

CHRISTMAS CANDLELIGHTING SERVICE

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Rev. Richard Maraj

Rev. Richard Maraj: Christmas is the celebration of the good news of great joy for all people. It is the celebration of the fulfillment of a 700-year prediction that a Savior was coming to give hope to everyone.

So if you really think about it, Christmas is built on two powerful and very important things. The first one, of course, is the birth of the Christ Child. When you think about it, the birth of a baby is one of the great miracles of life. It's one of the most sacred and precious things. A baby is one of the most beautiful and awe-inspiring creatures in the world! You look at a baby; you cannot help but feel a sense of joy!

The essence and the presence of a baby is so powerful -- the energy it radiates is so powerful -- that we call them bundles of joy. And I think babies are way more powerful than we realize. Even though they can basically do nothing for themselves, they're very powerful! And you know why? Because, in an instant, they can open our hearts. They can soften us and make us more tender, and gentler and kinder. It opens us in a way that makes us see life through the eyes of beauty and kindness and peace and goodness. You look at a child, and you cannot help but think of the endless possibilities for their lives.

The second symbol of Christmas is light. And we have all kinds of light: Christmas tree lights; lights are everywhere! But it really is also about celebrating the light of God, and that Christ light that was born unto the world.

You know, candle light and light, itself, really is universal symbol of hope, of peace and love. And we light a candle in honor of someone: to remember them. Candle light also reflects comfort and healing. And we say things like, "*I see you in the Light.*" "*I'll put you in the Light ... surround you in the Light.*" Because we realize how powerful and incredible light is.

Jesus said, "*I am the light of the world.*" And in John he also said, "*The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never overcome the light.*"

So interestingly, a baby and light are two powerful symbols of the celebration of Christmas. And they are both more powerful than we realize.

Emmett Fox connects babies and light and Christmas in this wonderful quote. He says, "*The one thing that matters in our lives, from our birth to our death, is for us to find the Christ child. The inner light that is spoken of in the Bible as a child, is the Light of God ... The conscious discovery by you that you have this power within you, and your determination to make use of it: that is the birth of the child.*"

And that really is the celebration of Christmas: is to reawaken and reconnect to that Christ child -- to that light of God in us.

Jesus not only said, "*I am the light of the world*"; he said, "*You are the light of the world.*" He said, "*You are the temple of the Living God.*" "*The Spirit of God lives in you; the kingdom of God is within you.*" And the Apostle Paul said, "*Christ in you: your hope of glory.*"

So it makes it pretty clear that the Christ child is in us; the Christ is in us; the light of God is in us. But sometimes we don't feel it. Sometimes we don't connect to it. Sometimes we don't believe it. Sometimes -- in the frustration, and the difficulties and disappointments and heartaches of life -- we feel far and disconnected from that Christ light, that Christ child, that light of God that is in us. But the fact is: it is absolutely true.

There are great reminders in Scripture to help us reconnect when we feel lost, and we feel hopeless, and we feel like we're struggling.

The first one is, *"To enter the kingdom, you must become as a child."* It is to remind us to reconnect with that childlike Spirit in us. And the other thing it says is, *"Do not hide your light, but let your light shine. Don't put it under a bushel basket, but put it on the lamp post, where it gives light to everyone in the house."*

So Christmas is really about reigniting and reviving that Christ light and that light of God that is within each of us. To allow ourselves to truly reconnect with it. So there are three things that we can do to reconnect with the Christ child and that light in us -- to help us have a fuller and richer experience of Christmas.

And the first thing we need to do is to **BELIEVE** that that light and that Christ child is in you. Do you believe that the light of God is in you? Do you believe Paul's words when he says, *"Christ in you: your hope of glory"*? Do you believe that you're the light of the world? Do you believe that you're created in the image and likeness of God?

I found a really cool quote. It's simple, but it's really powerful. It says, *"Don't use your energy to worry; use your energy to believe."* To practice believing. Are you willing to open your heart to believe that that light is in you? That precious Christ child is in you?

One of my favorite Scriptures is this one. It says, *"He who believes in me shall do the works that I do and even greater things than these."* That is a pretty bold statement, don't you think? That we shall do the things that he has done, and even greater? How could that be, unless that same Christ potential was in each and every one of us? The question is: are you willing to believe? Are you willing to believe that is true for you?

One of the things I've always found interesting and very cool and inspiring is that Mary was told that she would give birth to the Christ child: something so much bigger and greater she believed that was possible for herself! And even though she was frightened, and didn't think it was possible, she was willing to believe. Something that good -- that amazing -- could be done in and through her.

And so the question is: do you believe that you are being called to do something greater? Do you believe that greatness is in you?

The second thing is ... First, to believe it. And the second one is: you've got to **NURTURE** it. Just like babies; you know, they've got to be fed regularly. They have to be nurtured for them to grow. And so, in the same way, that Christ Spirit in us needs to be nurtured. It needs time; it needs attention. It needs an opportunity for us to expand in it.

I truly believe ... I love the lines in "Joy to the World." It says, *"Let every heart prepare him room; and heaven and nature sing."* So how much time are you spending in the quiet to prepare your heart? To expand it? To allow it to be filled with that light? To be filled with love? To be filled with peace? It's one thing to have it, but it's another thing to nurture it: to keep cultivating it. To keep connecting it and expanding it in you.

Believe it. Nurture it. And the third one is to **LET IT SHINE**. You know, one of the things I really like is that, in that same Scripture about letting it shine, it actually gives us a warning. It says, *"Do not hide your light, but put it on a lamp stand, and let it shine to give everyone light."*

And the fact is: many times in our lives, we are hiding our light. That, when we focus on the negativity, we're hiding our light. When we hold grudges and resentment towards others, we're hiding our light. When we don't go after our dreams, we are hiding our light. When we withhold our love, we are hiding

our light. When we don't own our greatness, we are hiding our light. In what way are you hiding your light? And are you willing to own it? To claim it? And to allow it to shine brighter in every aspect of your life?

I always think it's really cool that, when you look at a baby, you can't help but feel good. And when you shut off the lights and look at all the lights on a Christmas tree, it's hard to not feel good. That looking at light and a child stirs up something in us that we are sometimes disconnected from, and forgotten. And it that Christ child; it is that light of the world; it is that light of God.

So this Christmas, I invite you to take some time to deepen your belief. To believe it. To nurture it. And to let it shine. Because that Christ light and that Christ child is truly in you.

God bless you. And Merry Christmas!