

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
OLD FIRST CHURCH CHOIR
MARSHA PILACHOWSKI, LAY READER

DECEMBER 19, 2021
FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

PRELUDE *Carol* - Ralph Vaughn Williams

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.

LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT CANDLE

Fischer Gauthier and his mom and Winnie Langford and her dad

***HYMN** *Comfort, Comfort You My People* **3**
Based on Isaiah 40, the words of this hymn were written for John the Baptist Day (June 24) and first published in 1671 in a German collection of 1200 hymns, 300 of which were by Olearius. He also wrote a commentary on the entire Bible. The translator, Winkworth, was the foremost English translator of German hymns. The tune is from the 1551 Genevan Psalter. This arrangement and harmonization are from our former *Pilgrim Hymnal*. Here's a clue about accenting words that will make singing it easier and more fun (even like a dance!) – emphasize every syllable where the note above it is “open” (a half or whole note) rather than “solid” (a quarter note).

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 Psalm 80:1-7 p. 470

***HYMN** *Prepare the Way* **13**

The Swedish text was first published in 1812 and then revised by the author in 1819. Frans Mikael Franzén was librarian and professor of the history of literature at Abo Academy before becoming ordained and serving in several pastorates in Sweden and Finland, and then bishop. The translator, who was an Episcopal priest in Pennsylvania and New York City, was also a professor at Harvard and Virginia Seminary. The original version of the tune appeared in *Then Swenska Psalmboken* (1697).

SECOND LESSON Luke 1:46b-55 p. 832

SERMON According to the Promise

***HYMN** *Song of Zechariah* **601**
(verses 1, 4 and 5)

This paraphrase of the Benedictus Luke 1:68-79 is by Father James Quinn (1919-2010). It was written in 1969 and altered by the Psalter Task Force of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in 1985. Traditionally the Song of Zechariah was sung during the Service of Morning Prayer.

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 *Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence* - Larry Shackley
Mary Elizabeth Groupé, viola

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

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

***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.

BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE *Noel Bourguignon* - Claude-Benigne Balbastre

* Stand if able

We welcome all visitors and hope you will return! 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 Marsha Pilachowski and Amy Tronsen. Ushers and greeters for today's service are Marsha and Dave Pilachowski.

Please join us after worship today for coffee hour in the Narthex provided by Anastasia Gauthier and Amber Langford.

Our traditional *Candlelight Service of Lessons and Carols* service begins at 7 PM tonight which will include readers from the congregation, Gene Marie Callahan on the organ, the Old First Church Choir, Mary Elizabeth Groupé, viola, the singing of the Bennington Children's Chorus with Matthew Edwards on piano and soloist Kerry Ryer-Parke. Those who are able to walk a bit are asked to leave parking immediately in front of the church for others. A freewill offering will be taken with proceeds going to the for the Greater Bennington Interfaith Council Emergency Needs Fund.

The *Christmas Eve service* takes place on Friday, December 24 at 5 PM. This family service will be filled with a meaningful Christmas message, familiar carols and readings. The service concludes with the congregation singing "Silent Night" with lighted candles in front of the church. Reservations for this service can be made on the enclosed BLOG or by contacting the church office.

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

Choir practice, Sunday mornings, 9:30 AM in the choir loft

12/19: Candlelight Service of Lessons and Carols, 7:00 PM

12/24: Christmas Eve Service, 5:00 PM

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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Comfort, Comfort You My People

1. Comfort, comfort you my people,
tell of peace, thus says our God;
comfort those who sit in darkness
bowed beneath oppression's load.
Speak you to Jerusalem
of the peace that waits for them;
tell them that their sins I cover,
and their warfare now is over.
2. For the herald's voice is calling
in the desert far and near,
bidding us to make repentance
since the kingdom now is here.
O that warning cry obey!
Now prepare for God a way;
let the valleys rise in meeting
and the hills bow down in greeting.
3. Make you straight what long was crooked,
make the rougher places plain;
let your hearts be true and humble,
as befits God's holy reign.
For the glory of the Lord
now o'er earth is shed abroad;
and all flesh shall see the token
that God's word is never broken.

FIRST LESSON

Psalm 80

Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock! You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth

before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh. Stir up your might, and come to save us!

Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved.

O LORD God of hosts, how long will you be angry with your people's prayers?

You have fed them with the bread of tears, and given them tears to drink in full measure.

You make us the scorn of our neighbors; our enemies laugh among themselves.

Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved.

Prepare the Way

Prepare the way, O Zion,
Your Christ is drawing near!
Let every hill and valley
A level way appear.
Greet One who comes in glory,
Foretold in sacred story.

Refrain:

O blest is Christ that came
In God's most holy name.

Christ brings God's rule, O Zion,
He comes from heaven above.
His rule is peace and freedom,
And justice, truth, and love.
Lift high your praise resounding,
For grace and joy abounding. [Refrain]

Fling wide your gates, O Zion,
Your Savior's rule embrace.
And tidings of salvation
Proclaim in every place.
All lands will bow rejoicing,
Their adoration voicing. [Refrain]

SECOND LESSON

Luke 1:46b-55

And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

Song of Zechariah

Blest be the God of Israel,
The ever-living Lord.
You come in power to save Your own,
Your people Israel.
For Israel You now raise up
Salvation's tower on high
In David's house, who reigned as king
And servant of the Lord.

O tiny child, Your name shall be
The prophet of the Lord;
The way of God You will prepare
To make God's coming known.
You shall proclaim to Israel
Salvation's dawning day,
When God shall wipe away all sins
With mercy and with love.

The rising sun shall shine on us
To bring the light of day
To all who sit in darkest night
And shadow of the grave.
Our footsteps God shall safely guide
To walk the ways of peace,
Whose name forevermore be blest,
Who lives and loves and saves.

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!