

First Parish Congregational Church, United Church of Christ
P.O. Box 114, 47 East Derry Road East Derry, New Hampshire 03041
Tel. (603) 434 – 0628

December 24, 2020 Christmas Eve



Photo by Paul Lindemann

ALL ARE WELCOME

“Friend, you enter this church not as a stranger, but as a guest of God.

*Come, then, with joy in your heart and thanks upon your lips,
and offer God today your love and your service.”*

(Adapted from a 12th Century Church in Hampshire, England)

WE ENTER INTO GOD'S PRESENCE

Prelude: "*Silent Night*" Benjamin Gline Allen, trumpet & digital arranging
All images courtesy of Debbie Gline Allen except for the following:
Willow Tree Nativity scenes by Dan Kiefer on Unsplash
Aurora Borealis by Vincent Guth on Unsplash

HYMN "*Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*" (Hilary Gorgol)

Hark! the herald angels sing, "Glory to the newborn King;
Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled!"
Joyful all ye nations rise, join the triumph of the skies;
with the angelic host proclaim, "Christ is born in Bethlehem!"
Hark! the herald angels sing, "Glory to the new-born King!"

Christ, by highest heaven adored; Christ, the everlasting Lord!
Late in time behold Him come, off-spring of the virgin's womb.
Veiled in flesh the God-head see; hail the incarnate Deity,
Pleased in flesh with us to dwell, Jesus, our Emmanuel.
Hark! the herald angels sing, "Glory to the new-born King!"

WELCOME AND CENTERING BREATH Pastor Deborah

HYMN "*O Come, All Ye Faithful*" (choir)

O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant,
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem;
Come and behold Him, born the King of angels;
O come let us adore Him, O come let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him, Christ, the Lord!

Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation,
Sing, all ye citizens of heaven above!
Glory to God, all glory in the highest;
O come let us adore Him, O come let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him, Christ, the Lord!

Advent Wreath Lighting Ceremony (Pastor Deborah, Liz Greenberg)

Christ is our hope and our salvation. So, we light the candle of HOPE to remind us of the promises made by all the prophets that God would raise up a savior for his people Israel. God calls us to share our hope with each other.

Christ brings the Peace of God to us. So, we light the candle of PEACE to remind us that true peace can be found by following in God's path. God calls us to share this peace with others.

As Mary rejoiced in the birth of Jesus – so His birth brings us joy. We light the candle of JOY to remind us that God gives joy to every abiding heart. God calls us to share this joy with each other.

Love never fails – it transforms all those who give it and receive it. We light the candle of LOVE to remind us that Jesus is God’s gift of love to us – and that in Him, the light of love triumphs over darkness. God calls us to share this love with each other.

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. We light the Christ candle to remind us that the light of the world was born this night. Those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness – on them a light has shined.

Let us pray:

Almighty God - you have made this night holy by the gift of your Son, born of the Holy Spirit and of Mary. Upon Him rested all your grace, through Him has come all your mercy and steadfast love. Let His light shine within our hearts tonight even more brightly than ever before. Help us to hear your Word, to celebrate your everlasting love through Him and to share it with the world. Amen

Special Music: “O Holy Night” (Shellie and Rebecca Brook)

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

O God, we come back to hear the story once again for ourselves, for our faith, for our lives.

We pray now for others and ask that you hear our prayers, O God.

May those who are lonely hear an angel song of hope drawing near,

and the footsteps of kindly people on the way.

May those who are homeless find at least a sheltering stable on this night

and the company of a God who stays fast beside them.

May those who are rejected, be embraced by unexpected neighbors

and the lost, see a guiding star overhead.

May those who are hungry be filled with the gifts of those who have much

and justice rise up in all the earth around them.

May those who are powerless and without voice, who suffer in the silences

be given the wise and the prophets to speak for them.

Praise be to you, O God. Gather us all into your loving presence now and help us to cherish the life of the vulnerable Child in all the world.

PRAYER OF OUR SAVIOR (debts)

Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil; for Thine is the Kingdom, and the Power, and the Glory forever. Amen.

HYMN *“It Came Upon the Midnight Clear”* (choir)

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, goodwill to men, From heaven's all-gracious King."
The world in solemn stillness lay, To hear the angels sing.

Still through the cloven skies they come, With peaceful wings unfurled,
And still their heavenly music floats O'er all the weary world;
Above its sad and lowly plains, They bend on hovering wing,
And ever o'er its babel sounds The blessed angels sing.

Brian Williams: **“In the beginning...”**

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

HYMN *“O Come, O Come Emmanuel”* (choir)

O come, O come, Emmanuel And ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here Until the Son of God appear
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel Shall come to thee, O Israel.

Cyndi Gray: **“Greetings, favored one...”**

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.” But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

Then Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her.

HYMN *“O Little Town of Bethlehem”* (Hilary Gorgol)

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.
For Christ is born of Mary, and gathered all above
while mortals sleep, the angels keep their watch of wondering love.
O morning stars together proclaim the holy birth.
Your voices raise to God in praise; and peace to all on earth!

Dee Deranian: “a decree went out”

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. All went to their own towns to be registered. 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. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. 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 “*Away in a Manger*” (Brian Williams)

Away in a manger, no crib for a bed, the little Lord Jesus laid down His sweet head.
The stars in the sky looked down where He lay, the little Lord Jesus, asleep on the hay.
Be near me, Lord Jesus, I ask Thee to stay close by me forever, and love me, I pray.
Bless all the dear children in Thy tender care, and fit us for heaven to live with you there.

Jack Martin: “the glory of the LORD shone around them”

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

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: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

HYMN “*The First Noel*” (Hilary Gorgol)

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

Rachel Cobban: “they found the child lying in the manger”

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.” So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

HYMN “*Angels We Have Heard on High*” (choir)

Angels we have heard on high, sweetly singing o’er the plains,
and the mountains in reply, echo back their joyous strains.
Gloria, in excelsis Deo, Gloria, in excelsis Deo.
Come to Bethlehem and see Christ whose birth the angels sing;
Come adore on bended knee, God, our world now entering.
Gloria, in excelsis Deo, Gloria, in excelsis Deo.

Marge Palmer: “wise men came from the east”

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.” When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born.

They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who is to shepherd my people Israel.”

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.”

When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy.

HYMN “*We Three Kings of Orient Are*” (Brian Lew)

We three kings of Orient are bearing gifts we traverse afar
Field and fountain, moor and mountain Following yonder star
O Star of wonder, star of night Star with royal beauty bright
Westward leading, still proceeding Guide us to thy Perfect Light.

Glorious now behold Him arise, King and God and Sacrifice.

Alleluia, alleluia! Sounds through the earth and skies.

O Star of wonder, star of night Star with royal beauty bright
Westward leading, still proceeding Guide us to thy Perfect Light

Brian Williams: “Joseph’s dream”

On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.” Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod.

HYMN “Joy to the World” (choir)

Joy to the World, the LORD is come Let earth its praises bring;
Let every heart prepare Him room, And heaven and nature Sing,
And heaven and nature Sing, and heaven and nature Sing.
Joy to the world! the Savior reigns Let men their songs employ
While fields and floods Rocks, hills and plains
Repeat the sounding joy, Repeat the sounding joy;
Repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

A READING followed by a Reflection:

“First Coming” by Madeleine L’Engle read by Pastor Deborah

God did not wait till the world was ready, till nations were at peace.
God came when the Heavens were unsteady and prisoners cried out for release.
God did not wait for the perfect time.
God came when the need was deep and great.
God dined with sinners in all their grime, turned water into wine.
God did not wait till hearts were pure.
In joy God came to a tarnished world of sin and doubt.
To a world like ours, of anguished shame, God came and God’s Light would not go out.
God came to a world that did not mesh; to heal its tangles, shield its scorn.
In the mystery of the Word made Flesh, the maker of the stars was born.
We cannot wait till the world is sane to raise our songs with joyful voice,
or to share our grief.
God came with Love to touch our pain.
He came with Love: Rejoice! Rejoice!

HYMN “*Silent Night, Holy Night*” (choir and friends)

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.

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!

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 Pastor Deborah

***MERRY CHRISTMAS TO YOU AND YOURS!
MAY YOU BRING TONIGHT’S CHRISTMAS LOVE
WITH YOU INTO THE COMING YEAR!***



*Christmas Poinsettias
Poinsettias added to the beauty of
the season:*

Cynthia Gray: In Loving Memory of Sam Gray

Liz Greenberg and Pastor Deborah: In loving memory of Charles and Lilah Roof and William and June Ermer. In honor of our four beautiful daughters and their loved ones.

The Guerrin Family: In loving memory of family and friends

Joyce Pope: In loving memory of Glenn Pope

Margaret Ives: In Celebration of Marnie, Elizabeth, Robert, Bets, Ruth Ives and Bill Willis