

**Order of Worship**  
**Allen Ave. Unitarian Universalist Church**  
**December 22, 2019**

**Thought for Contemplation:**

*Attention is the beginning of devotion* -Mary Oliver

INGATHERING CHIMES

WELCOME

OPPORTUNITIES FOR CONNECTION Lay Leader 11:00am

CHALICE LIGHTING

Chalice of warmth,

Soften what is cold within

Chalice of flame

Light up what is dark within

Chalice of joy

Lifts our spirits and open our hearts. Anita Farber-Robertson

LIGHTING OF THE CHANUKAH MENORAH

INTROIT. *Sim Shalom*

CALL TO WORSHIP (Responsive) *We are Waiting* by Leslie Takahashi

This is the season of anticipation,

Of expecting, of hoping, of wanting.

This is the time of expecting the arrival of something-or someone.

***We are waiting.***

This is the time of living in darkness, in the hues of unknowing.

Of being quiet, of reflecting on a year almost past.

Waiting for a new beginning, for a closing or an end.

This is the time for digesting the lessons of days gone past, anticipating the future for which

***We are waiting.***

Waiting for a world which can know justice

Waiting for a lasting peace.

Waiting for the bridge to span the divides which separate us.

Waiting for a promise or a hope.

For all of this

***We are waiting.***

HYMN *Oh, We Believe in Christmas* #248

CHILDREN'S TIME *The Christmas Menorah* by Janice Cohn adapted by Rev. Anita

What I am going to tell you is a true story. It happened one day at the end of December, some time ago, in the town of Billings, Montana.

**SLIDE #1** A boy named Isaac was sitting in the family's den doing his math homework, when he heard a loud crash. His parents were out, and the babysitter jumped up and called out to him. "What happened, Isaac? Are you okay?"

But Isaac had no idea what had happened. He could tell that the sound had come from his bedroom so he and Mrs. Davis, his babysitter went to the bedroom and opened the door.

**SLIDE # 2A** whoosh of cold air blew in at them and they saw that the big window in his room was smashed, and the rock that had smashed it lay on is bed. On the floor lay the electric Menorah that had been lit in his window. It was lighted still, but instead of being upright in the window, it was on its side on the floor.

Why might Isaac have had a Menorah lit in his window in December? It was Chanukah. And Isaac and his family were Jewish. While other families in Billings decorated their homes for Christmas, Isaac's family decorated their home for Chanukah, their December holiday.

As Isaac and Mrs. Davis looked at the mess, Isaac felt a little scared. The rock was on his bed. If he had been in it, he would have been hit. Mrs. Davis called Isaac's parents. When they looked at the scene, they called the police. When he got there, Chief Inman shook his head.

"Throwing rocks into a Jewish kid's bedroom window- it's a twisted way of celebrating Christmas," he said.

Isaac finally understood what was going on. "Someone threw a rock in my window because I am *Jewish*?" he asked.

The chief said he thought so that there had been other incidents in the town, not only against Jews, but against African Americans and Native Americans in their town. Last week they had damaged the Jewish synagogue. Isaac was still confused because the people who did it didn't even know him. His parents explaining that it was because they were Jewish didn't help it make any sense. His parents agreed. Hating groups of people doesn't make any sense. But it happens.

**SLIDE #3** Television crews came out to the house, showed pictures of the smashed window, and interviewed Isaac's Mom.

Mrs. MacDonald, who lived in Billings saw the report on television and with Chief Inman called a meeting of the town. "Something has to be done!" she said. She told the story she had heard about how when the Nazis in World War II occupied Denmark, they decreed that all the Jews had to wear yellow stars of David sewed on their coats. The Nazis didn't like Jews. When the King of Denmark heard that, he didn't like it. So, the next morning King Christian of

Denmark came out of his royal palace on his royal horse with a yellow Star of David sewed to his clothes. - even though he wasn't Jewish. The people of Denmark saw this, and many of them who weren't Jewish also sewed yellow stars on their clothes. It got the Nazis really confused!

So, Mrs. McDonald suggested that everyone in town put Menorah's up in their houses, even if they weren't Jewish, to resist hate and show their support of the Jews in their town.

Pictures of a Menorah were copied and handed out around town. After the meeting Isaac's class talked about what happened. His teacher asked him to bring in his menorah and explain to the children about Chanukah, which he did.

They talked about bullies and about standing up for others when people make fun of their ways or bully them.

A lot of the children took the pictures of a Menorah, colored them, and brought them home, including his good friend Teresa who was excited to explain to her family about Chanukah and what had happened. She told them she thought their family should hang a Menorah up in their window.

The whole family talked about it together, about the risks, and about why they might do it. They decided yes, they would hang the picture of the Menorah in their window.

The next evening as they got ready for dinner, Isaac and his Mom were talking about how scary all of this was.

"Wait, Isaac," his Mom said. Before we sit down for dinner, let us take a little ride around town. This confused Isaac, but he said okay.

As they drove around their neighborhood, and then to see other areas beyond their neighborhood, Isaac was amazed.

**SLIDE # 5** Almost every window had a Menorah hanging in it. Some colored really fancy, some just the outlines, some made really really large so you could see it from far away. One was in Teresa's window with a big picture of a menorah.

Across the top she had written:

*" for our friend Isaac, with love from Teresa and the rest of the Hanley family."*

And Isaac didn't feel so scared or alone anymore.

**SLIDE #6** He went home and made a big sign he hung up on his new bedroom window:

*Happy Chanukah to everyone in Billings, with love, Isaac<sup>1</sup>*

**Song** (seated) Go Now in Peace #413 9:00am

(Children are invited to go now to their program)

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<sup>1</sup> Retold from the book by Janice Cohn, *The Christmas Menorah*.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR CONNECTION    Lay Leader    9:00am  
MUSIC FOR REFLECTION  
JOYS AND SORROWS  
MEDITATION AND PRAYER  
READING *Christmas Has No Right...* by Francis C. Anderson

Christmas has no right  
To burst upon us  
Suddenly  
And loudly  
From afar  
Lighting up  
Right where we are  
With nylon trees  
And along-life  
Plastic  
Star...  
It is a lonely  
Road  
To Bethlehem  
That must be walked  
Slowly  
And untalked  
Where no bright  
Light  
Or angel song  
Intrudes  
Ahead of cue  
To wrongly claim  
Arrival of the dawn  
Before the night  
Is walked  
By each of us  
On through.

OFFERING

READING: *Wonder Redux* by Kat Liu, An excerpt reader: Jennifer Caven 11:00am

If you look in the dictionary, there are two uses of the word “wonder.” The first meaning is *curiosity*, as in “I wonder how that works.” And the second meaning is *awe*, as in, “They gazed in wonder at the stars.” The two meanings feel different to me. When we wonder about something, there is the sense-whether it’s true or not-that we can use observation and reason to eventually discover the answer. When we wonder at something-marvel, behold in awe-there is more the sense that this is something so grand, so amazing, that all we can do is experience it. Yet the two definitions of wonder are clearly related, as both start with the recognition of not knowing.

SERMON

*So Many Ways of Waiting*  
The Rev. Dr. Anita Farber-Robertson

Here we are, waiting for Christmas.

When we were children, waiting felt high energy- Squeeling high energy. Right? It was like that for me. Was it like that for you? And it seemed to be that way for my young children. We often blamed the ways in which they seemed to bounce off the walls, on the sugar- all that candy at Christmas. And maybe some of it was the sugar. But waiting and anticipation are hard work for kids. After all, for children, any accommodation to delayed gratification can be hard work. Learning that skill set is one of the most useful of our growing up lessons.

Putting off something we want, because it will be better at another time-delayed gratification in the service of something bigger or better, or more important, is a valuable concept to grasp and to master.

We train for that, much as the athlete trains for a marathon or an Olympian for competition. We start possibly, small, by learning to eat dessert after dinner rather than before. We learn to save some of our candy for later. Maybe we discover that we can convert one desire into delivering an even better reward- for example, we may learn that if we share our candy we might have less of the joy of candy, but more of the joy of friendship and companionship. And friendship and companionship are more precious than candy.

When we are older, we learn to manage different kinds of waiting.

There is the kind of waiting we do for a bus, or a train. Boring. Oh, we can get anxious or impatient. But that doesn't hurry them up any. They will still get there when they were going to get there. And we can choose to fret or relax, or entertain ourselves with reading, or mind games. But such waiting is an exercise in acceptance. Nothing we are going to do, will change when our ride arrives.

There is the familiar, frenetic waiting, like getting our house ready for a party with guests that we are so excited are coming. That kind of waiting can feel very much like the waiting we knew when we were children. High energy. A little electric.

And we learn the other kinds of waiting. The ones that are for longer term. Waiting until spring for the bulbs we planted in autumn, to surface, and bloom. Waiting for the right time to marry. Waiting nine months for a baby to fully form in the womb. Waiting that we may want to rush at times, but at other times, be content to let mature and unfold in their own time. These waitings can be a mixed bag of emotions. Sometimes when we think we are in a hurry, that we can “hardly wait,” we are surprised at the disappointment and the let down when they burst upon us, and we realize we had not given ourselves enough down time for the spiritual work of preparation. At those times we can resonate with our poet:

Christmas has no right  
To burst upon us  
Suddenly  
And loudly  
From afar  
Lighting up  
Right where we are  
With nylon trees  
And a long-life

Plastic  
Star...  
It is a lonely  
Road  
To Bethlehem  
That must be walked  
Slowly  
And untalked  
Where no bright  
Light  
Or angel song  
Intrudes  
Ahead of cue  
To wrongly claim  
Arrival of the dawn  
Before the night  
Is walked  
By each of us  
On through.<sup>2</sup>

And we wonder how it got here, and how somehow, we'd missed the moment, the moment to shift from busy preparation, to wakeful, watchful waiting. It has happened to me...all the tasks, baking, choosing and wrapping gifts, sending cards, decorating the house, tasks that I love, consumed my time and my energy, and I never got the chance to quietly, mindfully, walk the lonely road that must be walked slowly and untalked, the road that meanders through the night, unhurriedly,

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<sup>2</sup> Frances C. Anderson, in *Celebrating Christmas*, Carl Seaberg, ed.

taking us to where the new is born, not early, but in its own unhurried, measured time. And still, we are surprised.

Kat Liu notices:

If you look in the dictionary, there are two uses of the word “wonder.” The first meaning is *curiosity*, as in “I wonder how that works.” And the second meaning is *awe*, as in, “They gazed in wonder at the stars.”

The two meanings feel different to me. (she says) ... Yet the two definitions of wonder are clearly related, as both start with the recognition of not knowing.<sup>3</sup>

Not knowing. That is the entry portal, the open gate to the heart of this season. Mary was invited, and entered that portal of wonder, not knowing. Luke (1:26-55 selected) tells us:

<sup>6</sup>In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, <sup>27</sup> to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. <sup>28</sup> And he came to her and said, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.”<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>29</sup> But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.

And as Mary wonders about this:

<sup>30</sup> The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup> And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. <sup>32</sup> He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. <sup>33</sup> He will

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<sup>3</sup> Kat Liu, *Wonder Redux*

reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

Mary is still baffled, wondering about how this works:

<sup>34</sup> Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?”<sup>[b]</sup>

<sup>35</sup> The angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born<sup>[c]</sup> will be holy; he will be called Son of God....

<sup>37</sup> For nothing will be impossible with God.”

And then Mary shifts her wondering. From wondering about, to acceptance, and wonder at such a thing:

<sup>38</sup> Then Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her.

<sup>39</sup> In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, <sup>40</sup> where she ... greeted Elizabeth. ...

<sup>46</sup> And Mary<sup>[e]</sup> said,

“My soul magnifies the Lord,

<sup>47</sup> and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

<sup>48</sup> for God has looked with favor on the lowliness of this servant.

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

<sup>49</sup> for the Mighty One has done great things for me,  
and holy is God’s name.

And then she does something which is beautiful and inspiring. She takes the awe and wonder she has experienced, and through that lens, applies it to the expectation, trusting that the larger, awe inspiring

purpose to which she has been called, will discover the “how to” of it in time. She sings,

<sup>50</sup> God’s mercy is for those who have reverence  
from generation to generation.

<sup>51</sup> God has shown strength...;  
... has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

<sup>52</sup> ... has brought down the powerful from their thrones,  
and lifted up the lowly;

<sup>53</sup> ... has filled the hungry with good things,  
and sent the rich away empty.

<sup>54</sup> ... has helped this servant Israel,  
in remembrance of God’s mercy,

<sup>55</sup> according to the promise ... made to our ancestors,  
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

Mary, it seems, comes to us as a legitimate next generation Hebrew prophet. It is not about her. In some greater sense, it is not about Jesus. It is about the vision of justice, mercy and peace. One hundred and sixty years after the Maccabean revolt, which we celebrate at Chanukah, when her people were still oppressed and struggling, when she lived the difficult life of the subsistence peasant, she responded with awe and wonder, that the promise was still ours, that we should continue to aspire to a world in which the lowly are lifted up and the powerful are brought down, where the rich are sent away empty and the hungry are filled, where mercy is the mark of the holy.

Mary's song, a single haunting voice of wonder and hope, of not knowing and profound trust, was sung in the waiting time, for those who would walk the

...lonely  
Road  
To Bethlehem  
That must be walked  
Slowly  
And untalked  
Where no bright  
Light  
Or angel song  
Intrudes  
Ahead of cue  
To wrongly claim  
Arrival of the dawn  
Before the night  
Is walked  
By each of us  
On through.<sup>4</sup>

The call of justice, of mercy, of peace is haunting and beautiful. Sometimes it takes a long and lonely journey, and the patience to follow a star, to reach the cradle of its rebirth, and feel the wonder that it still lives, fragile, awaiting our nurture.

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<sup>4</sup> Frances C. Anderson, in *Celebrating Christmas*, Carl Seaberg, ed.

May the call come to you, of justice, mercy peace. And may the road of your journey faithfully lead you to a cradle worthy of your love and your labor.

Amen and Blessed be.

CLOSING HYMN, *It Came Upon a Midnight Clear* # 244

BENEDICTION

CLOSING MUSIC (please remain seated for the closing music)

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