THE RABBI'S GIFT

There is a wonderful old story –entitled ***"The Rabbi's gift"*** that we want share this December Sunday, for to me it perfectly captures the true spirit of his Holiday season, whether you are Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, or Unitarian Universalist!

It seems that several centuries ago a Christian monastery had fallen on difficult times. There were only five monks left in the "motherhouse," the Abbot, and four others, all over the age of 75. Clearly, it was a dying community.

[PICTURE OF OLD RABBI IS PROJECTED UP ON THE CHANCEL SCREEN]



In the deep woods surrounding the monastery, there was a little hut that a Rabbi for a nearby synagogue used as a hermitage of contemplation. The next time the Rabbi came to the woods, the Abbot visited him, and asked if by some chance the Rabbi could offer any advice that might save the monastery.

The two old men read the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments together; they commiserated about the lack of the faithful. ***"Dear friend, can you give me a piece of advice about my dying order,"*** asked the Abbot? ***"No, I am sorry," the Rabbi responded, "I have no advice to give…the only thing I can tell you is that the Messiah is one of you!"***

When the Abbot returned to the monastery, he was asked by the other brothers, ***"Well, what did the Rabbi say?"*** and the Abbot responded***, "He could not help us, and the only thing he mentioned as I was leaving was something quite mysterious; he said that <u>the Messiah is one of us</u>. I don't know what he meant."***

[PICTURE OF OLD RABBI COMES DOWN, PICTURE OF MONKS IS PROJECTED UP]



In the days and weeks that followed, the monks pondered what he meant – whether there was any significance to the Rabbi's words, ***"THE MESSIAH IS ONE OF US."***

"If so," said one, ***"he probably meant the Abbot – the leader of the monastery for more than a generation. On the other hand, Brother George is a holy man, a man of wisdom and light – he could be the one. Certainly he could not have meant Brother Thomas – he gets nasty at times, but come to think of it, he is almost always right. Maybe the Rabbi did mean Brother Thomas. Well, he almost assuredly did <u>not</u> mean Brother Jacob -- He's so passive, a real nobody -- but then he has a gift for somehow always being there when you need him…maybe he is the messiah. Of course the Rabbi couldn't have possibly meant <u>me</u> – I'm just an ordinary person. Yet, suppose he did. Suppose <u>I</u> am the Messiah."***

And as the Brothers of the monastery contemplated in this manner, the old monks began to treat each other with **<u>extraordinary respect</u>**, on the off-hand chance that one of them might be the Messiah. They began to treat themselves with utmost dignity and respect.

Well…as strangers visited the monastery from time to time, they sensed **<u>an aura of spiritual strength and loving presence</u>** that permeated the atmosphere, and was strangely compelling. They began to bring their friends…and some of the younger men who came to visit the monastery started to talk more and more with the old monks. After a while, one asked if he might join…then another…and another – and before long, the monastery had become a vital center of spiritual hope, love and joy.

[PAUSE…]

I hope the point of this story is obvious. The question we might each ask this holiday season is: **who might I treat as if they might be "the Messiah"?** Think what our world might become if, all year long, we treat everyone we meet as if they are special and holy. Just imagine…