

**ORDER OF SERVICE**  
DECEMBER 24, 2017

**CHIME**

**GREETINGS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Beth Butler

**PRELUDE**

**“Wexford Carol”**  
*Irish Traditional*

Polly Oliver, piano

**OPENING WORDS**

The Rev. Dr. Stephanie May

On this Christmas Eve morning,  
     We invite you into a deep reflection  
         On the figure of Mary—  
             A woman honored within multiple religious traditions.  
 Today we will explore Mary in three religions—  
     As Mary, the mother of Jesus, in Christianity,  
     As Miriam, the sister of Moses, in Judaism,  
     As Maryam, the mother of Jesus, in Islam.  
 For many, Mary is an important religious figure of inspiration;  
     For others, she is an impossible ideal that has hurt women;  
         And for today, she is our teacher  
             As we listen to her stories and her songs.  
 In our listening,  
     May we hear something new about Mary  
         And something new about ourselves.  
 Christmas is the season of celebrating birth—  
     The appearance of new life, new understandings,  
         And new possibilities.

Let us listen well for what is waiting to be born in us.

**\*CHALICE & ADVENT WREATH LIGHTING**

Please rise now in body or in spirit, as \_\_\_\_\_  
     Comes forward to light our chalice  
         And all FOUR advent candles.

The light of the chalice is the symbol of our Unitarian Universalist tradition.

Like a parent awaiting the birth of a baby,  
     The advent wreath helps us to wait for Christmas

Each candle reminds us of something important—  
 Hope, Love, Joy, and today  
 we light a candle for Peace

As \_\_\_\_\_ finishes lighting the candles,  
 Please join me, if you wish, in saying together the words of our covenant...

*With open minds and loving hearts, we gather to search for meaning,  
 to care for one another, and to work together for a better world.*

To help us celebrate Christmas Eve  
 And to start our journey of exploring Mary in Christianity,  
 Please join in singing:

**\* CAROL                      "Away in a Manger"**

1. Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,  
 the little Lord Jesus laid down His sweet head;  
 the stars in the heavens looked down where He lay,  
 the little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.
2. The cattle are lowing, the Baby awakes,  
 but little Lord Jesus, no crying He makes.  
 I love Thee, Lord Jesus, look down from the sky  
 and stay by my side until morning is nigh.
3. Be near me, Lord Jesus; I ask Thee to stay  
 close by me forever and love me, I pray.  
 Bless all the dear children in Thy tender care,  
 and fit us for heaven, to live with Thee there.

**MARY IN CHRISTIANITY**

Rev. May

As most of you know, I grew up very Protestant.  
 This meant that I really didn't 'get' Mary.  
     Sure you should respect and honor Mary...  
     She was Jesus' mom  
     ...and I was taught you should respect your mom!  
 But, what I didn't get is why people prayed to *her*.  
 Or had pictures of her.  
     In the evangelical Christian tradition,  
     There was only Jesus . . .  
     Mary mattered only because of the son she bore.  
 Becoming a feminist scholar of religion didn't help matters.  
 Mary as a symbol for women raises feminist eyebrows.

How can one be both a virgin  
 And a mother???

And yet, for other feminist Christian scholars,  
 Mary is the remnant of an earlier culture  
 When pregnant woman were a magical mystery  
 For their ability to bring forth new life.  
 In many early cultures,  
 A woman with a swollen, pregnant body  
 Is a central religious symbol.

When reflecting on Mary in the Christian tradition,  
 Its important to remember that she  
 was deliberately chosen by God.

In an essay, "[No More Lying About Mary,](#)"  
 Nancy Rockwell writes,

*"Luke's is the only gospel in which Mary's story appears,  
 and in his account there is nothing submissive  
 nor immature about her.  
 According to Luke, the Angel approached her  
 with words of great honor:  
Hail Mary, full of grace."*

Rockwell goes on to say that Luke shows Mary as a spunky woman  
 Who challenges the angel, "*how shall this happen to me...*",  
 and doesn't stay put in domestic scenes,  
 but travels around Israel and even to Egypt.

She says that Mary attracted God's attention  
 not for her docile meekness, but for her grace—  
 grace that Luke depicts as "courage, boldness,  
 grit, ringing convictions about justice."

In a moment, we will hear Beth sing *Ave Maria*—  
 A piece that is both a song and a prayer.  
 The lyrics echo the call of the angel to Mary—  
 "Hail Mary, full of Grace"—  
 and then appeal to Mary to pray  
 for us sinners.

I hear in these lyrics an appeal to be on Mary's team,  
 Which is to say in world where brokenness  
 Too often keeps us apart from goodness,  
 Sometimes we need someone  
 who can help bridge the gap.  
 Sometimes we need someone who inspires us

By their goodness to help carry us  
 Through the tough times  
 When we're struggling.  
 As I understand it, this is the sentiment underlying  
 The devotion to Mary in the Christian tradition.  
 Here is a bold and brave woman who  
 caught the attention of God and  
 chose to accept a singular role in history.  
 I'd want her on my side too.

So as we listen to *Ave Maria*,  
 I hope we hear in it an echo of our own longings  
 For support and inspiration through  
 the tough times of our life . . .  
 now and in the hour of our death.

**MUSIC**                      **"Ave Maria"**                      Beth Cliff, alto  
    *Bach/Gounod*

**MIRIAM IN JUDAISM**                      Kate Holland  
 INTRO: Long before Mary, the Mother of Jesus was born...  
 Another Mary—Miriam—also played a pivotal role  
 In her religious community.  
 Kate is going to tell her story....

**OFFERTORY**                      **"Miriam's Song"**                      Recorded Music  
    *Debbie Friedman*

**MARYAM IN ISLAM**                      Rev. May

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are known as  
 "the religions of the book"—  
 Not only do they all rely on a sacred book...  
 The Torah, Bible, or Qur'an...  
 Their books also share  
 Some of the same people and stories.

In the Islamic holy book, the Qur'an,  
 Both Jesus and Mary appear.  
 Indeed, Mary is the only woman directly mentioned  
 by name in the Qur'an.

As you may know, the Qur'an was written in Arabic  
 and Arabic remains the sacred language of Islam—  
 used in the Qur'an and in worship.

The Qur'an is made up of 114 surahs, or chapters, of varying lengths.  
 What may surprise you is that one of these surahs

is [named for Mary](#)—or, as her Arabic name is translated,  
for Maryam.

This Surah tells the story of Mary and Jesus.

As in the Christian story, Mary is unmarried [a virgin]  
and Jesus is born by the power of God  
rather than a human father.

While his birth is special,  
Jesus is seen as a prophet,  
a witness *to* God,  
and not *as* God.

While in some ways, the story of Maryam  
is similar to Mary's story in Luke, in other ways,  
Maryam's story differs.

In a different Surah,  
the story of Mary's birth and childhood is told.

One commentator describes her as '[precocious](#)'—  
devout in her study and strong in her faith.

The Surah tells the story that everytime her uncle  
entered her prayer room, he found her with food.

When he asked her about it, she said,  
"It is from Allah. Indeed, Allah provides  
for whom He wills without account."

(3: 37)

Also different in the Qur'an is that Mary is alone  
when it is time to deliver her baby.

Afraid and overcome with pain,  
she cries out, "Oh, I wish I had died before this  
and was in oblivion, forgotten."

But the angel calls to her—showing her a stream  
Allah has provided

And urging her to shake the palm tree  
she sits beneath so that "ripe, fresh dates"  
would fall around her. (19:24-25)

I love this story—the assurance that she was not alone,  
that she was not forgotten, but provided  
with the life-giving sustenance  
she needed for herself and her son.

Mary and her story are beloved in Islam.

Hers is a story of devotion to Allah  
And of Allah's care for her  
... as a devout girl  
and as a frightened mother of a newborn.

**MEDITATION**

With this story of Maryam in mind,  
 I invite you now to enter into a time of meditation  
 As we listen to a portion of the Mary Surah.

All across the globe, Muslims learn Arabic  
 To understand the Qur'an—so that a Muslim  
 Can pray in Saudia Arabia or Bangladesh,  
 Boston or Wayland,  
 And know the sacred words.

While we may not know the words,  
 May these moments of listening  
 Open us to the story of Mary,  
 And to the experience of being alone and afraid . . .  
 Only to receive what we need.

To prepare for this time of meditation,  
 I invite you to take a deep breath in and out,  
 and another in and out.

**MARY FOR UUs**

Rev. May

As Unitarian Universalists,  
 We are part of a liberal religious tradition  
 That brings to sacred stories and ancient texts  
 Our scientific understandings and critical reason.

While this framework may lead us to question  
 the factual truth of some of these stories,  
 it does not mean they have no relevance to our lives.

In all of these stories, Mary was a bold and courageous woman.  
 At times, she felt afraid, confused, and alone.  
 And yet, in every story, God protected and provided for her.

The story of Mary is a story that assures us that even  
 When the unexpected and the uncertain happens,  
 we are not alone.

This does not mean everything will always go right.  
 Miriam, like Moses, never reached the Promised Land  
 to which she had helped to lead her people.  
 In the Christian story, Mary watched her son  
 be put to a painful death on a cross.  
 And in the Qur'an, Maryam was shamed by her community  
 for bearing a child while unwed—until Jesus

would successfully defend his mother.

Yet, in the journeys that each woman took,  
The god of her belief stayed near to her.

In a moment, we will hear a song that conveys  
Both the fear that followed Mary  
And the faith that sustained her.  
When I hear Mary call out to the breath of heaven,  
I hear the very human longing to not be alone  
When faced with fear and struggle.  
You'll hear her own doubts about the purpose of her life  
And her desire for assurance and support through it all.  
And in this, I suspect, we all recognize  
A part of ourselves and our experience.

On this Christmas Eve day,  
I hope that we all find ourselves supported, affirmed, and loved  
By a power and presence greater than ourselves . . .  
Whatever we may or may not name that power.  
May we all feel the breath of heaven,  
Of the possibilities of new life,  
Bring us strength and hope for the journey.

So may it be. Amen.

<b>MUSIC</b>	<b>"Breath of Heaven"</b> <i>Debbie Friedman</i>	Maureen Gormley, alto
<b>BENEDICTION</b>		Rev. May
<b>MUSICAL RESPONSE</b>	<b>"Chordal Amen"</b> <i>Anon</i>	Polly Oliver, piano
<b>POSTLUDE</b>	<b>"I Saw Three Ships"</b> <i>English Traditional</i>	Polly Oliver, piano