

**The San Francisco Swedenborgian Church
December 24, 2001 Christmas Eve Service**

Love Yearning to Be Born...

Transcript of Rev. Dr. Rachel Rivers' sermon

This world in which we live, this life that we have been given, is awesome, extraordinary, the depth and breadth of which is beyond our wildest imagination. For example, while we are all gathered here in this sanctuary tonight, we are at the same time on this Earth spinning around at the speed of about 900 mph. And while we are spinning, we are, of course, also orbiting our sun at about 66,000 mph. At the same time, our solar system is moving towards the star Vega at about 31,000 mph. And at the same time as all that, Vega along with our solar system is moving around our galaxy at about 700,000 mph. And at the same time as that, the entire galaxy is rotating at about 600,000 mph. And if that wasn't enough, our entire galaxy is racing through the universe in relation to the other galaxies at a speed in excess of one million mph. So while we're all sitting here rather comfortably, we are also moving wildly in at least six different directions at a cumulative speed of roughly 2.5 million mph.

There is so much more to life than meets the eye. While all of this is occurring, what is happening inside our own bodies is equally wondrous. Our hearts are beating, blood is flowing through our veins, our synapses are firing, and we're functioning as complete and whole beings; yet we are made up of units so small that we can't even see them. And biologists tell us that we have within each one of us about 100 trillion living cells.

Our bodies also share something in common with the cosmos. Astrophysicists tell us that every atom in our being was at one time part of a star. And these atoms that were once part of stars aren't just staying put within our own skin: they are moving through us and becoming part of the wood of this sanctuary, part of the poinsettias, part of the candles, part of another person, and moving on and on.

Scientific knowledge has been exploding for the last couple of hundred years and that rate of knowledge is accelerating. When I was a child in school, the idea of a subatomic particle being in two places simultaneously would have been considered ludicrous. And now, to physicists, it's considered common knowledge.

Last September I was reading *Discovery* magazine and there was an interview in it by a world-renowned theoretical physicist. His name is David Deutsche, from Oxford I think. Although he's a world-renowned theoretical physicist, what he was saying in that interview was considered pretty far out. He was postulating that given all the evidence, it is most likely true that there are uncountable parallel universes occupying the same physical space that we presently inhabit.

And then just three months later I heard the physicist Fred Allen Wolf in a lecture say that already now many physicists are coming to that same conclusion. Dr. Deutsche's theory goes on to suggest that a particle can not only be in two places at once, but that particles together making up all sorts of objects, and human beings themselves, may be present in many parallel universes simultaneously. (But then us Star Trek fans have known that for a long time!)

I love studying science even though I understand only a tiny fraction of it. I love studying it because it helps me see and remember the extraordinary depth and breadth that there is to physical reality and human life. Back at the beginning of the scientific revolution, the scientific discoveries being made were discrediting the more superficial religious beliefs. And as late as the 1960s, many people believed that science would soon eclipse religion altogether. They believed that because scientific knowledge was expanding so rapidly and we were learning so much, there would soon no longer be any need for religious philosophy or understanding: it would become obsolete. Religion would not be an issue in either personal lives or in the political sphere.

Clearly these prophecies were wrong. And I think part of the reason they were wrong is because the more scientific knowledge and understanding we gain, the more awesome and inspiring our experience and relation to life can become. When I'm awed and inspired, it often leads me to think about questions of meaning and purpose. It makes me think about good and evil, about hope and love. And the exploration into those questions is outside the purview of science. To address them we do best to turn our attention to the wisdom of the ages.

Dr. Roger Walsh, researcher of spiritual traditions, says that there four main tenets of ancient wisdom that are shared by all of the world's major religions, including Swedenborgianism.

The first tenet is that the physical world we live in and see and touch is not all there is to reality: at its source is another world, a sacred world, a world of spirit.

The second tenet is that we human beings hold dual citizenship in the physical world and the spiritual world. We have a part of our life and being in this world that we can see and touch, and at the same time in the core of our being we are at home in the world of consciousness, of spirit.

The third tenet is that the realm of spirit is one that we can connect with, one that we can reach, one that we can explore, one that we can tune in to and know about.

And the fourth tenet is that by becoming more aware of the inner spiritual state of reality, by growing in kinship to it, and by realizing our unity with it, we are best able to discern how we can serve one another with respect and compassion. We are able to explore and discover what the meaning of our life is and we are able to find within us the deepest experiences of being human.

This spiritual realm of which I have been speaking is where love resides. And it is the Christian faith that this love knows each one of us intimately, personally, and completely—and that this love *loves* each one of us intimately, personally, and completely. This love is yearning to be received. This love is yearning for us to receive its holy gifts of hope, peace, joy, and love. This love seeks to be born tonight into the manger of our lives.

Love is the most powerful force in the universe. The 18th century cosmologist, philosopher and theologian Emanuel Swedenborg wrote that the smallest possible particle of physical matter—only a vibration, really—what all else is made from—is literally *love*. So the spiritual and the physical are not really so distant from one another, Heaven and Earth not so far apart. By the state of our world right now and how we treat one another, it can certainly seem that these realms are very far apart. And that is why love is yearning to be born into the manger of our lives tonight.

We are invited this holy night to receive this love, to allow it to touch us in a new way, and allow it to give us just what we need to live our lives courageously, hopefully, peacefully, and joyously. This love invites us to experience the awesomeness of being a human being, to experience the privilege of being here on earth where it is our job and our task to grow in our capacity of love. Let us accept this challenge joyously.

Amen.