

Worship transcript for December 24, 2020, 7 pm

Prelude (Jubilee Singers)

“Mary Had a Baby”

Mary Had a Baby

Mary had a baby, Oh my Lord!

Mary had a baby, Oh my Lord!

Mary had a baby,

Where was he born? Born in a manger low.

Where was he born? Born in a manger low.

Mary had a baby ooh, oh my Lord!

What did they call Him? Some call Him one thing.

What did they call Him! But I'll call Him another.

What did they call Him? Some say Immanuel.

What did they call Him? I'll call Him Sweet Little Jesus Boy.

I'll call Him Jesus

He is called King Jesus, Wonderful counselor, Mighty God,

Everlasting Father, He's the Prince of Peace.

Mary had a baby, ooh, oh my Lord.

Call to Worship/Chalice Lighting (Rev. Louise Green)

Welcome to Christmas Eve with All Souls Unitarian DC! I am Rev. Louise Green, Minister of Congregational Care. We are so glad you are here from so many places, whether as long-time congregants, newer arrivals, or our very special guests. Let us fully breathe into this moment, and set aside holiday flurry and bustle, so that we may be present together.

At each Unitarian Universalist service, we light our chalice, symbol of the Light within us, and the sacred container around us. I invite you to light a candle also, and to imagine us all connected by Light, from hundreds of locations.

Algernon Blackwood said, Ritual is the passageway of the soul into the Infinite. Our Christmas ritual passageway takes us into an ancient tale of hope, hardship, and wonder. This year, we kindle Christmas chalices both expectant and weary, in grief and in joy. We await the beauty of story and song, anticipating a complicated and mysterious telling, one which has been retold for centuries.

Tonight, we are beautiful living members of the great family of All Souls. Welcome.

Carol

“O Come, All Ye Faithful”

O Come, All Ye Faithful

O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant,

O come ye, o come ye to Bethlehem;

Come and adore Him born the King of angels:

[Refrain] O come, let us adore Him, O come let us adore Him,
O come let us adore Him, Christ the Lord.

See how the shepherds, summoned to His cradle,
Leave g their flocks, draw nigh with lowly fear;
We too will thither bend our joyful footsteps:
[Refrain]

Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation,
Sing all ye citizens of heav'n above;
Glory to God in the highest:
[Refrain]

Child, for the people poor and in the manger,
Glad, we embrace thee with love and awe;
Who would not love thee, loving us so dearly?
[Refrain]

Welcome (Rev. Kathleen Rolenz)

Welcome to the All Souls Christmas Eve 2020 online gathering. I'm Rev. Kathleen Rolenz, the Interim Senior Minister

If these weren't Covid-times, you would have already been treated to the annual holiday Christmas Pageant, with all its accompanying costumes and chaos;
And tonight we would be in the sanctuary with a special service for children and families.
But we must make do with the materials at hand,
and we have created a service that combines – the best of both services;
by telling this ancient story with a cast and crew composed of All Souls children and families;
and songs and music offered to us from our own Jubilee Singers and Youth Choirs.

If you haven't already done so, I encourage you to get a candle to light at the end of tonight's service.
And though you'll be on mute, we encourage you to sing along with the carols.

Christmas Eve is an invitation to double down on a strange and wonderful vision
That we all seem to have tucked away somewhere in our practical, work-a-day hearts; a vision of hope
for all humankind.

This special night has always been about possibilities; the possibility that a child can grow up and remind
us of the things we yearn for made more clear by the brightness of a star: Peace among nations; peace
among all peoples and peace within our hearts.

So – dim the lights, and settle in, and get your candle ready – for the magic of Christmas Eve is about to
begin:

Anthem (Jubilee Singers)

“This Christmastide”

This Christmastide

Green and silver, red and gold, and a story born of old.

Truth and love and hope abide, This Christmastide. This Christmastide.

Holly, ivy mistletoe, And the gently falling snow.

[Refrain]

From a simple ox's stall came the greatest gift of all.

[Refrain]

Children sing sing of peace and joy at the birth of one small boy.

[Refrain]

Let the bells ring loud and clear, ring out now for all to hear.

[Refrain]

Trumpets sound and voices raise in an endless stream of praise.

[Refrain]

Green and silver, red and gold, and a story born of old.

[Refrain]

Christmas Prayer (Rev. Green)

Would you pray or meditate with me, as is your practice?

Loving Spirit of Life, Holy One of Many Names, we remember the generous graces of children tonight.

The wisdom of youth and young adults, and the faithful presence of all kinds of creatures around us.

Help us to recognize the deeper story at the heart of Christmas: the hard struggle of a family displaced from home country, search to find hospitality and food, unexpected birth amidst watchful animals in an outdoor shelter. The arrival of a great gift in most surprising circumstances.

If we remain watchful, we will witness these very same struggles and graces now. On this Christmas Eve, we learn again how the least regarded may come bearing great gifts. Let us be open to the coming of the Light, wherever it is given. Amen.

We invite you now to what we call Zoom Beholding: you may change to gallery view if you are on speaker view, and scroll through the many faces and homes that are represented. We will stay muted, please, and take a couple of minutes to wave a heartfelt virtual hello.

Offering (Rev. Green)

Our entire offering for Christmas Eve will go to our community partner: La Clinica del Pueblo, in English...

The People's Clinic. La Clinica has worked for over 35 years with the regional Latino/Latina community.

(Rose/Gary: www.lcdp.org for chat.) Funds will be collected by All Souls and then presented as one check in the New Year. Your dollars will fund medical services, mental health and addiction support, community health action, language access, and strategies for change.

Our alliance goes back for decades, including hosting the annual Posada, a large event in Spanish with pageant, gifts, music and Santa. I first experienced the beautiful mayhem of La Posada in 2004, with over 300 children and their families celebrating exuberantly in our Sanctuary. A very different Posada happened online this week, of course. This painful year of health crisis, anti-immigrant backlash, and economic insecurity has been tough for our Latinx neighbors.

This hardship is landing on real people with poignant stories. We dedicate this offering to the family and friends of Moisés Santos, a 44-yr-old immigrant from El Salvador. Moisés died on our own All Souls front steps last Friday, as he sought shelter in the cold. He was experiencing new addiction struggles, and 2020 job and home loss as a direct result of the pandemic. His father and extended family is in El Salvador. His sister works at La Clinica; another sister and the 20-yr-old daughter of Moisés live a block up 16th St.

We grieve this hard loss and so many more. There are thousands more struggling in similar ways tonight in DC, so your offering will make a difference. Please ponder how you might give very generously to the vital and life-saving work of La Clinica del Pueblo. Giving information will appear in the chat and on a slide. Thank you for your gifts to our neighbors.

Anthem (All Souls Junior Choir; animation by Zachary Combs)

“Winter Song” (Sara Bareilles)

This is my winter song to you
The storm is coming soon
It rolls in from the sea

My voice, a beacon in the night
My words will be your light
To carry you to me

Is love alive?

They say that things just cannot grow
Beneath the winter snow
Or so I have been told

They say we’re buried far
Just like a distant star
I simply cannot hold

Is love alive?

This is my winter song
December never felt so wrong
‘cause you’re not where you belong
inside my arms

I still believe in summer days
the seasons always change
and life will find a way

I’ll be your harvester of light
and send it out tonight
So we can start again

Is love alive?

Pageant

Kathleen: Tonight is a special night, as we retell an extraordinary story that begins with an ordinary moment. For Long ago, in Bethlehem of Judea, a babe called Jesus was born in a stable low. The story of his birth has been told and retold for generations, yet the story remains forever new, ever able to kindle hope in a troubled world. We tell the Christmas story to celebrate this special child, Jesus, whose message of peace and compassion may yet redeem the world. And we tell it to celebrate all children. For we believe that each child born is a son or daughter of God, and that every child born has the potential to redeem a bruised and broken world

Helen: The Unitarian Universalist thinker and religious educator, Sophia Fahs writes:

Each night a child is born is a holy night.

No angels herald their beginnings.

No prophets predict their future courses.

No Wisemen see a star to show where to find the babe that will save humankind.

Yet each night a child is born is a holy night.

Kathleen: Let us now prepare our hearts to hear this story anew.

“The Annunciation of a Woman” by Harmonia Rosales

Sofia: It all began when the Angel Gabriel appeared to Mary, the wife of the carpenter, Joseph of Nazareth, with news from God.

Ella: Do not be afraid, Mary, for you shall bear a son, and you call him Jesus. He will be a great leader and peacemaker.

Julia: Let it be, according to your word.

Angels We have Heard On High (All Souls Jubilee Singers)

Angels We Have Heard on High

Gloria in excelsis Deo.

Angels we have heard on high sweetly singing o’er the plains,
And the mountains in reply echoing their joyous strains.

Gloria in excelsis Deo.

Gloria in excelsis Deo, in excelsis Deo.

Come to Bethlehem and see him whose birth the angels sing.

Come adore on bended knee, Christ the Lord, the newborn King.

Gloria in excelsis Deo.

Gloria in excelsis Deo, in excelsis Deo, in excelsis Deo,
in excelsis Deo, in excelsis Deo, in excelsis Deo!

‘Town Crier Reading the News, C.1925’ Frank Dadd

Jonah: (With horn or decree) Hear ye, hear ye! Emperor Caesar Augustus requires everyone to return to the city of their birth to be counted and taxed. (Townspeople react)

Journey To Bethlehem “ by Maria Hunt

Helen: Mary and Joseph had to travel a long way from Nazareth, where they lived, to the town of Bethlehem. By this time the Angel's message had come true, and Mary was due to give birth any day now. But they set out from Nazareth and began their journey. However, when they got to Bethlehem, there are so many people in the city for the census that they couldn't find a place to stay.

The Census at Bethlehem – Pieter Bruegel the Elder

Luther: Good evening. We just got here from Nazareth, and we're looking for a place to stay.

John (Innkeeper #1): Sorry, we're full.

Sofia: So they tried another inn, but again,

Logan (Innkeeper #2): (Holds up large "No Vacancy" sign)

Luther: Oh I see. No vacancy.

Sofia: Now it was getting dark and chilly. (Shepherds, Animals & Townspeople shivering) But they had to keep trying.

In the Bleak Midwinter Recording (All Souls Jubilee Singers)

In the Bleak Midwinter

In the bleak midwinter frosty wind made moan,
Earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone;
Snow had fallen, snow on snow, snow on snow,
In the bleak midwinter long ago.

Christ a homeless stranger, so the gospels say,
Cradled in a manger and a bed of hay;
In the bleak midwinter stable place sufficed
Mary and her baby, Jesus Christ.

Once more child and mother weave their magic spell,
Touching hearts with wonder words can never tell;
In the bleak midwinter, in this world of pain,
Where our hearts are open love is born again.

Sofia: Finally, at the 3rd inn, though it was full, the Innkeeper saw that Mary was about to give birth and offered their animal stable for Mary and Joseph to spend the night.

Louisa: (Innkeeper #3): (Indicates dramatically for Mary and Joseph to follow her)

Annunciation to the Shepherds" by Taddeo Gaddi

Sofia: "And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And the Angel of the lord came upon them, and they were afraid, (Shepherds and sheep looked surprised or scared) but she said unto them:

Ella (alone on screen): "Behold, I bring to you tidings of great joy which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day, a savior. And this shall be a sign unto you, ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger."

Shot of Mary (Julia) and Joseph (Luther) looking down from each side of Jesus (Naomi)

Helen: Before anyone else arrived, the animals were there to welcome the new baby.

The Friendly Beasts (All Souls Jubilee Singers)

Jesus, our brother, kind and good, was humbly born in a stable rude,
And the friendly beasts around him stood, Jesus, our brother, kind and good.

"I," said the donkey, shaggy and brown, "I carried his mother uphill and down,
I carried her safely to Bethlehem town; I," said the donkey, shaggy and brown.

"I," said the cow, all white and red, "I gave him my manger for his bed,
I gave him hay to pillow his head, I," said the cow, all white and red.

"I," said the sheep with curly horn, "I gave him my word for his blanket warm,
He wore my coat on Christmas morn, I," said the sheep with curly horn.

"I," said the dove from rafters high, "I cooed him to sleep that he should not cry,
We cooed him to sleep, my mate and I, I," said the dove from rafters high.

And all the breasts, by some good spell, in the stable dark were glad to tell
Of the gifts they gave Emmanuel, the gifts they gave to Emmanuel.

Helen: After the animals had welcomed the babe, news of the birth spread quickly—it was shouted from the mountaintops—and soon other visitors began to appear.

Go Tell it On the Mountain (All Souls Children's Choir)

Go tell it on the mountain
Over the hills and everywhere!
Go tell it on the mountain
that Jesus Christ is born!

While shepherds kept their watching
o'er silent flocks by night
Behold throughout the heavens
There shone a holy light

Go tell it on the mountain
Over the hills and everywhere!
Go tell it on the mountain
that Jesus Christ is born!

The shepherds feared and trembled
when lo above the earth

Rang out the angel chorus
That hailed the baby's birth

Go tell it on the mountain
Over the hills and everywhere!
Go tell it on the mountain
that Jesus Christ is born!

Sofia: There were in the east three Magi who heard of the holy birth and, following a star, travelled from the ends of the earth to meet the new babe. "And Lo, (shot of star lighting) the star which they had seen, came to rest over the place where the child was born. When they came to the stable and saw the babe, they presented him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh."

March of the Kings

Prayer (Rev. Rolenz)

As we prepare to enter into this most silent of nights – a time of worship, a time of awe, a time of wonder, please get a candle ready so that we can share together in this time.

Take a moment now – to settle down – to quiet your minds and your hearts – to take some deep breaths – for this night has long been anticipated by children who celebrate Christmas all over the world.

It is a night for and about children – children and all that they bring to to the world
As infants they come into the world crying, startled by the lights and sounds around them,
and it is up to us to prepare for them a place in the world

Children bring us a fresh perspective, a more raw and real insight than we are accustomed; they look at the world and ask "why?" Why is the sky blue? Why do stars twinkle?

Spirit of Christmas Eve, remind us once again of the courage of this one baby, who grew up and continued to ask "why."

Why are some people seen as better than others?
Why do some people have a lot and others have little?
Why isn't there peace among the nations?
Why is there so little peace in our own hearts?

O Spirit of this Night, remind us to not be afraid to ask "why" and to listen to the voices of the least and littlest among us. I invite you now to sing this ancient and beloved carol, Silent Night. Although you too will be silent, we can use our imaginations to hear our voices one next to other, as we light candles of hope for a bright and peaceful season and new year.

Carol (Jubilee Singers)

"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, shepherds quake at the sight, glories stream from heaven afar,
Heavenly hosts sing "Alleluia," sleep in heavenly peace, sleep in heavenly peace.

Silent night, holy night, child of God, love's pure light radiant beams from thy holy face,
With the dawn of redeeming grace, sleep in heavenly peace, sleep in heavenly peace.

Benediction (Rev. Rolenz)

May the babe from long ago, and the children of tomorrow bring us hope and joy this Christmas Season.
And for their sake may we all labor to build a more peaceful and just world – So that one day both
heaven and nature may sing again:

Music (Jubilee Singers)

"Joy to the World"

Joy to the world! The Word is come; let earth with praises ring.
Let every heart prepare a room, and heaven and nature sing, and heaven and nature sing,
and heaven, and heaven and nature sing.

Joy to the earth! Now gladness reigns; let hearts their songs employ,
While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains repeat the sounding joy, repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

No more let sin and sorrows grow, nor thorns infest the ground,
Let righteousness its glories show as far as love is found, as far as love is found,
As far, as far as love is found.