

Welcome to First Congregational Church

An Open and Affirming Congregation of the United Church of Christ

First Sunday of Advent—November 29, 2020

HOPE

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

O Come, O Come Emmanuel

(Adele)

SETTING OUR INTENTIONS FOR WORSHIP

*CALL TO WORSHIP: (BY THOM SHUMAN)

God comes! So don't let go of all the reasons to rejoice.

We will sing a song of Advent to the One who fills our lives with joy.

God comes! So don't stop lifting your prayers with thanksgiving.

We will sing a song of Advent, to the One who hears the words and silence of our lips and hearts.

God comes! So don't stop giving your hearts to God.

We will sing a song of Advent to the One who graces us with a peace we cannot begin to understand.

*BRINGING OURSELVES INTO GOD'S PRESENCE:

God of the promised Messiah, as we wait for the fulfillment of your promise, we watch, we listen, and we open our hearts for your Word. Show us signs of your presence: a light in the darkness, a voice in the silence, and a stirring deep within us. Amen.

*OPENING HYMN: #116

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel (Psalter Hymnal)

1. O come, O come, Immanuel,
and ransom captive Israel
that mourns in lonely exile here
until the Son of God appear.

Refrain: Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel
shall come to you, O Israel.

6. O come, O Bright and Morning Star,
and bring us comfort from afar!
Dispel the shadows of the night
and turn our darkness into light. Refrain

7. O come, O King of nations, bind
in one the hearts of all mankind.
Bid all our sad divisions cease
and be yourself our King of Peace. Refrain

In our homes, we gather around wreaths to pray for our lost hopes, broken peace, limited joys, and love so hard to find and share, in this season of coronavirus. We affirm that our circle of candles means that we call this season "Advent," when God's light comes into the world and nothing can overcome it.

We light the candle of hope in the face of Covid-19, wildfires, hurricanes, closed businesses, lost pollinators, and the heartache of not singing together.

God's hope shines on hopelessness, and brightens the path toward peace.

Emmanuel, God be with us, in the weeks to come; lighting hope on the wick of our lives so that we may shine on the world. Amen.

GOSPEL LESSON

Luke 1:1-25 (NRSV)

Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, ² just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, ³ I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, ⁴ so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed.

In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly order of Abijah. His wife was a descendant of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. Both of them were righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord. But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were getting on in years.

⁸ Once when he was serving as priest before God and his section was on duty, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and offer incense. Now at the time of the incense offering, the whole assembly of the people was praying outside. Then there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified; and fear overwhelmed him. But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He must never drink wine or strong drink; even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." Zechariah said to the angel, "How will I know that this is so? For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years." The angel replied, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur."

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²¹ Meanwhile the people were waiting for Zechariah, and wondered at his delay in the sanctuary. When he did come out, he could not speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He kept motioning to them and remained unable to speak. When his time of service was ended, he went to his home.

²⁴ After those days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she remained in seclusion. She said, "This is what the Lord has done for me when he looked favorably on me and took away the disgrace I have endured among my people."

SERMON

The Toolbox for Advent

Rev. Emilia Halstead

HYMN: #122

Come, O Long-Expected Jesus

(United Methodist Hymnal, 1989)

1. Come, thou long expected Jesus,
born to set thy people free;
from our fears and sins release us,
let us find our rest in thee.
2. Israel's strength and consolation,
hope of all the earth thou art;
dear desire of every nation,
joy of every longing heart.
3. Born thy people to deliver,
born a child and yet a King,
born to reign in us forever,
now thy gracious kingdom bring.
4. By thine own eternal spirit
rule in all our hearts alone;
by thine all sufficient merit,
raise us to thy glorious throne.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

PUBLIC ACT OF MOURNING: #345 Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence
(Trinity Psalter Hymnal)

1. Let all mortal flesh keep silence,
and with fear and trembling stand;
ponder nothing earthly-minded,
for with blessing in his hand,
Christ our God to earth descendeth,
our full homage to demand.

PASTORAL PRAYER

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: #101 Comfort, Comfort O My People
(Trinity Psalter Hymnal)

1. Comfort, comfort ye my people,
speak ye peace, thus saith our God;
comfort those who sit in darkness,
mourning 'neath their sorrow's load.
Speak ye to Jerusalem
of the peace that waits for them;
tell her that her sins I cover,
and her warfare now is over.

3. For the herald's voice is crying
in the desert far and near,
bidding all men to repentance,
since the kingdom now is here.
O that warning cry obey!
Now prepare for God a way;
let the valleys rise to meet him,
and the hills bow down to greet him.

4 Make ye straight what long was crooked,
make the rougher places plain;
let your hearts be true and humble,
as befits his holy reign.
For the glory of the Lord
now o'er earth is shed abroad;
and all flesh shall see the token
that his word is never broken.

***BENEDICTION & SENDING:**

Most High God, for you nothing is impossible.
Through a poor young woman in a small town
you gave birth to your realm of endless glory.

**By your Holy Spirit, fill us with new life and hope
and overshadow us with your power and grace
so that we, like Mary, might be your servants,
bearing witness to the promise of your Word;
through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Our worship has ended; Our service now begins.
Amen.**

POSTLUDE

Carol of the Bells

(Adele)

