

A CHRISTMAS OF

*Light
and
Peace*



ADVENT 2022



*A*nother holiday season is upon us. As one who is all-consumed by the sparkle and magic of the season, even I must admit that the past few years have been challenging in many ways. This year is no different. My heart can easily stray from the purity and warmth of the season with so much turmoil swirling about in today's world.

As a result, I found myself contemplating how I might return to my childlike wonder of the holidays in the face of pain and suffering that has occurred throughout the course of this year. So much divisiveness over, well, nearly everything.

Then it occurred to me. Perhaps this is precisely the reason I must work to find my inner child and rekindle the spirit of the holidays within myself. The season is marked by traditions that symbolize hope. They are built upon the promise of better days and better ways.

Maybe hope sparks the gentle and generous warmth of the season within us each year. Maybe hope fuels our generosity and our seasonal compassion for our human family. Is it possible that this same hope sparks our thoughts, words, and actions in such a way

that the optimism of the holidays spills forth from each of us into wonderful acts of kindness and love? I submit that at the very least, hope must be a contributing factor.

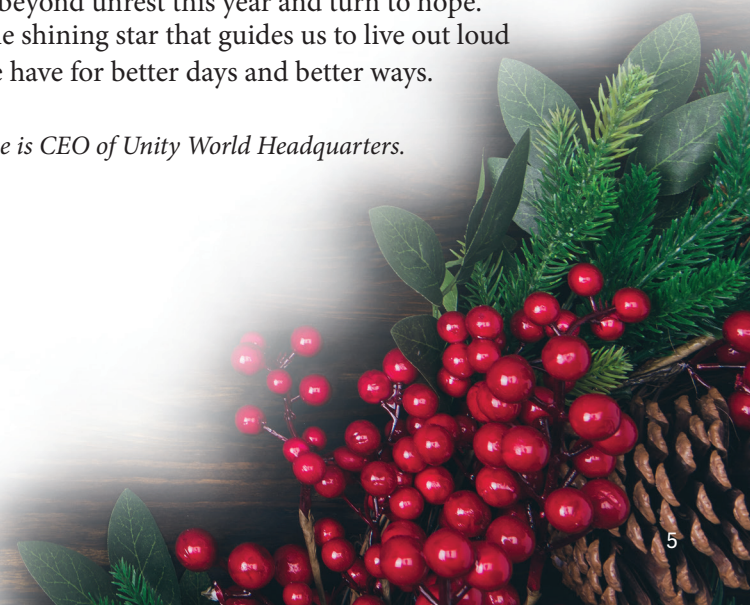
For this hope to continue to ignite an internal glow in each of us, mustn't we then take it upon ourselves to lead by example? Can we find it in ourselves to acknowledge the turbulence in the world and at the same time commit to exuding peace and light to ignite hope in those around us?

I think this may be our call this season—to shine forth our inner light of love and hope for all to see, to once again connect with the magic and nostalgia of the season, and to embrace the childlike love and enthusiasm of the season.

In doing so we are not only creating hope for ourselves and those in our circles, but we are outpicturing that very hope in our actions. We are affirming in our activity the hope that fuels us is manifesting as an outpouring of generosity and spirit in all we do.

Let us look beyond unrest this year and turn to hope. May it be the shining star that guides us to live out loud the hope we have for better days and better ways.

Rev. Jim Blake is CEO of Unity World Headquarters.





WHAT CHILD IS THIS?

Rev. Kathy Beasley

*I*t was December 1990, just months after the beginning of the Gulf War, when I found myself stationed in Japan at the Misawa Air Base. It was my first Christmas away from home and my first in a foreign country, so everything was different and new. Serving in the military overseas is a unique experience in itself—doing so in a time of conflict created a longing in me for the things of home.

I turned to the season's music for comfort and joy to cope with the distance. I found a song that somehow felt new to me in my Christmas music collection. "What Child Is This?" is a Christmas hymn that William Chatterton Dix wrote in 1865. I fell in love with it and often found myself lost within the mystery of the soulfulness of each word's movement.

The intellectual side of me knew and understood that the song heralded the birth of Jesus, while the intuitive that I was becoming saw this as a lens through which I could look upon the world around me. In the face of the Gulf War, I quietly questioned: *What child is this being born through all the chaos and destruction?* In looking at my life away from the familiar, the question became: *What child is this being born out of the unfamiliar?*

Every year since, I have become more aware of how every element of the story comes to life anew for us. In their own way, the Christmas stories become the poetry of rebellion and the song of change that allow us to choose on which side of history we will land. The same is true in every element of our seasonal rituals, as they allow more God through us to be made known in the world in times of violence or peace, helplessness or hope.



What will remain for us when every decoration is appropriately stored and every candle is extinguished? What remains is for us to take up our living, loving, and being in this world together. We must be daring enough to question our impact on the world and desire to know what is born in us and what is born in the world when we ask.

Many of our traditions and rituals involve retelling the stories, singing the songs, and gathering to remember and claim the origin story as part of our own stories. We must be prepared to go and tell it on all of the mountains of our lives today that the holy birth did not just happen a long time ago; it is happening now and again for all of us.

Beloved, more God is known through our faith, love, and acts that bring peace. Where we place the focus of our question, “What child is this?” becomes the focus of the blessings of the light of love and hope that come to life through us.

Rev. Kathy Beasley is a staff minister at Unity of Central Florida in Orlando and is a training supervisor in the Unity Prayer Ministry.

MAKING PEACE WITH GRIEF AT CHRISTMAS

Rev. Therese Lee



The holiday season can be difficult for those of us who have experienced change and loss, who are grieving. It may be filled with memories and feelings about people or pets who have died or perhaps those who are no longer present at our holiday celebrations because of divorce or other estrangements.

For most people, this time of year is one for celebrating joyfully as we gather. Yet for those of us who are grieving an empty place in the circle, at the table, and in our hearts, the constant reminders of togetherness can add to the overwhelming sense of grief. Whether the loss is due to death, divorce, moving, leaving the nest, or any change in relationship, it can be emotionally painful.

This grief we are feeling is valid, normal, and natural regardless of the bright Christmas lights, the carols being sung, and the delicious smell of cookies being baked. You might feel hopeless about ever feeling Christmas cheer and even wonder, “What is there to be joyful about?” You might even think you’d rather skip all the holiday gatherings.

Your feelings and fears are not illogical or irrational. What I have come to learn and understand is that grief is the normal and natural reaction to loss, to a change in any familiar pattern of behavior.

This familiar behavior could be many years old, like my being surrounded with 10 brothers and sisters on very loud Christmas mornings as kids, to this year waking up to absolute quiet now that I live alone. This familiar behavior can be more current too, from once hunting for the perfect pair of crazy dress socks for my husband to this year not buying any gifts. Knowing these are normal and natural reactions to loss brings me great comfort.

The good news is that grief doesn’t have to affect holiday seasons for the rest of our lives. We can make peace with our grief during the holidays.

My peacemaking practice for the holiday season is to accept, acknowledge, and allow. I accept it will be different. I acknowledge I may be uncomfortable. I allow the feelings and emotions to come as they may.

For me, here are some basic, practical, and emotionally helpful guidance reminders during this holiday season:

- I make a plan not to isolate even when I feel lost and alone.
- I am honest about how I feel. I sit with my feelings, and I talk about them.
- I decide which holiday traditions work for me and which ones to release and let go.
- I stay mindful of what and how much I am eating and drinking.
- I remember time doesn’t heal my broken heart; my actions do.
- I embrace *being* instead of *doing* and don’t get too busy.

Whatever you choose to do or not do this holiday season, give yourself the gift of staying true to yourself. To the best of your ability, seek out the places and people that allow your sadness and avoid those that ask you to pretend otherwise. Be gentle with yourself. Make this holiday season as much of a comfort as you can, as you take care of yourself and your heart.

May you be surprised to discover that even though there may be sadness, there may be moments of joy as well.

Rev. Therese Lee is minister at Unity of Hilton Head, South Carolina, and a Grief Recovery Method specialist.

HOPE AND FAITH

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT



NOVEMBER 27, 2022

Rev. David Brian Adams

This time of year, I find myself reflecting on Christmases past. I remember one year asking for what I considered the most prized of all gifts: an air hockey table. This thing had it all! It was a single-player version with lights, bells, and everything a 7-year-old could ever want!

I also recall how tough things were financially. My father had left ministry to become an insurance salesperson. My mother worked as a nursing assistant in a senior care facility. But as a child, I did not understand our financial woes—I simply knew what I wanted. I hoped and wished as every child does. At night I dreamt of how much fun that hockey game would be. I daydreamed of having friends over to enjoy it. I had faith that my parents would not forget my request and reminded God of that faith in my bedtime prayers.

When I woke up Christmas morning and saw the giant box labeled with my name, I jumped for joy! I threw my arms around my dad and mom, thanking them for the best gift ever. And like a child, I thought I had never felt so loved.

Years later, I feel the echoes of that Christmas. While I may not experience that same unfettered excitement, there is an inexhaustible sense of wonder present. As a child, the anticipation of receiving that air hockey table occupied my thoughts. Today my mind is open to innovative ideas, new ways of expressing the indwelling Christ in thought, word, and action. Time in prayer and reflection grounds my faith in this newness of being, and I become its loving caretaker.