

The  
*Sweetest*  
Christmas



Advent 2023



Well, we had already experienced one Christmas miracle, so we affirmed another. Lucas Gabriel truly lived up to his name. In the light of healing and with the strength that is God, he began to get better and better. The doctors were amazed. One day they were saying, “Lucas will probably be on medication for a few months.” The next day it became, “Lucas will probably be on medication for a few weeks.” And the following day, it was, “You will be able to take Lucas home shortly, and he will no longer need his medication.” Lucas came home with us on December 19.

The true meaning of Christmas was expressed within our new forever family—to trust the presence of the Divine within, to honor the light of God in our lives, and to come together in family and community, leaning on each other as we celebrate that which is always birthed in us: faith, hope, and love. That first Christmas with Lucas was the sweetest Christmas, and it set the foundation for each sweet Christmas after.

*Rev. Juan del Hierro is senior minister at Unity on the Bay in Miami, Florida.*





Christmas can be a magical time of year. I love the energy of love, peace, and hope that fills the air. The lights and colors are requisite to creating whimsy and spectacle. I embrace the childlike wonder of elves, fairies, angels, and Santa Claus.

My home is usually overflowing in a kaleidoscope of ornaments, figurines of treasured memories, lights draped across the fireplace and doorways. A real Douglas fir Christmas tree is picked out with specific dimensions. It must be at least six feet tall with full branches, have the perfect A-frame shape with needles curled at the proper angles to hold all the tree trimmings.

It was Christmas of 2003. I was dating my then-boyfriend, who eventually became my husband. I was beginning to imagine the possibility of him as a part of my life, but I was also aware he came from a very conservative English family. Even though I was born in England, I am outspoken and nontraditional. I wasn't sure they were going to accept me as a multiracial, independent, American woman.

This year, I would be visiting my boyfriend, someone I cared about deeply, and his large family in the U.K. His family saw Christmas as a religious holy day, a time of prayer and thanksgiving. They didn't decorate the house or have Christmas trees. I was filled with anxiety at the prospect of Christmas as a somber holiday.

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with his journey of creating the Christmas tree,  
I fell deeper in love with him.*

When he picked me up at Heathrow Airport, there was an air of anticipation in his bouncing steps. He wanted our first Christmas together to be special. When we arrived at his house, I was shocked to find there was a *very* decorated Christmas tree waiting for me. He knew how much a Christmas tree meant to me and didn't want me to miss out. I burst out laughing. He was so proud of his creation, but it was the ugliest tree I had ever seen.

It was an artificial tree made of metallic silver leaves and branches, about five feet tall and scraggly. Listing to one side, it was decorated with several different-colored light sets that didn't match. The best word to describe it was *garish*. The best five words: *a Charlie Brown Christmas tree*. At first, I felt sad just looking at the monstrosity.

Then Graham told me the story of how he had persuaded friends and family members to donate decorations for the tree. Later, the family came over and told me stories of his determination to make sure I had a Christmas tree. Each time they teased him and regaled us with his journey of creating the Christmas tree, I fell deeper in love with him.

I also realized that his family never had seen him go to such lengths for someone. There was something wonderful about his family supporting him on his Christmas tree pilgrimage, even if they thought it was strange. His family's teasing didn't bother him. He cared more about making our first Christmas together magical.

I came to love that pitiful tree. It no longer looked ugly to me. You see, my first impression was that he didn't care enough about me to get a nice tree. I came to realize that he loved me more than enough. He roped in family and friends to help him make our first Christmas together special—as a family.

*Rev. Sheree Taylor-Jones is pioneering a New Thought community in Austin, Texas, named Celebration of Spirit, emphasizing radical inclusion.*

# *The Nativity in You*

Rev. Ellen Debenport



**C**onsider this: Every character in the Nativity story represents a part of you. Their traits lie deep within your consciousness. Exploring the Christmas story in this way might bring deeper spiritual meaning to your reflections during Advent this year.

Called Bible metaphysics, this is perhaps the most distinctive teaching in the Unity spiritual movement. We take every character in the Bible, good or bad, and look at what they reveal about us as human beings and individuals. Understanding the Bible this way started with Unity cofounder Charles Fillmore, and the characters in the Christmas story were later explicated by Unity minister Hypatia Hasbrouck in her book, *The Trip to Bethlehem*.

We say every year that the birth of the Christ child symbolizes the Divine born in each of us. Celebrating our divine birth brings a deep awareness of our true spiritual nature, which can be renewed every Christmas.

But what of the others in the Nativity story? Let's use *The Trip to Bethlehem* as our guide to explore these characters and see how they are part of us.

**Mary** the virgin represents the pure soul, ready to allow the expression of the Christ. Her conversation with the angel is not a dream but a conscious connection with God. She symbolizes love, youth, and possibilities. All of these elements are a part of your own consciousness—your soul, your ability to connect with God, and your expressions of love.

**Joseph** represents the father, a nurturer, provider, and protector. Watching Mary's experience, he brings human awareness to spiritual oneness. A part of you nurtures and protects too. A part of you witnesses and honors the deep spiritual connection in others.

**Jesus** as an unborn child is "the image of God latent in every soul," Hasbrouck writes, "the suspicion ... that there is something divine about us." As a newborn, Jesus is the divine child with power to activate all parts of consciousness. For you, his birth represents the dawning realization of your own divinity or spiritual nature.

**The shepherds** are abiding in fields in darkness, unaware, but faithful enough to leave their valuable sheep to seek the child. Something in your consciousness prompts you to seek spiritual awareness, to heed the angels and journey out of darkness.





# Third Sunday of Advent



## Love

Rev. Teresa Burton

Cooking and baking are among my favorite parts of the Christmas season. I especially like getting out cookbooks, photocopied recipes, and handwritten instructions for goodies I make only around the holidays. This is one of the Christmas season's sweetest undertakings, in every way. I know what it means to me, but a special experience showed me what it had meant to someone else.

A few years ago, I caught up with someone I had not seen in more than 20 years. We were reunited around the holidays, and she told me she still made a recipe for Christmas balls I had given her.

I barely remembered it. As she described the confection, I had a vague recollection of maraschino cherries and ground nuts rolled in powdered sugar. I thought they were nice enough but unremarkable. I had dropped the recipe from my holiday baking repertoire years before.

But my friend told me she had made them every year until recently when she lost my handwritten recipe card. She asked if I could give her another one. I told her I would look for the recipe and email it to her. What she said next surprised me.



“Thanks, but I really want to find that card. I’ve had it for all these years. I’d hate to think it’s gone for good.”

I asked why.

“I liked having your handwriting. Every year, I would see that card and make that recipe and think of you.”

*Just as people come into our lives, they also leave—some gradually, others abruptly.*

I was touched to learn that. I was also surprised that a minor gesture from so many years before had made such an impression, but I suppose I shouldn’t have been. Throughout the years, I have saved mementos—ticket stubs, small souvenirs, scraps of handwriting—as a way of keeping dear ones with me and memories alive.



It never occurred to me that someone would want to keep memories of me alive and would feel happy finding my handwriting on a recipe card once a year. But it makes sense. Our lives are always changing. Just as people come into our lives, they also leave—some

gradually, others abruptly. The memories we make are ours forever. Christmas is the perfect time to remember those who, for whatever reason, are no longer with us. We keep them close when we hang the special ornaments, tell the funny stories, and make the treasured recipes. This is perhaps the sweetest tribute to those whose presence, whose kindness, has touched us.

This Christmas let’s allow ourselves to feel the bonds of friendship or kinship that transcend distance, time, and even life itself. This is how we keep one another close, our bonds of love unbreakable whether our memories are happy or bittersweet.

*Let all that you do be done in love.—1 Corinthians 16:14*

*On this day of Advent,*

I cherish memories of those who have touched my life with love.