

THE CHRISTMAS JOURNEY

Dec. 22, 2019

Rev. Richard Maraj (and the Unity of Phoenix Choir)

Rev. Richard Maraj: It's Christmas time again... that time of year that we celebrate the joyous and miraculous birth of the Christ Child, which was the fulfilling of a 700-year prophecy. It is a holy and sacred event that we celebrate every year – that we've been celebrating for more than 2,000 years.

My question for you today is: What does Christmas mean to YOU today? What does Christmas remind you or re-awaken in you? And how does Christmas change how you see yourself? How you see others? And how you see the world? And how does Christmas change how you show up in your relationships? In your work? And in all that you do?

And what is Christmas calling you to? Or, maybe, what is Christmas calling from you? As busy and as wonderfully active as Christmas can be, I think it behooves us all to take time to pause, to slow down, and to spend some time in the quiet to reflect, to connect, and to have a more profound and personal experience of Christmas.

This morning we're going to do something different than what we normally do. And, with the help of the choir, we're going to share the Christmas story. But we really want you to spend a little time in contemplation and reflection, listening to the music, listening to the words, and see what you can gain to truly deepen your experience of this incredible, holy holiday.

So I want you to take a deep breath now, everybody. Relax; just open your heart as we share the story of the Christmas narrative.

And the journey begins with the Angel coming to speak to the young virgin Mary, a maiden who was pure in heart. The Angel said to Mary, "*Greetings, o favored one; the Lord is with you.*" But Mary was troubled by the greeting; what could it mean? The Angel of God said to her, "*Fear not; for with God, nothing shall be impossible.*"

Angels are messengers of God, and they speak to our hearts to open us to greater possibilities and to our higher purpose. God's angels come to each and every one of us to remind us that we – like Mary – are highly favored and blessed... that each of us has been called and is being called to bring forth something great.

So do you know that you're highly favored? Do you know that you have been called to bring forth something great? And are you willing to accept this and know that, with God, nothing shall be impossible for you? Listen to the angels as they remind us!

[Choir sings "Angels We Have Heard on High"]

[Congregation applauds]

Rev. Maraj: The hopeful message of the angels reassured Mary that the great birth would take place through her. And Mary brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes. Similarly, we can be assured that the birth of the Christ Child – the birth of a greater version of ourselves and a greater experience of life – is a reality for us. In the same way a mother reassures her baby that

everything is okay, and things will get better, we can be reassured by the warmth of God's love that the fullness of God's kingdom is available to us, and that this child can be born in us.

[Guitar Instrumental: "What Child Is This"]

Rev. Maraj: When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, in Judea, in the days of King Herod, behold: there came wise men from the East to Jerusalem saying, *"Where is he that is born king of Jews? For we have seen his Star in the East, and are come to worship him."* And when they went into the house, they saw the young child with Mary, his mother, and fell down and worshipped him. And when they opened their treasures, they presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

When we see the Star – God's inspiration and guidance – the wise men in use will rise up to bring forth our gifts: the gifts of Spirit. God's riches are treasures. We are all blessed with unique and special gifts to share with the world. What are your gifts? And are you sharing those gifts fully and freely as you can?

[Choir sings "We Seek the Tiny King"/"We Three Kings"]

[Congregation applauds]

Rev. Maraj: And there were, in the same country, shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night. And, lo, the Angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone 'round about them. And they were afraid. But the Angel said unto them, *"Fear not; for, behold, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all people. For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a savior, which is Christ the Lord."*

There is a message of good news and great joy for all of us. That if we lay aside our fear, let go of the past, release all negativity that we've been holding on to, we will see and know that God's desire is to bless us. Are you willing to release your fear? Are you willing to let go of the past? Are you willing to let God bless you and bring you greater joy?

When we trust and follow God's guidance, it will lead us – as surely as it did the shepherds – to the place within our hearts where the Christ is born, where nothing can dismay.

[Choir sings "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen"]

[Congregation applauds]

Rev. Maraj: Jesus was born in a humble stable with animals in the stillness of the night, because there was no room in the inn. Similarly, for the Christ to be born in our hearts, it cannot be born in a busy mind and a crowded life that has no room for quietness, solitude and spiritual reflection.

Are you willing to spend daily time to allow yourself to have that space where you can nurture the Christ Child in you? And to allow it to be made manifest in all aspects of your life? I invite you now to just close your eyes and experience the inner joy and peaceful feeling that was felt on that "Silent Night."

[Choir sings "Silent Night"]

[Congregation applauds]

Rev. Maraj: And suddenly there was, with the angels, a multitude of the Heavenly Host, praising God, saying, *"Glory to God in the highest; on earth, peace and good will toward men."*

If there is to be peace in our world, it must begin with peace in our own hearts. The holy Child born within us is called Wonderful Counselor, Miracle Worker, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. The Prince of Peace came as a messenger to give us a message of love. The Christ Child – and that love – is as alive and as beautiful and as precious as a baby lying in a manger.

[Choir sings “Coventry Song” and “Away in a Manger”]

[Congregation applauds]

Rev. Maraj: Jesus came as an infant so that we might be set free, and enter into a new life and a new joy. The Christmas Story is our personal story: our journey of awakening to the beauty of our spirit, and to awaken to the light of God and the life of God! That we are here to live and to do our part to help bring heaven on earth.

May we be blessed always with the humility of the animals in the stable that night. May we always be blessed with the joy of the shepherds, the wisdom of the wise men, and with the radiance of the Star. May the beauty of the Christ shine in and through us today, Christmas Day and every day. May peace prevail in all human hearts, and may all beings be kind to one another.

This is how we bring peace on earth and joy to the world!

[Choir sings “Deck the Halls”]

[Congregation applauds]

Rev. Maraj: Let’s hear it for our choir, please!

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