

OPENING MUSIC: Antonio Vivaldi – The Four Seasons, Winter

[Vivaldi Four Seasons: Winter \(L'Inverno\), original version. Freivogel & Voices of Music 29](https://youtu.be/ZPdk5GalDjo)

<https://youtu.be/ZPdk5GalDjo>

OPENING WORDS

We have crept out of our close and crowded houses into the night and morning, and we see what majestic beauties daily wrap us in their bosom. . . .

These enchantments are medicinal, they sober and heal us. These are plain pleasures, kindly and native to us. We come to our own, and make friends with matter. . . . We never can part with it; the mind loves its old home: as water to our thirst, so is the rock, the ground, to our eyes, and hands, and feet.

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) From "Nature," Essays: Second Series (1844)

CHALICE LIGHTING

We light this chalice as a symbol of the spark of life which abides within us and around us. May it be as a light in a dark night, a light in a window that welcomes the weary traveller home!

May it be as a light in the hand of a trusted friend that guides us along the path!

May it be as the light in the face of one we love, bright with joy!

HYMN 194: We Light the Flame (purple book)

Words David Andrew Usher © Used by permission Tune: 'Beamsley' David Dawson

We light the flame that kindles our devotions.
We lift our hearts in blessed community.
The mind has thoughts, the heart its true emotions,
We celebrate in worship full and free.
Our faith transcends the boundaries of oceans.
All shall be granted worth and dignity.

So many ways to witness to the wonder.
So many dreams by day for us to dare.
Yet, reaching our, each way is made the grander,
and love made bold for dreamers everywhere.
Diversity will never cast asunder
our common weal, our bonds of mutual care.

Infinite Spirit, dwell with us, we pray thee,
That we may share in life abundantly.
Forgive our sins, feed us with good bread daily,
With strength resist temptation steadfastly.
O God of life, sustain us now, and may we
with mindful hearts, be thankful constantly.

INTRODUCTORY PRAYER

Keep me, O God, from pettiness; let me be large in thought, in word, in deed. Let me be done with fault-finding and self-seeking. May I put away all pretence and meet everyone face to face without self-pity and without prejudice. May I never be hasty in judgment and always generous ... Let me take time for all things. Make me grow calm, serene and gentle. Teach me to put into action my better impulses, straightforward and unafraid. Grant that I may realise it is the little things of life that create differences and that in the big things of life we are one. And, O Lord God, let me not forget to be kind!

HOSPITALITY QUOTES FOR THE FESTIVE SEASON

"There is no hospitality like understanding." — [Vanna Bonta, *Flight: A Quantum Fiction Novel*](#)

"Hospitality is the practice of God's welcome by reaching across difference to participate in God's actions bringing justice and healing to our world in crisis." — [Letty M. Russell](#)

THE HOSPITALITY OF THE PIGEON

Once upon a time, there lived two pigeons. They were husband and wife. They spend their day looking for food. In the evening they would come and rest on their favourite tree in the forest.

One evening, the wife returned home early. A usual she was waiting for her husband, when suddenly it started raining. She started to worry. "Where are you, my dear? You never get so late," she whispered to herself.

Just then she saw a bird-catcher coming towards her. In a cage he had a pigeon. It was her husband. "Oh no, what shall I do now" I wish I can help my husband," she said. She desperately tried to distract the bird-catcher by flapping her wings, but all in vain.

Soon, it stopped raining. "Brrr! It is so cold," said the bird-catcher. His clothes were wet. He decided to sit under the same tree where the two pigeons lived.

The poor wife sat by her husband's cage. And she started to cry. The husband said. "Do not feel sad, dear. We now have a guest. This man is shivering and hungry. He needs your help." Hearing this, the wife flew around getting dry twigs. She made a fire for the bird-catcher. Then she looked at the bird-catcher and said, "You are our guest, since I have no food to offer, I will jump into this fire. In few minutes I will become an edible item for you. You can eat me."

By now, the bird-catcher was overwhelmed by the hospitality of the humble pigeon couple. He at once stopped the wife jumping into the fire.

He opened the cage and set the husband free. "I have been cruel and selfish. I will never trap any bird in my net again," said the bird-catcher and went away. The two pigeons were happy to be reunited.

READING 1 by Rev Cliff Reed: What Is Christmas?

Candles herald the advent of the child of sorrows.
Twinkling lights challenge winter's darkness and our own.
Green trees, red berries, tell of nature's endurance.
Carols evoke praise and celebration and sweet nostalgia.
Old tales speak of magic and miracle and human redemption.

The sugared story of a teenager, pregnant out of wedlock,
of a family seeking shelter – and refuge from murder.

Stars in frosty skies that bring to mind another star –
which guided kings in homage to infant innocence –
and led another king, in selfish fear, to seek its destruction.

Merriment, fellowship and joy in each other's happiness;
Deeds of generosity, kindness and so much love;
Prayers for peace and justice and the defeat of evil:
These are the things that are Christmas.

May God bless them and us and a world that sorely needs this
season's hope and promise.

HYMN 165: The Spirit Lives To Set Us Free (purple book)

Words: Anonymous.. Music 'Walk in the Light' Traditional Arr David Dawson
The Spirit lives to set us free,

walk, walk in the light.
It binds us all in unity,
walk, walk in the light.

Walk in the light (3 times) walk in the light of love.

The light that shines is in us all,
Walk, walk in the light.
We each must follow our own call,
walk, walk in the light.

Walk in the light (3 times) walk in the light of love.

Peace begins inside your heart,
walk, walk in the light.
We've got to live it from the start,
walk, walk in the light.

Walk in the light (3 times) walk in the light of love.

Seek the truth in what you see,
walk, walk in the light.
Then hold it firmly as can be,
walk, walk in the light.

Walk in the light (3 times) walk in the light of love.

The Spirit lives in you and me,
walk, walk in the light.
Its light will shine for all to see,
walk, walk in the light.

Walk in the light (3 times) walk in the light of love.

READING 2 by Mary Oliver: 'Snowy Night'

Last night, an owl
in the blue dark
tossed an indeterminate number
of carefully shaped sounds into
the world, in which,
a quarter of a mile away, I happened
to be standing.
I couldn't tell
which one it was –
the barred or the great-horned
ship of the air –
it was that distant. But, anyway,
aren't there moments
that are better than knowing something,
and sweeter? Snow was falling,
so much like stars
filling the dark trees
that one could easily imagine
its reason for being was nothing more
than prettiness. I suppose
if this were someone else's story
they would have insisted on knowing
whatever is knowable – would have hurried
over the fields
to name it – the owl, I mean.
But it's mine, this poem of the night,
and I just stood there, listening and holding out
my hands to the soft glitter
falling through the air. I love this world,
but not for its answers.
And I wish good luck to the owl,
whatever its name –
and I wish great welcome to the snow,
whatever its severe and comfortless
and beautiful meaning.

Mary Oliver's "Snowy Night" reminds us to pay attention and to be with what is present, whether we understand it or not. It invites us to welcome, instead of to shun, the dark and be open to what we don't "know" and instead step into wonder.

MUSIC: Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov – The Snow Maiden, 'Dance of the Tumblers' (3:44) - [Rimsky-Korsakov: The Snow Maiden - Suite: 4. Dance of the Tumblers \(Danse des bouffons\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=smYOCqFRMwE)

<https://youtu.be/smYOCqFRMwE?si=fORGp3Y6b6r04IZx>

REFLECTIVE ADDRESSA Unitarian Reflection on the Winter Solstice, Christmas, and Hanukkah

Good morning, and welcome, friends. Today, we come together in the spirit of peace and reflection, seeking to understand and appreciate the seasonal celebrations of the Winter Solstice, Christmas, and Hanukkah. As Unitarians, we celebrate the diversity of traditions that illuminate our shared humanity and offer us opportunities for spiritual growth. These three events—seemingly different in their origins and expressions—hold profound meaning, each rooted in light, renewal, and the power of community. Let us explore these themes together.

The Winter Solstice: A Time of Renewal

The Winter Solstice, this weekend, marks the longest night and the shortest day of the year in the Northern Hemisphere. It is a moment when the earth appears to pause, holding its breath before turning once again toward the sun. The solstice is a time of transition, a turning point in the natural world, signalling the return of light after the darkness. For many cultures, this moment of the year has been a source of reverence and celebration.

In many traditions, the Winter Solstice is seen as a time of rebirth. It is a moment of hope, as the days begin to lengthen, and the light gradually returns. For our ancestors, who depended on the rhythms of the seasons, the solstice was a critical marker of survival. It meant that the harsh winter would eventually give way to the warmth of spring and the abundance of summer.

For us today, living in a world of artificial lights and constant activity, the Winter Solstice still holds important lessons. It is a reminder that even in our darkest moments, light is always on the horizon. Just as the earth turns towards the sun, we too can turn towards hope, towards renewal, and towards the light that exists in the world and in our hearts. As we gather in community, we can reflect on the cycles of our lives—times of darkness, but also moments of return, when we rediscover our sense of purpose, our hope, and our connection to the world around us.

Christmas: A Celebration of Love and Peace

For many of us, Christmas is a time of profound significance. While, arguably, its roots lie in the Christian tradition, the celebration of Christmas has become a broader cultural observance, a time for families and communities to gather, share meals, exchange gifts, and reflect on the values of love, generosity, and peace. At its core, Christmas is about the birth of a child—Jesus—who represents the possibility of redemption, the promise of new beginnings, and the power of love to transform the world.

Though the religious meaning of Christmas may differ for each of us, the themes of love, peace, and hope are universal. In the midst of the cold and dark winter, Christmas lights shine brightly, not just as decorations but as symbols of the light that resides in each of us.

This season invites us to reflect on our capacity to love one another, to reach out with kindness, to offer gifts not just of material things but of our time, our energy, and our hearts.

As Unitarians, we may not adhere to all the tenets of Christianity, but we can still find deep meaning in the story of Christmas. The idea that love has the power to overcome fear, hatred, and division is a message that resonates with our commitment to justice and compassion. We may not view Jesus as the divine Saviour in the traditional sense, but we can certainly admire the ideals of peace, compassion, and nonviolence that his life exemplified. These are values that transcend religious boundaries and speak to the shared humanity that unites us all.

At Christmas, we are reminded of the importance of giving and receiving in ways that go beyond the material. The gifts we exchange should not only represent our love for one another but also reflect our commitment to the common good. How can we extend the generosity of the season to those who are less fortunate? How can we use our resources and our influence to bring light and hope to those who are struggling? These are questions that invite us to take the spirit of Christmas into the world with us, not just during the holiday season but throughout the year.

Hanukkah: A Festival of Lights and Resilience

Hanukkah, the Jewish Festival of Lights, also falls during this season, often coinciding with Christmas or the Winter Solstice. Hanukkah celebrates the rededication of the Second Temple in Jerusalem and the miraculous survival of the Jewish people despite overwhelming odds. The story of Hanukkah reminds us of the importance of resilience in the face of adversity, the power of faith, and the enduring strength of community.

At the heart of Hanukkah is the story of a small group of Jewish rebels, the Maccabees, who overcame the oppressive forces of the Seleucid Empire. After reclaiming the desecrated Temple, they sought to relight the menorah, the sacred lamp in the Temple, but found only enough oil for one day. Miraculously, the oil lasted for eight days, giving them enough time to prepare more oil and maintain the light. This miracle became the foundation of the Hanukkah celebration, which lasts for eight days and nights, during which a candle is lit on the menorah (or rather the Hanukkiah) each evening.

The theme of light is central to Hanukkah, much like it is to the Winter Solstice and Christmas. But in Hanukkah, the light represents more than just hope or renewal—it symbolises resilience, the triumph of the human spirit over oppression, and the ability to maintain one's faith in the face of darkness. The lighting of the menorah is a reminder that, no matter the circumstances, we have the power to bring light into the world. Each flicker of the candle is an act of resistance, a statement that the darkness cannot extinguish the light of justice, hope, and truth.

Hanukkah also reminds us of the importance of community. The holiday is traditionally celebrated with family gatherings, communal meals, and the sharing of stories and

traditions. It is a time for bonding, for passing down cultural and religious values, and for reminding one another of the strength that comes from unity. In a world that often seems divided and fractured, Hanukkah calls us to remember the power of coming together, of supporting one another, and of standing strong in the face of challenges.

Common Threads: Light, Hope, and Renewal

Though the Winter Solstice, Christmas, and Hanukkah each have their own unique origins, they share common themes that transcend religious boundaries. At the heart of all three is the idea of light—a symbol of hope, renewal, and resilience. The solstice marks the return of the sun, Christmas celebrates the birth of a child who embodies peace and love, and Hanukkah commemorates the miraculous survival of a people against all odds. Each of these celebrations calls us to turn towards the light in our own lives and to share that light with others.

As we reflect on these three observances, we are reminded that no matter how dark the world may seem, the light of hope, love, and community will always shine through. We can all be a part of that light, whether by offering kindness to a stranger, working for justice in our communities, or simply being present for those we love. In this season of darkness and light, let us commit to being bearers of light, not just for ourselves, but for the world.

May the spirit of the Winter Solstice, Christmas, and Hanukkah inspire us all to live with compassion, to seek out the light even in the darkest moments, and to work together to build a world of peace, justice, and love.

Amen. So be it.

2 MINUTES OF SILENCE FOR MEDITATION/REFLECTION/CONTEMPLATION

MUSIC VIDEO: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart – Three German Dances, 'Sleigh Ride'

[W. A. Mozart - German Dance No. 3, K. 605 "Sleigh Ride" \(Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra\) | 9/15 -](#)

AFFIRMATION: 243 (purple book) – read, not sung
From 'Songs for Living'

This is my church. It is composed of people like me.

We make it what it is.

I want it to be a church that is a lamp to the path of pilgrims,
leading them to Goodness, Truth and Beauty.

It will be if I am.

It will make generous gifts to many cause, if I am a generous giver.

It will bring other people into its worship and fellowship,
if I bring them.

It will be friendly if I am. Its pews will be filled, if I fill them.

It will do great work if I work.

It will be a church of loyalty and love, of fearlessness and faith; a church with a noble spirit – if I, who make it what it is, am filled with these.

Therefore, I shall dedicate myself to the task of being all of these things I want my church to be.

OFFERTORY PRAYER

This church is sustained by what we are able to bring to it:

Our time and our energy,

Our love and our resources.

This morning's collection will be gratefully received after the service to support the work of this congregation. Please give generously.

POETRY by Darina Stoyanova – Prayer for Healing

I realize that the body is not separate from the mind

As I let go my old attitude toward my body

I appreciate the influence of the spirit and soul

And I embrace my body and my entire self

My body is a reflection of my thoughts

As I give myself positive affirmations

I release my negative emotions and thoughts

And I let my body be healed as well as my mind

I am forgetting that I am not my disease

And that I can stop the disease to please

I am not my mistakes and my failures

And I am not my past and my pains

I am awakening from my illusions

I fear and I choose not to

I suffer and I choose not to

I am sick and I choose not to

I am willing to get better and heal

I am lifted above the areas of my pain

I am rising beyond my suffering

I am releasing my desperation

I understand and accept my insecurities

I feel compassion toward my pains

I surrender my terror for it is not real

I surrender my fear as I surrender all things

I open my heart, my soul and my body

I know the strength and the power of faith

I feel the process of cleansing and

I welcome the miracle of healing

May every cell of my body be healthy

May every feeling of my soul be radiant

May every thought of my being be vibrant

May every action be aligned with love

I accept my imperfections as

I release my fears and doubts

I invite a healing light as

I become illumined and light

I trust the process and the journey

I receive peace and calmness

I learn from my mistakes and

I also learn from happiness

I wish to be released from the pain

I want to rise up joyful and strong

I will be born anew into health

And into happiness, peace and love

I am aware of the need to forgive

I am grateful for the opportunity to grow

I am confident that I will succeed

I am expecting my freedom and healing

I listen well to my body

I follow my intuition

I find all the knowledge and

I apply all the insights

I search for the lessons within

I release all shame and blaming

I let go of all false thinking

I let myself be free and happy

I cast out all the impurities

From my body, heart and soul

I do my best to fill myself with love

I expect a miracle with relaxed anticipation

I am my own best doctor and advisor

I am a catalyst for healing

I am a producer of health

I am a creator of happiness

Thank you for my healing body

Thank you for my gentle soul

Thank you for my strong spirit

Thank you for the chance to heal

I am willing to be enlightened as

I am blessed with this wisdom

I deserve to be healthy and happy and

I claim my perfect health again

I am ONE and I am LOVING.

I am HERE and I am NOW.

I am HEALED and I am WHOLE.

Thank YOU. Let it Be! And SO IT IS!

HYMN 94 'Welcome Hannukah': (purple book)

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Music: 'Grace soit Rendue' French Canadian Tune arr David Dawson.

Let us welcome Channukah,
Jewish feast of light,
when quite unexpected and mid desperate plight,
came to tired people with their spirits low,
plentiful resources of God's love to show:

*Alleluia! Alleluia!**Peace on Earth, goodwill everyone, Alleluia!*

Let us welcome Yuletide
in this northern clime:
when in deep December
once again its time
for us to make merry
and the long nights spurn,
bid the short days lengthen
and the sun return.

*Alleluia! Alleluia!**Peace on Earth, goodwill everyone, Alleluia!*

Let us welcome Christmas
when an infant smiles
and from manger cradle
gently reconciles
all whose hearts are boken,
or who live with pain,
so that every person
may be whole again.

*Alleluia! Alleluia!**Peace on Earth, goodwill everyone, Alleluia!*

At this festive season
let us all rejoice,
send the world a message
With a common voice.
Let our festive greeting
be that wars shall cease
and that all earth's people
learn to live in peace.

*Alleluia! Alleluia!**Peace on Earth, goodwill everyone, Alleluia!***CLOSING WORDS**

We are blessed with an abundance of good things for which we are truly thankful, as long as we remember them.

We are privileged with great freedom and power, for which in return we act with responsibility.

Plymouth Unitarian Church Rev Dr Edgar Mihas ' Seasonal reflections' Sunday December 22nd 2024
We are lucky to have shared this time and space together, because we are lucky to have each other.

May the spirit of this place and these friends go with us into the busy city!

Closing video: George Frideric Handel – Messiah, 'Pastoral Symphony'

[Boston Baroque — "Rejoice greatly" from Handel's Messiah with Amanda Forsythe - YouTube](#)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch/v=utzou53kym0>