

# Washington Ethical Society

A Vibrant Humanistic Congregation

## **Celebrating the winter holidays...Ethical Culture style!**

*Please enjoy this collection of readings and ideas as you bring your Ethical Culture values and tradition into your family's holiday celebrations. Compiled for the Washington Ethical Society, December 2015--but please feel free to share.*

### **Readings**

*Two Christmas Meditations*

*By Edward Ericson, Leader, 1959-1971, Washington Ethical Society, and author, The Humanist Way*

If, as Herod, we fill our lives with things and again things;  
If we . . . must fill every moment of our lives with action;  
When will we have the time to make the long slow journey  
across the . . . desert as did the Magi;  
Or sit and watch the stars as did the shepherds;  
Or brood over the coming of the Child as did Mary?  
For each one of us there is a desert to travel,  
a star to discover, and a being within ourselves to bring to life.

~

We stand with eyes toward the east/awaiting the rising of the star,  
And pray that love shall become flesh/and dwell among us.  
And that compassion shall be born in human hearts.  
We celebrate the discovery of fact/in the garment of legend.  
Let every cradle be visited by the three/good kings of Faith, Hope and Love.  
Then Christmas is with us always/and every birth is the birth of God among us.  
And every child is the Christ Child/And every song is the song of angels.  
To celebrate Christmas is to attest/the power of love to remake humankind.  
May we be renewed in the love which can save the world.

~

*A Reflection on the Symbol of the Winter Solstice*  
*By Felix Adler, founder of Ethical Culture, 1884*

The festival of the Winter Solstice was originally designed to celebrate the indestructible life in nature. The higher thought today is that the moral life of the world which appears so far as we know, in human beings only, is also indestructible

– that after every defeat it rises to new victory – that after every obscuration it shines forth with new brightness.

What is the symbol to which all shall express the thoughts that we in Ethical Culture would connect with the festival of the Winter Solstice? Is it the Christmas tree, or the old Yule tree which prior to the Christmas tree, symbolized the rekindling of the darkened light of the sun? But it expresses only the physical side of the festival, the fact of the evergreen life of external nature. For the higher, the spiritual nature, it does not stand.

The only symbol that can be adequate for us is the child – the child not merely as it plays around the tree, not as it enjoys its gifts, not in relation to its parents who take great pleasure in its happiness, but the child apart from all these connections, the child as the vehicle of a new moral life, and therefore the type of the ever-recurring renewal of the moral life, the child as the promise and the pledge of the whole unspeakable future.

~

*O We Believe in Christmas (also a song in the Unitarian Universalist hymnal)*  
*By Percival Chubb, Leader, 1912-1933, Ethical Society of St. Louis*

O we believe in Christmas, and we keep Christmas Day;  
and we will honor Christmas the ancient world-wide way:  
the Christmas of all peoples, the sun's returning cheer  
run out from towers and steeples at midnight of the year.  
And we will join at Christmas the song of hope and joy  
that finds its theme at Christmas in every girl and boy.  
The flame of life will dwindle as fades the sunset sky  
until a child shall kindle new light and raise it high.  
Then sing we all at Christmas the song of that new birth  
which holds the hope of Christmas and brings its joy to earth;  
which knits the generations each daughter and each son,  
beyond all tribes and nations, and makes the many one.  
Shine out ye lights of Christmas from hearth and tree and star!  
And let the warmth of Christmas shed kindness near and far!  
And clang, ye bells of Christmas, upon the frosty air!  
And may the joy of Christmas spread gladness everywhere!

~

*The Shortest Day*  
*By Susan Cooper, author*

So the shortest day came, and the year died,  
And everywhere down the centuries of the snow-white world  
Came people singing, dancing,  
To drive the dark away.

They lighted candles in the winter trees;  
They hung their homes with evergreen;  
They burned beseeching fires all night long  
To keep the year alive,  
And when the new year's sunshine blazed awake  
They shouted, reveling.  
Through all the frosty ages you can hear them  
Echoing behind us - Listen!!  
All the long echoes sing the same delight,  
This shortest day,  
As promise wakens in the sleeping land:  
They carol, fest, give thanks,  
And dearly love their friends,  
And hope for peace.  
And so do we, here, now,  
This year and every year.  
Welcome Yule!!

## **Rituals**

Light five candles for the WES Winter Festival values of Joy, Hope, Love, Peace, and Giving. You might light one candle a day, or one a week leading up to New Year's to signify your commitment to those values in the coming year. Or, you could simply have five candles at your holiday table.

~

For a variation on WES' values and a more scripted approach to candles, here is the candlelighting used at the St. Louis Ethical Society:

This is the time of year when candles are being lit all over the world. There are different stories that accompany them, different foods and songs and colors. But they are all lit in the spirit of the same ideals for warmer feeling among people, greater illumination, and a future of peace. Today many Ethical Societies across the country are celebrating with candles and song. We join with them, and with many celebrations past, by passing the flame from candle to candle.

### **\* Leader lights Candle**

Ethical Culture founder Felix Adler wrote that the Festival of the Winter Solstice was originally created to celebrate the indestructible life in nature and show faith in the return of the sun. Today we also celebrate and show our faith in the ethical life of humanity, which is also indestructible - after every defeat it rises to new victory - after every period of darkness it shines forth with new brilliance.

This evening we come together in the way people have been gathering since ancient times: to celebrate the harmony of light and dark. As our hemisphere once again wheels around toward the sun and daylight begins its slow return, we pass this flame among us.

[1st:] The flame from a single candle begins a transformation from darkness to light, from an end to a beginning. Within ourselves, joy dawns.

[2nd:] With illumination comes knowledge; with knowledge, understanding; and with understanding, peace.

[3rd:] A candle in the window extends goodwill to friends and strangers. We are many and we are different, and we are also one.

[4th:] Hope grows at the transformation from waning to waxing. On the darkest night of the year, we realize the promise of a life well-lived and anticipate a new beginning.

[5th:] Acts of kindness and expressions of caring pass like this flame from one to another. They unite into love for all the human family.

All: "Let us embrace Joy, Peace, Goodwill, Hope, and Love, and spread them among us and beyond us, the way we spread the flames from these candles.

~

Try a "reverse Advent" or "good deed Advent." Check out

<http://www.sisterserendip.com/2014/11/advent-calendar-of-good-deeds-2014.html?m=1>.

## **Platforms**

"The Holidays with Integrity: How the Humanists Stole Christmas" Amanda Poppei, Washington Ethical Society, December 2013 -

<http://www.ethicalsociety.org/site/1/podcast/WES20131215.mp3>

"Ethical Heroes: Santa Claus" Kate Lovelady, St. Louis Ethical Society, December 2011 - <http://ethicalstl.org/platforms/ESSTLPlatform2011-12-04.mp3>

## **Resources on Navigating the Holidays**

The holidays as an opportunity for interfaith dialogue

<http://blogs.uuworld.org/parenting/2011/11/07/interfaith-dialogue-with-your-parents/>

"The Doubting Parents' Guide to the Holidays" (Washington Post)

<http://parentingbeyondbelief.com/blog/?cat=32>