



## UNIVERSALIST UNITARIAN CHURCH OF HAVERHILL

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“Made to Shine,”  
a homily given by the Rev. Frank Clarkson  
on Christmas Eve, December 24, 2011

We’ve just heard the story of Jesus’ birth from the gospels of Matthew and Luke. Did you know that the other two gospels have no birth stories at all? Mark, the earliest gospel, begins with Jesus as an adult, at the start of his ministry. John, the latest, takes a more mystical approach, in which the spirit that Jesus embodies has been with us since the beginning. Listen to these familiar words:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being... in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it (John 1:1-5).

John is saying that, since the beginning of time, there has been this Spirit that has inhabited the earth, with God and of God. The gospel says, “That was the true Light, which lights every (one) that comes into the world” (John 1:9).

Now this passage has traditionally interpreted that light to be Jesus. And it is true that the Spirit, the light this passage describes was embodied on this earth beautifully, courageously, and faithfully by Jesus of Nazareth.

The question, for me anyway, is this: is that Spirit limited to the person of Jesus? Or should we take a more expansive view? The passage says the true light “lights every person who comes into the world.”

The church, over time, decided that Jesus was the only one. At least that was the dominant view. But it’s pretty clear that Jesus didn’t see himself that way. Listen to what he said to his followers, that ragtag group of common people, in his sermon on the mount:

“You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven” (Matt. 5:14-16).

You are the light of the world. That's what I want you to hear tonight. The radical message of the incarnation is that God is not just out there somewhere, but here, in our midst. You have that light in you, and you have had it all along.

The church has not done a particularly good job of proclaiming this. The church has been more comfortable making it all about Jesus. Maybe religious leaders worried that if they told ordinary people they had that kind of power, it would go to their heads. Maybe these leaders feared it would undermine their authority. But Jesus, whose birth we celebrate this night, whose power came from knowing that he was a child of God, that's what he said: "You are the light of the world." He wanted to share that love and that power.

The message of the incarnation is that we too are bearers of that light and that love. But do we believe it?

How do you think that crowd heard the sermon on the mount? When Jesus said, "You are the light of the world," don't you think someone said, "He's talking about us?" Didn't at least some of them say, "Not me--he doesn't know the pain, the brokenness, the baggage I'm carrying." When you've suffered enough loss and disappointment, it can be easier to give up, to lose hope, in yourself and in others. If you ever feel that way, then listen to these words from Marianne Williamson:

"Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."

If this feels like a leap of faith to you, then tonight I am asking you to take that leap; to believe you are a bearer of that holy light, and then to act like it. You may not have grown up hearing this. You may have been told that you were not good enough, not worthy of love or care. If so, please hear me. In God's eyes, you are good enough, you are worthy, you are beloved.

We gather this night to hear this story, of Love come to earth, because we forget. We forget that God loves us just as we are, and this we need to remember.

This past Sunday was our annual Living Nativity here, a heartwarming no-rehearsal pageant in which there's a role for anyone who wants one. Before we began, I told a story about a little girl who is excited to be in a Christmas play. Unlike ours, this one had rehearsals. Her mom is excited too, and must be a bit disappointed when, after the first rehearsal, she learns that her daughter has been chosen to be one of the stars in the pageant--not Mary or an angel, but literally, one of the stars, like in the sky. Her task is to wear "a five-pointed star lined in shiny gold tinsel designed

to drape over her like a sandwich board.” Trying to be upbeat, the mom asks, “What exactly will you be doing in the play?” And the daughter smiles and says, “I just stand there and shine.”

That is your role too--to shine. Christmas invites you to remember that there is a Love which has been with you from the beginning, and will be with you until the end. This night calls you to be who you were born to be; tells you again, “You were made to shine.” And made to share that light and that love with those around you, and with those in need. You were made to shine. Remember that, please, this night, and always.

Amen.