

## **“Light One Candle”**

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Unitarian Universalist Church in Meriden  
Meriden, CT

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Intergenerational Service of Holidays of Light

*Star light, star bright, first star I see tonight.*

When my gaze falls on that star in this season of holidays and holy days, it shines right into the center of my soul, and my soul smiles. Yet when Betty Girling’s father was trudging home with his old horse through a fierce blizzard on a long ago Christmas Eve, the raging storm hid the stars in fierce contrariness. No starlight, no moonlight. Simply one step after another with the hope against hope that he would make it home on that Christmas Eve that surely felt so far away. Such is the tale that we heard and witnessed just moments ago.

I wonder how it is with many of us at this particular holiday season. We light our chalice. We light our Advent candles. We light our candles of Hanukkah and Kwanzaa and gather in circles of family and friends or perhaps by ourselves, hoping against hope that we will make it home, that we will make it, that is, to a place of sanctuary, where we might feel safe and reassured that all is well, or at least that all can be well.

‘tis a season when so many among us have been under the weather, are recovering from serious surgery, are fighting anxiety and depression, and are uncertain of the future well beyond the uncertainty that we can always count on.

I invite you to consider the storms—literally and otherwise—that you have moved through over the years. Recall those chapters of your life when you were perhaps far from home, literally and otherwise. What brought you through them? What brought you into a space of heart and mind where hope was a driving force? What brought you out of a “dark night of the soul”?

Betty’s father was on his way home from town on Christmas Eve. The Nebraska plains served up a snowstorm of snowstorms. What could he do but move on. Surely he would soon catch a glimpse of the lights of their Christmas tree shining through the front window. For hour upon hour, there was only the driving snow blotting out the moon and the stars and perhaps even Christmas itself. Time became a blur; yet he kept on...until, until he caught a flicker of light. Did he quicken his step, however snow-clogged his boots, however chilled to the bone he was in his wool coat and heavy gloves long since soaked through and glazed over? I believe he did, driven by hope, hope in a faint flicker of light that soon revealed itself as many candles shining through a window. He simply walked toward the light, until he found himself in the radiance of Hanukkah lights and the welcoming warmth of their new neighbors.

Christmas came as Hanukkah. “It was a miracle,” he later proclaimed as the Goodmans brought him safely home. So too is Hanukkah grounded in a legendary miracle of oil burning in the rededicated temple well beyond its appointed time. So too is the birth of a child—every single child. A miracle need not be supernatural. The candles of Hanukkah, the lights of Christmas, the birth of a child—all invite our wonder. Is hope itself a miracle?

Whenever a lamp, a candle, or a chalice is lit amid the darkness, however deep the darkness, hope comes alive. On December 7, 1942 in a cramped garret in Holland, a young girl wrote in her diary:

“We just gave each other a few little presents and then we lit the candles. Because of the shortage of candles, we only had them alight for ten minutes.”

Just a few pages away, Anne Frank penned her credo:

“Despite everything, I believe that people are really good at heart.”

Was it a miracle that she was even able to imagine this?

Light every candle—the candle of a chalice, the candles of Advent, the candles of Hanukkah, the candles of Kwanzaa—and know that by so doing, we are kindling hope. However it is with you, with your family and friends, however it is with this community and our neighborhoods and our nation, light every candle. Be warmed by the flame; be emboldened by the radiance. Hold hope and walk toward the light.

So be it and Amen.

### **Sources:**

Anne Frank, *The Diary of a Young Girl*, Edited by Otto H. Frank and Mirjam Pressler, Translated by Susan Massotty, Doubleday, 1947.

Betty Girling, “Holiday Candles,” in *Treasured Stories of Christmas: A Touching Collection of Stories that Brings Gifts from the Heart and Joy to the Soul*, The Editors of Guideposts, Inspirational Press, New York, 1997.