

December 2018

FULL TEXT 7:30 and 9:30 pm Christmas Eve Services

Claire Feingold Thoryn

Music for Gathering – Jon Weinberg, dulcimer

Choir Processional - “Sing Hallelu” (S. Paulus) - Youth Choir Members and Alumni

Introit - “God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen/We Three Kings” (Arr. by Barenaked Ladies) - Oliver Cotran, Isaiah Johnson, Noah Harrington, Kat McCrae, Nick Rommel, Kyle Johnson

A Christmas Greeting - Claire

Adapted from the Prologue of the play *Middletown*, by Will Eno

Welcome newcomers, friends, hopeful people

Merry Christmas! I am Rev. Claire Feingold Thoryn.

Welcome to Follen Church, we are a Unitarian Universalist congregation.

Welcome: Ladies and Gentlemen, Esteemed Colleagues, Members of the Board, Local Dignitaries,

Lexingtonians, Arlingtonians, former Cantabrigians, everyone really,

stockbrokers, dockworkers, celebrities, nobodies,

all comers, newcomers, the newly departed, the poorly depicted, people who are still teething,

who are looking for a helping verb,

the quote beautiful,

the quote unbeautiful,

the drunk, the sober, the blue, the down,

los pueblos, los animales,

foreigners, strangers, bookworms, those whose eyes

are tired from trying to read something into everything,

those at a crossroads, in a crisis, a quandary, a velvety pew,

the dirty, the hungry, yes, we the cranky,

the thirsty, the furious, the happy, who are filled with life,
and of course the bereaved, the bereft,

and let's not forget the local merchants,
the smiling faces, the placeholders,
us, all we people slowly graying, slowly leaving,
who make all this possible,
this activity, this festivity, this hope,
this dream dreamt with open eyes,
friends of the deceased, the diseased,
friends of the disowned,
and of course also healthy friendly people
with great skin and congenital heart defects,
sports fans, down-and-outers, nonbelievers,
animal lovers everywhere,
real people people,
with doubts, without certainty, the majority of us,
silent, stifled, delinquent,
in the background, barely hanging on,
running out of

time, hope, air, heart, nerves, chances,
money, blood, friends, courage, faith,
hair, time, teeth, time, time,
health, hope, all of it, all of it,
those *sans* everything, those *avec* nothing,
who can't stand it any longer,
who never really could,
gentle gentle people, infinitely injured people,
lost souls, ghosts, descendants, shades, shadows,

future ancestors, Ladies, Gentlemen,

I know I'm forgetting somebody,
friends, likenesses, darkneses, citizens, people,
hopeful people, hopeful people, everybody,
every last lone dying and inconsolably lonely person,
every last joyous exhausted glorious person,
fellow human beings,
breathing people, breathers, breathers...welcome.
The fire exit's here and there.

Tonight is for you.
Merry Christmas.

(Pause...)

Our opening carol will begin with one voice—then a few—and then you too are invited to stand in body or in spirit for the third verse of “Once in Royal David’s City.”

Carol: Once in Royal David’s City

Soprano Solo

1. Once in royal David’s city stood a lowly cattle shed, where a mother laid her baby
in a manger for his bed. Mary was that mother mild Jesus Christ her little child.

Youth Choir Members and Alumni

2. From afar three magi journeyed to that stable rude and bare
to pay homage to the baby offering gifts both rich and rare;
So may we, our gifts bestow; Whether we be high or low.

*Please stand in body or in spirit for verse three

3. In that happy Christmas spirit, hear the angels from on high.

Sing their ancient salutations: joy's a gift you cannot buy.
So may we, with heart that sings, share the truth this season brings.

First Reading – Vivian Montgomery and Oliver Cotran

Luke 1:46-55, Mary's Song of Praise

"The Risk of Birth" by Madeleine L'Engle

Unto us a child is born

Our first reading is from the book of Luke, chapter one, the verses known as the Magnificat: Mary's Song of Praise; followed by a poem by author Madeleine L'Engle.

When Mary is told by the angel she will bear a child, she calls out in joy this prophecy:

'My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant.
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants for ever.'

(Pause...)

And, the poem “The Risk of Birth” by Madeleine L’Engle:

This is no time for a child to be born,
With the earth betrayed by war and hate
And a comet slashing the sky to warn
That time runs out and the sun burns late.

That was no time for a child to be born,
In a land in the crushing grip of Rome;
Honor and truth were trampled by scorn—
Yet here did the Savior make his home.

When is the time for love to be born?
The inn is full on the planet earth,
And by a comet the sky is torn—
Yet Love still takes the risk of birth.

(Pause...)

Our opening carols begin with some voices and grow into all voices. Please rise in body or in spirit for *The First Nowell* followed by *Angels We Have Heard on High*.

* CAROL - THE FIRST NOWELL

Sopranos and Altos

The first Nowell the angel did say

was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay, in fields, where they
lay keeping their sheep, on a cold winter’s night that was so deep.

Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Born is the king of Israel.

All Voices

They look-ed up and saw a star, shining in the east beyond them far,
and to the earth it gave great light,
and so it continued both day and night.

Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Born is the king of Israel.

* CAROL - ANGELS WE HAVE HEARD ON HIGH

Tenors and Basses

1. Angels we have heard on high sweetly singing o'er the plains
and the mountains in reply echoing their joyous strains.

Glo - o - ri - a, in ex-cel- sis Deo.

All Voices

2. Shepherds, why this jubilee? Why these songs of happy cheer?

What great brightness did you see? What glad tidings did you hear? Glo - o - ri - a,
in ex-cel- sis Deo.

Second Reading – Isaiah Johnson

Luke 2:1-19

Hebrews 13:2

Entertaining angels unawares

Our second reading is the story of Jesus birth as it is told in the book of Luke,
followed by a single line from the book of Hebrews.

Luke 2:1-19

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.¹⁰ But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the

Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.’ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

‘Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favours!’

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.’ So they went with haste 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.

But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.

(Pause...)

And, from the book of Hebrews, chapter 13:

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.

Anthem

“Peace” (D. Hidalgo & L. Perez) - Oliver Cotran, Isaiah Johnson, Noah Harrington, Nick Rommel, Kyle Johnson

Third Reading – Andy Wells-Bean and Vivian Montgomery

Selection adapted from the writings of Sophia Lyon Fahs

“One Heart” by Li-Young Lee

The work of wings is always freedom

Our third reading is adapted from the writings of Unitarian Universalist educator Sophia Lyon Fahs, followed by the poem “One Heart” by Li-Young Lee.

By Sophia Lyon Fahs:

For so the children come
And so they have been coming.
No angels herald their beginnings.
No prophets predict their future courses.
No wise ones see a star to show where
to find the babe that will save humankind.
Yet each night a child is born is a holy night.
Parents sitting beside their children's cribs
Feel glory in the sight of a new life beginning.
Each night a child is born is a holy night—
A time for singing,
A time for wondering,
A time for worshipping.

(Pause...)

“One Heart” by Li-Young Lee

Look at the birds. Even flying
is born

out of nothing. The first sky
is inside you, friend, open

at either end of day.
The work of wings

was always freedom, fastening
one heart to every falling thing.

Please remain seated for “It Came Upon the Midnight Clear.”

CAROL – IT CAME UPON THE MIDNIGHT CLEAR

Please remain seated.

1. It came upon a midnight clear, that glorious song of old,
from angels bending near the earth to touch their harps of gold;
“Peace on the earth, goodwill to all, from God in heaven we bring.”
The world in solemn stillness lay to hear the angels sing.

2. But with the woes of war and strife, the world has suffered long;
beneath the angel strain have rolled two thousand years of wrong;
and we who fight the wars hear not the love song which they bring.
O hush the noise of battle strife, and hear the angels sing.

Offering – introduced by Claire

Each Christmas Eve, we take an offering for the Minister’s Discretionary Fund. The money in this fund, given by you, helps members and friends of Follen who are experiencing financial difficulties, due to unemployment, health care costs, special needs, education needs, transportation costs and basics such as food or shelter. I ensure that all gifts from the fund remain confidential. The Fund models how the Follen congregation cares for its own, and your donations are enormously appreciated. If you are writing a check, please write “MDF” in the memo line. Our offering will now be given and received.

“In The Bleak Midwinter” (words by C. Rossetti, music by G. Holst) - Youth Choir Members and Alumni with Jon Weinberg, hammer dulcimer

“Carol of The Bells” (Ukrainian, Leontovich) - Sopranos and Altos from Youth Choir Members and Alumni

“Medieval Gloria”

Fourth Reading – Claire

“Funny” by Anna Kamienska

What's it like to be a human?

Our final reading is the poem "Funny" by Anna Kamienska.

What's it like to be a human
the bird asked

I myself don't know
it's being held prisoner by your skin
while reaching infinity
being a captive of your scrap of time
while touching eternity
being hopelessly uncertain
and helplessly hopeful
being a needle of frost
and a handful of heat
breathing in the air
and choking wordlessly
it's being on fire
with a nest made of ashes
eating bread
while filling up on hunger
it's dying without love
it's loving through death

That's funny said the bird
and flew effortlessly up into the air

Homily: In the Flesh

What's it like to be a human?

Christmas is a wild and strange story that we humans have tried to tame for thousands of years.

We have brought Christmas into our homes,
we sanitized it, painted it white, wrapped it in boxes,
and set it down on a shelf to look at but not touch.

But Christmas is a wild and strange story of grace and darkness and being hopelessly uncertain and helplessly hopeful.

*This was no time for a child to be born,
With the earth betrayed by war and hate.*

Emperor Augustus was greedy,
The Governor of Syria held unchecked power, and
King Herod was a petulant, small-minded, selfish, angry, jealous ruler.
He ruled an empire of fear, greed, paranoia and death.
But Love still took the risk of birth.

Mary could not wait any longer.

She was at a crossroads, in a crisis, a quandary, she and Joseph were dirty, hungry, thirsty, and yes, they were probably cranky.

You try keeping your spirits up when you're nine months pregnant and riding a donkey for 80 miles, all for the emperor to more easily collect your taxes, and there is no "Hotel Tonight" app on your phone because phones haven't been invented yet.

Often the stable is depicted as rustic wood, with a cute thatched roof, windows open to the night sky.

But if you want to visit the spot in Bethlehem where, it is said, Jesus was born, you might be surprised.

Once you make it past the ID checkpoints and are allowed into the West Bank, you enter the city of Bethlehem.

Instead of open countryside, barbed wire and busy streets.

Instead of wise men, armed men.

And there in Bethlehem is the ancient Church of the Nativity, built directly on top of, legend says, the very spot where Jesus was born.

You might *imagine* the entrance is very grand and imposing

But the main entrance of the church—the door that all must pass through—is only about four feet high, and two feet wide.

A child could walk through standing upright.

But for an adult to enter this ancient place, you must bow down.

Depending on how tall you are, you might even have to enter on your knees.

This door is called “The Door of Humility.”

After you crawl in on your knees, you stand up in the center of a grand space with soaring ceilings.

Oil lamps hang everywhere, casting a gloomy light.

But this vast sanctuary is not the spot where Jesus was born.

For that you walk to the back of the church and go down a set of narrow, dark stairs carved into rock.

It is very hot and there are people pressing on all sides of you, pilgrims from all over the world. The air is thick and full of incense.

You emerge in a tiny cave, 10 feet wide, 40 feet long.

It's dark, hot, crowded and smelly.
Lamps and tapestries hang all over the walls, like tinsel and ornaments.
And there, embedded into the floor is a silver star.
There it is, they say: *the* spot where Jesus was born.

When I knelt and touched that star, I tried hard to feel something magical.
Instead I felt like I had stood in line all day to see Santa, but when I finally got to the front of the line, he had left for the day, and only the decorations remained.
Except in this case I'd missed the action by a few thousand years.
The baby wasn't there anymore.

Where is that baby now?
Who is that baby now?

Love still takes the risk of birth.

Imagine you are Mary, and all you care about in this whole world is keeping your baby safe—
your vulnerable, soft-headed, tender-bellied, flailing wailing baby.
And you are so tired, and your legs are so weak, and your body craves rest,
But you can't sleep when the baby sleeps,
you can't lie back in the rough straw and gaze into your baby's eyes,
you have to get up, you have to go.
Back on the donkey, back to the caravan.
The bad guys are coming. The tyrant is angry.
And you would do anything, anything, to protect your baby.

*Here in a land where honor and truth are trampled by scorn,
Love still takes the risk of birth.*

What is it like to be a human? The divine one asked.
And then he opened his eyes in darkness and felt, for the first time, a
body. Incarnate. In the flesh.
Imagine a God who gives up all the power of the universe!!!! ...in
return for a hug and a kiss.
God just wanted to be held.
God wanted belly kisses, and warm milk, and gentle pats on the back.
Each night a child is born is a holy night.
God, Spirit, Ruach, Breath of Life:
God wanted for once not to be the Breath,
but to breathe.

I know some people choose a Unitarian church on Christmas Eve
because they aren't sure they believe that whole wild and strange story.
Well, you don't have to. "Believing" is not what Christmas is about.

What makes your heart sing, joyful and triumphant?
What makes your breath catch and your eyes well up?
What do you have faith in?
Faith is the mind choosing imagination over despair,
Hope over helplessness.
Imagine the wild and strange angels, the mighty flap of their wings
blowing your hair and clothes back, the loud rush of the wind in your
ears eliminating all other sounds.
The work of wings is always freedom.

What angels flock around us tonight?
What angels knock at our doors?
*When we show hospitality to strangers, we may entertain angels
unawares.*
May we open our hearts to the angel's song.
May we move through doorways of humility and hope.
May you take the wild and strange risk that is Love.
Merry Christmas. And Amen.

Anthems:

Un Flambeau Jeanette, Isabelle (Provençal carol, 17th c.) - Youth Choir Members and Alumni with Epp Sonin, piano (edited)

“Sing We Noel” (16th c. French carol, words by S. Cooper) - Youth Choir Members and Alumni with Epp Sonin, piano (edited)

Passing of the Light

“A light shone in the darkness, and the darkness could not overcome it.”
Now we will pass this light, candle by candle, to be held by us all.

Come to center

Will the light-passers please come up?
Ushers, can you take the lights down?

There is truly only one thing to remember as we pass the light: only tilt an unlit candle. Lit candles always stay upright. So, to light your candle, tilt it into the upright flame of candle next to you. Then hold your lit candle upright and steady so the next person can tilt their candle to yours.

Light the light-passers candles, have them stay at front

While we pass the light, please remain seated and sing “Silent Night,” which is printed in the order of service.

Send light-passers to aisle

Carol – Silent Night

A Meditation on the Light – Rev. Claire Feingold Thoryn

When “Silent Night” ends and all the candles are lit:

Please hold your candle low in your lap and look into the flame.

Let everyone in your family come into your mind –

your parents... life partner... children...

sister, brother... grandparents... grandchildren... aunts, uncles and cousins...

And let us give thanks that they are part of your life.

[Pause...]

Now bring to mind good friends... teachers... a coach... a mentor – someone who inspires you.

Give thanks for who they are and who they have been for you.

[Pause...]

Now let us remember the people we love

who are not still with us in this life.
Let us take a moment to rest in our memories,
and let our hearts be full.

[Pause...]

Now please bring to mind a hope you have for the coming year.
You may have many hopes, but for tonight, pick one.
Let the flame of your candle burn with that hope.

[Pause...]

And now let your flame stand for your many gifts:
Your strengths, your kindness, your talents.
Your unique self.

[Pause]

Now let's hold our candles high.
These candles are *your* light shining in the darkness
– *our* light.
And the darkness shall not overcome it.
Look around you at the sheer beauty of it all.

And when you feel ready,
with a last wish for the new year,
blow your candle out.

May our inner flame remain lit with gratitude and hope.
And may the light of all our candles shine out and on
into the new year.

Ushers, can you take the lights back up?

Let us now stand either in body or in spirit for our closing carols.

* CAROL – HARK! THE HERALD ANGELS SING

1. Hark! The herald angels sing “Glory to the newborn king!
Peace on earth and mercy mild God and sinners reconciled!”
Joyful all ye nations rise
Join the triumph of the skies;
With angelic host proclaim, “Christ is born in Bethlehem!”

Refrain: Hark! The herald angels sing, glory to the newborn King!

2. Hail the heav’n-born Prince of Peace! Hail the Sun of righteousness!
Light and life to all he brings
risen with healing in his wings.
Mild he lays his glory by,
born that we no more may die,
born to raise us from the earth
born to give us second birth.

* CAROL – JOY TO THE WORLD!

1. Joy to the world! The Lord is come:
let earth receive her King.
Let every heart prepare him room,
and heaven and nature sing,
and heaven and nature sing,
and heaven, and heaven and nature sing.
2. Joy to the earth, the Savior reigns;
let all their songs employ!
While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains repeat the sounding joy,

repeat the sounding joy,
repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

Benediction – “Beannacht” by John O’Donahue –Claire

On the day when
the weight deadens
on your shoulders
and you stumble,
may the clay dance
to balance you.

And when the ghost of loss
gets in to you,
may a flock of colours,
indigo, red, green,
and azure blue
come to awaken in you
a meadow of delight.

When the canvas frays
and a stain of ocean
blackens beneath you,
may there come across the waters
a path of yellow moonlight
to bring you safely home.

May the nourishment of the earth be yours,
may the clarity of light be yours,

may the fluency of the ocean be yours,
may the protection of the ancestors be yours.

And so may a slow
wind work these words
of love around you,
an invisible cloak
to mind your life.

Amen.

Benediction Response: *(in the round)*

“Joy Be Yours In The Morning” (words by K. Grahame, music by D. Wagner) -
Youth Choir Members and Alumni with Epp Sonin, piano

Postlude: Jon Weinberg, dulcimer