**Monton Unitarian Church**

**20th December**

**Sing-Your-Own Carol Service**

Dear friends

I can’t provide the music, I’m afraid, but I’ve indicated where we would be singing different carols. If you have recordings, or can find them on YouTube or some other digital wonder of the age, then you might want to sing along at those points. Or you can always do a magnificent solo – or miss the carols out altogether! Either way, I hope you enjoy our carol service!

Blessings, Anna

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| **Welcome – Unitarians at Christmas, by Kate McKenna**  They say a story can carry a truth far greater than the literal truth.  We Unitarians\* know the value of stories. We know they carry truth. We know they carry more truth than just the plain truth ever can.  Maybe we can’t believe a virgin gave birth to the son of God: but we can believe that all births are miracles, worthy of celebration and wonder.  Maybe we can’t believe angels brought revelations: but we can believe truth can be revealed through the actions and words of those who dare to speak it and to act it.  Maybe we can’t believe the angels sang to shepherds: but we can believe that those revelations about life can come to and through even those we think are the most humble.  Maybe we can’t believe the wise men travelled to see the newborn baby king: but we can believe that we should never be too lofty or think ourselves too clever or too rich to see the wonder and majesty in tiny things.  Maybe we can’t believe that Jesus brought back the light by redeeming our sins: but we can believe in a leader and teacher and prophet who brought and brings illumination to the lives of those who wish to listen.  We can believe in the light. Always, we can believe in the light.  Maybe we can’t believe the Christmas story: but we can believe \*in\* it as a story which points to a truth greater than we can possibly imagine.  And so we are here. Unitarians at Christmas. Celebrating. Long may we do so. |
| **Carol – O Come, all ye faithful** |
| **Prayer – by Christine C Robinson**  So let us pray. May these moments of quiet lead us to the heart of the season, which is peace.  May we breathe deeply of peace in this quiet place, relax into its warmth, know we are safe here, and let us open our hearts to the season’s story.  Like the wandering couple, may we find that our greatest joys issue forth from our greatest trials.  Like the harried innkeeper, may we find ways to be of help to others.  Like the lumbering beasts, may we be silent witnesses to the unfathomable glory of life.  Like the shepherds on the hill, may we know that we need never be afraid.  Like the journeying wise, may we always have the courage to follow our stars.  Like the angels, may we cry peace to a troubled world.  To these prayers for our own transformation we add our prayers for all of those who suffer and grieve at this time. May they find comfort. And for all those involved in war and conflict; may they be safe. And may this season of peace and goodwill nudge our world towards its ideals, for then will Christmas truly dawn. Amen. |
| **Reading – Blessing of Love and Wonder, part 1**  **by Rev. Lynn Gardner**  It was getting dark and the weary travellers needed a place to sleep. It’s almost 70 miles between Nazareth and Bethlehem, and Joseph and Mary were making the long journey that was required of them in order to pay taxes to the Roman Empire. It was a long journey for everyone, but Mary was feeling each mile a bit more than some, as she was about to give birth, and she was oh, so tired. But there was a blessing: one of their neighbours in Nazareth had offered them a donkey for her to ride on the long trip. Kindness can make any journey a bit easier.  The trip to Bethlehem wasn’t the only journey they were on. Mary and Joseph were on that exciting, sometimes nerve-wracking journey toward parenthood. It had been nine months since the angel Gabriel had appeared to Mary, asking her if she would carry this child, this son of God. “Here I am,” she had said, “let it be with me.” And so with her consent, which is hopefully how all children come to be, Mary was pregnant. And there was another blessing: her dear sweet Joseph, who believed her, who had faith in her and in God. Faith can help when times are confusing and difficult.  And there in Bethlehem this young couple was blessed with generosity: a place to stay. They were given space to rest until their baby was born. It wasn’t fancy, but it was warm and safe. |
| **Carol – O Little Town of Bethlehem** |
| **Reading – A Blessing of Love and Wonder, part 2**  **by Rev. Lynn Gardner**  Out in the fields, there were shepherds, watching over their sheep. It is said that angels came, announcing that a child was born. Now, I would guess that shepherds don’t always feel important. They might not always remember that they matter, especially when they’re out in a field at night. But on that night, there was a blessing: the angels came and sang, and they not only felt hope hearing of the birth of this little baby, but they also remembered, at least for that night, that they were each precious.  And a new star rose in the heavens, telling of the birth of one who would bring a message of peace, one who would bring change, one who would be called a king. Far away, wise ones heard of the star. They went to King Herod to tell him that a new king had been born. Herod was jealous, and afraid of what a new king might mean, and so he sent them to find the baby. And though the stories say they travelled to find him, there was a blessing: the wise ones felt compassion for this family, and they chose not to tell King Herod what they had seen.  And as Jesus was held, and rocked, and snuggled, and fed, and sung to, there was a blessing of love and wonder. There they were, all the people and animals gathered around a new baby, caring for him and for one another, resting in that amazing love.  Over 2,000 years later, we retell the story of Jesus’ birth, and of his life and teachings. And there is a blessing: a possibility of a better world. This possibility arises when we remember that we are all connected; when we choose kindness, faith, generosity; when we remember that each one of us matters. The possibility for a better world happens when we practice compassion; when we allow our hearts to be changed by love and wonder.  This Christmas — and every day — may you be touched by such blessings, and share them with all those you meet. |
| **Reading – A retelling of the Massacre of the Innocents, by David Osborne**  It still hurts when I think about it. Even now, whenever I hear a horse galloping I feel frightened. They came at dawn, a few on horses and the rest marching, and spreading out through the village. I can hear the shouting now, and the screaming and swearing. Worst of all was the crying of the children. My young brother Nathan was among the ones the soldiers killed.  It was the king’s order, apparently. They were to kill all the children. And they did. That’s power for you. Kings! Crush the poor and destroy the opposition.  Someone said he hoped that the child Herod was after had escaped and would come back one day for revenge. Well, if he escaped, good luck to him. But we don’t need revenge. What good would that do? We don’t need another king.  Not unless he is a king who lives with the likes of us.  Not unless he knows what it is like to feel so tired he could drop; and to go to bed hungry.  Not unless he is quicker at giving than he is at making demands.  Not unless he can heal people rather than bleed them.  Not unless he has a real way of making peace.  Not unless he is willing to die for his people and not just rule over them.  Not unless he can overcome hatred and death rather than just destroy his personal enemies.  But what kind of king would that be? |
| **Carol – In the bleak midwinter** |
| **Prayer – by Rebecca Parker**  Spirit of Life and Love  We remember the Magi, Observers of stars, Evidence-based seekers who found their way to kneel before a baby. May we, too, kneel before life’s intricate mysteries, following the path of science-based searchers for truth.  We remember Mary, birth-mother of a revolutionary prophet, the foetus in her womb a surprise, her choice a decision to magnify her hope, the birth difficult, attended by a beautiful diversity of animals, and a rag-tag gathering of vulnerable people. May we too, kneel at the cradle of earth’s dreams for peace and dedicate ourselves to revolutionary love.  We remember Joseph, unexpectant father, who embraced the baby as his own, believing that every child has a God-given entitlement to love and care. May we too, stand by the women and children of this world when patriarchal privilege and power threaten their freedom and put their well-being at risk.  We remember the Angels singing in a cold night to the over-taxed poor, promising peace and goodwill to all. May we echo their song in acts of solidarity and justice for all souls—refugee souls, green souls, disabled souls, black souls, young souls, transgender souls. May we join the bold, holy movement to bring heaven to earth. May the Morning Star brighten our hope for a new day, and may laughter strengthen all our prayers. Amen. |
| **Reading – A Baby Was Born, by Gwen Matthews**  Once upon a time, a baby was born. Even before that baby was born, there were people waiting and wishing and hoping for that baby.  The people who were waiting and wishing and hoping for that baby didn’t know exactly what that baby would be like.  And so, they wondered:  Would the baby have a smile so warm that it could melt the coldest snow and ice?  Would the baby have a voice so strong that it could shake the very mountains?  Would the baby be so courageous that all would be comforted, even during the most ferocious storms?  Would the baby show the world so much love that peace would settle into even the most hardened hearts?  But even as they asked these questions, as they imagined what the baby might be like, the people who were waiting and wishing and hoping for the baby already believed that the baby would indeed have a warm smile, a strong voice, a courageous spirit, and a loving heart.  And they weren't wrong.  When Jesus was born, his tiny body was wrapped up to keep out the cold. He was laid down on straw, in a trough that was used to feed the animals, inside of a barn. His young parents, proud and exhausted, had been forced to take a long journey, far from home.  Jesus’s parents were two of the people who had been waiting and wishing and hoping for him to be born, but there were people who had been waiting and wishing and hoping for Jesus to come. These people saw hurt and suffering in the world and they believed that this new baby, Jesus, could use his voice to spread a message of love and peace, and they knew it would take courage for him to do so.  But Jesus wasn't the only baby that people have waited and wished and hoped for.  People also waited and wished and hoped for…you.  Once upon a time, you were born.  But even before you were born, there were people waiting and wishing and hoping for you—but those people who were wishing and waiting and hoping for you didn't know exactly what you would be like.  And so, they wondered:  Would you be kind? Would you be brave? Would you show love? Would you spread peace and joy?  But even as they asked these questions, as the people who were waiting and wishing and hoping for you imagined what you might be like, what kind of person you might grow up to be, they already believed that you would be kind and brave and loving and that you would spread peace and joy in our world. They knew that you could help ease the suffering and hurt in the world and that you would speak out against violence and oppression.  And they weren't wrong. |
| **Carol – Hark the Herald Angels Sing** |
| **Blessing – Author Unknown**  So go into the world and bid others to follow the star;  Tell them the star means wisdom.  Tell them the star means kindness.  Tell them the star means understanding.  Tell them the star means tolerance.  Tell them the star means sacrifice.  Tell them the star leads to a vision of a fairer world.  Tell them the star shines in the heavens and in their own hearts, and if they will follow the light – their own light – they will bring peace and joy to others, and find it themselves.  And let the spirit of Christmas sing in our hearts as we leave this gathering of beauty and of love; let the vision of peace and goodwill to all people inspire us all, that each new day may become a fresh birth of hope and joy, now and forever more. Amen |