THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS
Every year, we say Advent is a time of spiritual preparation for Christmas. But what needs to be prepared? If not the presents we’ll give or the food we’ll make to celebrate, what needs to be tended in the weeks before the holy day?

It is our own sense of being. Advent, which means “beginning,” allows us time and space to nurture a fragile, new understanding of who we truly are, as tenderly as we would care for a new baby.

The story of Mary and Joseph and the divine child born in a manger has resonated with us for 2,000 years because we feel ourselves to be part of it. Christmas represents the divine child born in each of us and the divine attributes we can develop as we learn to express our God nature in human form.

The four Sundays of Advent proclaim aspects of that divine nature—hope and faith, peace, love, and joy. The weekday messages will guide you in contemplating the attributes of Spirit in you. Our booklet continues through the 12 days of Christmas, to Epiphany on January 6, with an exploration of your 12 divine powers.

As this unusual year draws to a close, we are especially attuned to its lessons and legacies. We hope this booklet reawakens in you a sense of oneness with God and a knowing of yourself as holy too.

Your Friends in Unity
The spirit of Christmas is in the air!

Men, women, and children everywhere are feeling a touch of the Christmas spirit. Whoever tunes in to the spirit of Christmas and sends forth its message of peace and goodwill again receives the message from those who also have been open to receive it. So it becomes a universal spirit constantly giving forth from one to another that which is uplifting, inspiring, and joy-giving.

The spirit of Christmas is in the air! Have you become receptive to it? It is being broadcast from the hearts of those who have caught its message of life, love, peace, and joy. It is being broadcast to everyone.

We hear it in the voices of people as they speak more kindly and more joyously. There is a lilt to the voices we hear as we pass along the street, as if a heart song were being released.

The spirit of Christmas is in the air!

Frances Foulks was ordained a Unity minister in 1923 and wrote extensively for Unity publications. Her best-known book is Effectual Prayer (Elizabeth Towne Company, 1927).
2020 has been a tough year for many. As such, the Christmas season this year may be challenging for some of us as a result of the global pandemic and its toll on our families, friends, and communities.

For others, this year’s holiday season may be welcome, a chance to rekindle annual feelings of warmth, generosity, and love, allowing us to step away from the stress, fear, and uncertainty that occupied so much of the year.

Regardless of where we find ourselves on this year’s spectrum, my humble invitation is to consider that we each have an opportunity to connect with at least one of the many threads in the tapestry of the Christmas spirit, something often talked about but difficult to define.

What is it that brings forth this luminous yuletide spirit?

Many say the heartwarming feelings that accompany the season come from the nostalgia of our holidays past, particularly the joy, anticipation, and magic we felt as children. Some say it stems from the generosity of gift-giving that makes us feel so good. Others tell us it’s in the time spent with family and friends.

Lots of people find it in the richness and inspiration grounded in their religious traditions. I have other friends who bask in the opportunity to reflect upon all of their blessings at this time of year, leaving their hearts overflowing with feelings of being blessed and grateful.

Finally, some of us simply see the resulting kindness from all of these things combined and expressed during this time of year, and it fills our spirit with hope. Hope that stems from witnessing some of the highest expressions humanity has to offer during this time of year. Hope that allows us to see past the commercialism that surrounds the season and fix our gaze upon the purest form of the human spirit underlying it all. Hope that someday, as a human family, we will be able to harness the source beneath this multithreaded adornment of goodness and express it every day throughout the year.

Whatever your experience has been in 2020, may we each find a strand in the woven fabric of the Christmas spirit and may it anchor us throughout this season, gently lifting our hearts and spirits while wrapping us in hope for the future.

Happy holidays, friends. May the peace and spirit of the season be upon you, and may you be richly blessed. Namaste.
Peace
AS A PRACTICE
Rev. Martha Creek

Now, discipline always seems painful rather than pleasant at the time, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.—Hebrews 12:11

Peace has been a core value of mine since my earliest memories. I had a vision as a small child that included two giant keys for my life. This image was striking and unforgettable. Imagine gleaming skeleton keys taller than anything you’ve ever seen. Taller than the Empire State Building. Taller than the stalk in Jack and the Beanstalk. Infinitely tall. These two giant keys were forgiveness and gratitude. These were my assignments for life, so to speak, or perhaps the Holy Grail of living a life of peace. Even now during times of challenge, stress, upset, confusion, fear, turmoil, and uncertainty, the keys still have priority as a chief aim for me to continually practice, always in the direction of peace.

My family didn’t attend church. However, I wanted to. I asked my momma about going to church, and she responded in her classic pioneer-woman tone and way, “If you want to go to church, then find you a way to get there.” So I did. I called the neighbors and asked around to see who goes to church and where. I asked them to pick me up and offered to walk to their house, if necessary. Of course, they were delighted for me to attend church with them.

It was a Methodist church, and my Sunday school teacher was named Clio. She was an emissary of love, sweetness, and a calm presence. Her smile was proof that God was real. She was a master teacher of peace. I loved her and I loved being with her. She gave me my first Bible, which I still have. She signed it for me too. She lived to be nearly 100 and still wholeheartedly lives in my being. She let me read to the class and gave me assignments to study and memorize. She saw me and my passionate desire to learn. As I reflect in this writing, I’m open to the reality that she actually enjoyed me too. Perhaps she saw me as a gift of peace.
She was the epitome of peace. I never once heard her raise her voice, react to the roomful of energetic children, or express even a flinch of disappointment when I couldn’t recite the lines perfectly. I wanted and still want to be more like that. I’ve worked at it for 50 years now, but I’m pretty sure it was Anne Lamott who wrote: “You get to experience one second of peace for every year you practice.”

What? One second of peace for every year of practice? Talk about humbling!

After a lifetime of practice—including a large spectrum of love and loss, trials and triumphs, messes and messages, and giving and receiving—I’m up to 50 seconds of peace.

Yet this Advent gift of 50 seconds of peace holds the full power of the universe. You have the power of the universe within you to create a new experience. As you are born again into the peace that surpasses all understanding, accepting the reality of what is, devoted to live by what can be, practiced in what is effective and productive, and ever-transforming your consciousness and experience, you can truly celebrate the now moment, the new opportunity, and the gifts of the creative process.

Live as peace, dear friends, and practice, practice, practice. After all, practice makes … progress.

Rev. Martha Creek is a healthy congregations facilitator and trainer. Learn more about her at marthacreek.com.