

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
KATE MUSSO, LAY READER
GENE MARIE CALLAHAN, ORGANIST
OLD FIRST CHURCH CHOIR

DECEMBER 14, 2025
THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

PRELUDE *Come, O Come Emmanuel*

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.

LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT CANDLE Sandy Bechtel and Helga Gutschow

*HYMN *The Angel Gabriel from Heaven Came* 16

The text of this hymn was written by Sabine Baring-Gould (1834-1924). He was born in Exeter and educated in Germany, France, and Cambridge. He was ordained in 1864 and served a curacy in Horbury, then in Dalton. He was a prolific writer, publishing thirty novels as well as several folk song collections. Upon the death of his father, he inherited the family's estate at Lew-Trenchard, where he became both squire and rector in 1881. He remained there until his death.

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. In Jesus's name we pray, Amen.

ASSURANCE OF PARDON AND *GLORIA PATRI (579)

FIRST LESSON Psalm 146:5-10 p. 507

*HYMN *Watchman, Tell Us of the Night* Insert
(Tune: WATCHMAN)

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 Matthew 11:2-11 p. 792

SERMON What Did You See?

*HYMN *People, Look East* 12

Eleanor Farjeon was an English Roman Catholic who wrote nursery rhymes 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 or hand it to an usher after the service.)

RECEPTION OF NEW MEMBERS (see insert)
Helga Gutschow, Emmett Murphy, and John Murphy

OFFERING

OFFERTORY *Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence* - French Carol

*DOXOLOGY (592) AND PRAYER OF DEDICATION

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

*HYMN *Of the Father's Love Begotten* 309

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.

*BENEDICTION

*POSTLUDE *Wake, Awake, for Night is Flying* - J.G. Walther

* 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 are Joyce Goeke and Mary Elizabeth Groupé. Ushers for today's service are Charles Dewey and Kate Musso.

Please join us for coffee hour after worship today graciously provided by Janet Van Derpoel-Andrea, JW and Mary Brooks, and Kate Musso.

Our traditional *Candlelight Service of Lessons and Carols* service begins at 7 PM tonight featuring the singing of the Bennington Children's Chorus; organist, Gene Marie Callahan; soloists Kerry Ryer-Parke and Katherine Beck; carol singing by the congregation; scripture readings by members of the congregation and a brief sermon by the Rev. Clarke.

The Christmas Eve service takes place on Wednesday, December 24 at 5 PM. This family service will be filled with a meaningful Christmas message for young and old, familiar carols and readings. The service concludes with the congregation singing "Silent Night" with lighted candles in front of the church. A children's Christmas craft activity will be held at 4:30 in the parlor before the service begins, all are welcome!

The blanket drive for the needy and the clothing drive for grade school kids continues. All items should be new or gently used and can be given to Jeannette or Anastasia to distribute. (if they are not available at worship, there will be bins in the Parlor to place these items in for temporary storage).

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

Choir practice 9:45 AM in the choir loft

12/14: Candlelight Service of Lessons and Carols, 7PM

12/17: Bible Study, 6:30 PM, Parlor

12/18: Trustee's meeting, 5:30 PM, Parlor

12/24: Christmas Eve Service, 5PM

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

VT RTE. 9 AND MONUMENT AVENUE

OLD BENNINGTON, VERMONT

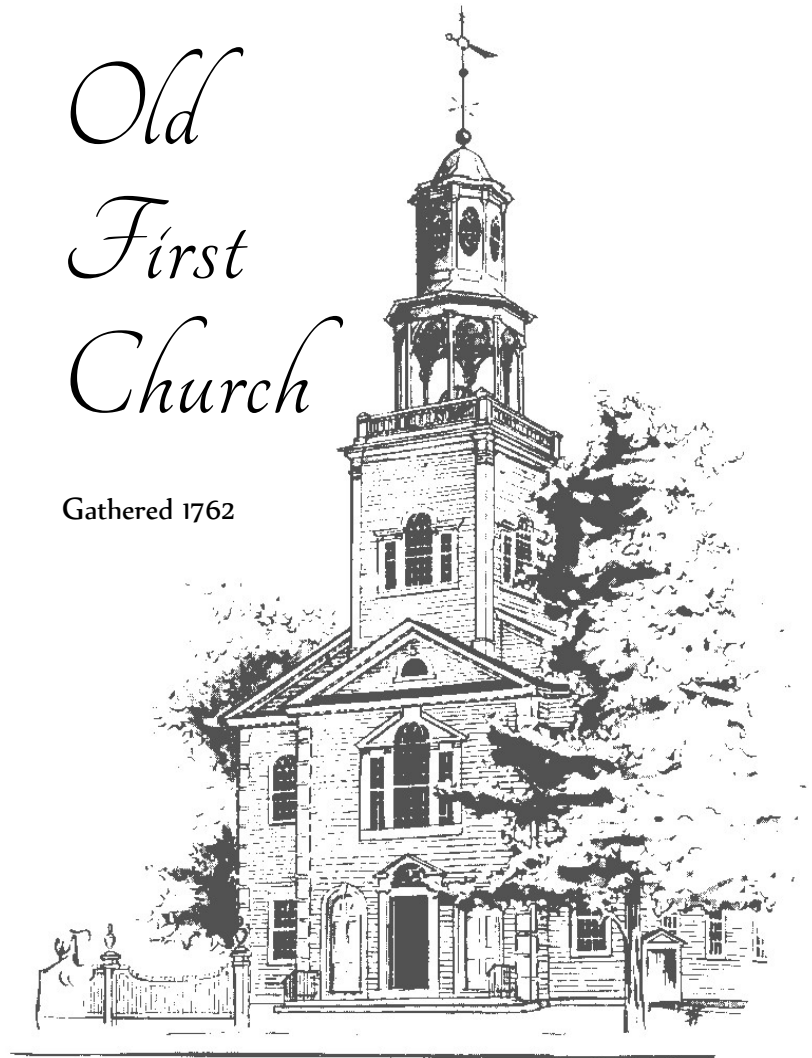
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Old First Church

Gathered 1762



The Angel Gabriel from Heaven Came

The angel Gabriel from heaven came,
His wings as drifted snow, his eyes as flame;
"All hail," said he, "O lowly maiden Mary,"
Most highly favored lady, Gloria!

"For know a blessed mother you shall be,
All generations praise continually,
Your Son shall be Emmanuel, by seers foretold."
Most highly favored lady, Gloria!

Then gentle Mary meekly bowed her head,
"To me be as it pleases God," she said,
"My soul shall laud and magnify God's holy name."
Most highly favored lady, Gloria!

Of her, Emmanuel, the Christ, was born
In Bethlehem, all on a Christmas morn,
And Christian folk through-out the world will ever say:
Most highly favored lady, Gloria!

FIRST LESSON

Psalm 146:5-10

Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD their God,

who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith forever;

who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets the prisoners free;

the LORD opens the eyes of the blind. The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down; the LORD loves the righteous.

The LORD watches over the strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

The LORD will reign forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the LORD!

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!

SECOND LESSON

Matthew 11:2-11

When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?"

Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see:

the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them.

And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me."

As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind?

What, then, did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces.

What, then, did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet.

This is the one about whom it is written, 'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.'

"Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist, yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

People, Look East

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

Of the Father's Love Begotten

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!

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!

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!

MEMBERSHIP RECEPTION

We prepare to welcome into our membership today, Helga Gutschow, Emmett Murphy, and John Murphy by reaffirmation of faith.

THE CONFIRMATION OF FAITH

In presenting yourself for membership in the First Congregational Church of Bennington, do you affirm your trust in God as the creative source of life and power?

I DO

Are you willing to accept the example and teachings of Jesus Christ and seek to make them the guiding principles of your life?

I AM

Will you be loyal to this Church and support it by your prayer, your presence, and your service?

I WILL

THE WELCOME OF THE MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH

We, the members of the First Congregational Church, hereby affirm your reception, *Helga, Emmett, and John* into the full membership of our communion. We pledge to you our mutual care, support, and prayers. God grant that loving and being loved, serving, and being served, blessing and being blessed, we may prepare ourselves, while we dwell together on earth, for the age that is to come.

COVENANT

We covenant with the Lord and with one another and do bind ourselves in the presence of God, to walk together in all His ways, according as He is pleased to reveal Himself unto us in our diversity of mind and spirit.

We declare, and intend, and with dependence upon His powerful grace we engage, to walk together as a church of the Lord Jesus Christ in the faith and order of the Gospel so far as we shall have the same revealed to us, conscientiously attending the public worship of God, the sacraments of the New Testament, the discipline of His Kingdom, and all His holy institutions in communion with one another, and watchfully avoiding all sinful stumbling-blocks, as become a people whom the Lord hath bound up together in the bundle of eternal life.

Depending, as did our forebears, upon the continued guidance of the Holy Spirit to lead us into all truth, we work and pray for the transformation of the world into the Kingdom of God, and we look with faith for the triumph of righteousness and the life everlasting.

Adopted by the Old First Church, at the Annual Meeting, May 1980.

Our covenant exemplifies the history of our Congregational tradition. The first paragraph is, with a minor modification, one of the original New England Church covenants, used by the Salem Church in 1629. The second paragraph is taken from what appears to be the original covenant of our own church, from the late 18th century. The third paragraph is an excerpt from a Modern Congregational confession, the Kansas City Statement of Faith, of 1913. Like many traditional confessions of faith, our covenant is triune in character, the three paragraphs speaking, respectively, of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.