

Welcome to First Congregational Church

An Open and Affirming Congregation of the United Church of Christ

Christmas Eve: 4pm
December 24th, 2021

PRELUDE Taladh Chriosda "Christ Child Lullaby" (Public Domain)

SETTING OUR INTENTIONS FOR WORSHIP

CALL TO WORSHIP: (written by Wild Goose Resource Group, Iona Community)

Light looked down and saw darkness.

"I will go there," said Light.

Peace looked down and saw War.

"I will go there," said Peace.

Love looked down and saw hatred.

"I will go there," said Love.

So Christ, the Lord of Light, the Prince of Peace,
the King of Love, came down and crept in beside us.

OPENING SONG: Angels, from the Realms of Glory (Public Domain)

1) 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.

2) Shepherds, in the field abiding,

Watching o'er your flocks by night,

God with us is now residing;

Yonder shines the infant light: **Refrain**

Refrain: *Come and worship,*

come and worship,

Worship Christ, the newborn King.

LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT CANDLES: Phil & Eleanor Kimball, Carol Hovey & Tim Wildman

Reader 1: Advent. Arrival. Appearance. Return. Hope, anticipation, joy, and wholeness

find their place in the coming of Jesus.

Reader 2: Tonight on Christmas Eve we kneel with families all over the earth in the

presence of the Most High.

Reader 3: The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in

the land of deep darkness, on them light has shined.

[Light candle of Hope.]

Reader 4: As we have been invaded by light, let us share the light.

[Light the candle of Peace.]

Reader 1: As we have been found, let us seek out the lost.

[Light the candle of Joy.]

Reader 2: As we have been liberated, let us set the captives free.

[Light the candle of Love.]

continued on next page

Reader 3: How perfect it is that God would send a child to lead us.

Reader 4: 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 journey in darkness.

Reader 1: We light the Christ candle knowing that Jesus is born, and Love has come to earth.

[Light the Christ Candle.]

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

CHRISTMAS REFLECTION "Registration" by Rachel Hackenberg
(From the Still Speaking Writers Group of the UCC)

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. [...] Joseph went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. - Luke 2:1-2 & 5

In those days, households were required to register with their provinces for the purpose of being taxed by the Roman Empire. Some complied. Some resist it. Some fled. Some revolted against a headcount that served only to extract money from oppressed communities.

In these days, adults working in the US are required to register with the Social Security Administration for the purpose of paying taxes. For some adults, compliance begins with the registration of a social security number. For others who are barred from registration, non-compliance is necessary for working and living.

In these days, photo identification cards are frequently required to purchase prescriptions, pick up packages, drive a motor vehicle, or pay with a check. Many comply. Some resist, as photo IDs represent an infraction upon their religious beliefs.

In these days, proof of vaccination is increasingly required to work, to attend school, to travel, to dine or to dance. Some are complying. Some are resisting. Some are seeking exemption.

In those days, as in these days, God's work within, through, around, and beyond us continues without fail--no matter our registration status.

God most holy, God made flesh, navigating all these social regulations and government registrations is a daily spiritual practice. On this holy eve, we wait in expectation for the Miracle that unfolds within--yet is unhindered by--the demands of this world. Amen.

CALL TO CONFESSION

Moment of Silence

ASSURANCE OF PARDON:

God is faithful and just. God judges all people with equity. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness -- on them light has shined. In the glow of God's grace, you are forgiven! Let this revelation brighten your soul!

Forgiven and forgiving, we will carry the light of Christ's love to an aching and ailing world. Alleluia! Amen!

HYMN:

Good Christian Friends, Rejoice (Public Domain)

1) Good Christian friends, rejoice
with heart and soul and voice;
now ye hear of endless bliss:
Jesus Christ was born for this!
He has opened heaven's door,
and we are blest forevermore.
Christ was born for this!
Christ was born for this!

2) Good Christian friends, rejoice
with heart and soul and voice;
give ye heed to what we say:
Jesus Christ was born today.
Ox and ass before him bow,
and he is in the manger now.
Christ is born today!
Christ is born today!

THE STORY OF CHRISTMAS

THE OVERTURE

Psalm 96:7-10 & Psalm 123:1-2 (NRSV) Sara Nichols

SONG

Oh Come All Ye Faithful (Public Domain)

O come, all you faithful, joyful and triumphant
O come now, o come now to Bethlehem
Come and behold the ruler of all Angels
O come in adoration, O come in adoration,
O come in adoration, Christ is Lord!

Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation
Sing all you messengers of heavenly love;
"Glory to God, all glory in the highest"
O come in adoration, O come in adoration,
O come in adoration, Christ is Lord!

JOURNEY AND BIRTH

Luke 2:1-7 (NRSV)

Everett Sims

SONG

O Little Town of Bethlehem (Public Domain)

Oh little town of Bethlehem, how still we see you lie!
Above your deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by;
Yet in your dark streets shines the everlasting light,
The hopes and fears of all the years are met in you tonight.

For Christ is born of Mary, and gathered all above,
While mortals sleep the angels keep their watch of wondering love.
Oh morning stars, together proclaim the holy birth!
And praises sing, and voices ring with peace to all on earth.

THE CHRISTMAS PRAYER (written by Wild Goose Resource Group, Iona Community)

In the face of the Gospel, let us ask God for a good Christmas:

...That no powerful Nation should tax the poor or uproot them;
...That no unmarried mother should be put away in disgrace;
...That no door will be shut on those who need to find it open;
...That shepherds and sheep and all of nature need not be afraid;
...That barbed wire and angry soldiers may not be found in Bethlehem;
...That wise men and wise women might appear in Yemen, in Afghanistan, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in Michigan;
...That children may be protected from those who would abuse them;
...That this Christmas, worship may become a manger, and the church a stable, and the rumor become a reality, that - Christ has come among us.
And this we pray in Jesus's name. Amen.

SONG:

It Came upon the Midnight Clear (Public Domain)

1) It came upon the midnight clear,
 that glorious song of old,
 from angels bending near the earth
 to touch their harps of gold:
 "Peace on the earth, good will to men,
 from heaven's all-gracious King."
 The world in solemn stillness lay,
 to hear the angels sing.

4) For lo! the days are hastening on,
 by prophet seen of old,
 when with the ever-circling years
 shall come the time foretold
 when peace shall over all the earth
 its ancient splendors fling,
 and the whole world send back the song
 which now the angels sing.

CALL TO THE OFFERING (The special offering tonight will support Family Promise)

GRATITUDE MUSIC

Away In A Manger (Public Domain)

SONG OF THANKSGIVING:

Joy to the World! (Public Domain)

1) Joy to the world! the Lord is come:
 let earth receive her King.
 Let every heart prepare him room,
 and hev'n and nature sing,
 and hev'n and nature sing,
 and hev'n, and hev'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.

3) No more let sin and sorrow grow
 nor thorns infest the ground;
 he comes to make his blessings flow
 far as the curse is found,
 far as the curse is found,
 far as, far as the curse is found.

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.

PRAYER OF DEDICATION:

Christ comes! Our hearts are full, our joy is boundless. God, transform this offering into a living message of hope, peace, joy and love to our church, our community, our nation, and our world. Amen.

CANDLE LIGHTING CEREMONY

INVITATION

SONG: Silent Night, Holy Night (Public Domain)

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.

2 Silent night! Holy night!
Shepherds quake at the sight.
Glories stream from heaven afar,
heavenly hosts sing: "Alleluia!
Christ the Savior is born!
Christ the Savior is born!"

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!

4 Silent night! Holy night!
Wondrous star, lend thy light;
with the angels let us sing
Alleluia to our King:
"Christ the Savior is born!
Christ the Savior is born."

ONE LIGHT

Let us hold up our candles...One candle is but a flicker...

And together, we create a bright flame of Christ's light in the world.

Consider the beauty of our lights shining together. See how the light presses back the darkness.

Jesus is the light of the world! Jesus is the hope of all our tomorrows! With the help of God, let us strive to be vocal witnesses of the light that Christ brings.

THE CHRISTMAS PLEDGE: (SOURCE UNKNOWN)

Believing in the beauty and simplicity of Christmas, we commit ourselves to the following:

1. **To remember those people who truly need our gifts.**
2. **To express our love for family and friends in more direct ways than presents.**
3. **To rededicate ourselves to our own spiritual growth.**
4. **To examine our holiday activities in light of the true spirit of Christmas.**
5. **To initiate one act of peacemaking within my circle of family and friends.**

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

On Christmas Night All Christians Sing (Public Domain)

