

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
BENNINGTON, VERMONT

*Vermont's Colonial Shrine: Welcoming all to share God's light,
and proclaiming God's embracing love since 1806*

THE REV. KENNETH A. CLARKE, MINISTER
GENE MARIE CALLAHAN, ORGANIST

DECEMBER 13, 2020
THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

PRELUDE *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel* - Edward H. Wetherill

OPENING WORDS (responsive)

Sing praises to the Lord.

Who made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is.

The Lord our God is near always.

Let us pray for the peace of God's presence.

HYMN *Arise, Your Light Is Come*

(LYRICS REPRINTED AT THE END OF THE ORDER OF SERVICE)

Contemporary poet and U.C.C. minister and professor Ruth Duck was working on an adaptation of *Rise Up, O Men of God* when, she writes, "this new hymn text came to me, as if the new wine of the faith I wanted to express would not fit into the old wineskin of the earlier text." The tune by William Henry Walter was published in 1872. Walter was organist at Presbyterian and Episcopal churches in Newark, and at Columbia University.

OPENING PRAYER (unison)

Almighty God, Light of the World, you caused light to shine out of the darkness in the advent of Christ; you continually open to us the ways we are to prepare. We confess our failure to see the light and to walk in your ways. We have not always opened our eyes to the needs of others, and our feet have wandered from the paths of justice and peace. We ask that the Spirit of Jesus be born anew within us, that our hearts may be stirred to glorify the hour before us, with acts of compassion and service. Amen.

ASSURANCE OF PARDON AND GLORIA PATRI (579)

FIRST LESSON Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11 p. 603

HYMN *Watchman, Tell Us of the Night*

(LYRICS REPRINTED AT THE END OF THE ORDER OF SERVICE)

The author, John Bowring (1792-1872) was a member of the British Parliament, held appointments in France and Hong Kong, knew 200 languages and could converse in 100, wrote extensively, and escaped (although his wife did not) an attempt to poison him and his family while he was in China.

SECOND LESSON 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24 p. 961

SERMON Hold Fast to What Is Good

HYMN *People, Look East*

(LYRICS REPRINTED AT THE END OF THE ORDER OF SERVICE)

Eleanor Farjeon was an English Roman Catholic who wrote nursery rhythms and singing games for children. Her text first appeared in a section of the 1928 *Oxford Book of Carols* on modern texts adapted to traditional tunes. The French carol tune was earlier a setting for *Shepherds, Shake Off Your Drowsy Sleep*. The organist, choirmaster, composer and hymnal editor Martin Shaw wrote the harmony.

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS OF THE CHURCH (Visitors are kindly requested to fill out one of the visitor's cards in the pew and put it in the offering plate.)

OFFERING

OFFERTORY *Lo How A Rose E'er Blooming* - arr Mark Hayes

***DOXOLOGY (592) AND PRAYER OF DEDICATION**

CLOSING PRAYER AND THE LORD'S PRAYER (debts/debtors) p. 16

HYMN *See Amid the Winter's Snow*

(LYRICS REPRINTED AT THE END OF THE ORDER OF SERVICE)

This text was written by Edward Caswall (1814 – 1878). Caswall was an Anglican priest who was deeply involved in the Oxford movement. He and his wife became Roman Catholics in 1847 and after her death two years later Caswall joined John Henry Newman and was reordained in 1852. The remainder of his life was devoted to service to the poor, the sick, and little children. Most of his writings and translations were during this period.

BENEDICTION

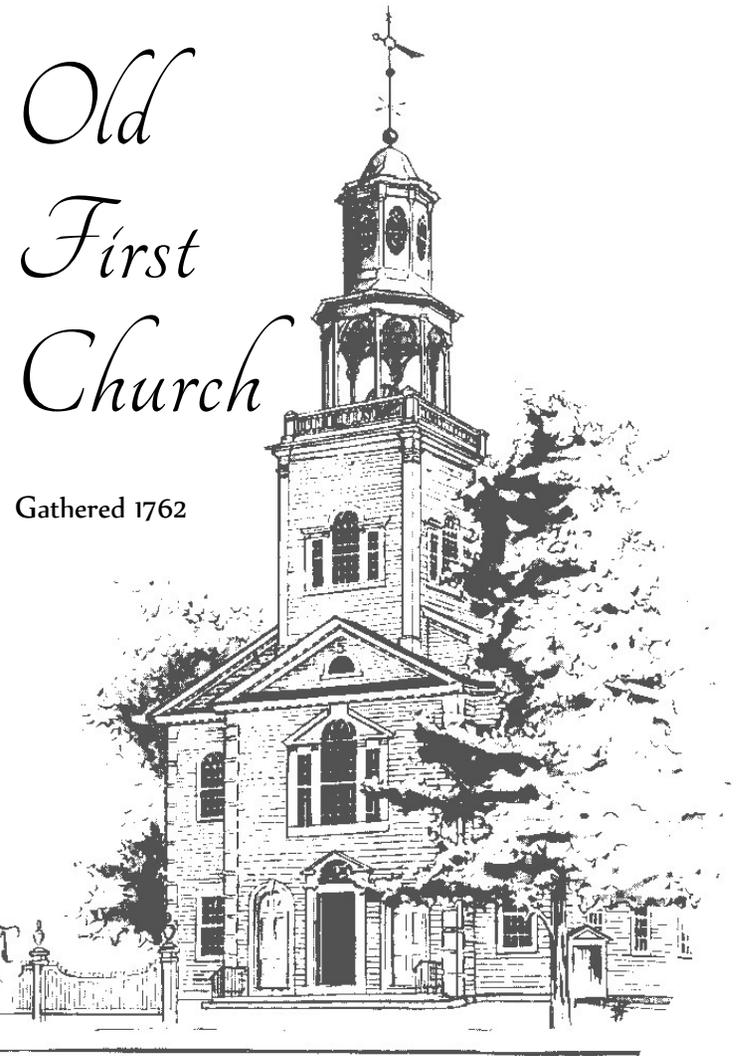
POSTLUDE *A Virgin Most Pure* - arr. Charles Wood

Deacons on call this month are Pat Guerrero, Jeannette Lesser and Amy Tronsen.

Worship and life at Old First is changing in response to the need to reduce activity as we work to get through the challenge of the COVID-19 presence in our life. Our prayers and thoughts go to everyone immediately affected and thanks go to all people who work to provide care and supply our needs in this time. An audio version of our weekly worship services can be found on the church's website by clicking on the "Worship" tab and selecting "Worship Here and Now". Or simply paste the following into your computer's browser at the top of the page: <http://oldfirstchurchbenn.org/worship/worship-here-and-now/>

If this link appears in blue on the device you are using to read this, you can also just "click on the link" and you will be there! The church office has been temporarily moved to the home of our office administrator. Please use email, phone or U.S. Mail for correspondence.

If you are interested in discussing matters of faith and want to inquire about Christian membership in the church, please contact Rev. Clarke. We welcome the chance to have you join us in our historic, but active-in-the-world, community of faith!



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

(OLD FIRST CHURCH)

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Arise, Your Light Is Come!

Arise, your light is come!
The Spirit's call obey;
show forth the glory of your God,
which shines on you today.

Arise, your light is come!
Fling wide the prison door;
proclaim the captives' liberty,
good tidings to the poor.

Arise, your light is come!
All you in sorrow born,
bind up the brokenhearted ones
and comfort those who mourn.

Arise, your light is come!
The mountains burst in song!
Rise up like eagles on the wing;
God's power will make us strong.

Watchman, Tell Us of the Night

1. Watchman, tell us of the night,
What its signs of promise are.
Traveler, o'er yon mountain's height,
See that glory beaming star.
Watchman, does its beauteous ray
Aught of joy or hope foretell?
Traveler, yes; it brings the day,
Promised day of Israel.
2. Watchman, tell us of the night,
Higher yet that star ascends.
Traveler, blessedness and light,
Peace and truth its course portends.
Watchman, will its beams alone
Gild the spot that gave them birth?
Traveler, ages are its own;
See, it bursts o'er all the earth.
3. Watchman, tell us of the night,
For the morning seems to dawn.
Traveler, darkness takes its flight,
Doubt and terror are withdrawn.
Watchman, let your wanderings cease;
Hasten to your quiet home.
Traveler, lo, the Prince of Peace,
Lo, the Son of God is come!

People, Look East

1. People, look east. The time is near
Of the crowning of the year.
Make your house fair as you are able,
Trim the hearth and set the table.
People, look east and sing today:
Love, the guest is on the way.
2. Furrows, be glad. Though earth is bare,
One more seed is planted there:
Give up your strength the seed to nourish,
That in course the flower may flourish.
People, look east and sing today:
Love, the rose is on the way.
3. Birds, though you long have ceased to build,
Guard the nest that must be filled.
Even the hour when wings are frozen
God for fledging time has chosen.
People, look east and sing today:
Love, the bird is on the way.
4. Stars, keep the watch. When night is dim
One more light the bowl shall brim,
Shining beyond the frosty weather,
Bright as sun and moon together.
People, look east and sing today:
Love, the star is on the way.
5. Angels, announce with shouts of mirth
Christ who brings new life to earth.
Set every peak and valley humming
With the word, the Lord is coming.
People, look east and sing today:
Love, the Lord, is on the way.

See Amid the Winter's Snow

See, amid the winter's snow,
born for us on earth below,
see the gentle Lamb appears,
promised from eternal years.

Refrain:

Hail that ever-blessed morn,
Hail redemption's happy dawn,
Sing through all Jerusalem:
Christ is born in Bethlehem.

Say, you holy shepherds, say,
tell your joyful news today.
Why have you now left your sheep
on the lonely mountain steep? [Refrain]

"As we watched at dead of night,
there appeared a wondrous light;
angels singing 'Peace on earth'
told us of the Savior's birth." [Refrain]

ISAIAH 61:1-4, 8-11

The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to provide for those who mourn in Zion—to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, to display his glory.

They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations. For I the LORD love justice, I hate robbery and wrongdoing; I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them. Their descendants shall be known among the nations, and their offspring among the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge that they are a people whom the LORD has blessed.

I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.

1 THESSALONIANS 5:16-24

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil.

May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.