

## ✧ ✧ Upcoming AOF Events ✧ ✧

### ➤ Free Movie Nights!

**Fridays, Dec 6 & Dec 20, 2019, 7pm – 10pm**

Twice a month, [Reason Center](#) (RC) and AOF join hands to host a **Free Movie Night** under an excellent [MPLC License](#). We can't name the movies, but we can hint.

The first (Dec 6) is a highly praised 2017 documentary about three ex-Hasidic Jews from Brooklyn as they struggle with being ostracized from their former community and families, while revealing how and why they left their faith. The second movie is the popular 1980 comedy about a South African tribal native lost in an urban world, the most commercially successful release in South Africa's film industry.



Can't guess? Don't worry, Just contact Reason Center (see contact info below). They'll tell you, then you can tell anyone.

Movie Night is an informal, picnic-style family evening. The venue has a huge silver screen and a dynamic sound system. Chairs are available but may be a bit uncomfortable for a two-hour sit, so it's OK to bring blankets, pillows, lawn chairs and your own snacks & beverage, non-alcoholic please. RC will provide fluffy, buttery theatre popcorn. Children are welcome if they're cool kids -- and if you judge the movie appropriate for them.

The movies are especially for Reason Center members, but non-members are welcome too. RC *may* beg a small donation to cover costs. How can you become a member? Sign up at <http://reasoncenter.com/donate/>. A measly \$5 a month, membership is tax deductible if you itemize, and the perks (like this one) are like a gift from crazy gods.

**Contact:** Reason Center, 916-426-6416, or email <reasoncenter (at) gmail (dot) com>

**Location:** Reason Center, 1824 Tribute Rd, Suite A, Sacramento. Map: <https://goo.gl/iVQL8z>.

*Free Movie Nights occur on two Friday evenings each month. Suggest your own fave film for next time!*

### ➤ Freethought Dinner Social

**Sunday, Dec 8, 2019, 5pm – 7pm**

Come dine out with friends and members of the local community of reason. Please join the hungry freethinkers at the **Opal! Opal!** restaurant for fine food, good drink and sparkling conversation. This Dinner Social will also be a farewell to a restaurant that has tickled our taste buds for 14 years. **Opal! Opal!** will close for good in mid-December. Goodbye, and thanks.

But if you join us, *please tell* the contact person, see below, because she has to make reservations! For the beautiful menu, see <http://www.eatatopa.com/themenu.php>.



**Location:** Opal! Opal! restaurant, 5644 J Street, Sac., ph. 916-451-4000, see <https://goo.gl/maps/6m1yq9guBL5UgmzJ6>.

**Contact:** 916-457-9123 (Lynne), or email: "thelynnster55 (at) comcast (dot) net"

*Note from the activity host:* Just walk in, order your meal at the counter, and join the group. Some may be a bit sensitive to colognes and perfumes, so except for personal pheromones, please be chemical free.

### ➤ HumanLight/Solstice Party

**Sunday, Dec 22, 2019, 1pm - 4pm**

Come celebrate positive Humanist ideals and values: reason, compassion, hope, science, kindness, joy and community. At a time of year rife with religious holidays, the annual **HumanLight** (slash) **Winter Solstice** party lets be festive and celebrate common values and friendship.

The party will include a potluck, music, and a people- and pet-food charity drive. No charge to attend! Even parking is free! Just bring something to share for the potluck, your appetite, and a smile. (Maybe something for the charity drives, but that's optional.) Be prepared for secular fun! The event is family-friendly, so bring the kiddos too.



**The Potluck:** This event is a potluck, so whip-up (or buy) your favorite dish to share. Please bring your food already prepared and ready to serve. The Reason Center kitchen has a microwave oven for warming-up food, but no oven or stove. A sink and refrigerator are also available. Plates, bowls, utensils, napkins, and cups will all be provided, but please remember to bring a serving utensil for your dish. Bring some beverages to share too. Wine and beer are okay.

**The Charity Drive:** Previous charity food drives have been successful, so we are doing it again! We will be collecting food and basic supply items for two local charities, the [River City Food Bank](#) and the [Sacramento Pet Food Bank](#) (aka "Titanic's Pantry"). So either dig through your pantry or consider purchasing something at the store to donate. We will also have donation jars available for cash/check donations for both charities. This is a wonderful opportunity for the freethought community to come together and show their compassion and kindness for others in need in our local community. Donations for human and pet food and supplies are encouraged, but not required.

For the *River City Food Bank*, please bring donations of canned, boxed, and bagged foods (non-perishable); baby food and formula; baby diapers and wipes; toiletries such as soap, shampoo, deodorant, toothpaste, dental floss, razors, lotions in all sizes (travel or family size); bags (paper or plastic); and grocery store gift cards. For *Titanic's Pantry*, bags of dry and canned cat and dog food, and even toys, leashes, collars, cat litter, bedding and other pet supplies to donate for our furry friends in need, would be appropriate and appreciated.

The HumanLight/Solstice Party is sponsored by AOF and [the Humanist Association of the Greater Sacramento Area \(HAGSA\)](#). For its history, visit <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HumanLight>. Direct questions to the event host, see below.

**Location:** Reason Center, 1824 Tribute Rd, Suite A, Sacramento. Map: <https://goo.gl/iVQL8z>.

**Contact:** Don Knutson, ph. 916-447-2169 (h) or 916-805-9337 (c), or email "dkvegdon (at) gmail (dot) com"

*Reason Center has no cooking facilities, so pre-prep please, poopsie. Hot plates, crock pots and warmers are OK. Open fires, not so much. To volunteer, help set up & clean, contact the event organizer.*

## ➤ New Years Eve Dinner

**Tuesday, Dec 31, 2019, 5pm – 8pm**

Like to "ring in" the New Year? Then ring it with your freethinker pals at the **Old Spaghetti Factory** in Midtown Sac! **Reservations required** for this special dinner party, because **New Years Eve!** So please-please-please tell the event host, Lynne. She needs a head-count by **Dec 10**. Be nice.

For the delicious menu, visit <http://www.osf.com/menus/>. Party hats optional.

**Location:** Old Spaghetti Factory, 1910 J Street, Sac, ph. 916-443-2862, see <https://goo.gl/maps/YQaZMb2GULF2>.

**Contact:** 916-457-9123 (Lynne) or email: "thelynnster55 (at) comcast (dot) net".

*Dining Socials occur irregularly at various Sac-area 'raunts. Family friendly, all are welcome. (And don't be shy, suggest your own favorite eatery for next time!)*



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## ❖ ❖ Upcoming non-AOF Events ❖ ❖

### ➤ Humanist Salon

**Sunday, Dec 8, 2019 10am – 11:30am**

The Humanist Salon (aka Compassionate Humanists) is where it's safe to be you! The Salon celebrates science, reason, diversity, inclusiveness and equal opportunity, all without religion. Members sit at the table and discuss a topic provided by the facilitator, or sometimes just relax and strengthen community bonds by listening to others' stories. Everybody learns from everybody. All who are open-minded are welcome to the Salon.

**Location:** Roseville Labou, 1730 Santa Clara Drive, Roseville. Map:

<https://goo.gl/maps/UC4975CE19P2>.

**Contact:** Ph. 916-836-5269, or email [info@compassionatehumanists.com](mailto:info@compassionatehumanists.com).



### ➤ Sunday Morning Coffee and Community

**Sunday, Dec 15, 2019, 10am – 12am**

Warm up with hot coffee, donuts and conversation with your fellow freethinkers. Check out the library, the latest FFRF newspaper, and donuts from Marie's (legendary in Sacramento).

Open to all, but especially Reason Center members. To become a member Sign up at <http://www.reasoncenter.org/p/donate.html>. Membership is a mere \$4 a month.

**Location:** Reason Center, 1824 Tribute Rd, Suite A, Sacramento. Map: <https://goo.gl/iVQL8z>.

**Contact:** Reason Center, ph 916-426-6416, or "reasoncenter (at) gmail (dot) com. Your charming event hosts are Mynga Futree and Nancy Sneed.



### ➤ Skeptics in the Pub

**Friday, Dec 27, 2019, 6:30pm – 9:30pm**

A monthly meeting devoted to skepticism, rational thought and good beer, designed to promote fellowship and camaraderie among skeptics, critical thinkers, freethinkers, rationalists and other like-minded individuals. Also, beer.

**Location:** Sactown Union Brewery, 1210 66th Street, Sac. Map: <https://goo.gl/maps/DY1yLewkpVASHnTa7>.

**Contact:** Email Email "sacskeptics (at) gmail (dot) com" or "sbaker81 (at) comcast (dot) net".

## ➤ Yet More Area Events

For more, see <https://unitedcor.org/event-calendar-2/>, the Sacramento Coalition of Reason global events calendar. We don't have room for all the freethought activity in the area. But we keep you hopping.

### *You can help. Here's how.*

#### **When you donate blood...**

If you donate blood at Vitalant, formerly BloodSource, please use the AOF BloodSource ID, #4857.

Find a Donation Center at <https://www.vitalant.org/Our-Organization/Locations.aspx>. Blood donations save lives, serve our ideals, and show freethinkers can also serve the community. What's more humanistic than donating blood?

#### **Support Reason Center**

Since Reason Center opened in July 2014, it has hosted hundreds of events and accrued twelve partner organizations. Its mission: to support a social and intellectual community for freethinkers, contribute to society through education and community service, advance the civic understanding and acceptance of freethinkers, and uphold the separation of religion and government. All good work.

But to continue, "RC" relies on support from members and donors. Please stand up for Reason Center, because it stands up for you. To set up a monthly or one-time donation, visit [ReasonCenter.org](http://ReasonCenter.org).

#### **Support AOF**

You can support AOF *without spending a dime*. How? When you purchase goods at Amazon.com, simply use this link: <https://smile.amazon.com/ch/68-0325762>. Bookmark it now! Prices & service will be the same, but AOF will receive a small kickback for whatever you purchase. Sweet!

#### **Suggest a Meeting**

Know a compelling speaker, have a great meeting idea? Tell the AOF Program Committee! Go to <http://www.aofonline.org/contact.html>, click "Program Committee" in the drop-down line, and enter your thoughtful suggestion. (Reasonable honorariums paid to speakers.)

#### **Volunteer?**

We suggest it meekly. See <http://www.aofonline.org/learn/committees.html> for opportunities.

## ✧ ✧ Secular Holidays ✧ ✧

### ➤ International Human Rights Day

**Tuesday, Dec 10, 2019**

"IHRD" promotes, defends and remembers the basic human rights *every person in every country* has as a result of being born into this world. The basic document that outlines these rights is known as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as adopted by the United Nations in 1948.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was a result of the atrocities of World War II. As the United Nations came into being its charter gave human rights a new international legal status, and the need to codify human rights as a means to prevent similar atrocities took shape. It created a Commission on Human Rights, which spent three years drafting the declaration with the help of such members as Eleanor Roosevelt, John P. Humphrey, Charles Malik and Rene Cassin. Adopted without dissent on December 10, 1948, the declaration has grown in stature and respect over the years as it continues to assert the human dignity and worth of every human being. Countries around the world have celebrated this day, but only been since the 50th anniversary celebrations in 1998 has IHRD gained in popularity.

Eleanor Roosevelt once said that the fate of human rights lies in the hands of everyone in every community. Freethinkers know the importance of this statement. It can often be a challenge for many of them to be given the same rights and opportunities as others in their own communities, much less in the world. They, of all people, understand the importance of keeping human rights the center of focus and attention in the world at large. Celebrating International Human Rights Day is a way to show how everyone, religious or not, is connected in ways that run deeper than the nature of belief.



### ➤ Bill of Rights Day

**Sunday, December 15, 2019**

By Presidential Proclamation:

*Now, Therefore, I, Franklin D. Roosevelt, President of the United States of America, do hereby designate December 15, 1941, as Bill of Rights Day. And I call upon the officials of the Government, and upon the people of the United States, to observe the day by displaying the flag of the United States on public buildings and by meeting together for such prayers and such ceremonies as may seem to them appropriate.*

To view the official proclamation, see: <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/proclamation-2524-bill-rights-day>.

The first 10 amendments to the United States Constitution make up the Bill of Rights. Passed by Congress on September 25, 1789, these rights place limits on government power. Did you know ...?

- The bill was introduced by James Madison. He later became the 4th President of the United States.
- The Bill of Rights initially had 12 proposed amendments. One concerned the number of constituents for each Representative. The other addressed compensation of Congressmen. Neither were ratified.
- In 1992, compensation of Congressmen was ratified 203 years later and is now the 27th amendment.
- The Bill of Rights is displayed in The Rotunda of the National Archives Building in Washington, DC.
- There were 14 copies of the Bill of Rights, one for each of the 13 states to sign and one for the federal archives. Only 12 copies survive today.

## ➤ Winter Solstice

**Saturday, December 21, 2019**

December Solstice, the *real* Reason for the Season. Called Winter Solstice in the northern hemisphere, Summer Solstice in the southern, people have marked this astronomical event for thousands of years. Many religions have seasonal holy days or celebrations linked to the December Solstice. It is the day the Northern Hemisphere has less daylight than at any other time of the year (we call it *the shortest day*), and the Southern Hemisphere has more daylight occurs than any other time (*the longest day*).



The precise date of the December Solstice varies by year, but will occur between the 20th and 23rd of December.

"Solstice" derives from two Latin words: *sol* (meaning sun) and *sistere* (to cause to stand still). At noon in either hemisphere the sun will be low in the sky during the winter season, high in the sky during summer. The day with the least daylight is the Winter Solstice, where sun has the lowest elevation. So in the Northern Hemisphere, the December Solstice is officially the first day of winter, sometimes called Midwinter.

To the ancients, this day marked a key point in the cycle of life. For modern astronomy enthusiasts, it offers an opportunity to celebrate what we have learned about the cosmos, and allows us to appreciate the complexity of the universe.

## ➤ HumanLight

**Monday, December 23, 2019**

[HumanLight](#) is a holiday to celebrate the humanist values of tolerance, compassion, empathy, honesty, free inquiry, reason and rationality. The event began in New Jersey in 2001, established by by Joe Fox and Gary Brill of the [New Jersey Humanist Network](#) to provide an alternative to Christmas celebrations. They have described it as follows:

*"The very first HumanLight celebration was held in New Jersey on December 23, 2001 at a gala event attended by close to 100 people. HumanLight is December 23rd, and should always be celebrated on or around this date. This date was chosen for several reasons. A critical objective was to be part of the peak celebration time of the holiday season, yet to have a distinct date of our own that did not coincide exactly (and thus interfere) with other holidays such as the Winter Solstice, Christmas, or Kwanzaa. We liked December 23rd because it was close to the shortest day of the year, a natural event of note, as well as very close to vacation days that typically lead to family gatherings. We wanted Humanists at family gatherings and other holiday social events to be able to say "Happy Holidays" and mean it; to have a positive, constructive way to start a conversation in which they could explain to loved ones what Humanism is about. "*



## Those Baby Jesus Stories

By Valerie Tarico, from [http://new.exchristian.net/2018/12/six-hints-that-baby-jesus-stories-were\\_21.html](http://new.exchristian.net/2018/12/six-hints-that-baby-jesus-stories-were_21.html); condensed.

See baby Jesus in the creche, the manger, the shepherds, the angels, the three kings and a star above the stable. It's the Nativity, so we think of it. But in fact it is a mashup of two [distinct narratives from Matthew and Luke](#), with embellishments over centuries. What is historical, what not? We may never know, because the Gospels themselves are full of add-ons.

Here are hints that the story we know was totally unfamiliar to early Christians.

**1. The Silence of Paul.** The earliest NT texts are Paul's letters from 50-57 CE and others who forged his name. The letters (Epistles) give no hint that Paul or the forgers knew of signs or wonders surrounding the birth of Jesus. The closest is Gal

4:4, where Paul wrote that Jesus was “born of a woman ... under the law” or “in accordance with the law.” That’s it. No virgin birth, no angels, no visions, no magi – though it would have been the ideal time to mention such things, and they would have helped Paul’s argument. What “under the law” means is ambiguous and debated but suggests a natural birth with nothing shocking about it.

**2. The Silence of Mark.** Mark’s Gospel—the one closest to the events—has no nativity or “infancy” story, though looks to be the primary source for Matthew and Luke. In Mark, all the wonders and signs begin at Jesus’s baptism (a voice from heaven); so some sects believed that God “adopted” Jesus at that point.

Why say Mark is a source for Matthew and Luke? For starters, the wording in Mark, Matthew, and Luke would likely get flagged by plagiarism software. Mark is also the most primitive and simple, the most “bare bones,” of the three. Powerful passages like the Sermon on the Mount are absent, and the endings vary from copy to copy. For these and other reasons, scholars believe it predates the others. Mark was telling the life story of Jesus, with signs and miracles. To ignore the auspicious birth miracles would have been odd—unless those stories didn’t yet exist.

**3. A Tale of Two Tales.** Beyond basics, the Matthew and Luke nativity stories have [little overlap](#). In both, Jesus is born in Bethlehem of a virgin Mary betrothed to a man named Joseph. That’s about it.

In Matthew, an unnamed angel appears to Joseph, astrologers arrive bearing symbolic gifts, a star appears in the east, Herod seeks to kill Jesus, warnings come as dreams, and the holy family flees to Egypt just before Herod’s mass slaughters of boy infants.

In Luke, the angel Gabriel appears to the parents of John the Baptist. They conceive, but the father is punished for doubting. Gabriel then appears to Mary. During a visit between the two prospective mothers, who are cousins, the unborn John the Baptist recognizes the unborn Jesus and “leaps.” Later when John is named, his father regains the lost power of speech. A census forces Mary and Joseph to go to Bethlehem. The inn is full, so Jesus is born and laid in a manger. Angels sing to visiting shepherds. After his naming, his parents take Jesus to the Jerusalem temple where he is recognized and blessed by a holy man and a resident prophetess. The family then returns to Nazareth (no visit to Egypt).

Some try to harmonize these stories, but it’s simpler to say they are different branches of an oral tradition. Studies of fairy tales shows how versions tend to split off, with characters and magical elements diverging over time. The Matthew and Luke nativities likely did something similar, oral tales circulating and evolving before the authors set them down. You see it in the apocryphal pseudo-Gospels, such as the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century “Infancy Gospel of Thomas,” which has extravagant miracles appearing nowhere else, such as the child Jesus bringing clay birds to life or turning another child into a withered corpse.

Note how Matthew and Luke each inserted a dubious event (an impossible census and an unlikely mass infanticide, neither grounded in history) to make the story “work.” Dubious history becomes credible only after potential eyewitnesses die off, so this is another clue that one or more generations lapsed before the stories took their present form.

**4. Pagan Parallels.** Luke’s story seems slanted toward a Roman audience, and in fact the idea of [gods impregnating human women](#) was a common pagan story trope. Theologian Marcus Borg has argued that the story was trying to pivot fealty from Caesar Augustus to Jesus. According to Roman imperial theology, the god Apollo had impregnated Augustus’s human mother, Atia. During Augustus’s reign, titles inscribed on coins and temples included “Son of God,” “Lord” and “Savior,” as well as the phrase “peace on earth.”

**5. Say what?** Oddly, by the second chapter of Luke, Jesus’s parents seem to have forgotten all the signs and wonders of his birth. When the boy is twelve, Mary and Joseph take him to Jerusalem for a festival; they lose him and find him three days later among the teachers in the temple. When they scold him, he says “*Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?*” *But they did not understand what he said to them*’ (Luke 2:49-50).

*They didn’t understand!* Wow. This bizarre memory lapse, directly after the nativity story, suggests that the nativity was tacked on later.

**6. Divinity Rising.** Line up the four gospels in the estimated order they were written (Mark, 60CE; Matthew, 70-90CE; Luke, 80-95CE; John, 90-100CE). A pattern emerges. Jesus demonstrates divinity earlier and earlier. In Mark, as mentioned, he is shown to be divine when baptized (perhaps adopted or possessed by God at that point). In Matthew and Luke, he is divine from birth. In John, he is the Logos, divine *before* birth—though also born of a woman. This pattern suggests that theologies about Jesus emerged and evolved as Christianity coalesced.

Once the Church bundled up the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, the stories merged. The astrologers became three Kings riding camels. Mary got her own “immaculate conception” and became, to some, a sinless perpetual virgin. The Jesus’s birthplace became a stable filled with adoring animals. And the holy birthday moved to winter solstice, weaving in delicious and delightful pagan traditions including feasting, tree decorating and festivals of light. The birth of a long-awaited messiah fused with the rebirth of the sun—and their joint birthday party became, in the dead of winter, a celebration of bounty and beauty and love and hope that captivated hearts even beyond the bounds of Christianity.





### Sac-FFRF to Raise Secular Holiday Display

Join jolly members of the [Greater Sacramento Chapter](#) of the [Freedom From Religion Foundation](#) as they erect a display showing our founding fathers adoring the Bill of Rights, which *really* was born in December (Dec 15, 1791, to be exact).

The secular display-raising will happen Saturday, Dec. 14 at 10:00 AM on the North Steps of the Capitol. Anyone is welcome to join the fun.

The secular display, an annual feature at the CA State Capitol since 2016, is occasionally defaced by liberty grinchies.



### Meanwhile, in Illinois ...



For the second year a Satanic display graces the Illinois State Capitol rotunda, sponsored by the local Satanic Temple, and created by local artists Holiday Gerry and Rosa Posa. The display says, "Knowledge is the Greatest Gift," featuring a woman's hand holding an apple while a snake surrounds it. It will be up through Dec 28, "enough time for conservatives to stick their feet in their mouths." (Source: <https://www.npr.org/2018/12/04/673422143/satanic-sculpture-installed-at-illinois-statehouse-just-in-time-for-the-holidays>.)



### Not yet an AOF member? Please join us!

**Atheists and Other Freethinkers** is a 501(c)(3) non-profit association, FEIN 68-0325762, incorporated in 1993. Meetings are free and open to the public. AOF also hosts civic service projects, dinners, movies and parties! See what awaits you at [www.aofonline.org](http://www.aofonline.org).

AOF President & Editor: Fantastic Fran Evanisko

Vice-president: Marvelous Mynga Futrell

Secretary: Rapid Ruth Rezos

Treasurer & Registrar: Kinetic Ken Nahigian

Webmistress: Palpable Pat Kelley

Directors at large:

Roger Zabkie, Pamella Rivers, Pat Kelley,

Linda Ostrofsky (Jetta), Kaeleigh Pontif

#### How to Contact AOF:

- Call 916-304-3796 (voicemail)

- Or write to PO Box 15182, Sacramento, CA 95851-0182

Or visit <http://www.aofonline.org/contact> to e-message us

#### How to Join AOF:

Visit <http://www.aofonline.org/join>, or come to a meeting. We have forms.

#### AOF's Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Atheists-and-Other-Freethinkers/533365556831322>

#### AOF Mission Statement:

"The purpose of Atheists and Other Freethinkers (AOF) is to promote the civic understanding of atheism and the acceptance of atheists in our community. Through educational programs, projects, and publications, AOF will extend secular perspectives, including the separation of religion and government and the right to think and speak freely on these perspectives."

*What is a Freethinker?* One striving to form opinions of life, religion, politics and philosophy on the grounds of reason and experience, rather than tradition, authority or custom. He or she need not be an atheist, though in a religious society most atheists do tend to be freethinkers.

AOF supports a benign separation of Church and State as the best means to protect the liberty and intellectual commerce of citizens. "... to keep forever from these shores the ceaseless strife that has soaked the soil of Europe in blood for centuries" (James Madison, 1803).

Our vision: to be a venue where secular and unchurched citizens can socialize, dialog, develop friendships and enjoy shared company. AOF does not discriminate on such grounds as race, sexual orientation, age, gender, class, physical debility or (\*cough\*) religion. We welcome the fair-minded of all political persuasions and preferences. Be respectful, and you may join.

Donations to AOF are tax deductible, and the newsletter is free by email. Please share with sympathetic friends.

Letters, submissions? We love them! See:

<http://www.aofonline.org/read/submission-guide.html>.