



**NEIGHBORHOOD UNITARIAN
UNIVERSALIST CHURCH**

**Christmas Eve Homily
5PM**

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What is so special about Christmas? Really, what is so special about Christmas?

We sing songs telling us to decorate our homes and to be happy, that this is a holy night, but what makes this night holy?

Earlier, Hannah told us the story that's in the Bible about a baby named Jesus who was very special.

In fact, Christmas is called "Christmas" because Jesus is also known to Christians as "Christ", which means that he was anointed, or recognized as an important religious and political leader in the Jewish tradition of messianic expectation.

"Christmas" means "Christ's mass"; the church service each year that celebrates Jesus, who he was, and what he did.

So, that is what we are doing here tonight, celebrating Christmas with our church family!

A long time ago, during the time of the Roman Empire,

Cesar Augustus, the Emperor, decided that he wanted to have a census and take a head count of every one in the lands that he ruled.

That is why Mary, who was pregnant with Jesus, and Joseph, her soon-to-be husband, traveled all the way to the town of Bethlehem,

which was where Joseph was from.

The Emperor wanted to find out how many people were from each town. Mary and Joseph were poor and didn't have money for a nice warm room in a hotel, so they had to seek shelter in a barn.

Mary did not have any soft place to lay Jesus down upon after he was born, so she wrapped him up and laid him in a food trough, or manger.

For many of us, who perhaps did not grow up on a farm, the idea of sticking our hands in a horse trough or in a bucket of cow feed is a gross thought.

We would never imagine placing a newborn baby to sleep in one!

Also, Jesus was supposed to be this important person, a leader for his people.

A christ. A messiah.

Why does the story of his birth in the Gospel of Luke tell us that he was born in a dirty, smelly, cold place?

We would think that the story would make more sense for a baby this important to be born in a huge palace, filled with toys for him to look at, with a soft bed for him to lay on and warm blankets.

There should be a big fireplace in the room and the sweet smells of plentiful food for his tired momma and the best musicians in the land there to play lullabies for the new baby. Right?

Well, actually, no.

The story of Jesus' birth makes sense because Jesus lived his life and said things that taught us the importance of loving one another.

This story tells us that having lots of money or connections doesn't make a person great, it's the love and compassion we are capable of and that we demonstrate that makes our lives noteworthy.

Jesus did not waste any time in teaching us this lesson.

He began on the very day he was born.

The only other people invited to see the newborn baby Jesus were some poor shepherds who were lying in a nearby field.

These were, of course, the days before the Internet, TV, and radio,

and the announcement of this great leader's birth had to be made somehow.

That is why poor people were chosen to come and meet Jesus and to spread the word of his birth.

Angels were sent to invite the shepherds and to tell them exactly how to find Jesus.

When the shepherds made it back home, who do you think they told about Jesus?

Other poor people! Their families, their friends.

The Emperors and the nobility did not receive the news of Jesus first; those people already had a sense of themselves as significant.

What happened was quite the opposite. On his first day in the world,
even though he was still just a baby,
Jesus was already teaching people who were often overlooked (by showing them) that each person is worthwhile and that we should recognize that in each other.

That is the true Christmas message,
and it's no accident that it's also our *first* principle!
"we affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person"
At Christmastime, the story of Jesus' birth serves to give us a little reminder of this,
because even though it's simple, it's easy to forget.
We forget to always be our best selves in our families and friendships,
We don't always lend a hand when we can,
We don't always take the time to show others that they are loved by us.
But, at Christmastime, there's a certain magic in the air.