

**“A Time for...”**  
A Christmas Homily  
Rev. Dr. Jan Carlsson-Bull  
Unitarian Universalist Church in Meriden  
Meriden, CT  
Christmas Eve 2016

*...a time for singing.*

And so we do.

*...a time for wondering.*

And so we shall ever be.

*...a time for worshipping.*

And so we are on this Christmas Eve, brought together by a child born over two thousand years ago, a child whose life and legacy would prove transformative for his family, his friends, and this world—and yes, for us. We need not call ourselves Christians, though some of us do, to take in the wonder of the child of Bethlehem. The first story of his life wasn't even recorded until 60 years after his death. More stories followed. Who knows which and how many strands of those stories rose from sheer hope and morphed into legend? Who knows which and how many strands of those stories rose from the most reliable record possible, called oral tradition?

The birth story itself resonates in the hearts of all drawn to a tale of a child whose parents were expecting. They weren't even married. Yet they were both bidden to set out on a grueling trek from Nazareth to Bethlehem, the city of David, because they were descendants of the family of David. Imagine doing so with an extra passenger stirring and jumping inside you. Imagine doing so not quite knowing when this little passenger would make himself/herself known. Did Mary and Joseph really know it was a boy?

Shelter for the imminent birth was unavailable in the roadside inns that held a modicum of comfort for the birth. What to do? Accept the offer of an innkeeper. Head for the barn out back. And so the child was born amid sheep and cows and who knows what else making their voices known in the very first carols of what we have come to know as Christmas.

So humble, and yet such a hullabaloo—angels and shepherds and wise men and a mad dash to Egypt to escape a fearful king intent on destroying the young child, for who did he think he might be? The Messiah, the long promised savior of the Jewish people, arrived to overthrow the kingdom and power of the Roman Empire. Such power is blind to power in any other form. It is only to be feared. So it was in that time. So it is in ours.

Yet here was an innocent babe, born in a barn. I wonder how many here were born in a barn... or at home with or without a midwife... or maybe even in the family car or a taxicab... or perhaps in a hospital, with every possible comfort and access to medical technology to assure a safe birth for mother and child.

I wonder how many here were born with a star heralding our arrival, with a choir telling the world we were finally here, with wise women and men gathered round just to catch a glance and bring what gifts were deemed dear. Perhaps we were born with a television blasting in the other room, siblings nosing around outside the door of our birth, the sounds of a night blustery with winter winds, the sounds of a city shrill with sirens, the aroma of dinner served downstairs, or maybe the fragrance of a summer morning. Imagine the scents and sounds of the time that you were born. Dream yourself back into that time, those moments that your cry rang out announcing to the world, “I’m here!” Hey, everybody, I’m here!”

A holiday, a holy day; a holineight, a holy night. The day or night of your birth was a holy time. So there were no angels. So there were no wise men. So there were no premonitions that you would work wonders in the world, though you may have, and you may yet do so. What do you suppose your own parents wondered as they gazed upon you for the first time? Joyous? Elated to see you? I hope this was the case. Yet not all of us are born into the great comfort of love. Some of us find our way with parents not our birth parents. Some of us are still squirming in our own skin, longing to feel at home. Some of us were born with a veritable lump of coal in our birth blanket. Did we know that it was the stuff from which exquisite crystals might grow, as the child in our story learned in Kindergarten?

What you can know is this: The night of your birth was a holy night. The day of your birth was a holy day, “a time for singing, a time for wondering, a time for worshipping.”

Your birth calls for a song. What is *your* birth song? What would you like it to be? Plaintive? Jubilant? Winsome? Memorable? Your birth calls for wonder. How precious, how delicate, how vulnerable! I wonder how he will make it in this world. I wonder if she will thrive and blossom and unwrap the fullness of the gift that she is. Your birth calls for worshipping. But we as humans mess up. How are we worthy to be loved and adored? As my husband, Dan, speculated the other night, even Jesus probably had meltdowns. Even Jesus was probably given time-outs. Worship is not blind adoration, but tending to that which is worthy. And you are; each child is, wholly and wondrously worthy. “O come let us adore him!” O come let us adore her!”

On this Silent Night, Holy Night, imagine that each of us is once again a newborn babe—wriggling our way into life, crying out that we are here, reaching out to be held, wondering in our most primal ways how we will grace the slice of history that is ours to know. We are born into a world that cries out for innocence, for hope, for truth, for the transforming power of love, and for justice that is wholly compassionate. This is the promise that each of us brings at birth—the promise of possibility, of unwrapping the exquisite gift of who we are

Thank you, Sophia Lyon Fahs for reminding us that

“Each night a child is born is a holy night—

A time for singing

A time for wondering

A time for worshipping.

## Sources

Sophia Lyon Fahs, *For So the Children Come*, in *Singing the Living Tradition*, Beacon Press, Boston, Unitarian Universalist Association, 1993, 616.

*The Gospel According to Luke* in the Bible (King James Version)

Frank Rivas, "A Cautionary Christmas Tale," as shared by a colleague.