**Monton Unitarian Church**

**13th December 2020**

**Facing a long journey…**

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| **Welcome – by Paul H Bicknell**  There are some heights to which we have not risen, and never will;  there are some depths to which we have not fallen, and never will, we pray.  Somewhere between there are places where we can reach up and reach out  for the strength we need for our journey.  This is such a place.  Thus we pause for refreshment; thus we worship in thanksgiving. |
| **Prayer – by Marta M Flanagan**  Holy One, known by many names -- Creator, Sustainer, Spirit of Life and Love -- you make your presence known to us in the sunshine of winter, in the dance of the flame, and in the lingering embrace of a trusted one.  Fill us this day with warmth, with power, with strength. Help us to see our lives with a freshness born of the spirit. Lift up the blessings: the loved ones, the ones we treasure for simply being themselves, the ones we laugh with, the ones who teach us to trust ourselves. Hold close the ones who are ill this day, those who feel the discouragement of the body. Stand by those who know their time is limited. Fill them and us with courage, with peace.  May we be released us from our burdens. We bring the memories of the past, times when we fell short, times when we were hurt. We have fear: worries of what will be and how we will make do. We get carried away with small concerns: the daily issues that press upon us. Help us to let go. Free us from inner bonds.  We look at ourselves: the advantages we have been given, the opportunities we have seized. May we be filled with a sense of gratitude for the gifts that are ours: knowledge, skills, and hard-won insights. May we be nudged to give back, to reach out -- sharing our talents, our riches, and ourselves with those who are discouraged, disheartened, or simply unaware; with the young, the dispossessed, the elderly.  Gracious God, grab our attention, seize us with the brightness of the day, with the miracles of life itself, that we might be filled with new passion, new resolve, heeding your quiet call to take the next step. Amen. |
| **Story – Baby Christmas, by Michael Lawrence**  There is a general rule that you are allowed to have fun at Christmas. So this story is mostly a bit of fun for your inner child – but it does make its way into the rest of the service! So, with thanks to Michael Lawrence – the story of Baby Christmas.  It was Christmas Eve, and there were lots of presents to deliver down lots of chimneys. But when Father Christmas put on his Christmas suit, Baby Christmas began to cry.  “Oh dear”, said Mother Christmas. “Oh dear, oh dear, oh deary-me. What can we do to cheer you up?”    To keep Baby Christmas amused, Mother Christmas dressed him up in his Baby Christmas suit and sat him in his Baby Christmas sleigh. She even gave him a sack of toys to pretend to deliver, and tied Rudolph Junior to the front of the sleigh. “There. Now you’re just like Father!” But then “My mince pies!” Mother Christmas cried! And away she went to rescue them before they burnt to a frazzle!  But while Mother Christmas was gone another nose begun to twitch. “Nun-nun-nun-nose!” Said Baby Christmas. Rudolf Junior’s nose had never glowed before but he knew what it meant. It meant that he was old enough to fly! “Ho-ho! Wa-hee!” cried Baby Christmas , as out they flew into the dark and frosty night.  Father Christmas was just about to set off on his rounds when Mother Christmas missed her little one. Mother and Father Christmas searched high and low and low and high for their little lost lad. Where could he be? WHERE could he be?  And where was Baby Christmas? Flying around the world with Rudolf junior! Lights twinkled and winked and winkled and twinked from one end of the world to the other. Down they went, and up again, and round, and round again – until they were quite quite giddy. Rudolf Junior landed on a roof. But his hooves slipped and slithered and into the chimney went Baby Christmas! Down through the dark he fell. Down and down and down until “Wup!” said Baby Christmas kerplunking into the hearth.  Mother and Father Christmas, of course, were desperately flying across the sky with Rudolf Senior – “Don’t you worry, Mother”, said Father Christmas, “he’ll be out delivering pressies you mark my word. Right chip off the old block, that lad.”  In the house, far below, Baby Christmas stared at the big bright tree, with its lights, and tinsel and silver bells. Then he remembered what Father did. “Yappy Kissmus”, said Baby Christmas, putting one of his presents under the tree. Then Baby Christmas looked out of the window. The snow was so thick out there. Baby Christmas loved the snow, so out he went to play – until a large branch dumped all its snow right on top of him!  Suddenly, up in the sky, Rudolf Senior spied a small red glow far below – he’d know that nose anywhere! So down they came, and Mother and Father Christmas ran round and round the garden – but no sign of Baby Christmas – until – “Atchoo!” Now they saw him! They picked him up and hugged him tight – but then Father had to get on. After all, it was the busiest night of the year, and all those presents had to be delivered, and he hadn’t even started. Up they climbed, Rudolf Senior then Rudolf Junior up and up into the dark sky.  But as they were nearing home, Rudolf Junior sneezed again – “Atchoo!” And when he sneezed he lost his balance. And when he lost his balance, his bright red nose took him in another direction entirely. “Oh noo”, cried, Mother Christmas, “not again!” After the little sleigh went Mother and Father Christmas. And as they went, a single sound rang out in the dark and frosty night. A bubbly little sound. A tinselly little sound. A very Christmassy little sound. Baby Christmas – laughing! |
| Reading – If We Do Not Venture Out By Marni Harmony (adapted) If, on a starlit night, with the moon brightly shimmering, We stay inside and do not venture out, the evening universe remains a part of life we shall not know.  If, on a cloudy day, with grayness infusing all and rain dancing rivers in the grass, we stay inside and do not venture out, the stormy, threatening energy of the universe  remains a part of life we shall not know.  If, on a frosty morning,  dreading the chilling air before the sunrise, we stay inside and do not venture out, the awesome cold, quiet, and stillness of the dawn universe  remains a part of life we shall not know.  If, throughout these grace-given days of ours, surrounded as we are by green life and brown death,  hot pink joy and cold gray pain  and miracles—always miracles—  if we stay inside ourselves and do not venture out then the fullness of the universe shall be unknown to us and our locked hearts shall never feel the rush of worship. |
| **Prayer – Thomas Rhodes**  So as we think about the journeys undertaken by others, and by ourselves, and the risks we take in giving ourselves over to this life, let us pray.  Holy Spirit of Life and Love, You who are our source and our ultimate destiny, lead us this day on a crooked path. So often we are in so much of a hurry, taking the direct route to our goal, not allowing ourselves to be distracted, sometimes being too direct with each other In all that we seek to do, and to be.  But we can see that no river takes a direct path to the sea, your trees and bushes sprout crooked limbs, and birds, beasts and insects meander in their search for food, shelter, or a mate.  We lose so much when we take the direct route—the motorway which bypasses the quaint town, the arrow that misses the mark, the chance to stop and say hello, and how are you, and really listen to the reply.  So lead us on the crooked path, past wandering streams and crooked trees, following our hearts desire, not just duty’s demands, for the crooked path also leads us home.  Amen. |
| **Reflection – Facing the long journey of life**  The film It’s a Wonderful Life is frequently voted either one of Christmas’s greatest movies, or indeed the greatest. Those of us who have watched it will have laughed and cried our way through George Bailey’s life, his trials and tribulations, his moment of utter despair, and his final realisation that despite all the problems facing him, the world with him in it was a better place than without him.  It’s quite a challenging topic. So many of us find it very easy to slip into a way of thinking that makes us so very unimportant – helpless in the face of all the major troubles in the world, untalented in the face of all the incredible artists, singers, actors, scientists, and just generally very ordinary people. Would the world really be any different without us in it? Have all our struggles really made any valuable impression on life?  It was a dilemma I had awful times with when I was a late teenager. My breakdown at university when I was 19 was primarily because I couldn’t see the point of doing what I was doing, because it wasn’t making a big enough difference – it wasn’t world-changing. I had what was in effect a huge dose of arrogance that said if I wasn’t that incredible politician who finally brought peace to the middle east, or swept thousands of people into the Unitarian movement and became a modern day guru, then I wasn’t worth anything. Which is, of course, absolute nonsense.  At Christmas we celebrate the story of a baby born in very humble circumstances, who happens to be anything but an ordinary baby, according to the myth, and who goes on to be pretty revolutionary, politically, and have all sorts of things claimed for him religiously. But for me, one of the most important messages about the myth of Christmas is the miracle of the ordinary. Just a child being born, in pretty drab, poor surroundings, to just an ordinary girl. Nothing special – it’s happened billions of times, the world over. And yet that birth, and every birth, is a miracle of biology, of circumstance, of love, of hope. There are children being born right now in circumstances much, much worse than a stable in Jerusalem – imagine giving birth in the Yemen, or Syria, constantly listening for the sound of imminent attack. And yet each new life brings a flicker of hope, that there is a future worth living for, worth striving for, worth loving for.  No-one knows what their lives hold for them. No-one knows their journey through life, we don’t come with travel plans and tickets already made out. When Baby Christmas got whisked away by Rudolph Junior, he didn’t know where he was going to end up. And it didn’t matter – because it was the ride itself that was the important bit. That and doing what you can to bring a blessing wherever you end up - Yappy Kissmus and all.  When Mary and Joseph set out on their journey to Bethlehem, they knew where they were going geographically – but they would not have had any idea what their personal and emotional destination would be, or where the child that Mary was carrying would end up. Yet, they knew that the journey they were taking, and the path that they were being sent to walk down, was an important one, simply because of who they were.  We don’t know where we are going to go in our lives – but we need to understand that though we may not have been heralded by angels, our journey through life – our life itself – is equally important – not only to us, but to all those who we touch with our lives. Just as in It’s a wonderful life – our journeys may be hard – our direction may be unknown – the events of our lives may unfold completely at odds with how we thought things would be, but it is so important that whatever our path may be, we walk it with pride, and courage, and compassion – because of all the people we will touch along the way. George Bailey, in It’s a Wonderful Life, planned to see the world – but never left the town he was born in. And yet through his small-town life, his acts of generosity even though he had little to be generous with, and his love and care for others, he achieved so much more than the miserly Mr Potter, bringing peace and comfort to those who knew him.  At this time of year, we sing of the Christmas child bringing peace on earth, goodwill to all people. Even if it is just a myth, it’s one that we need to hear, not just at Christmas but every day, every hour. We each have the power to be the Christ-child in some small way, for someone somewhere. After all, remember the song –  Let peace begin with me, Let this be the moment now.  With every step I take, let this be my solemn vow.  To take each moment, and live each moment,  In peace eternally.  Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me.  By our prayers and through our hands, peace may come, and each person we meet may learn to know that they are loved.  **Blessing – words by Eric Williams, then by John and Sarah Millspaugh**  And so I send you on your way.  Blessed is the path on which you travel. Blessed is the body that carries you upon it. Blessed is your heart that has heard the call. Blessed is your mind that discerns the way. Blessed is the gift that you will receive by going.   Truly blessed is the gift that you will become on the journey.  For in our religious tradition, it is not just ministers and religious professionals who have power to bless. Each of us has the power to bless another, and to bless the world  Therefore, as we have been blessed, so we bless one another to be a blessing. Feel the love of the universe flowing through this community, into you, and out into the universe again. Let the love of all the universe—your love—flow outward, to its height, its depth, its broad extent.  You are more than you know, and more beloved than you know. Take up what power is yours to create safe haven, to make of earth a heaven. Give hope to those you encounter, that they may know safety from inner and outer harm, be happy and at peace, healthy and strong, caring and joyful. Be the blessing you already are. That is enough. Amen. |