

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
KRISTIN ROESSNER, LAY READER
GENE MARIE CALLAHAN, ORGANIST
OLD FIRST CHURCH CHOIR

JANUARY 7, 2024

PRELUDE *Brightest and Best* - James F. Harding

OPENING WORDS (responsive)

O God of power and love be with us.

O God of peace hear our prayer.

In this time of worship we pray to you.

Hear us and give comfort always.

*HYMN *Brightest and Best of the Stars of the Morning* 67

This Epiphany text was written by Bishop Reginald Heber. Heber (1783-1826) was born in Malpas, England, and educated at Brasenose College, Oxford, where he won prizes for his poetry. He was ordained in 1807 and became vicar of the family estate at Hodnet, Shropshire. In 1823, Heber was appointed bishop of Calcutta and ordained the first native Christian there. Heber died suddenly at the end of a day in which he had baptized forty-two people. He wrote all his hymns before he went to India.

OPENING PRAYER (unison)

Look to this day!

For it is life, the very life of life.

In its brief course

Lie all the verities and realities of your existence:

The bliss of growth

The glory of action

The splendor of beauty,

For yesterday is but a dream

And tomorrow only a vision,

But today well lived makes every yesterday a dream

of happiness

And every tomorrow a vision of hope.

Look well, therefore, to this day!

ASSURANCE OF PARDON AND *GLORIA PATRI (579)

FIRST LESSON Matthew 2:1-12 p. 783

*HYMN *O Morning Star, How Fair and Bright* 69

This hymn, originally in German was written by Philipp Nicolai while a pastor in Unna. An unknown "pestilence" had spread so broadly that in seven months thirteen hundred people had died. The pastor's home overlooked the cemetery where up to thirty bodies were buried daily. These events led him to seek comfort in Christ and in the hope of eternal life. The hymn became a favorite "wedding hymn" in Germany.

SECOND LESSON Ephesians 3:1-12 p. 950

SERMON The Wisdom of God in Its Rich Variety

*HYMN *For the Bread Which You Have Broken* 508

Louis Benson wrote the text in 1924. Benson started his career as a lawyer, but abandoned it after seven years to become a Presbyterian minister, after which he became editor of several hymnals, and taught hymnody at Auburn and Princeton Seminaries. The tune was written in 1959 by V. Earle Copes, a 1940 graduate of Davidson College. Copes is a Methodist minister, and has served as minister of music in a number of churches and on college faculties.

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 or hand it to an usher after the service.)

OFFERING

OFFERTORY *Bring We the Frankincense of Our Love*
- Carmichael arr. Lein and Weaver

*DOXOLOGY (592) AND PRAYER OF DEDICATION

SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER (insert)

The congregation is invited participate in the service as found in the insert included in this order of service. (*We will come forward to partake of the bread and juice, symbolizing a continuous Table.*)

COMMUNION VOLUNTARY

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

*HYMN *We Three Kings of Orient Are* 66

Text and tune were written by John Henry Hopkins, Jr. in 1857. His undergraduate and master's degrees were from the University of Vermont. He was a pastor, and then professor of church music at General Theological Seminary. He designed stained glass windows and Episcopal seals and forms. The introduction was written for our hymnal by Robert Stigall, a church organist and choir director in Charlotte, N.C.

BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE *Let Our Gladness Know No End* - Robert Ruhrer

* Stand if able

We extend a warm welcome to our guests and visitors and we are delighted to have you worship with us. Please fill out a visitor's card found in the pew and be sure to identify yourself so we can present you with a gift bag.

Deacons on call this month, ushers, greeters and communion servers for today's service are Janet Van Derpoel-Andrea and Sue Philpott.

Please join us for fellowship and refreshments in the foyer after the service. Our thanks to Betsy Ehrenfreund and Marsha Pilachowski for providing coffee hour this morning.

Flowers for worship are provided by Kate Musso.

The Council will meet in the Parlor after worship today.

Weekly offering envelopes are available on the glass top table in the foyer. Please indicate the envelope number located on the front of the box along with your name on the sign out sheet.

The Church's Annual Meeting is tentatively scheduled for Sunday, February 11 following worship. If you are a Chair or Advocate on the Church Council, please prepare a 2023 year-end report and email, mail or drop it in the mail slot at the Barn by January 22.

UPCOMING MEETINGS & EVENTS: *(All meetings are open to members of the church)*

Choir practice, Sunday mornings, 9:45 AM in the choir loft

1/17: Trustee meeting, church parlor, 5 PM

1/18: Deacon's meeting, Barn, 4 PM

1/22: Annual reports due in the church office

1/26: Monumental Music at the Barn, 7 PM, see BLOG for more information

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!

HEALTH NOTE: Indoor air is constantly exchanged with fresh air with a LifeBreath circulation system operating during the service to maintain the healthiest standards for public gathering.

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

(OLD FIRST CHURCH)
VT RTE. 9 AND MONUMENT AVENUE
OLD BENNINGTON, VERMONT

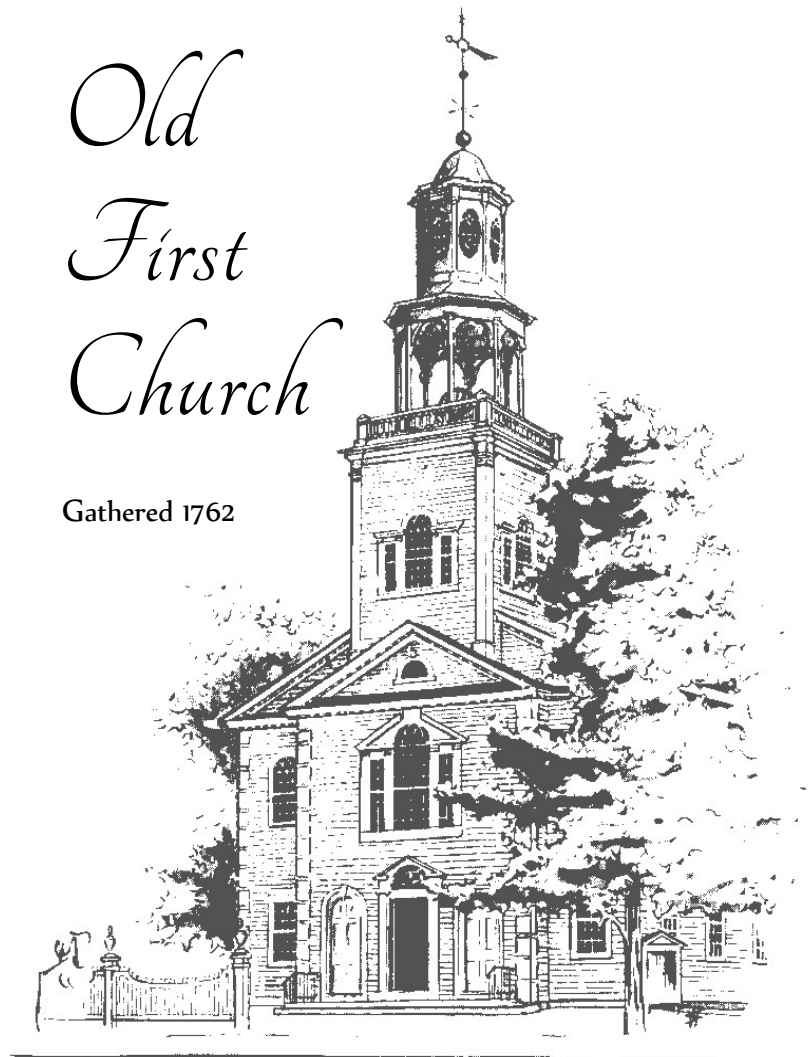
MAILING ADDRESS & CONTACT INFORMATION

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Old First Church

Gathered 1762



Brightest and Best of the Stars of the Morning

Brightest and best of the stars of the morning,
dawn on our darkness and lend us thine aid;
star of the east, the horizon adorning,
guide where our infant Redeemer is laid.

Cold on His cradle the dew-drops are shining,
low lies His head with the beasts of the stall;
angels adore Him in slumber reclining,
Maker and Monarch and Savior of all!

Shall we then yield Him, in costly devotion,
odors of Edom and offerings divine,
gems of the mountain and pearls of the ocean,
myrrh from the forest, or gold from the mine?

Vainly we offer each ample oblation,
vainly with gifts would His favor secure;
richer by far is the heart's adoration,
dearer to God are the prayers of the poor.

FIRST LESSON

Matthew 2:1-12

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. 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.

O Morning Star, How Fair and Bright

O Morning Star, how fair and bright
Thou beamest forth in truth and light!
O Sovereign meek and lowly!
Thou root of Jesse, David's Son,
My Lord and Savior, Thou hast won
My heart to serve Thee solely!
Thou art holy,
fair and glorious, all victorious,
Rich in blessing,
Rule and might o'er all possessing.

Thou heavenly brightness! Light divine!
O deep within my heart now shine,
And make Thee there an altar!
Fill me with joy and strength to be
Thy member, ever joined to Thee
In love that cannot falter!
Toward Thee longing
Doth possess me; turn and bless me;
Here in sadness
Eye and heart long for Thy gladness!

SECOND LESSON

Ephesians 3:1-12

This is the reason that I Paul am a prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—for surely you have already heard of the commission of God's grace that was given me for you, and how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I wrote above in a few words, a reading of which will enable you to perceive my understanding of the mystery of Christ. In former generations this mystery was not made known to humankind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit: that is, the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God's grace that was given me by the working of his power. Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ, and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him.

For the Bread Which You Have Broken

For the bread which You have broken,
For the wine which You have poured,
For the words which You have spoken,
Now we give You thanks, O Lord.

By this promise that You love us,
By Your gift of peace restore,
By Your call to heaven above us,
Hallow all our lives, O Lord.

With the saints who now adore You
Seated at the heavenly board,
May the church still waiting for You
Keep love's tie unbroken, Lord.

In Your service, Lord, defend us;
In our hearts keep watch and ward;
In the world to which You send us
Let Your kingdom come, O Lord.

We Three Kings of Orient Are

We three kings of Orient are,
bearing gifts we traverse afar,
field and fountain, moor and mountain,
following yonder star.

Refrain:

O star of wonder, star of night,
star with royal beauty bright;
westward leading, still proceeding,
guide us to thy perfect light!

Born a King on Bethlehem's plain,
gold I bring to crown Him again,
King forever, ceasing never
over us all to reign. [Refrain]

Frankincense to offer have I:
incense owns a Deity nigh;
prayer and praising, we are raising,
worshiping God Most High. [Refrain]

Myrrh is mine; its bitter perfume
breathes a life of gathering gloom;
sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying,
sealed in the stone-cold tomb. [Refrain]

Glorious now behold him arise,
King and God and Sacrifice;
Alleluia, Alleluia,
sounds through the earth and skies. [Refrain]

**Order of Service for
The Lord's Supper or Communion
At the First Congregational Church
Bennington, Vermont**

Scripture Sentences

Opening Words and Invocation

Prayer of Confession (read by the Minister and People in Unison)

We come not into thy presence, most holy Lord God, trusting in our own righteousness but in thy manifold and abiding mercies. Remembering this day the great heart and passion of a son of man of long ago, we are conscious of our shortcomings. We would here be turned to the way of his brave and tender spirit, and find that wholeness of life which shall be at once a divine blessing for us and a divine ministry from us. Forgive our failures and shortcomings, and by thy grace strengthen our desire for goodness, that we may henceforth serve thee without fear and without shame, all the days of our lives. Amen.

Responsive Reading

Let us hear the words of Jesus which speak of the way of blessedness.

Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

BLESSED ARE THEY THAT MOURN; FOR THEY SHALL BE COMFORTED.

Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth.

BLESSED ARE THEY WHICH DO HUNGER AND THIRST AFTER RIGHTEOUSNESS; FOR THEY SHALL BE FILLED.

Blessed are the merciful; for they shall obtain mercy.

BLESSED ARE THE PURE IN HEART; FOR THEY SHALL SEE GOD.

Blessed are the peacemakers; for they shall be called the children of God.

BLESSED ARE THEY WHICH ARE PERSECUTED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS' SAKE; FOR THEIRS IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

THIS IS THE FIRST AND GREAT COMMANDMENT.

And the second is like unto it, namely this: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

ON THESE TWO COMMANDMENTS HANG ALL THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS.

Offertory and Communion Prayer

The Lord be with you.

AND ALSO WITH YOU.

Lift up your hearts

WE LIFT THEM TO THE LORD.

It is right to give our thanks and praise

LET US GIVE THANKS TO THE LORD OUR GOD

Words of Institution

The Lord Jesus, the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread; and, when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said: This is my body which is broken for you. This do in remembrance of me.

After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood. This do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.

Take and eat this in remembrance of Christ.

Take and drink this in remembrance of Christ.

Silent Prayer

The service continues and concludes as found in today's order of service.