



# commUNITY

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## Wonder

*The life of a congregation is a rich community tapestry of people, programs, ministries and worship. We lift up the patterns of this tapestry at Unity Church with the threads of monthly themes woven through our worship and programming. These themes deepen our understanding of our own faith and strengthen our bonds with one another in religious community. We explore each theme in worship and in our newsletter; in covenant groups, guided writing sessions and Wednesday evening programming; and in our community outreach ministries, our literary journal and programs, and many other opportunities. The December theme is Wonder.*

In the middle of the Ursa Major constellation – that well known dipper of stars ladling the darkness as it rotates through the night – there is an empty speck of sky on which the Hubble telescope sharpened its focus 15 years ago this month. To the naked eye, it is just another black point in the sky's surrounding blackness; but with the powerful magnification of Hubble's lenses, for ten days in 1995, the telescope recorded a series of remarkable photographs revealing so much more.

It was one of these photographs that philosopher Jacob Needleman ran across soon after on the cover of a magazine at an airport newsstand. He writes: "I was struck with wonder: a nearly microscopic point in an apparently empty patch of the night sky was here shown to be a window onto hundreds, thousands of stars, many certainly greater than our own sun, and, like our sun, pouring out unimaginable streams of life-creating energy. . . ." Needleman returned the magazine to the rack and left, only to stop in his tracks a few steps later, reconsidering what he had just seen. Returning to the magazine, then, and reading the description of the photograph inside, he

confirmed that what he had seen in the picture were not stars at all but whole galaxies. "Hundreds and thousands of galaxies never before known or seen inhabited that infinitesimal speck of empty sky, each galaxy itself containing billions of suns." Needleman writes, "I suddenly became very quiet inside."<sup>1</sup>

Such is the experience of wonder – a deep silence that rises within when our eyes are opened wide by astonishment; a sense of awe that can bring us to a complete standstill, gaping to take in whatever veridical marvel we are witnessing in that moment.

Yet, as desirable as this experience can be, the magic of wonder cannot be forced. Perhaps at no time in the year is this clearer than in December's "season of wonder." Now, with the air filled with twinkle and bell song and with garland draped in festive fringes all around, we know the season wears styles both beautiful and bawdy. Surely we can be stirred to wonder. But, for a host of reasons, we might also find ourselves shrinking away from so much shine and song.

What do we do then, when wonder wanders away?

As Needleman's story reminds us, we may have to look again. We may have to slow down or stop altogether. We may need to reconsider, what is it we have just seen? What is it we are witnessing? A speck in the night sky? A child born in a barn? A wick still in flame days after the oil has been spent? Stories can burn bright with miracle and wonder; images can tell us tales of suns shining brightly over ten billion years ago. But often we must prepare ourselves to receive them.

Our task is to look and to listen. To step out of our frenzied pace so that wonder might find us. To make ourselves available and let ourselves linger at the edge of the unknown long enough that mystery might open our eyes to a wider, deeper view. And if our hearts are heavy, perhaps our task then, is to sit quietly with a single candle burning until the marvel of its gentle glow might ever so briefly lighten our load.

"Reverence the highest, have patience with the lowest," wrote the transcendentalist Margaret Fuller. "Are the stars too distant, pick up the pebble at thy feet and from it learn all."

So the pebbles and the stars await our gaze. And the stories of the season will unwind their tales, ancient and familiar. We are merely asked to go back and look again, with eyes and ears and hearts open, until the silence rises up within.

~ Karen Hering,  
Consulting Literary Minister

### Worship Theme Resources

#### BOOKS

*Deep Play*, a meditation on the human capacity for physical and spiritual play – and the sense of wonder found in our deep forms of play, by Diane Ackerman

*Ecstatic Poems* by Kabir, translated by Robert Bly

*Small Wonder*, essays by Barbara Kingsolver

*Teaching a Stone to Talk*, by Annie Dillard

*Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* – Shunryu Suzuki (book)

*Beauty*, by John O'Donohue

*Each Moment You're Alive Is a Gem*, by Thich Nhat Hanh

#### FILM

##### *Wall-E*

Irrational love defeats life's programming.

<sup>1</sup>Jacob Needleman, *A Sense of the Cosmos*, (Rhinebeck, NY: Monkfish Publishing House, 2003), ix.