

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
CAROL POPPE, LAY READER
LYNN RALEY, ORGANIST

JANUARY 4, 2026

PRELUDE *Gottes Sohn ist kommen* - Johann Sebastian Bach
The Son of God Has Come (1685-1750)

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 Ecclesiastes 3:1-13 p. 537

***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.

SECOND LESSON John 1:1-18 p. 862

SERMON Words and Wisdom

***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.

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 *Nun danket alle Gott* - Georg Friedrich Kauffman
Now Thank We All Our God (1679-1753)

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

SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER (insert)

The congregation is invited to participate in the service as found in the insert included in this order of service. *(Please note that grape juice is on the outer circle only and wine inside. We partake together after all have been served.)*

COMMUNION VOLUNTARY

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

***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.

POSTLUDE *Fugue in D Minor* - Johann Pachelbel (1653-1706)

* 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 and ushers, greeters and communion servers for today's service are Sue Philpott and Marsha Pilachowski.

Please join us for coffee hour after worship today graciously provided by Mary and JW Brooks, Nancy Coseo, and Pat Ross.

Thank you to those who provided memorial poinsettias this year. Anyone wishing to bring home plants should take them today. Poinsettias and protective plastic sleeves are in the Narthex.

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

The blanket and clothing drive 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)*

- 1/8, 1/15, 1/21, 1/29: Bible Study, 6:30 PM, Parlor
- 1/11: Axis for Good/ACT meeting, after worship, Parlor
- 1/20: Deacon's meeting, 4:00 PM, at Marsha's house
- 1/22: Trustee's meeting, 5:30 PM, Parlor
- 1/25: Council meeting, following worship

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!

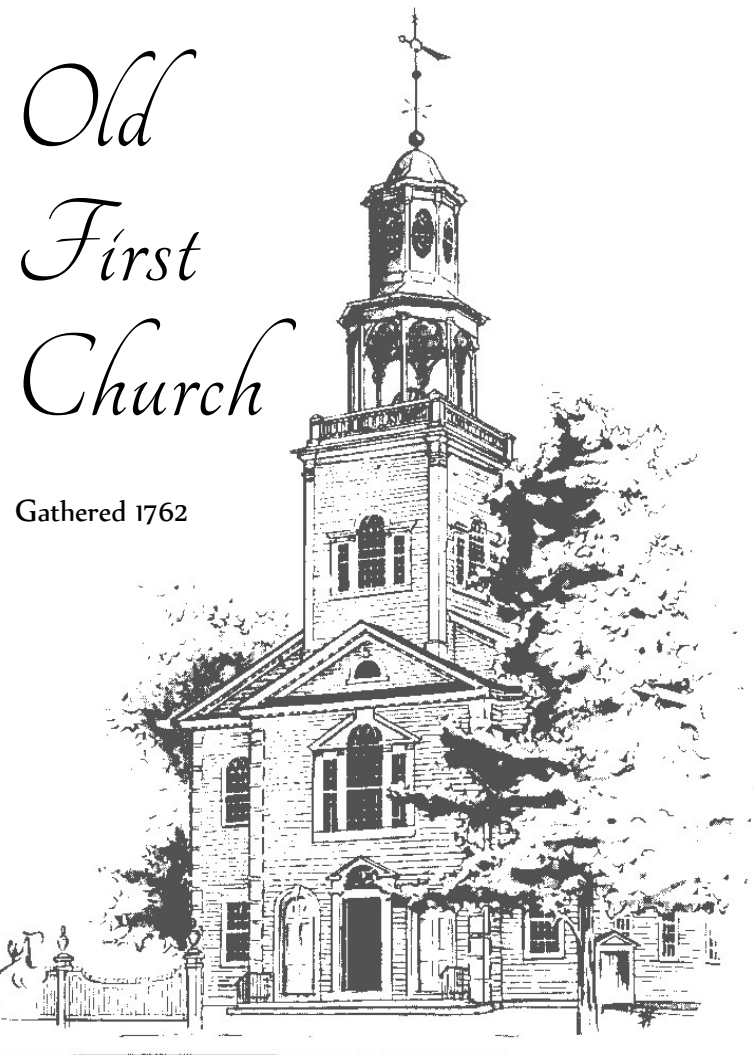
To maintain the healthiest standards for public gathering, indoor air is constantly being exchanged with fresh air with a LifeBreath circulation system operating during the service today.

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

VT RTE. 9 AND MONUMENT AVENUE
OLD BENNINGTON, VERMONT

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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 Ecclesiastes 3:1-13

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

a time to be born and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;
a time to kill and a time to heal;
a time to break down, and a time to build up;
a time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together;
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
a time to seek, and a time to lose;
a time to keep, and a time to throw away;
a time to tear, and a time to sew;
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
a time to love, and a time to hate;
a time for war, and a time for peace.

What gain have the workers from their toil? I have seen the business that God has given to everyone to be busy with. He has made everything suitable for its time; moreover, he has put a sense of past and future into their minds, yet they cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. I know that there is nothing better for them than to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live; moreover, it is God's gift that all should eat and drink and take pleasure in all their toil.

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]*

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own,^[c] and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.' ") From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

O Morning Star, How Fair and Bright

O Morning Star, how fair and bright	Thou heavenly brightness! Light divine!
Thou beamest forth in truth and light!	O deep within my heart now shine,
O Sovereign meek and lowly!	And make Thee there an altar!
Thou root of Jesse, David's Son,	Fill me with joy and strength to be
My Lord and Savior, Thou hast won	Thy member, ever joined to Thee
My heart to serve Thee solely!	In love that cannot falter!
Thou art holy,	Toward Thee longing
fair and glorious, all victorious,	Doth possess me; turn and bless me;
Rich in blessing,	Here in sadness
Rule and might o'er all possessing.	Eye and heart long for Thy gladness!

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.

**Order of Service for
The Lord's Supper or Communion**

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.