

CHRISTMAS CANDLELIGHTING SERVICE

Dec. 23, 2020

Revs. Richard Maraj, Lori Fleming and Richard Rogers

WELCOME

Rev. Richard Maraj: Good evening, and welcome to our Christmas Candlelight Service. We hope that your holiday season is going wonderfully and safely. And tonight we hope to add to the depth and richness of your Christmas experience through this service this evening.

You know, COVID has forced us to adjust and do things differently in so many areas of our lives, including church. Tonight, Rev. Lori and Rev. Rogers and I are really excited and grateful to be able to bring you this service, which is our first virtual Candlelighting Service that we have ever done. One of the differences -- besides not being together in person -- is that we would like you to experience the lighting of the candle. So we would like each of you to get a candle and, later in the service, we will ask you to light it at that appropriate time.

So right now, I just want you to take a deep breath and just open your heart to the joy of Christmas. To the preparations, the decorations, all the ways we celebrate. Take another breath, and just open your heart to experience Christmas from the wonder of a child's perspective. One more deep breath, and just open your heart to connect with the quietness and the stillness of the stable long ago where the Christ child was born. And let us just open a space in our heart to allow this Christmas to be a special experience: that will take us deeper and have a richer experience of Christmas than we've ever had before. So we pray this; we affirm this; and we celebrate this all through the name and the nature of the babe born in Bethlehem. And so it is. Amen.

CHRISTMAS CAROLS

Rusty Ferracane and the Unity of Phoenix Choir sing "The First Noel"

The first Noel, the angels 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.

Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel,
Born is the King of Israel.

They looked 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.

Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel,
Born is the King of Israel.

Rusty Ferracane and the Unity of Phoenix Choir sing "Hark the Herald Angels Sing"

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!”

Hark! The herald angels sing,
“Glory to the newborn King”

Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace!
Hail the Son of Righteousness!
Light and life to all He brings,
Risen with healing in His wings,

Mild He lays His glory by,
Born that man no more may die,
Born to raise the sons of earth,
Born to give them second birth.

Hark! The herald angels sing,
“Glory to the newborn King”

Rusty Ferracane and the Unity of Phoenix Choir sing “Silent Night”

Silent night! Holy night!
All is calm, all is bright.
'Round yon virgin mother and child,
Holy infant so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace,
Sleep in heavenly peace.

Silent night! Holy night!
Son of God, love's pure light,
Radiant beams from thy holy face,
With the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth,
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth,

GIVING OF GIFTS AND TITHES

Rev. Lori Fleming: It's that time in our service to give of our gifts and our tithes and our offerings. We've been so blessed throughout this year by all of you who have sent in your checks, who have contributed online ... even though we couldn't meet, many times you still helped keep us going. We're so grateful for that! Thank you for all your gifts and tithes and offerings.

Our offering blessing is: *“Divine love, through me, blesses and multiplies all that I have, all that I give, and all that I receive.”* And so we say thank you, Mother/Father God, for these gifts, these tithes and these offerings. We know they are given in love, they are received in love, and that they move through this ministry with the energy of divine love out into the world as good. And that each giver is blessed – heaped up, pressed down and overflowing – for that is the Law. And so it is. Thank you, God! Amen.

SOLO:

Rusty Ferracane sings “Mary, Did You Know”

Mary, did you know
That your baby boy would one day walk on water?
Mary, did you know
That your baby boy would save our sons and daughters?
Did you know
That your baby boy has come to make you new?
This child that you delivered will soon deliver you

Mary, did you know
That your baby boy will give sight to a blind man?
Mary, did you know
That your baby boy will calm the storm with His hand?
Did you know
That your baby boy has walked where angels trod?
When you kiss your little baby you kissed the face of God?

The blind will see
The deaf will hear
The dead will live again
Oh, the lame will leap
The dumb will speak
The praises of The Lamb

Mary, did you know
That your baby boy is Lord of all creation?
Mary, did you know
That your baby boy would one day rule the nations?
Did you know
That your baby boy is heaven's perfect Lamb?
And the sleeping Child you're holding is the great "I Am"?

Oh, Mary, did you know?
Oh, Mary, did you know?

MEDITATION

Rev. Richard Rogers: So let's move into our time of meditation. I want you to close your eyes, and I want you to feel the magic of this holiday season. That Christ is born in you! That the fullness of God is right where you are. That you were created in the image and likeness of God. So take a deep breath, and feel the activity of God in you. The fullness of God: right where you are. That there is no separation between you and God. That you are the living expression of all that God is. I am the Christ. I am the son or daughter of the Most High. I am the Spirit of God moving into form: moving into life. I AM. I AM all that God is!

This Christmas, we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ into the world. And we celebrate how each and every one of us is called to give expression to all that God is. That each and every one of us is an expression of the Christ Spirit. We are God's Spirit moving into form. We are God's Spirit moving into manifestation. We are the One! And especially in these times – where there's so much that's going on in the world – we let our light shine! We let the fullness of God shine forth in us, as us, through us.

Take another deep breath. And whatever is going on in your life today, the fullness of God is right there: right where you are. That whatever is going on in your life, the power of God in you is infinitely greater than the details. Claim that Spirit of God. Claim that Spirit of God as your true identity: as your true purpose. That it is the sum total of who you are. You are the Light! You are the Spirit! You are the Presence! You are the divine nature of God!

Take another deep breath. And imagine every area of your life being blessed by that Spirit. By that Power. By the activity of God. Every area of your life going higher, becoming greater, becoming more alive. That right where I am, God is! Right here, right now, is my moment! It is my choice. For the power of God is in me! And nothing can stand against me.

Thank you, God; thank you, God; thank you, God, for the Christmas Spirit. For the birth of Christ into the world. For the glory of God that is within me, and for the power of God that is transforming my life. We dedicate this night to all that God is: being manifest and made merry and bright right where we are. Thank you, God; thank you, God; thank you, God! And so it is. Amen.

SOLO:

Rusty Ferracane sings "Joseph's Lullaby"

Mary, are you sleeping?

Mary, I'm afraid

Mary, can I live up to

The choice that God has made?

Jesus, can you tell me

Here upon my knee

What kind of father will I be?

What can I give to you

You, made from miracles

That God has given me to keep?

I can't give much to you

You, made from miracles

But I can hold you as you sleep.

What can you learn from me

You, made from miracles

When I've so much to learn from you?

What can a man like me

Offer the miracle

Who taught me miracles come true?

Tell me how to guide you

Tell me what to say

Tell me how to show you how

To show the world the Way

How to please the angels

Watching from above

When all I have to give you is love.

But if its love you need

You, made from miracles

Then take my hand and hold it tight!
And I will give you love
Sweet, little miracle
That God has given me tonight.
Sweet, little miracle
Oh, what a miracle!
That God has given us tonight.

MESSAGE

Rev. Richard Maraj: Thank you, Rusty; that was absolutely fabulous! Thank you; thank you so much!

So the reason that we have Christmas -- and the reason that we gather at this time every year -- is because, more than 2,000 years ago, something amazing happened. On a quiet, silent night, in a humble, remote place far away from the busy-ness of the city, in a manger surrounded by animals, something miraculous and amazing happened.

It was the birth of a child: a child whose birth was predicted more than 600 years before! It was the birth of the Christ child. It was the birth of the Messiah. It was the birth of the Savior. And that night was the birth of a lasting hope. The birth of an eternal peace. The birth of an enduring love and a profound joy for all people.

Can you imagine how amazing it must have been to have been there that holy night? Can you imagine how amazing it must have been for Mary to give birth to the Messiah and the Savior? Can you imagine how amazing it was for Joseph to witness and to support this miraculous event? And can you imagine how amazing it must have been for those shepherds ... you know, watching their flock by night, when suddenly the sky filled with heavenly hosts saying, "I bring you news of great joy for all people, and glory to God in the highest, and peace and good will for all people."

I mean, Christmas is really amazing! You know, and even as amazing as Christmas is, when we celebrate it year after year after year, after a while it's not as amazing. It doesn't impress as much. I mean, sometimes we can get a little "ho hum" and even a little bit skeptical or cynical about Christmas.

So it reminds me of the story about this doctor that moved to this new, small town. And that anyone came to him, he was able to cure them of almost any and everything. And he got such a reputation that they called him "Dr. Amazing," because it really was amazing how he could cure everything! Everybody loved him -- everybody believed in him -- except the town cynic named Fred. Fred was not impressed at all, and he made it his mission that he was going to discredit this doctor and show he wasn't that great.

So he made an appointment to see the doctor. And he said to the doctor, "*You know, I have lost my sense of taste. I can't taste anything! No matter what I eat, I can't taste!*" He said, "*What are you going to do to cure me?*"

And the doctor thinks, you know, and he's talking to himself a little bit. And after a bit, he says, "*Fred, the thing I think you need is Jar #43.*" So he leaves, comes back in a minute, and there's a jar with the number 43 on it. And he says, "*Just taste this.*" And so he puts it in his mouth, and then Fred spits immediately; he's disgusted! He said, "*This is the worst thing I've ever tasted!*" And the doctor smiles and said, "*Fred, it looks like we cured your issue with not being able to taste!*"

So Fred was really ticked that he didn't discredit him! So he came back a month later with a new problem. And he said to the doctor ... He said, "*Doc, I can't remember anything.*" He said, "*If you ask me what happened last week, I can't remember. You ask me what I had for lunch yesterday, I can't*

remember. I just can't seem to remember!" And the doctor thinks and thinks, and he's thinking for a while. And you could tell Fred thought, *"I got him now!"* And then the doctor thinks for a few more minutes, and he said, *"Fred, I know what you need. What you need is Jar #43."*

You know, sometimes *[laughs]* we can be like Fred, where we are really not that amazed and not that impressed with different aspects of life. Sometimes even with Christmas, we can be kind of "ho hum" about Christmas. Sometimes we can be "ho hum" about certain areas of our lives. We can be "ho hum" about our work, about ourselves and our family.

Now, in the Book of Luke, it says, *"Everyone who heard was amazed at what the shepherds were told."* You see, Christmas is amazing! But unless we feel that it's amazing, we actually will not experience the fullness of the joy, and the sacredness, and the transformation that's available for us. If we are not amazed by Christmas, it is hard to be touched and to be transformed, and to really connect with the greater meaning of this amazing holiday

So the question is: What do we need to do to be amazed by Christmas, and touched by it in an amazing and wonderful way?

The first thing we need to do is **WE NEED TO BE WILLING TO ALLOW OURSELVES TO BE AMAZED**. When was the last time you were amazed? And I can tell you when I was amazed! It was about four days ago! Rev. Rogers gave me one of those gourmet Crumbl cookies. And it was a chocolate chip one: huge chunks of chocolate chips. And he said I needed to warm it up, because it needed to be eaten warm. So I warmed it up, and I pulled off a piece. And you ever see chocolate just pull off and stretch? And I put it in my mouth, and the warmth of the chocolate melting in my mouth; it was so succulent. It was so soft, and there was a little bit of crunchiness. And it was like a party in my mouth! It was a heavenly experience! *[Laughs]* I think I was so amazed by how good it tasted, it could have been the best cookie I ever had in my life! I think I actually elevated; I think I may have floated in the air for a moment. I was amazed at this cookie!

And, to me, you've got to be willing to be amazed in life! You know, if we aren't being willing to be amazed, we just rob ourselves of the joy and the fullness of life. And this idea of our willingness to be amazed is really about a mindset. And the mindset is captured beautifully in Scripture when it says that we must become as a child to enter the kingdom of heaven. Because children's mindsets are joyful; they're playful; they're innocent; they're pure; they're trusting. And they get fascinated by anything! It is amazing how open the mind of a child is! They are willing to be amazed!

I remember when my nieces and nephews were young. We would get them expensive toys, and they would open it. And then the next thing you know, they're playing with the box more than they're playing with the toy! I used to tell my brothers and sisters, *"Why don't we just buy them empty boxes?"* because they seemed fascinated with that!

And the fact is: Life is filled with beauty and magnificence, and so many things that we should be of awe of, and to allow ourselves to be amazed. So if we really want to have a rich experience of Christmas, we need to allow ourselves to be amazed at the magic, at the miracle and at the meaning of this amazing, amazing season.

The second thing we need to do is be amazed and **TAKE IT PERSONALLY**. There was a Catholic mystic in the 1600's named Silesius. And he said this: *"Even if Christ be born a thousand times anew, despair, o man, unless he is born in you."* See, the birth of the Christ child is something we should take personally, because that birth needs to take place within us. We need to accept and recognize and own that the Spirit of the Christ really lives in us: not just in Jesus, but in us. Paul said, *"Christ in you, your hope of glory."*

And so what we really need to do is really take Christmas personally: take that birth of the Christ child personally. I mean, isn't it amazing that the same light of God that was in Jesus is in us? I mean, isn't it amazing that the Christ Spirit that was in Jesus is in us? Isn't it amazing that the same light that shines – that no darkness can overcome – is in us, and is always available to us? I mean, it is amazing the words that Jesus said, when he said, *"He who believes in me shall do the works that I do and even greater things than these."* Which means within us is that Christ Spirit: that Christ potential, that Christ power!

The light of the Christ is born in me. Let's say that together: *"The light of the Christ is born in me."* Deep breath. The light of the Christ is awakened in me! Together: *"The light of the Christ is awakened in me."* Take a deep breath. And now: the light of the Christ is renewed in me. Together: *"The light of the Christ is renewed in me."* Take a deep breath.

See, we need to be amazed by the birth -- amazed by Christmas. But also, we need to take it in personally, because it is a personal experience. It is only when we experience it personally that Christmas can have the great joy and meaning for us in our lives.

And the final thing is to not just be amazed, but LET THAT SPIRIT BE AMAZING IN US. You know, I believe that sometimes we don't allow ourselves to be as amazing as we truly are. You know, I bet every one of us has at least one area of our lives where we're not living as amazingly as we know we can live. And sometimes we think it is because of our problem, or it's because of our lack of education or obstacles, but I would say the greatest thing that holds us back from living as amazingly as we can is our own fear.

Remember that Marianne Williamson poem, "Our Deepest Fear"? It says, *"Our deepest fear is not our darkness, but it is our light."* It is our light -- it is our magnificence, it is our greatness -- that sometimes scares us. Sometimes we're afraid of massive success. Sometimes we're afraid of all our dreams coming true. Sometimes we're afraid to love deeper than we have ever loved before. You know, sometimes we're afraid to be amazing. We're afraid to own the magnificence of the Christ presence and spiritual power in us! Sometimes we're afraid to love wildly. We're afraid to follow our inner calling. We're afraid to live with passion. You know, we're afraid to change and transform our lives. Sometimes we allow fear to stop us from living the kind of lives we want, and to going after our dreams. And being fully who we came here to be.

So I ask you: In what way is Christmas calling to you to live more amazingly? To do something more amazing? Maybe in your family. Maybe in your work. Maybe in some other area of your life. Christmas is calling us to reignite that flame in us. To open ourselves to that light, and let that light shine, and be amazing.

So this Christmas, let us allow ourselves to be amazed by the birth of the Christ child. Let us allow ourselves to take it personally, and have it be cultivated in ourselves. And let us also allow that light and that Christ in us to be amazing. Because you really are amazing! And if you live from that place, you will have an amazing Christmas season!

God bless you all!

LIGHTING OF DISCIPLE CANDLES AND AFFIRMATIONS

Rev. Richard Maraj: You will notice that the large Candle in the center is already lit. That is the Christ candle. That represents the Christ Spirit -- that light of God -- in each and every one of us. That same light that Jesus fully expressed and demonstrated, and that Christ light that is in us in potential, waiting to be more fully expressed.

The 12 candles -- six on each side -- represent the 12 spiritual qualities that make up the fullness of our Christ potential. And we are going to begin now by lighting these individual candles. And, as we do light them, we will be speaking an affirmation on behalf of each and every one of them.

And so, when you speak these affirmations, I really encourage you to just own it. To literally speak those words as your own words to reignite and to allow that Christ quality to shine brighter in your life.

Rev. Lori and Rev. Richard will light, and then we will affirm together.

Rev. Lori Fleming: We light this candle for the disciple, Peter, the spiritual quality of Faith.

Rev. Richard Maraj: Together: I am filled with faith. I know the Christ presence blesses me and provides for me in all situations.

Rev. Lori Fleming: We light this candle for the disciple, John, the spiritual quality of Love.

Rev. Richard Maraj: Together: I am loving, caring and responsive to the needs of others. I am God's love expressing in the world.

Rev. Lori Fleming: We light this candle for the disciple, Andrew, the spiritual quality of Strength.

Rev. Richard Maraj: Together: I am strong and unafraid. I can do all things through God who strengthens me.

Rev. Lori Fleming: We light this candle for the disciple, James, son of Zebedee, the spiritual quality of Judgment.

Rev. Richard Maraj: Together: I am wise and discerning. I trust God's wisdom in all situations.

Rev. Lori Fleming: We light this candle for the disciple, Phillip, the spiritual quality of Power.

Rev. Richard Maraj: Together: God is the one presence and power in my life. The power of God moves through me now.

Rev. Lori Fleming: We light this candle for the disciple, Bartholomew, the spiritual quality of Imagination.

Rev. Richard Maraj: Together: I am a co-creator with God. I see great possibilities for my life.

Rev. Richard Rogers: We light this candle for the disciple, Thomas, and the spiritual quality of Understanding.

Rev. Richard Maraj: Together: I am understanding. I see the spiritual truth in every aspect of my life.

Rev. Richard Rogers: We light this next candle -- the eighth candle -- for the disciple, Matthew, and the spiritual quality of Will.

Rev. Richard Maraj: Together: My will is to do God's will. I listen to and follow God's guidance at all times.

Rev. Richard Rogers: We light this candle for the disciple, James, son of Alphaeus, and the spiritual quality of Order.

Rev. Richard Maraj: Together: My life unfolds in an orderly manner. All things are working together for my highest good.

Rev. Richard Rogers: We light this candle for Simon, and the spiritual quality of Zeal.

Rev. Richard Maraj: Together: I go forth with a spirit of enthusiasm and excitement to do what is mine to do.

Rev. Richard Rogers: We light this candle for Thaddeus, and the spiritual quality of Elimination.

Rev. Richard Maraj: Together: I release all guilt and resentment. I affirm God's peace. I am free!

Rev. Richard Rogers: We light this final candle for Judas, and the spiritual quality of Life.

Rev. Richard Maraj: Together: I am alive with God. Every cell of my body radiates life.

LIGHTING OF INDIVIDUAL CANDLES

Rev. Richard Maraj: So we invite you now to take your candle now, and light your candle at home, as we listen now to "O Holy Night."

SOLO:

Rusty Ferracane sings "O Holy Night"

O holy night, the stars are brightly shining
It is the night of our dear Savior's birth
Long lay the world in sin and error pining
'Til he appeared and the soul felt its worth
A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn

Fall on your knees
O hear the angels' voices
O night divine!
O night when Christ was born
O night divine!
O night, O night divine!

Truly he taught us to love one another
His law is love and his gospel is peace
Chains shall he break, so we all can live as brothers
And in his name, all oppression shall cease
Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raise we
Let all within us praise his holy name

Christ is the Lord!
Oh, praise his name forever
O night divine!
O night, when Christ was born
O night divine!
O night; O night divine!

WRAP UP/APPRECIATING THE LIGHT

Rev. Richard Maraj: I know you've already been looking at the beauty and the magnificence of the flame in front of you, and seeing that radiant glow that moves beyond it. And as brilliant as that flame is, know that there's a light even more brilliant and more bright and more dependable that is within you. That can guide you through any dark situations to something greater and something better. The Christ is born in you; that light of God shines in you! And let us all make a commitment to let that light shine brighter than it ever has today and as we step into this new year.

MERRY CHRISTMAS

Rev. Lori Fleming: And so, everyone, in this beautiful Christmas season, I invite you to remember to rebirth the Christ Spirit in your own hearts and souls and minds, and begin to embody the teachings of our Master Teacher, Jesus, who taught us to love unconditionally, to welcome strangers into our home, to heal ourselves and each other, and to forgive 70 x 70 or more ... until all we can feel is unconditional love. And so, from my heart to yours, a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year! Blessings!

Rev. Richard Rogers: I want to wish you a Merry Christmas! You know, my hope and my prayer for each and every one of us is that we give thanks for all the good in this year, and that we open to 2021 ready to experience all the good that God has for us. So I look forward to seeing all your little faces in the new year, and squeezing each and every one of you, because I know that there's a better day that's coming!

BENEDICTION

Rev. Richard Maraj: So thank you so much for joining us for our first virtual Candlelighting Service! I hope it was meaningful for you.

And now we just want to close with our benediction: "The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and grant you peace.

God bless you all, and Merry Christmas!

ENDING CHRISTMAS CAROL

Rusty Ferracane and the Unity of Phoenix Choir sing "Silent Night"

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.

Joy to the world! The Savior reigns;
Let men their songs employ,
While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat, repeat the sounding joy.