

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 20, 2020 ~ FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

PRELUDE *Infant Holy, Infant Lowly* -arr. Mark Kellner

OPENING WORDS (responsive)

O God hear our prayers this Advent time.
Restore us with your promised day.
Give rest to those who are weary.
Give joy to those who wait for light.

HYMN *Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus* 2

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

The author of the text, who was his parents' eighteenth child, and who as an Anglican priest was devoted to the Methodist movement, wrote over 6,000 hymns in the mid-18th century. The composer was a gifted song leader and composer in Wales and wrote *Hyfrydol* before he was 20 years old. An interesting thing about this tune is that, with one exception, all the melody is within the first five notes of the scale.

OPENING PRAYER (unison)

Eternal God, in whom we live and move and have our being, whose face is hidden from us by our sin, and whose mercy we forget: cleanse us from all offenses, and deliver us from proud thoughts and vain desires; that humbly we may draw near to thee, confessing our faults, confiding in thy grace, and finding in thee our refuge and our strength, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

ASSURANCE OF PARDON AND GLORIA PATRI (579)

FIRST LESSON 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16 p. 245

HYMN *Of the Father's Love Begotten* 309

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

A native of Spain, Aurelius Clemens Prudentius (348 – c. 413) was educated in imperial schools where he studied the Latin poets Horace and Virgil. He became a law student and twice a magistrate before being appointed to court office by Theodosius. At age fifty-seven he renounced the world and retreated to a life of poverty, seclusion, and writing.

SECOND LESSON Luke 1:26-38 p. 831

SERMON The Season's Promise

HYMN *Song of Mary* 600

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

Sister Miriam Therese Winter wrote this hymn in 1978 for the Medical Mission Sisters of Philadelphia. She is professor of liturgy, spirituality and worship at Hartford Seminary. The tune is Aeolian (Greek), first published by John Wyeth in 1813 as the setting for an Isaac Watts' hymn.

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 *Love Came Down at Christmas* -arr. Mark Hayes

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

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

HYMN *It Came Upon a Midnight Clear* 38

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

Edmund Hamilton Sears wrote the hymn while a pastor in Wayland, MA, and it was published in 1849. William Reynolds notes that this is the first of the "carol-like hymns from the pens of American poets. Hymns stressing the social message of Christmas – 'peace on earth, good will' – are distinctly American." Sears was educated at Union College in Schenectady and Harvard Divinity School. Richard Storrs Willis wrote the tune for another poem, "See Israel's Gentle Shepherd Stand" in 1850. He studied at Yale and with Felix Mendelssohn in Germany and was a vestryman at the Church of the Transfiguration in New York City.

BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing* -David Cherwien

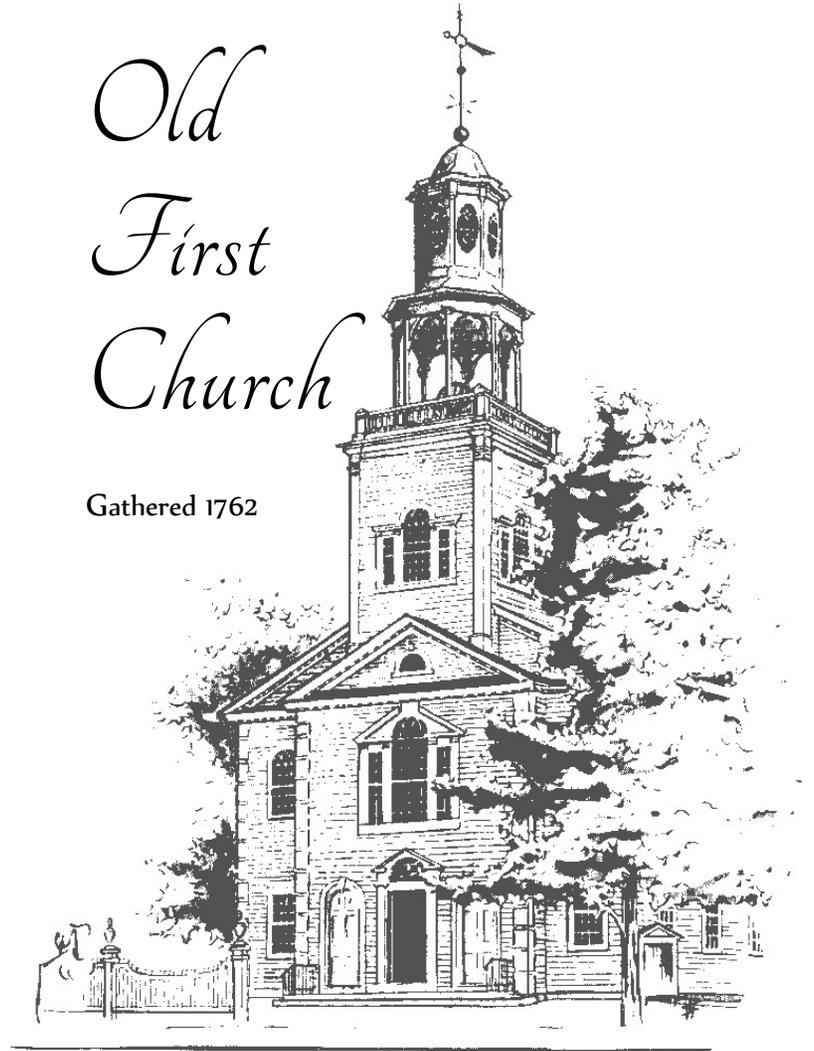
Deacons on call this month are Pat Guerrero, Jeannette Lesser and Amy Tronsen.

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!

Old First Church

Gathered 1762



FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

(OLD FIRST CHURCH)

1 Monument Circle • Old Bennington, Vermont 05201 • (802) 447-1223

office@oldfirst.comcastbiz.net • www.oldfirstchurchbenn.org

Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus

Come, Thou long-expected Jesus,
Born to set Thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us;
Let us find our rest in Thee.

Israel's strength and consolation,
Hope of all the earth Thou art;
Dear desire of every nation,
Joy of every longing heart.

Born Thy people to deliver,
Born a child and yet a King,
Born to reign in us forever,
Now Thy gracious kingdom bring.

By Thine own eternal Spirit
Rule in all our hearts alone;
By Thine all-sufficient merit,
Raise us to Thy glorious throne.

Of the Father's Love Begotten

1. Of the Father's love begotten,
Ere the worlds began to be,
He is Alpha and Omega,
He the source, the ending He,
Of the things that are, have been,
And that future years shall see,
Evermore and evermore!

2. O ye heights of heaven adore Him;
Angel hosts, His praises sing;
Powers, dominions, bow before Him,
And extol our God and King;
Let no tongue on earth be silent,
Every voice in concert ring,
Evermore and evermore!

3. Christ, to Thee with God the Father,
And, O Holy Ghost, to Thee,
Hymn and chant and high thanksgiving,
And unwearied praises be:
Honor, glory, and dominion,
And eternal victory,
Evermore and evermore!

It Came Upon a Midnight Clear

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

2. 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.

3. And ye, beneath life's crushing load,
Whose forms are bending low,
Who toil along the climbing way
With painful steps and slow,
Look now! for glad and golden hours
Come swiftly on the wing:
O rest beside the weary road,
And hear the angels sing.

4. For lo, the days are hastening on,
By prophet bards foretold,
When with the ever-circling years
Comes round the age of gold;
When peace shall over all the earth
Its ancient splendors fling,
And the whole world give back the song
Which now the angels sing.

Song of Mary

My soul gives glory to my God,
My heart pours out its praise.
God lifted up my lowliness
In many marvelous ways.

My God has done great things for me:
Yes, holy is this Name.
All people will declare me blessed,
And blessings they shall claim.

From age to age to all who fear,
Such mercy love imparts,
Dispensing justice far and near,
Dismissing selfish hearts.

Love casts the mighty from their thrones,
Promotes the insecure,
Leaves hungry spirits satisfied;
The rich seem suddenly poor.

Praise God, whose loving covenant
Supports those in distress,
Remembering past promises
With present faithfulness.

2 SAMUEL 7:1-11, 16

Now when the king was settled in his house, and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him, the king said to the prophet Nathan, “See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent.” Nathan said to the king, “Go, do all that you have in mind; for the Lord is with you.”

But that same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan: Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the Lord: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle. Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, “Why have you not built me a house of cedar?” Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the Lord of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel; and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house. Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.

LUKE 1:26-38

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.” Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” The angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.” 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.