

Welcome to First Congregational Church

An Open and Affirming Congregation of the United Church of Christ



December 20, 2020

LOVE

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

The First Noel

(Adele)

SETTING OUR INTENTIONS FOR WORSHIP

CALL TO WORSHIP: (WRITTEN BY JOHN BIRCH)

In the lonely places
The wilderness
Where we stand forlorn
Windswept and alone
Your voice calls out

Prepare a way for the Lord

In the hidden places
The shadows
Where we hide our fears
Embrace our tears
Your voice calls out

Prepare a way for the Lord

Because of the tender mercy of our God,
by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven
to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the path of peace. (Luke 1:78-79)

As the rising sun comes to us each dawn
Shine upon those who live in the shadows
That all might know the joy of our rebirth
The forgiveness of sins
And your great mercy, O God.

BRINGING OURSELVES INTO GOD'S PRESENCE:

God of Light, You brought forth light as Your first act of creation. You then brought forth light in the form of Your Son, Jesus, who continues to shine the light of hope in a world of darkness and despair. As we prepare, once again, for the birth of Jesus, You call us to shine with Your light, and to bring Your light to the world. Continue to call us into the ways of Your Son's love, peace, and joy, so that we might share the light of hope with this world. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

OPENING HYMN: #126

Angels From the Realms of Glory
(Lyrics: United Methodist Hymnal)

Angels from the realms of glory,
wing your flight o'er all the earth;
ye who sang creation's story
now proclaim Messiah's birth:

Refrain:

Come and worship, come and worship,
worship Christ, the newborn king.

Shepherds, in the field abiding,
watching o'er your flocks by night,
God with us is now residing;
yonder shines the infant light: [Refrain]

Sages, leave your contemplations,
brighter visions beam afar;
seek the great Desire of nations;
ye have seen his natal star: [Refrain]

ADVENT WREATH LIGHTING, THE CANDLE OF LOVE:(by Maren Tirabassi)

Tim Wildman

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 these candles mean that this is the season Advent, when God's light comes into the world and nothing can overcome it. We relight the candles of Hope and Peace and Joy.

We now light the candle of Love - even when many things dimming our sparkling light like: loneliness, racism, queer bashing, and body shaming.

God's love illuminates both hatred and compassion and brightens the path, for all, to the birth of Christ.

Emmanuel, God be with us, in the week to come, lighting hope, peace, joy, and love on the wick of our lives so that we may shine on our world your unconditional welcome to all. Amen.

⁵⁷ Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. ⁵⁸ Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her.

⁵⁹ On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him Zechariah after his father. ⁶⁰ But his mother said, "No; he is to be called John." ⁶¹ They said to her, "None of your relatives has this name." ⁶² Then they began motioning to his father to find out what name he wanted to give him. ⁶³ He asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And all of them were amazed.

⁶⁴ Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue freed, and he began to speak, praising God. ⁶⁵ Fear came over all their neighbors, and all these things were talked about throughout the entire hill country of Judea. ⁶⁶ All who heard them pondered them and said, "What then will this child become?" For, indeed, the hand of the Lord was with him.

⁶⁷ Then his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke this prophecy:

⁶⁸ "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them.
⁶⁹ He has raised up a mighty savior for us
in the house of his servant David,
⁷⁰ as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,
⁷¹ that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all
who hate us.
⁷² Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors,
and has remembered his holy covenant,
⁷³ the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham,
to grant us ⁷⁴ that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies,
might serve him without fear, ⁷⁵ in holiness and righteousness
before him all our days.
⁷⁶ And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,
⁷⁷ to give knowledge of salvation to his people
by the forgiveness of their sins.
⁷⁸ By the tender mercy of our God,
the dawn from on high will break upon^[b] us,
⁷⁹ to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace."

HYMN: #153

Who Would Think That What Was Needed
(Written by the Iona Community, Tune: Scarlet Letters)

1. Who would think that what was needed,
To transform and save the earth,
Might not be a plan or army,
Proud in purpose, proved in worth.
Who would think, despite derision,
That a child should lead the way.
God surprises earth with heaven,
Coming here on Christmas Day.

2. Shepherds watch and sages wonder
Monarchs scorn and angels sing
Such a place as none would reckon
Hosts a holy, helpless thing.
Stabled beast and passing strangers,
Watch a baby laid in hay.
God surprises earth with heaven,
Coming here on Christmas Day.

3. Centuries of skill and science
Span the past from which we move
Yet we might question whether
With such progress we improve
In our search for sense and meaning
Let our hopes and humor fray
God surprises earth with heaven,
Coming here on Christmas Day.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

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

4. At his feet the six-winged seraph,
cherubim with sleepless eye,
veil their faces to the Presence,
as with ceaseless voice they cry,
"Alleluia! Alleluia!
Alleluia, Lord Most High!"

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: #150

Sing a Different Song
(Written by the Iona Community)

1 Sing a different song now, Christmas is here,
Sing a song of people, knowing God's near.
The Messiah is born, in the face of our scorn.
Sing a different song to welcome and warn.

2 Love a different love now, Christmas is here,
Love without condition, love without fear.
With the humble and poor, with the shy and unsure,
Love a different love, let Christ be the cure.

3 Dance a different dance now, Christmas is here,
Dance a dance of war on suffering and fear.
Peace and justice are one, in the light of the son,
Dance a different dance, God's reign has begun.

SETTING OUR INTENTIONS FOR THE WEEK AHEAD

BENEDICTION & SENDING: (ADAPTED FROM LITURGY BY JOHN BIRCH)

For the desert places in which we walk

The streets we roam; The paths we cross

Guide our feet:

Take us to places where you would go,

Give us words that you would use,

**That in this Advent season of promise and preparation, we might point the way,
with John the Baptist, to the Messiah. Our worship has ended—our service now
begins. Amen.**

POSTLUDE

I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day

(Adele)