

Links in the Description

Unitarian Universalist Church of Olinda

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As the Christmas season draws to a close, its most recent related holiday was Epiphany, this past Friday Jan. 6 – often called the 12th Night of Christmas, which is referenced in the song about the partridge on the pear tree.

The word Epiphany itself refers to a divine manifestation – a revelation of sorts. In the Christmas story, it's about the divine presence that is contained in an unexpected place – a child in a humble lodging in a dingy town in Judea, a far-off corner of the Roman Empire.

But, as the story goes, those who were ready to look beyond appearances were able to recognize the awesome presence in that child. As the Epiphany carol *We Three Kings of Orient Are* suggests, the stargazers from the east followed special signs that led them to make that connection. A similar thing is said to have happened to many local shepherds, who were prepared to go deeper than the superficial setting of the child's whereabouts.

There are many unexpected connections we can make – with a bit of extra digging.

A couple Easters ago, I talked about the wonder of allowing oneself to go down unexpected “rabbit holes” – that is to say, letting ourselves follow interesting paths when exploring a topic, or subject of interest, which may often mean we end up in a much different place from where we started, as our initial query may have been transformed.

If, for instance, you've ever looked up an article on Wikipedia, and then clicked a link on a related topic, and suddenly found yourself several articles deep, many hours later, you'll know what I mean.

Of course, these rabbit holes of exciting exploration don't necessarily need to be on Wikipedia, or even online. Any stroll down a bookstore or library, including your own bookshelves, may yield similar results. Even a casual chat with a friend is often bound to take interesting turns, and you might find that the topic at the end of your visit might be very different from where you were, many conversations before, at the beginning of a visit.

Of course, online media has a way to enhance the speed at which these rabbit holes go – and it's also important to be especially cautious with the content that is available on the internet, since out of the great volume of information we can find on it, much of it is not always reliable. Finding trustworthy sources, and coming in with a healthy dose of skepticism, can help reduce the risk. With a bit of caution, we can find fun, interesting, and even transformative material.

Over the past couple of years, we have made much more ample use of online resources at our church. We occasionally have online resources during our live in-person services, including music, and what I call "video readings". Not only are we broadcasting online live, but we also have archived sermons, so you may watch some of the messages of inspiration from more than two years ago. And these options can go further than you might realize.

You may have noticed that, when I send out the link for the online edition of our services, I don't just title my e-mail "Sermon", I call it "Worship Resources". I do this quite deliberately, as I often include more than just a transcript of the sermon and a recording of it.

When you click the link in the Worship Resources e-mail, you usually, also have access to recordings of some of the hymns that go along with the topic we explore, and I often also include links to articles or videos

that I might not have included in the live service, but which are related to the topic, or may even have been part of my inspiration toward it.

If you watch exclusively on YouTube, without accessing the UU Olinda page, you can also find any links by scrolling down a bit to where it says *Show more* and clicking there, which expands to offer additional details. This is what is called the *description* of the video, and that's where I may include links to resources for further exploration.

In some of the sermon recordings, you might hear me say “links in the description” – it is this *Show more* doohickey that I mean by “the description”. In 2009 the YouTuber *Wheezy Waiter* called this section for description of details *the dooblydoo*, an expression that has also caught on among YouTubers. Whether you look at the “links in the description” or “in the dooblydoo”, the key action is looking at that option to *Show More* – on offering to find additional connections.

I set up these options in these different ways in order to offer some possibilities *beyond* the Sunday service. Whether you attended live, online or in-person, or you access the services later on, you can continue to use these Worship Resources throughout the week, or even months later.

Over the holiday season, I celebrated and encouraged us in our community to seek out new connections, or actively maintain existing ones. This could mean getting in touch with other people, or perhaps figuring out new ways to foster a better relationship with oneself, especially if the holiday time meant spending more time at home during a snowstorm.

Whether the past holidays meant more cozy time by the fireplace (or perhaps with a streamed version of a fireplace, such as the blockbuster film *Fireplace for Your Home*), or whether it meant a resurgence of in-person encounters, it may well have meant a change of pace from some of the other, more “regular” times of the year – the “ordinary time”.

Yet, as we begin a new year, amid more “regular” spots in the calendar, it pays off to consider what it means to keep this spirit of connection – or re-connection – into this year. This includes seeking out new opportunities, some of which may seem hidden or not immediately obvious, but which may be quite close-by – if we invest some effort or intentionality in looking for them... if we decide to take that extra step and look for “Show More”... to explore the “links in the description”.

Some of these may be just a click away – literally scrolling down and being open to go into a new rabbit hole and see what direction a link (a connection) might lead us into. It may include being open to connecting over new media (with appropriate precautions), or reinitiating our use of more traditional media, such as phone, or post mail – or even getting back into the practice of spending time with each other after the church service... you know, doing more church after “church”.

My friends, the holiday time may offer us a reminder to be intentional in connecting through the colder, darker winter months. And, just like the spirit of Christmas, that initiative need not be confined to December.

My friends, during the more “regular” times of the year, the spirit of connection may remain with us. It may look different – our availabilities, energy levels, and needs, will be different in different seasons – but the opportunities to be with each other, and the benefits of exploring reconnection with ourselves and those around us, are still there.

My friends, may the spirit of connection and reconnection carry forward in this new season.

So may it be,
In the spirit of connection,
Amen

*Suggested Hymns:***Opening Hymn #326 Let All the Beauty We Have Known**

~)-| Words: Dana McLean Greeley, 1908-1986

Music: English melody, adapt. and harmony by Ralph Vaughan Williams, 1872-1958, © 1931 Oxford University Press

DANBY

Hymn #259 We Three Kings of Orient Are

Words & Music: John Henry Hopkins, Jr., 1820-1891

KINGS OF ORIENT

Closing #22 Dear Weaver of Our Lives' Design

~)-| Words: Nancy C. Dorian, 1936- ,

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Music: Nikolaus Herman, 1480-1561,
harmonized by J. S. Bach, 1685-1750

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