

# A bit of irony from the Christmas story

**BY THE REV. DR.  
KHARMA R. AMOS**  
*Spirit of Life*

A supreme height of irony this Christmas season is that some who are celebrating the birth of a poor, unhoused, Middle Eastern refugee (i.e. Jesus) are nearly foaming at the mouth calling for the deportation of our immigrant neighbors. And of course, the irony gets even thicker when we consider that the soapbox upon which they stand may have been built by their own immigrant ancestors, who just happened to arrive a generation or two earlier. Seriously, what in the name of all that is holy is up with this? If Christmas is a celebration of the birth of Jesus, I fear too many have missed the point.

Our UU theme of reflection this month is “presence,” so one simple question on my mind is this: Where and in whom/what are we most likely to find the presence of the sacred? On this point, I’m not sure how the Christian testament or the Jewish faith of Jesus could be more clear. Do not — absolutely do not — look to the places of power and respectability. If you want to find the presence of the sacred — by whatever name and in whatever way you imagine them — the last place you should be looking is to empires or any of the people or forces that uphold them. This point is reinforced in the Bible again and again, and the narratives about Jesus’ birth are pretty blatant about it.

The canonical gospels include only two stories of the nativity, and they don’t agree on much. However, this is not cause for concern, because the authors weren’t in the business of reporting the news. Rather, they told a story of Jesus’ birth (many years after his death) in ways

that supported their overall goals of inspiring new generations of followers to embody the same love that characterized his life. Incidentally, the love part is really important. In fact, anywhere it’s missing, we can be pretty sure it’s not really about Jesus.

The Christmas narratives suggest a few things to me about where we might discover divine presence:

- You want to find the sacred? You go to the ones without power who have been turned away from every place they went in search of help.

- You want to discover the holy? You hang out in places that smell like manure, animals, exhausted human bodies, earth and birth. You also probably have to abandon your expectations.

- You want to journey with the divine? You travel with broken-hearted people who have been through some stuff and discovered that, if anything, God is a verb. That’s the way poet Buckminster Fuller (grandson of a Unitarian minister) put it: “God is a verb.” If you want to find God, look for the sacred action of love, because the holy is more present in the act of our loving than our talking about the concept of love, more accessible to us when we are imperfectly trying to love hurting people and refusing to give up when it gets hard.

For my part, I am hoping for less irony and more alignment with the example of Jesus — the one who was born in a manger, became a refugee and committed his life to loving his neighbors, especially the vulnerable and marginalized.

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*The Rev. Dr. Kharma R. Amos  
is minister of the Unitarian  
Universalist Church of  
Brunswick.*