

## Homily for Christmas Eve.

How, my dear friends and Christmas visitors, how are you really feeling this evening? Are you tired of all the humbug, hoping this hour will take you to a place of peace where you too can catch at least a glimpse of beauty? Or are you in the merry mood of Christmas, ready for Santa, ready to rejoice, and ready to rumble with any and all reindeers or any cynical Scrooges that may come your way? Are you in a mood of Christmas past or Christmas present or not at all sure just how you feel? If so you are not alone. Christmas Eve is a time when our hearts, even if we do not want them to, open and memories flood in. Followed by our fondest hopes and dreams usually hidden under our adult demeanor. For those of us who are past our youth, our hearts can grow a bit melancholy. Our childhood Christmases are indeed forever gone.

But some of us remember. Once I looked for angels, absolutely sure that they were hiding everywhere, maybe in the Christmas greenery or treading lightly, so as to leave no footprints, just behind me on the snowy path to the village church. Once I had no trouble believing and now it is so much harder. I must admit that this Christmas finds me vulnerable, happy, sad, grateful and full of longing. This Christmas is for me a lot like a present I am a bit afraid to open. What if it is not what I want? What happens to our

great expectations once our wishes are fulfilled? Just like they will soon be for this congregation, at least as far as space is concerned. We will be able to do so much more. But it is after all still just a great place to grow the kind of congregation each of us want. I hope there are a few UU angels hidden over there, in unexpected places and difficult moments. I will surely look for them.

If you had a star to follow this Christmas where would it lead you? Beyond the manger scene what are your hopes? In far away lands soldiers this night, this morning surely hope for peace. Now there is a tough Christmas! We have all had some of those. For me a memorable Yule was when I was a newly wed eighteen-year-old Danish girl in Baghdad, Iraq. My husband had the flu, was fast asleep and I was by myself in a strange land where Yule was not a major holiday. No overt signs of Christmas anywhere. But something had to be done. It was Christmas Eve! So I found my trusty battery operated (and at the time in that country illegal) Grundig short wave radio and dialed desperately for some Christmas joy. That evening in the dark midnight hours I found carols coming Bethlehem, choral music and Latin prayers from Rome, BBC international reporting a white Christmas morning, an unknown French station with bells and for hours I sat there and followed the coming of Yule, as best I could, as the holiday traveled like Santa around the globe.

So again my question to you is: If you had a star to follow this Christmas and into the New Year, where would it lead you? Think about this as I tell you this story. *An old Buddhist said: Tell me, what is this day you cherish so, that you call Christmas?*

*And the Stranger from the West said: "Christmas is not a day, really, it is a light, I think. It comes when days are shortest and darkest and hearts despair, and it reminds us that winter death is a temporary thing and that light and life are eternal.*

*"And it is hope. For it demonstrates how kind and generous and self-forgetting human beings can be. And we know that what people can be sometimes, they can, if they will, be most times.*

*"And assuredly, it is love. Its symbol is a newborn babe, warm and safe in his mother's arms. To be sure, he was born a long, long time ago. Yet through the ages his influence as he became a man and the truths he taught and the love he incarnated have proved stronger and dearer in matters that matter most than all the kings and armies and governments of history. Oh, whatever else it may be, Christmas indeed is love.*

*"I think I understand," the old Buddhist said. "Christmas is like a lotus blossom. When it blooms, it holds, as in a chalice, the beauty of the world.*

*"Yes, you do understand," said the Stranger from the West.*

*"When it comes, Christmas brings the light that redeems us from*

*darkness, the hope that casts out fear and the love that overcomes the world. 'It is Christmas!' We rejoice. And suddenly, the lotus blooms..."*

My wish and prayer for each of us is that your Christmas star, your hopes and dreams may bloom like a glowing lotus in your heart, filling your days with joy and light, this evening, this season and in the coming year. Amen so be it.