



Christmas Eve 2016

A Prayer of Peace and Hope

Rev. Michael Walker

**Unitarian Church of Harrisburg,
Pennsylvania**



Christmas Eve

Intergenerational Service – Market Street – 3 pm

Gathering Music	Family Candle-lighting around Sanctuary	Ann Hossler and Hannah Belser
Prelude	<i>Go Tell it on the Mountain</i> (Spiritual)	John Hursh, bass JD Stillwater, drums Hannah Belser, piano
Welcome		Rev. Michael Walker, Interim Minister
Reading (with Chalice Lighting)	<i>Come Christmas!</i> (Rev. Maureen Killoran) @	Ann Stillwater (light: Rev. Mike)
* Carol	<i>Oh, Come All Ye Faithful</i> (John Francis Wade)	Hannah Belser, Accompanist
Reading	<i>The Meaning of Christmas to a Unitarian Universalist</i> (Lenny Scovel) @	Alexander Julnes
Choir Anthem	<i>Jesus, Our Brother</i> (12th c. French carol)	Ann Hossler, Director of Music
Responsive Reading	621 - <i>Why Not a Star</i>	Sara Palmer, Director of Religious Exploration
Activity for All Who Wish Upon a Star	Sharing Stars of Peace, Love and Hope	Congregation
Offering	Benefits the Minister's Discretionary Fund, helping our members in times of need.	Rima Cameron, Trustee
Offertory & Carol (and passing out candles)	<i>Twelve Days of Christmas</i> (please join in singing!)	Grady & Jane Bechtel and congregation
Reading	<i>At Christmas</i>	Robin Stillwater (Edgar Albert Guest)
Gift of Music	<i>Gesu Bambino</i> (Pietro Yon)	Alicia Smith, flute
Homily	<i>A Prayer for Peace and Hope</i>	Rev. Michael Walker

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Intergenerational Service – Market Street – 3 pm

Prelude	<i>Go Tell it on the Mountain</i> (Spiritual)	John Hursh, bass JD Stillwater, drums Hannah Belser, piano
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Welcome	Rev. Michael Walker
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Welcome, welcome, one and all! And Merry Christmas, to you and to everyone! I am the Reverend Michael Walker, minister of this church, and I'm glad to see all of you here. Today, we celebrate Christmas Eve with carols and candles, music and words of wisdom shared by many from our spiritual fellowship.

Whether you come here to sing and dance, or to sit and think, you are welcome. Whether you are young or old, or somewhere in between, you are welcome. Whether you are gay or straight, male or female, or any other identity, you are welcome. Whether you come here with a heavy heart and a troubled mind, or if you are here filled with joy and mirth, you are welcome.

We are a caring community and let this be such a happy occasion to be here together. Welcome home, one and all.

No one is ever really ready for Christmas.
If we were really all prepared:
If every gift we had contemplated had been obtained;
If every present was beautifully beribboned;
If all the goodies our friends deserve were baked and cooled, and stored just so;
If each and every person we love was gathered for our celebration;
If we never snapped at someone we care about, nor stopped short of being all that
we could be;
If our minds were 100 per cent loving and our hearts were 100 per cent generous;
They truly would be ready
---and truly we would not need Christmas quite so much.
So come, Christmas, most needed of seasons.
Come with the reminder that love does not depend on
Perfection but on willingness to risk connection.
Come into the unready manger of our hearts
That we may feel the warmth of new life
And give flesh to the promise of hope
That cries to bring healing into our world.
Come Christmas!
Come, Love,
Come, Hope.
Be born in our unready hearts
On this silent and holy night.

Reading

*The Meaning of Christmas to a
Unitarian Universalist* (Lenny Scovel)

Alexander Julnes

Why Christmas? Especially to one who doubts? Are you not being hypocritical? Unitarian Universalists, with their penchant for secular humanism are fond of arguing the validity of Christmas: Is it a Christian holiday? A pagan holiday? A secular holiday? Even outside my UU circles there is much apathy about Christmas — “It’s just another day” I’ve heard quoted by many. I know all this. . . and I don’t care! I love Christmas, always have and always will. It fills me with nostalgia and generosity and goodwill. And as far as the “meaning of Christmas” is concerned, as a Unitarian Universalist, I believe it is part of our spiritual maturation to search for and assign meaning to all the days of our lives. In this, Christmas is the high-water mark of the year — a time when the world slows, and considers our relationships with each other. Isn’t that in itself enough to celebrate? Worthy of decorations, lights and music? The gifts we give each other at this time of year are more than just demonstrations of our generosity — they are symbols of the gifts we are capable of giving on all the other days of our lives. Gifts of love, compassion, industry, advocacy... the gifts of our common humanity. These were the values of Jesus — the true Christian values. And if we, as a Unitarian Universalists, need to reconcile the language of Jesus as the Savior in celebrating Christmas, can we not acknowledge that through his ministry of compassion, he was in fact our savior, by showing us the way to save ourselves?

Choir Anthem

Jesus, Our Brother
(12th c. French Carol)

Ann Hossler,
Director of Music

They told me that when Jesus was born a star appeared in the heavens above the place where the young child lay.

When I was very young I had no trouble believing wondrous things; I believed in the star.

It was a wonderful miracle, part of a long ago story, foretelling an uncommon life.

They told me a super nova appeared in the heavens in its dying burst of fire.

When I was older and believed in science and reason I believed the story of the star explained.

But I found I was unwilling to give up the star, fitting symbol for the birth of one whose uncommon life has been long remembered.

The star explained became the star understood, for Jesus, for Buddha, for Zarathustra.

Why not a star? Some bright star shines somewhere in the heavens each time a child is born.

Who knows what it may foretell?

Who knows what uncommon life may yet again unfold, if we but give it a chance?

Offering	Benefits the Minister's Discretionary Fund, to help people in times of need	Rima Cameron, trustee
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Maybe you have fond memories of gift-giving and gift-receiving at this time of year. Some people may also have memories of years when money was tight, and gifts were sparse. Of course, this can happen at any time of year, and not just Christmas. One way in which congregations can help members in time of need is through something we call the Minister's Discretionary Fund. This is not money for the minister's use – the fund is there for him to disburse to someone who comes to see Rev. Mike, privately, and shares what is happening in their life, and they need some help. In the past, a member was out of work and needed a little help to make sure the electricity would stay on. And that person was very relieved that we were able to help their family.

If this is a cause that you can support, I encourage you to give generously during the offering. Thank you in advance, for helping our members in their times of needs. Our special Christmas Eve offering will now be received.

Offertory	<i>Twelve Days of Christmas</i> (Traditional)	Led by Grady & Jane Bechtel
Also, pass out candles		

A man is at his finest towards the finish of the year;
He is almost what he should be when the Christmas season is here;
Then he's thinking more of others than he's thought the months before,
And the laughter of his children is a joy worth toiling for.
He is less a selfish creature than at any other time;
When the Christmas spirit rules him he comes close to the sublime.

When it's Christmas man is bigger and is better in his part;
He is keener for the service that is prompted by the heart.
All the petty thoughts and narrow seem to vanish for awhile
And the true reward he's seeking is the glory of a smile.
Then for others he is toiling and somehow it seems to me
That at Christmas he is almost what God wanted him to be.

If I had to paint a picture of a man I think I'd wait
Till he'd fought his selfish battles and had put aside his hate.
I'd not catch him at his labors when his thoughts are all of self,
On the long days and the dreary when he's striving for himself.
I'd not take him when he's sneering, when he's scornful or depressed,
But I'd look for him at Christmas when he's shining at his best.

Man is ever in a struggle and he's oft misunderstood;
There are days the worst that's in him is the master of the good,
But at Christmas kindness rules him and he puts himself aside
And his petty hates are vanquished and his heart is opened wide.
Oh, I don't know how to say it, but somehow it seems to me
That at Christmas man is almost what God sent him here to be.

Let us take time this evening, this beautiful night, gathered in a safe place with people we care about, and speak out *a prayer of peace and hope* for those who are less fortunate, for whatever reason. Two millennia ago, we are told a teacher lived. Jesus was something like a hippy of his era, teaching about love, and extending that love to all, even the outcast of his society. He advocated for food, clothing, healing and respect be extended to all, and not just those with money and power. He spoke truth to power, defying the unjust oppression of authorities in his society. And he spoke for peace among men.

It seems the year of 2016 will be remembered by many people as the worst year of their lives. For all that has changed since the days of Jesus, it seems that there is much that has not changed. During the presidential campaign, we sat numb, witnesses to hateful and incendiary rhetoric, pandering to the basest of emotions in a class of people who feel the right to privilege, yet have seen that privilege diminish in our multicultural world. From this came the unfair and unpopular victory of a person whose rhetoric seems poised to take us to the brink of war, while disregarding and casting off the people in need right here in our own country. The hateful rhetoric, unjust treatment of the poor, and war-mongering, does not represent who we are as a freedom-loving people, as a justice-loving people. Whispers of nuclear proliferation have arisen in civil, or perhaps uncivil, discourse. How do we respond to this on Christmas Eve and in the coming year?

In my view – and, if I may be so bold as to say I believe this would also be the view of the socialist firebrand, Jesus – the role of government is not simply to raise money, fight wars and legislate social norms. Its role is rightly defensive, not offensive, both in word and in deed. I believe that the role of government – as the organizing principle of our society, of which we do have rights and a say – includes caring for the people, ensuring education, nutrition, clean water and healthcare, among other things, are available to each and every person. To every person, regardless of their color or creed, age or ethnicity, national origin or status as a citizen or an immigrant.

I'm mindful of the economic disparities of our society — the perennial struggle between the *haves* and *have-nots*. I'm aware that I am gainfully employed and that I benefit from respect unconsciously bestowed by others. Also, that the color of my skin opens up doors that might be closed to others. I'm aware that my family has a roof over our heads, vehicles that get us to work on time, food on the table and the cupboards are full. When I think of these blessings, I also think of those who may have not all of those things, or even have any of those things. It has been shown that when jobs are plentiful, and when classes of people are not discriminated against in the town square and in the workplace, that crime and the need for crime – and the need for prosecution – all decrease. Our system is based on privileges and privileges by their nature are reserved for a few, while many are left out. And so, I pray that we become aware of our privilege and that we use

what privilege and grace is granted us to reach out and help others. For any who find themselves in dire straits, let us pray that the coming year be full of hope and promise. That those who have been out of work, let us pray that they find employment. That those who have struggled to feed and clothe their children or themselves, find the means to do so. Let's pray to change all this and then... and then, my friends, let's **practice** this prayer by the work of our hands and hearts.

Just as we pray for these things, we are surely aware of a great divide in our society. It is a systemic sickness that pervades our American culture and I pray that we can join together to make it right. It is a systemic sickness that brings to power those who would do harm to others, or aggrandize themselves at the expense of others, or otherwise not represent the justice we expect of our leaders. It is a systemic sickness that causes irrational fears in the hearts of those meant to serve and protect, when faced with a black child playing in the projects, assuming he must have a gun. It is a systemic sickness that seeks to dismantle healthcare and other social services, disparagingly calling them entitlements – and believing that the rich are entitled, while the poor are out of luck. A fear that giving something to those with less will somehow diminish those who currently have power and money. This is not a rational fear. With that said, of course, we know: *Fear is never rational*. So, I pray that we find our voices and that we speak up, loudly and clearly. In the coming years, our voices, our prayers and our actions, will be more important than ever before. We pray for peace and hope, but we must also work

for it, for that is how prayer really works. We set the intention and then we get to work, even when it runs counter to the whims of Caesar.

So, lest we forget, we are indeed gathered here to celebrate Christmas. Through the years, we have held this time as sacred, as a time to be with family, to be warm and safe and cozy in our homes, to be happy and generous with our love and care for others in our lives. It is a day that commemorates the birth of one that many know as their savior, someone who — as a man and a teacher — walked among us and taught us to be kind, charitable and loving. Jesus taught that the poorest among us should be lifted-up by our society, not further trod upon. He showed us that it is unjust for society to treat any class of people as lesser than the rest. He taught us that those who lead us should do so with honor and respect, honesty and empathy. Most of all, he brought to those who followed him, and any who would listen to him, a message of hope. Regardless of whether you think of Jesus as a wise man or as the Son of God, he had a meaningful message that still resonates today.

I now invite you into a time of prayer. Will you pray with me?

Spirit of Life, O Holy One that we call by Many Names, we pray...

We pray for peace in the world, including the Holy Lands of our ancestors.

We pray our leaders remember whom they serve and that common sense prevails.

We pray that our hearts be filled with loving-kindness for all others.

We pray that those who have less than we do, find what they need.

We pray that we can each learn to help those with less, the best that we can.

We pray for young people of color who risk their lives just walking down the street.

We pray for love and for all those in our lives whom we love.

Spirit of Life, O Holy One that we call by Many Names, we pray...

We pray for peace. We pray for life. We pray for love. We pray for hope.

Shanti. Shalom. Amen.

*** Carol**

Silent Night
(Joseph Mohr & Franz Xavier Gruber)

*** Passing the Flame**

*** Benediction**

MW

This evening, we gathered in thanks and praise, lifted our voices in song,

And we prayed for hope and peace and love and life.

Before we depart and head off into the night, I ask you to look at your hands.

Our prayers come to naught, without the work of our hands.

For these are instruments with which we each do the work of The Most Holy.

It is by our efforts that we sow peace, that we share love, that we bring hope.

Let us go out into the cold winter, bringing warmth with us, and touch the lives

Of others seeking warmth, seeking peace and life, seeking love and hope.

We have it in our power to bring these things to those who are seeking it.

Let us go out and do so. *May it ever be so and blessed be you all!*

Postlude

Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas
(Hugh Martin and Ralph Blane)

Emily Alberici,
vocal

Please remain seated until the end.

Extinguish Chalice

MW

Go Now in Peace...



Christmas Eve

Contemplative Service – Clover Lane – 7 pm

Gathering Music	Family candle-lighting on Rood Screen	Ann Hossler and Hannah Belser
Prelude	<i>O Holy Night</i> (Adolph-Charles Adam)	Kel Kyle, trumpet
Welcome		Rev. Michael Walker, Interim Minister
Reading (with Chalice Lighting)	<i>Come Christmas!</i> (Rev. Maureen Killoran) @	Marsha Dulaney (light: Rev. Mike)
* Carol	<i>Oh, Come All Ye Faithful</i> (John Francis Wade)	Hannah Belser, Accompanist
Reading	<i>The Meaning of Christmas to a Unitarian Universalist</i> (Lenny Scovel) @	Rima Cameron
Gift of Music	<i>I Wonder as I Wander</i> (John Jacob Niles)	Marsha Dulaney, vocal
Reading	<i>The Gift</i> (William Carlos Williams)	Barbara Byrne
Gift of Music		Nate & Adam Malarich, piano and trumpet
Reading	<i>Emmanuel</i> (Rev. Sara Movius Schurr) @	Karen Sykes
Gift of Music	<i>O Come, O Come Emmanuel</i> (15th c. French, arr. by Patrick Liebergen)	Maggie Myers, vocal
Offering	Benefits the Minister's Discretionary Fund, helping our members in times of need.	Rima Cameron, Trustee
Offertory (and passing out candles)	<i>O Little Town of Bethlehem</i> (Phillips Brooks and Lewis Redner)	EvAnn Hawley, accordion
Choir Anthem	<i>Deep Peace</i> (Trad. words, arr. by Ruth Schram)	Ann Hossler, Director of Music

Homily *A Prayer for Peace and Hope* Rev. Michael Walker

* Carol *Silent Night* Ann Hossler,
(Joseph Mohr / Franz Xavier Gruber) Director of Music

* Passing the Flame

* Benediction

Postlude *Right Here, Right Now* Jay Umble,
(Composed by Jay Umble) @ guitar

(please remain seated until the end)

Extinguish the Chalice and go now in peace...

*** Please stand in body or in spirit
@ Unitarian Universalist**

Sound Tech: David Smith

SEE NEXT PAGE



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Prelude

O Holy Night
(Adolph-Charles Adam)

Kel Kyle,
trumpet

Welcome

Rev. Michael Walker

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So come, Christmas, most needed of seasons.
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And give flesh to the promise of hope
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Be born in our unready hearts
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As the wise men of old brought gifts
 guided by a star
 to the humble birthplace

of the god of love,
 the devils
 as an old print shows
 retreated in confusion.

What could a baby know
 of gold ornaments
 or frankincense and myrrh,
 of priestly robes
 and devout genuflections?

But the imagination
 knows all stories
 before they are told
 and knows the truth of this one
 past all defection

The rich gifts
 so unsuitable for a child
 though devoutly proffered,
 stood for all that love can bring.

The men were old
 how could they know
 of a mother's needs
 or a child's
 appetite?

But as they kneeled
 the child was fed.

They saw it
 and
 gave praise!

A miracle
 had taken place,
 hard gold to love,
 a mother's milk!
 before
 their wondering eyes.

The ass brayed
 the cattle lowed.
 It was their nature.

All men by their nature give praise.
 It is all
 they can do.

The very devils
 by their flight give praise.
 What is death,
 beside this?

Nothing. The wise men
 came with gifts
 and bowed down
 to worship
 this perfection.

Emmanuel means “God is with us”. Who is your Emmanuel? Who is your “God is with us”, the one you were promised, the one you have been waiting for?

For the ancient prophet Isaiah, he was a boy soon to be born who would guide the people of Judah back to peace and harmony with God. He would bring hope for victory and greatness in the tribe. He would be a gift from God to his chosen people.

Who is your Emmanuel, your “God is with us”?

For Christians, he is Jesus of Nazareth. The baby in the Christmas story who grew to be a remarkable teacher among the Jewish people; whose ideas about love, forgiveness, and justice changed the world forever.

Who is your Emmanuel, your “God is with us”?

Perhaps your Emmanuel is a political leader, standing for the rights of the oppressed—a Martin Luther King, a Gandhi, a Mother Jones. Perhaps in their work with people you feel God is with us.

Who is your Emmanuel, your “God is with us”?

Perhaps your Emmanuel is an artist, bringing transcendence to the human spirit and lifting our hopes and dreams into the light—a J. S. Bach, a Martha Graham, a William Shakespeare. Perhaps in the presence of great beauty and creativity you feel God is with us.

Who is your Emmanuel, your “God is with us”?

Perhaps it is a child. Created from our bodies, the child who is filled with the potential to do every great thing. Your promise from God that the world has hope for justice and beauty. For in the presence of a child we too can feel that God is with us all.

Gift of Music	<i>O Come, O Come Emmanuel</i> (15 th c. French, arr. Patrick Liebergen)	Maggie Myers, vocal
Offering	Benefits the Minister’s Discretionary Fund, to help people in times of need	Rima Cameron, trustee

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Also, pass out candles		

Choir Anthem	<i>Deep Peace</i> (Trad. words, arr. by Ruth Schram)	Ann Hossler, Director of Music
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what privilege and grace is granted us to reach out and help others. For any who find themselves in dire straits, let us pray that the coming year be full of hope and promise. That those who have been out of work, let us pray that they find employment. That those who have struggled to feed and clothe their children or themselves, find the means to do so. Let's pray to change all this and then... and then, my friends, let's **practice** this prayer by the work of our hands and hearts.

Just as we pray for these things, we are surely aware of a great divide in our society. It is a systemic sickness that pervades our American culture and I pray that we can join together to make it right. It is a systemic sickness that brings to power those who would do harm to others, or aggrandize themselves at the expense of others, or otherwise not represent the justice we expect of our leaders. It is a systemic sickness that causes irrational fears in the hearts of those meant to serve and protect, when faced with a black child playing in the projects, assuming he must have a gun. It is a systemic sickness that seeks to dismantle healthcare and other social services, disparagingly calling them entitlements – and believing that the rich are entitled, while the poor are out of luck. A fear that giving something to those with less will somehow diminish those who currently have power and money. This is not a rational fear. With that said, of course, we know: *Fear is never rational*. So, I pray that we find our voices and that we speak up, loudly and clearly. In the coming years, our voices, our prayers and our actions, will be more important than ever before. We pray for peace and hope, but we must also work

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We pray for love and for all those in our lives whom we love.

Spirit of Life, O Holy One that we call by Many Names, we pray...

We pray for peace. We pray for life. We pray for love. We pray for hope.

Shanti. Shalom. Amen.

*** Carol**

Silent Night
(Joseph Mohr & Franz Xavier Gruber)

*** Passing the Flame**

*** Benediction**

MW

This evening, we gathered in thanks and praise, lifted our voices in song,

And we prayed for hope and peace and love and life.

Before we depart and head off into the night, I ask you to look at your hands.

Our prayers come to naught, without the work of our hands.

For these are instruments with which we each do the work of The Most Holy.

It is by our efforts that we sow peace, that we share love, that we bring hope.

Let us go out into the cold winter, bringing warmth with us, and touch the lives

Of others seeking warmth, seeking peace and life, seeking love and hope.

We have it in our power to bring these things to those who are seeking it.

Let us go out and do so. May it ever be so and blessed be you all!

Postlude

Right Here, Right Now
(composed by Jay Umble)

Jay Umble,
guitar

Please remain seated until the end.

Extinguish Chalice

MW

Go Now in Peace...

