



# Unitarian Universalist Congregation of York

## “A Family Christmas”

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When I was younger, my family had a tradition of giving gag gifts to each other. For \$20 or less, we were supposed to get a funny or silly gift for the family member whose name we drew out of a hat. We would draw the names when we were together at Thanksgiving, and then we’d have basically a month to figure out what would be the funniest thing we could give to the person whose name we’d picked.

At first, we just bought silly things. Funny hats, toys, once very memorably one of those singing fish plaques - that one got handed around in the exchange year after year! But eventually people started getting creative. One year I picked my Mom, and I bought her some random silly things at the dollar store, and I wrote a story to lead her through unwrapping them. And one year, my brother drew my name. I had taken a cross-country road trip that year and posted lots of pictures, and he printed out 20 of the photos that were just flat boring landscapes and put them all on a poster for me: “Jen’s Amazing Journey Through The Flattest, Most Boring Parts of the United States.” Neither of these gifts cost us anywhere near \$20, but they made the best memories - and the best stories.

Can you think of the best present you ever got? What were some favorite presents, anyone? Big or small, what stands out? (responses)

Now some presents are good because they’re exactly what you wanted, or because someone picked out something that shows they know you really well. But sometimes the best presents are the ones with the best stories.

This time of year, really, is all about stories. Today we heard about the story of the animated special *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, and we heard a re-telling of the story of the birth of Jesus and the making of a family, and then we heard a story about a tree and the bigger family that includes all living things.

Who here has a favorite story they tell again and again in their family? It doesn't have to have anything to do with Christmas or Hanukkah or any holiday...I see a lot of hands!

The stories we tell again and again are part of how we make a family. And it's how we form and re-form different families throughout our lives - because family isn't just about the people you are related to by blood, it's about the people you choose, and who choose you back. Like we heard in our version of the birth of Jesus, the record is certainly not clear on whether or not Joseph was the actual related-by-blood father of Jesus, but there was no doubt that he was the boy's father of loving connection.

Sometimes our stories change. Sometimes that is because they need to - maybe we learn new information that impacts our story - and sometimes it's because the old stories no longer work for us. You know what this is like if you ever go back to read a book or watch a movie that you used to love, and you find that you just don't feel the same way about it. In the Unitarian Universalist tradition, we love to honor the many different kinds of stories told by people across history - those stories are part of different faith traditions and different experiences of the world, but if we listen with open hearts and minds, we can find so many similar themes. And if we find that some stories mean more to us than others do, then when we hear a story that maybe we don't like as much - we can remind ourselves that maybe that story is really important to someone else sitting right next to us!

After all, there's no one best story that will teach the same thing to everyone - think of our last reading, the poem about [Alfie the Christmas Tree](#):

"You see, some folks have never heard a jingle bell ring,

And they've never heard of Santa Claus.

They've never heard the story of the Son of God. And that made Alfie pause.

Did that mean that they'd never know of peace on earth  
or the brotherhood of man?

Or know how to love, or know how to give? If they can't, no one can.

You see, life is a very special kind of thing, not just for a chosen few.

But for each and every living breathing thing. Not just me and you."

Is peace on earth something that can only be taught by the Christmas story?

No! Is loving, and generosity, something you can only learn from Jesus - or  
Santa Claus? No!

We tell well-loved stories again and again because we feel comfort in them,  
and even when we change, we can still find new meanings in old stories. And  
we can also tell new stories to each other, again and again, to make our  
community. To make our families, with love at the center.

Love and joy and family are at the center of the Christmas story, and we  
remind ourselves of that every year when we sing beloved carols, too - songs  
are also stories! Please rise in body or spirit to sing Hymn #231, "Angels We  
Have Heard on High," and let's give those "glorias" all we've got!