

Opening Music: [O Come, O Come, Emmanuel - Enya](#) 3 mins 40 secs

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!

1st Hymn Purple No. 21: 'Come and find the quiet centre'

Come and find the quiet centre
in the crowded life we lead,
find the room for hope to enter,
find the space where we are freed:
clear the chaos and the clutter,
clear our eyes, that we can see
all the things that really matter,
be at peace and simply be.

Silence is a friend who claims us,
cools the heat and slows the pace,
God it is who speaks and names us,
knows our being, touches base,
making space within our thinking,
lifting shades to show the sun.
raising courage when we're shrinking,
finding scope for faith begun.

In the Spirit let us travel,
open to each other's pain;
let our lives and fears unravel,
celebrate the space we gain:
there's a place for deepest dreaming,
there's a time for heart to care;
in the Spirit's lively scheming
there is always room to spare.

Words by Shirley Erena Murray b. 1931 © 1992 Hope Publishing Company, Carol Stream, IL 60188. All rights reserved. Used with permission.

Music: Lewis folk melody, traditional, arranged by John L. Bell, b.1949.

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!

Short Story 1: The Candle's Light

Once there was a candle flickering dimly in darkness — its flame flickered uncertainly fearing being extinguished by outside forces despite yearning fiercely igniting hearts illuminating spaces surrounding them!

One night as darkness enveloped everything around — the candle embraced vulnerability sharing warmth freely shining brightly amidst shadows encouraging others nearby ignite their flames too creating radiant symphony dancing together harmoniously weaving connections spreading warmth far across wide communities!

This tale symbolises embracing vulnerabilities shining light amidst struggles empowering others ignite hope alongside our own self! By illuminating paths for those feeling lost — we cultivate unity building bridges strengthened through shared experiences bringing forth profound transformations inspiring collective growth across diverse communities enriching lives touching countless hearts along way!

2nd Hymn Purple no. 94: ' Let us welcome Hanukkah'

Words □ *Andrew M. Hill. Used by permission.*

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!

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 broken,
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!

1st Reading by Jadine Lydia – Momentary Stillness

there's something so delicate
about the winter solstice,
as if all living creatures
are hung on the threads
of momentary stillness,
waiting for the earth
to breathe life again –
like the millisecond
before a flower bud opens,
like the oceans lull

before the turn of the tide,
like the breath before
a newborn baby's cry.
and in this momentary
stillness, we must find hope,
that all will be well.
all will be replenished.
all will be renewed,
once more.

2nd Reading 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.

Plymouth Unitarian Church 'Winter Solstice Reflections' Rev Dr Edgar Mihas Sunday 21st December 2025
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: [Coventry Carol - arr. Martin Shaw](#) video – 2mins 45 secs

3rd Reading: St Luke tells of the birth of Jesus (Luke, Chapter 2)

AND it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. And all went to be taxed, everyone into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

2nd Short Story: The Story of the Angry Young Man and The Buddha

It is said that one day the Buddha was walking through a village. A very angry and rude young man came up and began insulting him, saying all kinds of rude words.

The Buddha was not upset by these insults. Instead, he asked the young man, "Tell me, if you buy a gift for someone, and that person does not take it, to whom does the gift belong?"

The young man was surprised to be asked such a strange question and answered, "It would belong to me because I bought the gift."

The Buddha smiled and said, "That is correct. And it is exactly the same with your anger. If you become angry with me and I do not get insulted, then the anger falls back on you. You are then the only one who becomes unhappy, not me. All you have done is hurt yourself."

3rd Hymn Green 97: 'The universal incarnation'

Around the crib all peoples throng
In honour of the Christ-child's birth,
And raise again the ancient song:
'Goodwill to all, and peace on earth.'

But not alone on Christmas morn
Was God made one with humankind:
Each time a girl or boy is born,
Incarnate deity we find.

This Christmastide let us rejoice
And celebrate our human worth,
Proclaiming with united voice
The miracle of every birth.

Round every crib all people throng
To honour God in each new birth,
And raise again the ancient song:
'Goodwill to all, and peace on earth on earth.'

Music: 'Solothurn' Swiss Traditional melody har David Dawson Used by permission

Words: John Andrew Storey used by permission

REFLECTIVE ADDRESS

At this turning point of the year, we gather at the edge of darkness and light. The Winter Solstice marks the longest night, the deepest hush of the sun's retreat, and yet — quietly, almost imperceptibly — the moment when the light begins its return. Across cultures and centuries, human beings have paused at this threshold. We have watched the sky. We have lit fires and candles. We have told stories. And we have reminded ourselves that darkness, however long, is not the end of the story.

For Unitarians, the Winter Solstice speaks not as a doctrine but as a truth written into the fabric of the universe. It is a truth we feel in our bodies and see in the natural world: cycles of loss and renewal, of rest and rebirth. The Winter Solstice does not deny the darkness. It honours it. It acknowledges that growth often begins underground, unseen, and that hope is not the absence of night, but the promise held within it.

It is no accident that so many religious traditions place festivals of light at this moment in the year. Christmas and Hanukkah (from tonight until Monday 22nd December 2025), though distinct in history and theology, arise from the same human need: to affirm meaning, courage, and moral clarity when the world feels cold, uncertain, or overshadowed.

In the Christian story of Christmas, we hear of light entering the world not through power or triumph, but through vulnerability. A child is born not in a palace but in a stable, to parents on the margins, under an empire that knows nothing of his name. The Gospel of John speaks of a light that shines in the darkness, and the darkness does not overcome it. For Unitarians, this story need not be read as a supernatural interruption of nature, but as a profound metaphor: that compassion, justice, and love are born again and again in ordinary lives, often in unlikely places.

The Christmas story reminds us that transformation does not always arrive with certainty or control. It arrives fragile. It asks to be protected. It grows because people choose to care for it. And in that sense, Christmas is deeply aligned with the Winter Solstice itself — a moment when the returning light is so faint it can be missed unless we are paying close attention.

As we saw in Hymn 94, Hanukkah, too, is a festival of light born from struggle. It commemorates a people who resisted erasure, who refused to let their faith and culture be extinguished by empire. The story of the oil — burning longer than expected — has become a

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symbol not of magical abundance, but of perseverance. One small flame, faithfully tended, can last through the night.

From a Unitarian perspective, Hanukkah speaks powerfully to our shared ethical heritage. It is a reminder that religious freedom, cultural identity, and moral conscience are worth defending. It teaches that hope is not passive optimism but active commitment: lighting the candle again tonight, even when tomorrow feels uncertain.

What unites the Winter Solstice, Christmas, and Hanukkah is not theology, but wisdom. Each teaches that light is precious because it is vulnerable. Each insists that human beings have a role to play in sustaining it. The sun may return on its own, but justice does not. Compassion does not. Peace does not. These require hands, hearts, and courage.

In a world that often feels caught in prolonged darkness — marked by conflict, climate crisis, loneliness, and fear — these stories matter deeply. They do not promise that suffering will vanish. Instead, they remind us that meaning is forged in response to suffering. That dignity can be reclaimed. That communities can gather, even now, and say: we will not surrender to despair.

The Winter Solstice invites us to slow down, to rest, to acknowledge what has been lost this year. It gives us permission to grieve, to feel tired, to admit that we cannot always be strong. Christmas invites us to imagine new beginnings born from love. Hanukkah invites us to act — to kindle light deliberately, repeatedly, and publicly, especially after last Sunday's antisemitic attack against the Jewish community of Bondi in Queensland, Australia, who had gathered to light in public the first candle of Hanukkah.

As Unitarians, we are not asked to choose among these traditions, but to listen to them; to hear the truths they offer and weave them into a living tapestry of shared humanity. We affirm that wisdom is not owned by any one people or creed. It emerges wherever humans seek meaning with honesty and care. So, what might this season ask of us?

Perhaps it asks us to tend our inner light: to protect the parts of ourselves that are gentle, idealistic, or still healing. Perhaps it asks us to be bearers of light for one another — to show up, to speak kindly, to resist cruelty, to stand with those whose lights are threatened or dimmed. Perhaps it asks us to trust that even when progress feels invisible, something is shifting, something is turning, something is slowly, faithfully growing.

The Winter Solstice assures us that the sun will return. Christmas assures us that love can be born anew. Hanukkah assures us that even a small flame can endure. Together, they offer not certainty, but courage.

May we leave this season with eyes attuned to the light — however faint, however feeble — and hands ready to shelter it. May we remember that we are part of an ancient human practice: gathering in the darkness, telling stories, and choosing hope; and may the light we kindle here carry us forward, day by day, into a longer, brighter, and more compassionate year. Amen. So be it.

Music: Hymn 5 [VOCES8: O Nata Lux by Thomas Tallis](#) (video: 2mins 7secs)

AFFIRMATION: 242 purple book – (to be read, not sung, by everyone)

May the deeds we do with our hands,
and the words we speak with our lips,
and the thoughts that we think with our minds,
and the things we feel in our hearts,
be at all times worthy of the divine spark within us.

Traditional

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 immediately 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!

4th Hymn Green 82: 'People look east'

People, look east! The time is near
of the crowning of the year.
Make your house fair as you are able,
trim the hearth, and set the table.
People, look east, and sing today:
Love, the guest, is on the way.

Furrows, be glad! Though earth is bare,
one more seed is planted there:
give up your strength the seed to nourish,
that, in course, the flower may flourish.
People, look east, and sing today:
Love, the rose, is on the way.

Stars, keep the watch! When night is dim,
one more light the bowl shall brim,
shining beyond the frosty weather,
bright as sun and moon together.
People, look east, and sing today:
Love, the star, is on the way.

*French carol, Music: 'Besancon Carol, Har. John Stainer 1840 – 1901
Words Eleanor Farjeon, 1881 – 1965 from Oxford Book of Carols by permission of David
Higham Associates, Ltd.*

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.

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 Music video: [Thomanerchor: "Jauchzet frohlocket" by Johann Sebastian Bach - YouTube](#) video, 4mins 26secs