

## **Christmas Reflection: Leaving By A Different Road**

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If Christmas is about anything, it is about recognizing the sacred in the ordinary. It's the story of a baby born to a poor family, an anonymous mother, not even important enough to have space made for her to give birth indoors. And yet in Christian tradition, this baby is an incarnation of the divine. In Christian tradition, this baby is the Messiah. The night that he was born is called a holy night. The contrast between the ordinariness of his circumstances and the grandeur of his essence could not be starker.

Of course Unitarian Universalists like to say that Jesus has no monopoly on holiness. As Sophia Lyon Fahs wrote, every night a child is born is a holy night. Our tradition teaches that every child is holy and, indeed, every person is holy. Everyone is an incarnation of God. The unique thing of course, is that Jesus was recognized as holy – not by everyone, but by a few key people. And this recognition made all the difference.

The story goes that the wise men were among the first to recognize Jesus' holiness. They followed a star and a Biblical prophecy to find him in this nondescript little town of Bethlehem, lying in the hay of the manger – a true needle in a haystack. They recognized his holiness and gave him gifts of devotion and connected with him. Perhaps they talked with his parents; perhaps they looked into his eyes, perhaps they touched his feet. Whatever happened in that moment of contact, it changed them. The Scripture says that the wise men came by one road and left by a *different* road.

Maybe they saw a unique holiness in Jesus – that's certainly the traditional interpretation – or maybe in seeing the holiness in Jesus, they were somehow newly able to see the holiness in everyone. Maybe the baby Jesus was a teacher who taught them awe. With his teaching, maybe Mary and Joseph too now reflected the image of God to them. Maybe they now looked at one another with fresh eyes and saw God as well. Maybe from that moment forth, everything was

changed, everything glowed, and the world was sacred. They left by a different road.

In the story I read earlier, the baby Erik was also such a teacher. His mother saw a loud, smelly homeless man who was causing a ruckus with her baby. But Erik was delighted by the man – he found him fascinating, hilarious, and wonderful, wanted to touch him and be held by him. He wanted to lay his soft baby head on the man’s shoulder. Perhaps Erik saw the face of God in the old man’s face. And Erik’s mother, in that moment of contact, was changed. As the old man tenderly held her baby, she realized that in only seeing his tattered clothes and garrulous chatter, she had misrecognized him – she would have missed his holiness entirely if it had not been for the wisdom of her baby. She ran to the car crying, “Forgive me.” She left by a different road.

If we take away one thing from this Christmas season, I would hope it would be that we leave differently than we arrived. Walk away from this special time and place with a new reverence for the mysterious beauty of the universe. Walk out of here with the stunning awareness that we all have a spark of divinity within us, no matter how tattered, no matter how wounded, no matter how far we’ve strayed from our center. It is our task to open our hearts and recognize that divinity in ourselves and in one another.

May the love in this season give us a little more capacity to love; to love ourselves as well as the stranger. May the hope in this season give us a little more hope; the kind of hope that calls us to work toward a better future for all. May our encounter with these holidays fill us with light that glows from within us as we leave this morning by a different road, now softer, more compassionate, more whole.