

Welcome to First Congregational Church

An Open and Affirming Congregation of the United Church of Christ

Christmas Eve: 4pm

December 24th, 2020

WELCOME

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.

Hymn Sing/Prelude Organ: Bill Metevier, Song Leader: Rev. Emilia Halstead

The First Noel

1. The first Noel the angel did say
was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay;
in fields where they lay keeping their sheep,
on a cold winter's night that was so deep.

Refrain:

Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel,
born is the King of Israel.

2. They looked up and saw a star
shining in the east, beyond them far;
and to the earth it gave great light,
and so it continued both day and night. [Refrain]

Angels We Have Heard on High

1. Angels we have heard on high,
singing sweetly through the night,
and the mountains in reply
echoing their brave delight.

Refrain:

Gloria in excelsis Deo,
gloria in excelsis Deo.

continued on next page

2. Shepherds, why this jubilee?
Why these songs of happy cheer?
What great brightness did you see?
What glad tidings did you hear? [Refrain]

O Little Town of Bethlehem

1. O little town of Bethlehem,
how still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
the silent stars go by.
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
the everlasting light;
the hopes and fears of all the years
are met in thee tonight.

4. O holy Child of Bethlehem,
descend to us, we pray,
cast out our sin, and enter in,
be born in us today!
We hear the Christmas angels
the great glad tidings tell.
O come to us, abide with us,
our Lord Emmanuel.

SETTING OUR INTENTIONS FOR WORSHIP

*CALL TO WORSHIP:

Leader: Sing to our God a new song; Sing to our God all the earth.

People: Glory to God in the highest heaven, Peace on earth to all!

Leader: The heavens are telling the glory of God. Let the earth rejoice, let trees of the forest sing for joy!

People: Glory to God in the highest heaven, Peace on earth to all!

*OPENING PRAYER:

Emmanuel, today we celebrate your coming and rejoice in your promises. We joyfully welcome you to this world and celebrate your presence in our lives. We hear the glad tidings of the angel voices. We come to experience this good news of great joy for all the people. We are here; we are ready, O God! Let the light of your love break forth! Amen.

1. Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive its king;
let ev'ry heart prepare him room,
and heav'n and nature sing,
and heav'n and nature sing,
and heav'n, and heav'n and nature sing.

2. Joy to the earth, the Savior reigns!
Let all their songs employ
while fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains,
repeat the sounding joy,
repeat the sounding joy,
repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

4. He rules the world with truth and grace,
and makes the nations prove
the glories of his righteousness,
and wonders of his love,
and wonders of his love,
and wonders, wonders of his love.

LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT CANDLES:

Advent. Arrival. Appearance. Return. Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love - bringing wholeness - find their place in the coming of Jesus. Tonight on Christmas Eve we kneel with families, in our homes, all over the earth, in the presence of the Most High.

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of deep shadows, on them light Christ's Light shines.

[Relight the candle of Hope.]

As we have been warmed by Christ's light, let us share the light. *[Peace.]*

As we have been found by Christ, let us seek out the lost. *[Joy.]*

As we have been liberated by Christ, let us set the captives free. *[Love.]*

How perfect it is that God would send a child to lead us.

The voice of God was heard in the cries of a baby, and that sound reminds us that God cared for us enough to be with us, to save us from the powers of death and destruction, and end our time of hiding in the shadows.

We light this candle knowing that Jesus is born, and that Love and Light has come to earth. *[Light the Christ Candle.]*

For to us a child is born, the Anointed One whom God sends to bring peace and light, freedom and reconciliation. Thanks be to God! Amen.

THE STORY OF CHRISTMAS

SOLO

O Holy Night

Rev. Emilia Halstead

THE ANGEL GABRIEL VISITS JOSEPH

Matthew 1:18-25

Sara Nichols

18 Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. 19 Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. 20 But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." 22 All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

23 "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall name him Emmanuel,"

which means, "God is with us." 24 When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, 25 but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

HYMN

Away in the Manger

1. Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,
The little Lord Jesus laid down His sweet head.
The stars in the bright sky looked down where he lay,
The little Lord Jesus, asleep on the hay.

2. The cattle are lowing; the baby awakes,
But little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes.
I love you, Lord Jesus! Look down from the sky
And stay by my side until morning is nigh.

JOURNEY AND BIRTH

Luke 2:1-7

Carol Hovey/Tim & Jim Waldman

1 In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2 This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3 All went to their own towns to be registered. 4 Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. 5 He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. 6 While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. 7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

HYMN

Jesus Our Brother, Strong and Good

1. Jesus, our brother, strong and good,
was humbly born in a stable rude,
and the friendly beasts around Him stood,
Jesus, our brother, strong and good.

6. Thus all the beasts, by some good spell,
in the stable dark were glad to tell
of the gifts they gave Emmanuel,
the gifts they gave Emmanuel.

THE SHEPHERDS AND THE ANGELS

Luke 2:8-14

Rebecca Maccini

8 In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: 11 to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. 12 This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and singing,

14 "Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"

HYMN

What Child Is This

1. What Child is this, who, laid to rest, on Mary's lap is sleeping?
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet,
while shepherds watch are keeping?

Chorus:

This, this is Christ, the King,
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing:
Haste, haste to bring Him laud,
The Babe, the Son of Mary!

2. Why lies He in such mean estate, where ox and ass are feeding?
Good Christian, fear: for sinners here,
the silent Word is pleading. [Chorus]

THE SHEPHERDS REJOICE

Luke 2:15-20

Eleanor & Phil Kimball

15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." 16 So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. 17 When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. 19 But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. 20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

BRASS ANTHEM

"Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence"

Tim Wildman & Jim Wildman

CHRISTMAS MEDITATION

Rev. Emilia Halstead

THE CHRISTMAS PRAYER (ATTRIBUTED TO ROBERT LEWIS STEVENSON)

Loving God,
help us remember the birth of Jesus,
that we may share in the song of the angels,
the gladness of the shepherds,
and worship of the wise men.

Close the door of hate
and open the door of love all over the world.
Let kindness come with every gift
and good desires with every greeting.
Deliver us from evil by the blessing which Christ brings,
and teach us to be merry with clear hearts.

May the Christmas morning make us happy to be thy children,
and Christmas evening bring us to our beds with grateful thoughts,
forgiving and forgiven, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

CANDLE LIGHTING CEREMONY

HYMN:

Silent Night, Holy Night

1. Silent night! Holy night!
All is calm, all is bright
'round yon virgin mother and child!
Holy infant, so tender and mild,
sleep in heavenly peace,
sleep in heavenly peace.

3 Silent night! Holy night!
Son of God, love's pure light,
radiant beams from thy holy face
with the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth!
Jesus Lord, at thy birth!

BENEDICTION:

A Child is born to us! A Son is given!
He is named Wonderful Counselor,
Mighty God, Prince of Peace!

Christ is born! Merry Christmas to all!

POSTLUDE

The First Nowell

(Adele)

