

First Congregational United Church of Christ

December 18, 2022



Photo by Enno Limvere

Ministers: All who are a part of this church

Pastor: Rev. Enno K. Limvere

Musician: Ben Nichols

Choir Director: Ann Russ

Advent Candle Lighter: Ann Russ

Gathering Music

Words of Welcome

Prelude

Words to Light the Advent Candles of Joy and Peace

People who love caroling: In this season of Advent, we come to hear the old, ancient story brought to life, in our community, in this gathering, so we may find some joy.

People who love Christmas Pageants: We gather to do our part in this pageant and out in the world. We help our neighbors, reach out to those in need, shine our lights, and share joy that is a gift, given because of God's unconditional and steadfast love that endures forever.

People who are glad their kids are no longer in pageants: Jesus, who was born, not in a palace, but a stable in a small town, brought joy to shepherds and angels alike. Like a blanket of snow that covers up barren ground, insulating the seeds and plants that will spring up again, joy doesn't erase our problems, but gives us time rest and gain strength.

Lighting of the Candles of Joy and Peace

People who like a white Christmas: God of Joy, the time of Christmas is near, with anticipation of all that is good and beautiful, may our light shine as the Advent candles before us, and the lights that adorn our Advent Wreath outside. May joy be our companion as we celebrate Immanuel, God is with us.

In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Act 1- Narrative of Nativity

Scene 1 - Don't Stop Believing – On a Journey

Narrator 1: A long, long time ago in a Galilee far, far away....

Narrator 2: There was a young couple who traveled to Bethlehem to be enrolled in the census. This was the hometown of Joseph, who was engaged to Mary. Mary was with child, and because of this, Joseph's relatives refused to welcome them into their homes.

Narrator 1: They went to an inn but there was no room except in the manger, so the innkeeper allowed them to stay there, for a small fee of course... In this place filled with animals, straw, and angels, Mary gave birth to their first child.

Narrator 2: Too early for a flashback? Imagine if you will... When Joseph found that Mary was with child, he was troubled, but an angel of Lord appeared to him in a dream, “Joseph, Son of David, do be afraid to take Mary as your wife. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus”

Townspeople: **“Look, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him ‘Emmanuel’ which means “God is with us.”**
Matthew 1:23

Music Interlude - O Come, O Come Immanuel

Scene 2 - Shepherds on a Slope

Narrator 3: In a place that was in the middle of nowhere, probably around Hungry Jack.

Narrator 4: There were shepherds out in the fields, doing what shepherds do, watching the flock, the stars, and wishing they had better cell phone reception or internet in this remote place so they could watch Charlie Brown’s Christmas Special, The Grinch, Elf, or White Christmas on their smartphones.

Narrator 3: When suddenly, an angel appeared and they were terrified, for not even the taco truck or UPS comes out this far, much less shining their own lights, high beams.

Narrator 4: “Do not be afraid – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day, the Messiah. 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 heavenly host praising God and saying:

Townspeople: **“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth, peace among those whom God loves”** (Luke 2:14)

Music Interlude – Angels We Have Heard on High

Scene 3 - Wise Ones See the Light

Narrator 5: Since back then, they thought the world was flat, and everything revolved around them, this scene literally comes from the end of the world, on the East side, just past Hovland.

Narrator 6: There were some people who studied the stars in the sky, believing they could tell of the future maybe, of the character of the person born under a certain constellation, and of happenings around the world.

Narrator 5: What they saw was a new star that rose in the East, stars rise in the West, don't ya know, and interpreted this to be a prophecy. They gathered up their belongings, stopped at Ben Frankl to get some presents, and headed out.

Narrator 6: What is often missed in this story is that this journey took them about 2 years, they even had to stop and ask for directions. But they warned not to go back to King Herod because he was up to no good in the neighborhood. You have to come back on Epiphany on January 6th to hear the rest of the story... For now, the Wise Ones begin their journey.

Wise One: I think we go this way...

Townspeople: **“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.”**

Musical Interlude – We Three Kings

Scene 4 - Meanwhile, back at the Manger & Sharing Good News

Narrator 1: Meanwhile, back at the manger, things are getting pretty crowded as the everyone gathers around the new parents and infant.

Narrator 2: The shepherds are trying to tell the people the visit of the angels and the announcement of this child who is and is to become the Messiah and bring joy to all people

Narrator 1: All who heard this, even some of those relatives who were feeling guilty about allowing their new family member to be born in such a place, were amazed and some even believed these shepherds who definitely were not locals.

Narrator 2: The shepherds having found the chosen one, realized they left the sheep out in the middle of nowhere and decided it was a long night. But they couldn't stop talking, glorifying and praising God for all they had seen and heard while they returned

Townspeople: **“But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.”** Luke 2:19

Musical Interlude – Away in the Manger

Act 2 - Jesus Christ in the 21st & a Fifth Century

Scene 1 - In the Time of Pandemic

Narrator 3: In the Gospel of Matthew, as part of the story of the Wise Men and King Herod, Joseph and Mary flee from Bethlehem because they were warned in a dream by an angel that King Herod was coming after Jesus. After King Herod realized he had been tricked by the Wise Ones, he sent his troops to kill all male children under the age of 2 years old in the town of Bethlehem. This family did find refuge in Egypt, but many families in Bethlehem did not escape the violence.

Narrator 4: In our time of political unrest and war, the future of our children and grandchildren is in doubt. With the global climate crisis and the rising authoritarianism around the world, the future can look bleak. We fear what is happening and what is coming. Let us remember that there have been climate crises, tyrants, and wars in our past, and they do not continue on forever.

Narrator 3: So, we have not a lot singing this morning because we are doing what we can to protect our families, our community, and all people. We wear our masks and keep our distance, get our vaccinations and be careful around the vulnerable.

Narrator 4: In this time of societal rifts, we learn once again, that it isn't the size of our homes, bank accounts, or vehicles we truly need. We need compassion, family, and the resources to help those who are vulnerable. We need hope, peace, joy, and love.

Townspeople: **“The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and the shadow of death, light has dawned.”** (Isaiah 9:2)

Musical Interlude – In the Bleak Midwinter.

Scene 2 - Centering on the Child of Bethlehem

Narrator 5: Does it make a difference to you, to me; to realize that Joseph and Mary faced hardships, rejection, fled for their lives, and in the midst of the joy of a beautiful baby and the coming Messiah, their lives were not perfect?

Narrator 6: For God so loved the world, for God so loves you, that Jesus came into this world bringing good news of great joy of the child. “By the

tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace.” (Luke 1:78-79)

Narrator 5: Mary proclaimed, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, who looked down with favor on the lowliness of the servant. God’s mercy is for all who are loved, from generation to generation. God has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts, brought down the powerful and lifted up the lowly, filling the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.” (Luke 1:46-53)

Narrator 6: For a child has been born for us, a child given to us; authority rests upon Christ’s shoulders; and is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Parent, Prince of Peace. Christ’s authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for God’s kingdom. Christ will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

TOWNSPEOPLE: “For nothing is impossible with God. Here I am, the servant of our Creator; let it be with me according to your word, love, and vision.”

Musical Interlude – *Go, Tell It on the Mountain*

Joys and Concerns, Pastoral Prayer and the Lord’s Prayer

Our Father/Mother God, who are in heaven, holy is your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

Our Time of Giving

Doxology

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;

Praise God, all creatures here below;

Praise God for all that love has done;

Creator, Christ, and Spirit, One. Amen

News of God at Work in our Congregation & Community

Closing Hymn Red Hymnal #313 Joy to the World

- 1 Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King;
let every 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 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.

- 3 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.

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Benediction

Sending Music

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Prayer List: Meredith Eliot (Church-Davison), Vicki Biggs-Anderson, Paulette Anholm, Mike Carlson, Gwen Dornfeld, Sally Dunn, Arlene Cleberg, Bob Carter; The Families of Richard Swanson, Jim Beaster, and EvaLyn Carlson, Tom Heinz (father of Carol Bennet)
Shut-ins and Care Center: Nona Smith, Lou Goodell, Bev Denyes, Nancy Cihlar

MEASURE OF OUR FAITHFULNESS

The First Congregational UCC Budget adopted in January 2022 shows a need for a yearly income of \$151,756.

After 49 weeks, the Budget Donations and Income should be \$143,000.70

Thank you for all your support!

Kevin R LeVoir, Treasurer

THIS WEEK:

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 15

10:00 AM - Tai Chi(Cancelled because of Weather)

12:00 AM- Women's AA

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 16

7:00 AM - AA (FS)

8:00 AM - Harbor Watch

2:00PM-6:00PM - Piano Lessons

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 17

9:30AM-2:30 PM - Piano Lessons

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 18

9:00 AM – NO Sunday School

9:30 AM - Christmas Program Practice

10:00 AM – Hymn Sing

10:30 AM – Inside AND ON ZOOM 4th Sunday of Advent- Joy, on this Sunday, it is time to get together and have some fun. We will be inviting everyone and anyone to show up at 9:30 to practice for our Christmas Pageant 2022. We will need narrators, Mary and Joseph, Shepherds, Angels, Wise Ones, and an Inn Keeper. We also need townspeople to keep us going.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 19

3:00PM-5:00PM - Food Shelf Open to the Public (LL)

7:00PM - ALANON

Pastor Enno's Day off

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 20

2:00AM-6:00PM - Piano Lessons

6:00PM - Christmas Caroling Outside

7:00PM - Zen Meditation (LL)

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 21

2:00PM-6:00PM - Piano Lessons

2:00PM - Ministerial Lectionary Study

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 22

10:00AM - Tai Chi

12:00AM- Women's AA

2:00PM-6:00PM - Piano Lessons

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 23

7:00AM - AA (FS)

8:00AM - Harbor Watch

2:00PM-6:00PM - Piano Lessons

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 24

7:00PM – Inside AND ON ZOOM Christmas Eve Service, we will gather inside to sing some Christmas carols and to hear the story of Jesus' birth as told by the Gospel of Luke. We will end our service with candle lighting and singing Silent Night to fill the world with the peace that passes all understanding. (The policy for indoor masking and singing has been changed by the Board of Directors which will take effect in this service. Masks will be worn at your comfort, not mandated, and we will resume singing not just at the end of the service.)

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 25th

Merry Christmas! Stay home and enjoy family and friends

Mission Statement work progressing

The Mission Statement Task force thanks everyone who attended the Listening Session on Nov.20, 2022 and offers the revisions mentioned below for your consideration. We plan to have a short—45 minute—Listening Session on Sunday, January 8, following worship. It will follow the same format.

Please consider these questions: What do you like, not like, or what is missing?

We look forward to hearing your ideas to help us present a version to consider voting on at the winter Annual Meeting on January 29.

Revision 11.28.22

At First Congregational United Church of Christ:

- We welcome all
- We celebrate and honor Creation
- We explore the mysteries of our faith
- We work for justice and peace