

# Welcome to First Congregational Church

*An Open and Affirming Congregation of the United Church of Christ*

Epiphany Sunday

January 3, 2021

## WELCOME & ANNOUNCEMENTS

### First Peoples Land Acknowledgement

We want to acknowledge that we gather as First Congregational Church on the traditional land of the Wabanaki Confederacy, the Abenaki people and the Pennacook people, past and present, and honor with gratitude the land itself and the people who have stewarded it throughout a thousand generations. This calls us to commit to continuing to learn how to be better stewards of this land we inhabit as well.

### PRELUDE

Prelude no 1 by JS Bach

(Adele)

### LIGHTING THE TRINITY CANDLES (BY J. PHILIP NEWELL IN "CELTIC TREASURE")

We light a Light:

**In the name of the Creator who creates life,  
In the name of the Christ who loves life,  
In the name of the Spirit who is the fire of life.**

### SETTING OUR INTENTIONS FOR WORSHIP

\*CALL TO WORSHIP: [written by Thom Shuman]

We gather wondering, 'Where will we find the Babe born in Bethlehem?'

**We will find the Babe in the laughter of children, and in the wisdom of grandparents.**

We gather asking, 'Where will we find the Child of Christmas?'

**We will find the Child where those in need are gifted with hope, and where the oppressed are set free.**

We gather wanting to know, 'Where will we find the Christ who has come to us?'

**We will find our Hope where fear is overwhelmed by grace, where hatred is overwhelmed by love, and where all people are overwhelmed by joy.**

BRINGING OURSELVES INTO GOD'S PRESENCE: [by J. Philip Newell, in "Celtic Treasure"]

**You have taught us, O Christ to love the world. You have shown us the light that is within us and within all things. May we learn to love you more, in this time of worship and praise. In loving you more, may we learn to love the earth and all its people more, for you are the light of all life. Amen.**

\*OPENING HYMN: #164

ARISE, YOUR LIGHT IS COME  
1 Arise, your light is come!  
The Spirit's call obey;  
show forth the glory of your God  
which shines on you today.

2 Arise, your light is come!  
Fling wide the prison door;  
proclaim the captive's liberty,  
good tidings to the poor.

3 Arise, your light is come!  
All you in sorrow born,  
bind up the brokenhearted ones  
and comfort those who mourn.

4 Arise, your light is come!  
The mountains burst in song!  
Rise up like eagles on the wing,  
God's power will make us strong.

#### AGAPE FEAST

GOSPEL LESSON

Luke 2:21-38 (The Message)

<sup>21</sup> When the eighth day arrived, the day of circumcision, the child was named Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived.

<sup>22-24</sup> Then when the days stipulated by Moses for purification were complete, they took him up to Jerusalem to offer him to God as commanded in God's Law: "Every male who opens the womb shall be a holy offering to God," and also to sacrifice the "pair of doves or two young pigeons" prescribed in God's Law.

<sup>25-32</sup> In Jerusalem at the time, there was a man, Simeon by name, a good man, a man who lived in the prayerful expectancy of help for Israel. And the Holy Spirit was on him. The Holy Spirit had shown him that he would see the Messiah of God before he died. Led by the Spirit, he entered the Temple. As the parents of the child Jesus brought him in to carry out the rituals of the Law, Simeon took him into his arms and blessed God:

God, you can now release your servant;  
release me in peace as you promised.  
With my own eyes I've seen your salvation;  
it's now out in the open for everyone to see:  
A God-revealing light to the non-Jewish nations,  
and of glory for your people Israel.

*continued on next page*

**33-35** Jesus' father and mother were speechless with surprise at these words. Simeon went on to bless them, and said to Mary his mother,

This child marks both the failure and  
the recovery of many in Israel,  
A figure misunderstood and contradicted—  
the pain of a sword-thrust through you—  
But the rejection will force honesty,  
as God reveals who they really are.

**36-38** Anna the prophetess was also there, a daughter of Phanuel from the tribe of Asher. She was by now a very old woman. She had been married seven years and a widow for eighty-four. She never left the Temple area, worshiping night and day with her fastings and prayers. At the very time Simeon was praying, she showed up, broke into an anthem of praise to God, and talked about the child to all who were waiting expectantly for the freeing of Jerusalem.

#### CALL TO THE FEAST

#### PRAYER OF ADORATION:

**Living God, you are present in our midst and we praise you. You are tearing down walls of alienation and exclusion. For this, we praise you because, in Jesus, you have shown us a way of hospitality, simplicity, prayer, peacemaking, and resistance. Because your Spirit makes a new path for us, as we struggle to live in the shadow of doubt and fear. Weak as we are, you fill us with hope. Lover of our souls, you give us joy and we praise you. Amen.**

#### SIGNS & SYMBOLS

#### SHARING THE FEAST

"Jesus Child" by John Rutter, The Cambridge Singers

#### INTRO TO THE EPIPHANY STORY

Matthew 2:1 (The Voice)

Jesus was born in the town of Bethlehem, in the province of Judea, at the time when King Herod reigned. Not long after Jesus was born, magi, wise men or seers from the East, made their way from the East to Jerusalem...

#### FOLLOWING THE STAR

The Magi World Tour

(Photo Slideshow)

#### THE EPIPHANY STORY

Matthew 2:2-12 (The Voice)

When the wise men arrived in Jerusalem, they made inquiries. The wise men asked the people of Jerusalem, "Where is this newborn, who is the King of the Jews? When we were far away in the East we saw His star, and we have followed its glisten and gleam all this way to worship Him."

King Herod began to hear rumors of the wise men's quest, and he, and all of his followers in Jerusalem, were worried. So Herod called all of the leading Jewish teachers, the chief priests and head scribes, and he asked them where Hebrew tradition claimed the long-awaited Anointed One would be born.

The scribes and priests told King Herod, "An ancient Hebrew prophet, Micah, said this: "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are no poor relation—For from your people will come a Ruler who will be the shepherd of My people Israel."

Herod called the wise men to him, demanding to know the exact time the special star had appeared to them. Then Herod sent them to Bethlehem.

Herod said to the wise men, "Go to Bethlehem and search high and low for this Savior child; and as soon as you know where He is, report it to me so that I may go and worship Him.

The wise men left Herod's chambers and went on their way. The star they had first seen in the East reappeared—a miracle that, of course, overjoyed and enraptured the wise men. The star led them to the house where Jesus lay; and as soon as the wise men arrived, they saw Him with His mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped Him. They unpacked their satchels and gave Jesus gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

And then, just as Joseph did a few months before, the wise men had a dream warning them not to go back to Herod. The wise men heeded the dream. Ignoring Herod's instructions, they returned to their homes in the East by a different route.

Hymn: #160

JESUS, THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

2 Joyful, all you saints arise.  
Jesus, the light of the world.  
Join the triumph of the skies.  
Jesus, the light of the world.

**Refrain:** We will follow the light, beautiful light.  
Come where the dewdrops of mercy are bright.  
Shine all around us by day and by night.  
Jesus, the light of the world.

4 Hail the Bearer of God's peace.  
Jesus, the light of the world.  
Hail the Sun of Righteousness!  
Jesus, the light of the world. **[Refrain]**

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

IRISH KEENING/MOURNING "KEENING SONG" (ARR. GALLAGHER)

PASTORAL PRAYER (BY J. PHILIP NEWELL IN "CELTIC BENEDECTION")

Lord's Prayer: (Translation by Neil Douglas-Klotz in Prayers of the Cosmos)

**O Birther! Father-Mother of the Cosmos, focus your light within us - make it useful. Create your reign of unity now-through our fiery hearts and willing hands. Help us love beyond our ideals and sprout acts of compassion for all creatures. Animate the earth within us: we then feel the Wisdom underneath supporting all. Untangle the knots within so that we can mend our hearts' simple ties to each other. Don't let surface things delude us, but free us from what holds us back from our true purpose. Out of you, the astonishing fire, returning light and sound to the cosmos. Amen.**

\*CLOSING HYMN: #154

Go, Tell It on the Mountain

**Refrain:** Go, tell it on the mountain  
Over the hill and everywhere  
Go, tell it on the mountain  
That Jesus Christ is born!

While shepherds kept their watching  
O'er silent flocks by night  
Behold throughout the heavens  
There shone a holy light. **[Refrain]**

Down in a lowly manger  
the humble Christ was born  
And God sent us salvation  
That blessed Christmas morn. **[Refrain]**

\*SETTING OUR INTENTIONS FOR THE WEEK AHEAD

\*BENEDICTION & SENDING: (BY J. PHILIP NEWELL IN "CELTIC TREASURE" &  
"CELTIC BENEDICTION")

The blessings of heaven,  
The blessings of earth,  
The blessings of sea and sky.

On those we love this day and on every human family:  
The gifts of heaven, the gifts of earth, the gifts of sea and sky.

**May the light of God illumine the heart of my soul.**

**May the flame of Christ kindle me to love.**

**May the fire of the Spirit free me to live this day, tonight, and forever. Amen.**

POSTLUDE

Prelude in A Minor by JC Bach

(Adele)