

PRAYER: Mother-Father-God; Divine Mind of the Universe: Thank You for bringing us here to renew our connection with You and to refresh our understanding of Who We Truly Are. As Spirits, we chose to come to Earth to have human experiences & to create more love through our thoughts, words & intentions. With Your leading the way for us, we affirm that we will always abide in Well-Being with glad hearts. We affirm our choice to live in joy as we demonstrate our spiritual Love to all around us. Daily, we listen for Your guidance; daily, we choose to be filled with joy; daily, we affirm that we view life from our Higher Selves. Trusting You, the One Holy Presence, we *live* our Truth through our joy. Again, we say “Thank You” ...& so it is; Amen.

SCRIPTURE:

Luke 1: 46 & 47 = “And Mary said: ‘Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord, rejoice, rejoice, my spirit, in God my Savior.’”

MESSAGE:

REJOICE! Gift Yourself with Joy!

REJOICE!! Can we each speak & feel the joy that Mary felt when she rejoiced in her understanding of the God-Essence? This is the first Sunday in Advent. It’s a holy season for Christian churches & all Christians. *The American Heritage Dictionary* defines **advent** as a noun; the coming or arrival of something momentous; example: the advent of the computer. In Christianity, Advent is the birth of the Christ; the Advent season is the period of 4 Sundays before Christmas.

Many churches have formal routines for this season ... an Advent wreath with candles, each representing a different week and Christmas Day; Christmas pageants for kids; special evening services; choral cantatas; celebrations; etc. Unity doesn’t get too involved in rituals & big ceremonies; they’re not stressed as vital. All ceremonies & rituals serve as reminders, symbols for a desired inner state.

So, at U.E.S., we don’t have any big rituals planned for the next few weeks. Our U.E.S. Christmas Party will be our pot-luck, on the 18th. That day, Sylvia will bring the message, “Feliz Navidad!” because Andre & I will be out of town. We’ll have a Birthday Party for Jesus on Christmas morning, with lots of Christmas carols to sing & a little gift for everyone who comes. As you see, we put up a few decorations: a tree, a few wreaths, a nativity scene. But, we’ll stress the importance of inner feelings, an inner state of joy, & peace of mind. The goal at Christmas is to experience a rebirth of the Christ-Mind within. To feel the joy & to honestly rejoice, that is the number one reason for celebration!

The dictionary defines *rejoice* as...to feel joyous; to be filled with joy; to gladden. What does rejoicing mean to us at U.E.S., & why rejoice for the birth of Jesus now, in December? Everyone says that December is a time of year for rejoicing. Biblical experts believe that Jesus was most likely born in the Spring, when shepherds had sheep in the fields, not in December. I understand the very early Christians, before the church really got organized, celebrated Jesus’ birth in December because that was a Roman festival time, & since they were being persecuted as Christians, in December, they could celebrate & *melt into the crowd* without being noticed.

So, I checked “Google” for the history of Christmas & learned this [from History.com]. Modern & ancient traditions are very different. We have two sources from the New Testament about Jesus’ birth, Matthew & Luke, but they did not refer to each other. We put the two stories together to get a full picture. Matthew told of the star & the wise men, but gave no date. We have no real data of when Jesus was born. Back then, Romans celebrated their pagan holidays. One was *Saturnalia*, on Dec. 17, & that consisted of many parties, lasting 3 to 5 days! New Year’s was another bash, really a 5-day party! In between was a birthday celebration, on 12/25, for a Roman god. The Winter Solstice [on 12/21] is the darkest day of the year. Pagans then & now celebrate that darkest day. In the Roman religion, the Winter Solstice was the center or middle of their year. So, Romans lit bonfires to keep things light & to

keep the dark away. The early Christian church leaders decided to not try to ban those festivals; they decided to ignore the Roman habits. And they continued.

Finally, in A.D. 353, the Catholic Pope, Julius the first, officially authorized celebrating Dec. 25, as the birthday of Jesus. The word *Christmas* is from Latin, *Cristes Maesse*, which means “Christ’s Mass.” We still celebrate that date. I wonder what Pope Julius & the 12 disciples & Jesus would think if they saw our money-driven celebrations these days.

The Advent season, the momentous arrival of the Christ is cause for rejoicing! It’s especially joyful if that arrival of “the Christ” has *personal meaning* for us. It seems to me that much of the “rejoicing” in modern America is about food, big meals, parties, drinking alcohol, money, presents, company-festivities, shopping, finding a perfect gift, cookies, music, fancy lights, candles, etc. To me, all of that is to help make things festive, to help get us into a *rejoicing* mood. That’s okay; we can do whatever works, but if those things are the focus for us, we miss the whole point of Christmas.

Many of our events at this time of year do not produce rejoicing. The stress of family gatherings, old family arguments brought up again, big meal preparations, or no family close by, feeling alone & lost when all others seem to be celebrating. Gift-giving at Christmas is a tradition based on the gifts of the Magi to the Christ Child. With the present tough economy, some likely are feeling depressed about an inability to give the gifts they’d like to give others...no money to spare! Of course, we desire to be able to give gifts to others. Giving is a great mood-lifter; giving is a sign of love; giving is a higher thought process. Experts all say the best thing to give is “self,” not some purchased thing. I can hear your thoughts now. “How can I give myself? I’m so busy & frazzled now. What do I have to give that has meaning?”

There are many ways to *give of self*, both to others & to you. Think back in your life. What were some of the best, most meaningful & most memorable things you ever got? What were the most memorable moments of your life? Maybe time with your dad on a fishing or hunting trip, or learning to tie knots. Maybe mom’s help to learn how to bake cookies, or to sew on a button. Maybe getting a hug from Grandma & feeling very loved. Maybe a compliment & a pat on the head from a favorite teacher. Maybe a first kiss. Those things can be remembered for a lifetime & held in our heart as special gifts of love. Those are the gifts that sustained us, not a doll or a new toy truck. What gifts are most meaningful? When we care enough to give our very best, we give self, our love, our time, our positive attitude. There is no need to spend a dime!

One of my most memorable Christmases was 1957. Earlier that year, my dad learned his receptionist-bookkeeper was embezzling money. Dad had just built a new house, & he & Mom were hosting a House-Warming Party, when the banker called. Dad was overdrawn at the bank, the IRS was after him for taxes, etc. We never found out exactly how much she took; she repaid \$1,000. So, later, when Christmas came, we 4 kids were allowed to spend only ten cents per gift, & only for family members. All the money came out of Dad’s pocket! What can you buy for Mom or Dad with only ten cents? Even in 1957, that was not much! We made gifts out of colored paper, glue, & stuff. I gave my dad a little plastic bag of 10 nails. We kids gathered boxes from everywhere & wrapped little things in many boxes, bigger & bigger ones, to make it look like something special.

That’s the year we started a new tradition: we all took turns opening gifts at the breakfast table. We all “Ooohed & Aaahed” over each other’s presents, which made it seem like so much more. It took at least an hour or more to open all the little gifts. That’s what I remember most...the fun at the breakfast table! Andre & I still do that routine, & so do my sisters!

When we give a gift, we can’t wait for an expected return. A *GIFT* is freely given; no strings & no expectations. If we expect something in return, it was a bribe or a swap; it was not a gift. Someday, when we die & our Spirit drops the body & flies home to Source, our Spirit won’t care what we did or what we gave or received, but Who we were Being, while doing whatever. So, we could each ask the question: Who do I choose to be this Christmas...today...this week...this coming year?

One of the most important persons *to gift* this Christmas Season is YOU. One of the most important gifts you can give to you is JOY! Give yourself the gift of your own time, your own love, your own attention, your own focus. Rejoice in being *you*. Rejoice in Self-discovery this Christmas. Plan on spending some quality time with Self & Divine-Mind. Maybe you'll make a great advancement in growing Self into spiritual maturity. After all, YOU are your most important project on Earth.

Do you know, yet, exactly why you are here on Earth? Do you know your life's purpose? Have you *attained* your highest goals? I doubt if any of us here have attained our highest goals & been able to *truly sustain* that achievement. So, we're each a work in progress. That's a good thing!

Will we give Self the gift of time to make more progress this Christmas? Will we give Self the gift of a rejoicing attitude? In spite of the economy, in spite of the weather, in spite of what relatives do or say, allow yourself to rejoice, anyway! Choose to create the *experience of joy*. Happiness is not the destination; it's a method of transportation. We each get to choose how much rejoicing we'll experience this Advent Season. It doesn't depend on outer things, events, people, Christmas décor & stuff. It's an inner decision & choice.

How do we do that? There are many ways. We can us mood-shifters, pay attention to our focus, make a new choice, intend joy, find an inspirational book [there are many in our library], chat with someone who is farther up their spiritual ladder, phone a long-time friend, use the "Golden Key" idea, which means to let go of all challenges, troubles, problems & focus your mind, thoughts & expectations on the Source, the God-Essence. Think ONLY what you desire to attract to your experience; think only joy! Do more meditation, with the goal in mind of finding inner joy. Slow down; take time; *let it be*.

Life has gotten so much faster in recent decades! Our grandparents didn't rush so much; they walked here & there; they had time to sit on the front porch & watch people go by. Our way of life is so focused on productivity, efficiency & speed. That attitude fills the workplace, so that one person must do the work of two people; jobs are cut to part-time to save money & to be more *cost-effective*. The *need for speed* is very obvious on T.V. Ever notice how ads jump from photo-to-photo, allowing only one second each!! Kids today have a very short attention span; some have real trouble focusing!

Question: When was the last time you thought you did not have time to meditate or pray? Are we too impatient to sit still & have a chat with Divine Mind? That's the one entity with whom we need to chat! It's okay to sit & take the time to chat with the One Presence. We can't hear an answer or a solution or a new idea if we're rushing & not taking time. Rejoicing & finding joy is truly an inside job. Nobody can do it for us. We must choose it for Self. We're always at a point of choice.

Marjorie Holmes one said, "At Christmas, all roads lead home." [unknown source; internet] You & I know we can't go *home* to our childhood home again. Either it's not there or somebody else lives in it or our family is all scattered & gone, etc. But, your *home* is where your heart is. Where is your heart these days? I hope it's with YOU. I hope your heart is *in love* with YOU. I hope your heart is longing to celebrate YOU, to lift up YOU, to renew YOU, to gift YOU with love, peace of mind & Christmas Joy.

We've all heard of the recent book, *Eat, Pray, Love*, right? That's a very good formula for life, for celebrations & for Christmas! *Eat, Pray, Love!* I wish for you a genuine Christmas gift. I wish you the time to eat & to pray & to love ... at a slow pace, so you can truly fill up on & experience JOY. Yes, Christmas is a good time for *rejoicing*. Make every day a "Christ's Mass" in your life. Every day is a *great day* to rejoice in & with the God-Essence. Let's focus on finding our inner JOY in our meditation.

MEDITATION: This is the time when we slow down & settle into a quiet, inner space to refresh our connection with Divine-Mind. Close your eyes for a private encounter; relax; let the chair hold you; let your shoulders down & focus on your breathing – in/out. ~ Quiet the chatter in your mind; slow down inside & rest in silence. ~ Let your intention for the next few minutes be to gain insight on finding & holding inner Joy, so you can truly Rejoice. ~ Feel the Life-Force within you. ~ Just rest in the silence & let everything slow down, your thoughts & your breathing. ~ As you sit in the stillness, find & feel your Life Force; find the Source of your aliveness; find the God-Essence in you. ~ Let the God-Mind touch your thinking mind. ~ Welcome the One Presence as *True Love for you*, freely given. ~ Bask in the warmth of that Great, Divine Love for you ~ As you rest in that love, understand that Source knows all you have been, or done or said in the past, & it still loves you so very much. ~ Know that you have great value to the One Presence. Know that you are loved so much. You were created, specifically, to be you. You are a beloved child of the God-Essence. ~ Feel the acceptance & respect Divine-Source has for you. ~ Know that you are never alone, that the God-Energy is inside every cell of your body, in your every thought, word & deed. ~ Know that Divine-Mind wants the very best for you. ~ Know that the One Presence is there with you, beside you, within you, ready to give you all that you desire; the Kingdom is yours for the asking. ~ Feel the love. ~ Let this Great Love spread to your toes, finger tips, to every cell in your body, your very soul fills up on this wonderful divine love. ~ Let that feeling of Divine Love get stronger. ~ Multiply it again. ~ Memorize how good this feels to you now. ~ Make a new choice to live the rest of your life from this love-filled place. ~ Know that you now better understand true love. Know that you can demonstrate perfect love. Know that you can now rejoice in true, perfect, divine love. ~ Choose to bring all this love back with you to the rest of your days on Earth. ~ Gently, bring your love-filled focus back to your chair, the room, & when you're ready, open your eyes.

“Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord; REJOICE!” ... & so it is ... Amen.