jesus*, which means *One who will save the people who are lost*. As the prophet has said, *See, a maiden shall conceive and bear a child who shall be named Emmanuel – God is with us.*”

CAROL #225 (verse 1 & 3) *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*

LESSON - Luke 1: 26-38 *Hail, Mary, Full of Grace*

And the angel also was sent to the maiden Mary, and he said to her, 'Hail, Mary, full of grace. Yehovah, Being of beings, is with you. Blessed are you among women.' Mary was bewildered and wondered what to make of it - and the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have accepted the grace of God and you will conceive and bear a child of holy spirit. You will name the child Jesus, who will become great and will be called the child of the Most High, and of your child's realm there is no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be? I am a maiden.' And the angel said, 'Nothing is impossible with God.' Then Mary said, 'Here am I, the servant of the Being of beings. Let it be with me according to your word.'"

ANTHEM *Sweet Was the Song* - Arlen Clarke

LESSON *My Soul Magnifies My Source* - Luke 1: 39-47

In those days, Mary learned of her cousin Elizabeth's pregnancy and she immediately set out to the house of Elizabeth and her husband, Zechariah, who was a high priest at the temple in Jerusalem. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, she felt as if the child in her own womb leapt up and Elizabeth was filled with a holy spirit and exclaimed, 'Mary! Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.'

And Mary laughed with delight and replied most intently, 'My soul magnifies my God. My spirit rejoices in fulfilling the grace given to God's lowly servant. Shall not all generations hence call me blessed, for the Source of all being has done great, holy things for me as a blessing generation to generation. So thus, will not the Divine One humble the proud, break down the powerful, lift the lowly, fill the hungry, empty the rich, & remember servant Israel?'

CHRISTMAS WISH #1 *The Impossible Dream*

The first Christmas wish that I would offer is that we all are willing to open entirely to the full power of life within us, to all its potentials in the seed of our being – to wonder about it, but not to fear.

Mary and Joseph both had dreams about an angel who came to each of them to say, Mary is going to have a baby and it will be a very good thing, so don't worry.

At first Mary didn't believe the angel – "How can this be?" she asked. Sort of like Ebenezer Scrooge in A Christmas Carol.

He said, "Christmas? Bah, humbug – No! Impossible! Foolishness! Fake news!" until the Spirit of Christmas came to him in a dream.

(Spirit - Angel– same thing.)

The spirit reminded Mary, "Nothing is impossible for the power of life."

Mary was quite young, and there were many things she didn't understand yet. She could only wonder.

But when she realized it was true she was to bear a child, and when she had talked with Joseph and later with her cousin Elizabeth, we hear of all their joy and hopes for the child.

By receiving the divine light that was this child and every child, Mary would magnify the light of the world – she would make the power of life greater for the good of the world. That was maiden Mary's dream – her impossible possible dream.

That we all can open entirely to the full power of life within us – to wonder and not be afraid - that is my Christmas wish #1.

LESSON - Luke 2: 1-7 *In Those Days, A Decree*

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus, that all the Roman Empire's world should be registered so as to be identified to pay taxes to the Emperor. All were required to return to their own home towns to be registered. Joseph went from Nazareth to Bethlehem, the city of David from whom he was descended. Mary, pregnant with her child, went with him. When they had arrived, there were no rooms in the inns and she gave birth to her baby in a stable and she wrapped him in swaddling clothes and used a manger for his bed.

* **CAROL #253** *O Come All Ye Faithful*

LESSON *In That Region, Shepherds Keeping Watch* - Luke 2: 8-16

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel stood before them and glory shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid, for see—I bring you good news of great joy for the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in swaddling cloth and lying in a manger.' And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of other angels, praising the Source of all being and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest and on earth grace and peace to all!'

CAROL #237 *The First Nowell*

LESSON *Where is the Child?* - Matthew 2: 1-2, 8-12

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem, a group of powerful leaders called Magi, from Persia (an empire to the east), came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born ruler of the Jews, for we have come to pay homage." King Herod and all Jerusalem were frightened by this. Herod sent the visitors to Bethlehem, for it was written that Bethlehem would be the birthplace of the messiah. "Go and find the child," Herod said. "And, bring me word so that I

also may go pay homage.” When the wise visitors saw the child’s star stopped above a house, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with new mother Mary; & they knelt down & paid homage. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road. When Herod learned of this, fearing the rise of a Persian-supported Jewish ruler in Israel, he sent soldiers to kill all the children in & around Bethlehem who were two years old or younger.

ANTHEM *Coventry Carol*

CAROL #244 (v. 1-3) *It Came Upon the Midnight Clear*

CHRISTMAS WISH #2 *Who Is Coming to Town*

In the Christmas story at this point,
the life or death question is,
Who is coming to town?
It’s not Santa Claus.
This Christmas story is different.

Power is coming to town:
Emperor Augustus’s tax collectors;
imperial Persia’s magi diplomats;
Judean governor Herod’s soldiers;
heavenly angels of light;
troubled Judean multitudes and uncertain Bethlehem shepherds
forced to pay Roman taxes;
and Mary and Joseph
(not poor and homeless as some like to say -
but, as historical research suggests,
well connected to power
through the Jerusalem temple priesthood,
through the palace of King David
and through the Maccabee revolutionaries –
so quite threatening to Roman and Judean power-holders).

Now all who came to Bethlehem town
had been sent the light, the creative power of being –
because everyone has been sent this light.
As Ebenezer Scrooge observed,
they all had the power to make life happy or unhappy for everyone,
just as we do.
What they did with their power
would influence the potential of every soul

and the spirit of the ages.

So my second Christmas wish is that our allies will become powerful
and the powerful will become our allies
and our enemies, in this new light, will become faithful friends.

OFFERTORY *Carol of the Bells*

LESSON *When They Saw the Child* - Luke 2: 17-20

When the angels had gone, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the angels have made known to us.' So they went and found Mary and Joseph and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. And the shepherds returned to field and flock, glorifying and praising God to all for what they had heard and seen.

* **CAROL #231** (v. 1-2) *Angels We Have Heard on High*

* **CAROL #245** (v. 1-2) *Joy to the World*

CHRISTMAS WISH #3 *All I Really Want for Christmas*

The Christmas story ends with hope – a new beginning.

Magi have left a treasure of gifts.

Shepherds have taken the holy word out to the people.

The powerful and the people

have heard a message that will gradually magnify
their expectations of messiahs.

Even the command of Herod to slay the little children was subverted –
for ancient records report no such harm.

Instead, from Bethlehem there shone a great light
that spread until empire once again
learned to subvert it.

So what can our third wish be -

after receiving the light and gaining allies to share it?

I would suggest that Christmas Wish #3 be

that each person and each people

will learn to use the light – the spirit of Christmas –

and help render happiness and holiness to all –

to use this power to grow in understanding and to grow in caring

and to help the whole community likewise to grow.

There is a Christmas song that says,

“All I Really Want for Christmas is to Grow a Little Bit More Conscious”.
I’d like to add a second verse
changing the word “conscious” to “gracious” -
the highest use of grace, a synonym for the light, the creative power of life:
“All I really want for Christmas is to grow a little bit more gracious.”
It’s a two step deal – first consciousness, then graciousness.

The spirit of Christmas, the light of the world, empowers us –
ceaselessly, unstintingly.
Joy, I think, is to receive that light, feel its worth, and use it graciously.
That would make it a holy light.
And that is Christmas Wish #3.

SUNG BENEDICTION *O, Holy Night*

*** SPOKEN BENEDICTION** *To All a Holy Night*

We have shared Christmas stories and carols.
May our sharing be your best Yuletide gift.
And, in the spirit of Christmas, paraphrasing Charles Dickens,
may you make all times in the long calendar of the year
kind, forgiving, charitable, and pleasant,
always holding in your spirit
lessons from Christmases past,
appreciation for Christmas present,
and devotion to future Christmases
that bless all Earthkind.
The spirit of Christmas –
God blesses it and all of us, Every One.

Before we extinguish our chalice and sing our last carol, please turn to your neighbor with a wish of merry Christmas and a happy new year.

*** EXTINGUISHING THE CHALICE**

With that third wish in mind, and while Reverend Karen extinguishes our chalice,
let’s share the printed words in unison:

We extinguish our chalice, but not our light.

Our light of Christmas spirit we carry out to the world.

*** CAROL #251** *Silent Night*

WASSAIL & MERRY CHRISTMAS!!!

