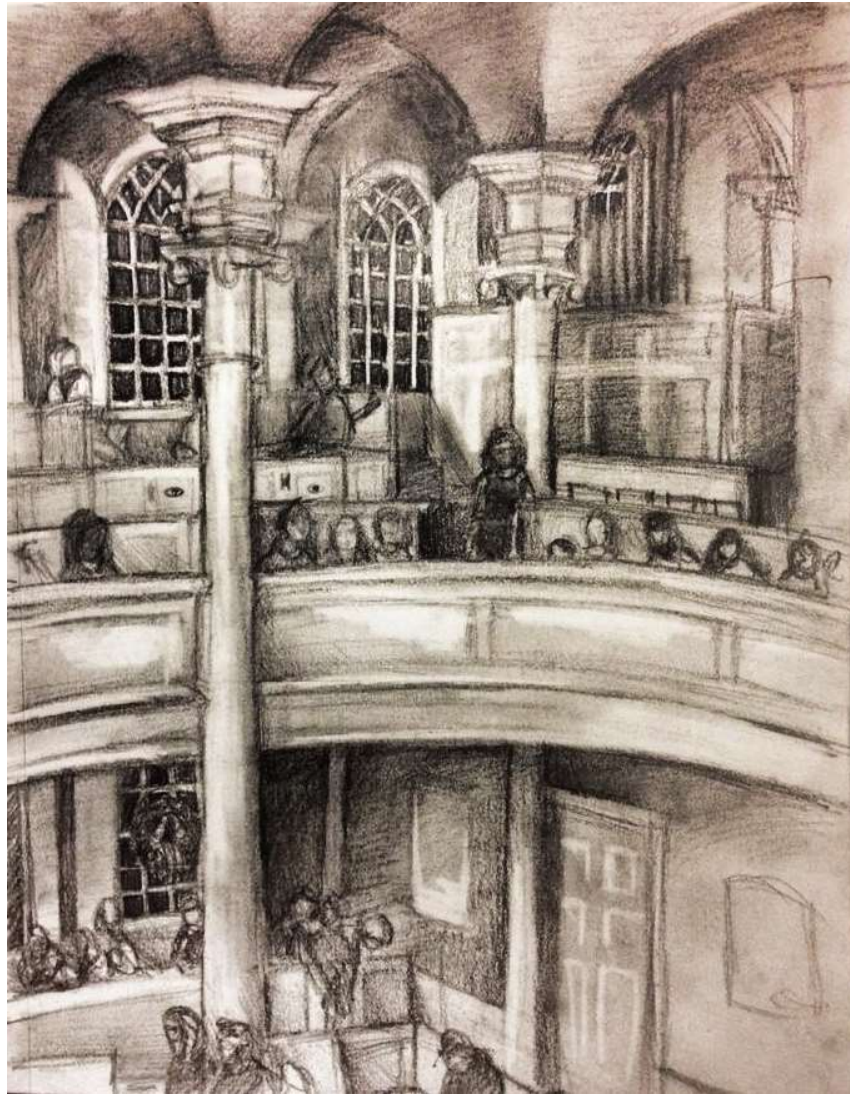


Christmas Eve at the Old First Church



Old Bennington, Vermont
Gathered 1762

Christmas Eve at the Old First Church

Old Bennington, Vermont

December 24, 2023
5:00 p.m.

*Vermont's Colonial Shrine: Welcoming all to share God's light,
and proclaiming God's embracing love since 1806*

Kenneth A. Clarke, Minister

Gene Marie Callahan, Organist

Harriet Welther, violin

Mary Elizabeth Groupé, viola

Old First Church Choir

Francois Secordel, violin

Perri Morris, cello

PRELUDE

Away in a Manger

- trad. arranged for strings and piano - David D. Mason

In Dulci Jubilo

- trad. arranged for strings and piano - David D. Mason

The Angel Gabriel for strings, piano, and chorus

- 19th Century Basque Carol arr. and orchestrated by John Leavitt

* CONGREGATIONAL CAROL

O Come, All Ye Faithful

1. O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant,
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem!
Come and behold Him, born the King of angels!

2. Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation!
Sing, all ye citizens of heaven above!
Glory to God, all Glory in the highest!

Refrain:

O come, let us adore Him, O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him, Christ, the Lord!

Refrain

ADVENT CANDLE LIGHTING

Renny & Hillary Ponvert

CALL TO WORSHIP (responsive)

O sing to the Lord a new song,

FOR GOD HAS DONE MARVELOUS THINGS.

Make a joyful noise to the Lord all the earth;

BREAK FORTH INTO JOYOUS SONG AND SING PRAISES.

So all of creation may sing new songs of gladness

AND WALK IN THE WAY OF PEACE.

A MOMENT WITH THE CHILDREN

*CONGREGATIONAL CAROL

What Child Is This

1. What Child is this, who, laid to rest,
on Mary's lap is sleeping?
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet
while shepherds watch are keeping?
This, this is Christ the King,
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing;
Haste, haste, to bring Him laud,
The Babe, the Son of Mary!
2. So bring Him incense, gold and myrrh,
come, one and all, to own Him;
the King of kings salvation brings;
let loving hearts enthrone Him.
Raise, raise a song on high,
The virgin sings her lullaby.
Joy, joy for Christ is born,
The Babe, the Son of Mary.

CONGREGATIONAL PRAYER (unison)

We rejoice this night in the unquenchable and eternal light that shines upon all creation. In that light we acknowledge those greeds within us which have darkened our days and those selfish customs among us that have shadowed the lives and spirits of others. This night may the light of Christmas enter our hearts in spoken word, song and wonder. May the joy of Christ's birth illumine our every hour and thought until all of us, as part of God's family, shall be brought out of any darkness to holy light eternal. In Christ's name we pray, Amen.

* CONGREGATIONAL CAROL

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

1. Hark the herald angels sing
"Glory to the newborn King!
Peace on earth and mercy mild
God and sinners reconciled"
joyful, all ye nations rise
join the triumph of the skies
with the angelic host proclaim:
"Christ is born in Bethlehem"
2. Christ by highest heav'n adored
Christ the everlasting Lord!
Late in time behold Him come
offspring of a Virgin's womb
veiled in flesh the Godhead see
hail the incarnate Deity
pleased as man with man to dwell
Jesus, our Emmanuel

Refrain

Hark! The herald angels sing
"Glory to the newborn King!"

Refrain

3. Hail the heav'n-born Prince of Peace!
Hail the sun of righteousness!
Light and life to all He brings
ris'n with healing in His wings
mild He lays His glory by
born that man no more may die
born to raise the sons of earth
born to give them second birth

Refrain

* CONGREGATIONAL CAROL

O Little Town of Bethlehem

1. O little town of Bethlehem,
how still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
the silent stars go by;
yet in thy dark streets shineth
the everlasting light;
the hopes and fears of all the years
are met in thee tonight.
2. For Christ is born of Mary;
and gathered all above,
while mortals sleep, the angels keep
their watch of wondering love.
O morning stars, together
proclaim the holy birth!
And praises sing to God the King,
and peace to all on earth.
3. How silently, how silently,
the wondrous gift is given!
So God imparts to human hearts
the blessings of his heaven.
No ear may hear his coming,
but in this world of sin,
where meek souls will receive him, still
the dear Christ enters in.

SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 9:2, 6-7

David Pilachowski, Reader

* CONGREGATIONAL CAROL

In the Bleak Midwinter

1. In the bleak midwinter, frosty wind made moan,
earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone;
snow had fallen, snow on snow, snow on snow,
in the bleak midwinter, long ago.
2. Our God, heaven cannot hold Him, nor earth sustain;
Heaven and earth shall flee away, when He comes to reign:
in the bleak midwinter, a stable place sufficed
the Lord God incarnate, Jesus Christ.
3. Angels and archangels, may have gathered there,
cherubim and seraphim, thronged the air;
but His mother only, in her maiden bliss,
worshiped the beloved, with a kiss.
4. What can I give Him, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;
if I were a wise man, I would do my part;
yet what I can I give Him: give my heart.

SCRIPTURE

Luke 2:1-20

Jessie Kuzmicki, Reader

* CONGREGATIONAL CAROL

The First Nowell

1. The first Nowell the angel did say
was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay;
in fields where they lay a keeping their sheep,
on a cold winter's night that was so deep.
2. They looked up and saw a star
shining in the east, beyond them far;
and to the earth it gave great light,
and so it continued both day and night.

Refrain:

*Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell,
born is the King of Israel.*

Refrain

3. And by the light of that same star,
three Wise Men came from country far;
to seek for a King was their intent,
and to follow the star wherever it went.

Refrain

OFFERING

OFFERTORY ANTHEM

The Savior of the World is Born *Salvator mundi natus est*

- Gustav Holst
- arranged for choir and piano

* DOXOLOGY (592) AND PRAYER OF DEDICATION

CHRISTMAS MEDITATION

* CONGREGATIONAL CAROL

Angels, From the Realms of Glory

1. Angels, from the realms of glory
wing your flight o'er all the earth.
You who sang creation's story
now proclaim Messiah's birth:
3. Sages, leave your contemplations,
brighter visions beam afar.
Seek the great desire of nations,
you have seen His natal star: *[Refrain]*

Refrain:

Come and worship, come and worship,
Worship Christ, the new born King!

2. Shepherds, in the fields abiding,
watching o'er your flocks by night.
God with us is now residing,
yonder shines the infant light: *[Refrain]*
4. All creation, join in praising
God the Father, Spirit, Son.
Evermore your voices raising,
to the eternal Three in One: *[Refrain]*

PASTORAL PRAYER AND THE LORD'S PRAYER (debts/debtors)

* CONGREGATIONAL CAROL

Joy to the World!

1. Joy to the world! the Lord is come:
let earth receive her King;
let every heart prepare him room,
and heaven and nature sing,
and heaven and nature sing,
and heaven and nature sing,
and heaven, and heaven and nature sing.
2. Joy to the world! the Savior reigns:
let us our songs employ;
while fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains
repeat the sounding joy,
repeat the sounding joy,
repeat, repeat the sounding joy.
3. He rules the world with truth and grace,
and makes the nations prove
the glories of his righteousness,
and wonders of his love,
and wonders of his love,
and wonders, wonders of his love.

* BENEDICTION

* OUTDOOR CANDLELIGHT CAROL

Weather permitting, the congregation will gather to sing *Silent Night* in a circle outside the church tonight. Candles will be available outside.

Silent Night, Holy Night

Silent night, holy night! All is calm, all is bright,
round yon virgin mother and child!
Holy Infant, so tender and mild,
sleep in heavenly peace, sleep in heavenly peace.

Silent night, holy night! Shepherds quake at the sight,
glories stream from heaven afar, heavenly hosts sing:
“Alleluia; Christ the Savior is born, Christ the savior is born.”

Silent night, holy night! Son of God, love’s pure light
radiant beams from Thy holy face,
With the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth, Jesus, Lord at Thy birth.

Silent night, holy night! Wondrous star, lend thy light;
with the angels let us sing, alleluia to our King;
Christ the savior is born, Christ the Savior is born.



*stand if able

We welcome all of you to this annual Candlelight Service of Lessons and Carols, a tradition we are proud to host here at Old First Church. We are glad you have made it part of your Advent/Christmas season this year and we hope this service of worship tonight both enriches your life and glorifies God. The “Old First” Congregational Church was first gathered on December 3, 1762, and is thus celebrating its 261st anniversary during this Advent season. The term, “gathered,” signified that the church was composed of all who chose to be part of its communion, regardless of where they lived. People still gather here from a wide area, including Bennington, North Bennington, Shaftsbury, Pownal, Arlington, Hollis and Peterborough, New Hampshire, Hoosick Falls, Cambridge, Greenwich, Melrose and Albany, New York. If you have no other church affiliation, we invite you to do the same. Livestream and later recorded content of our worship services--including the Christmas Eve Lessons and Carols--can be found and enjoyed at any time online by going to <http://oldfirstchurchbenn.org/worship/worship-here-and-now/> which brings you to our church website section entitled “Worship Here and Now”. From there look for the live stream link contained on that page.

Tonight’s ushers are Nancy Andrews, Larry Ross, Pat Ross, and Don Swanda.

This Christmas we are especially thankful for the skills and participation of our church choir: Jim Dilley, Susan Kachmar, Wayne Kachmar, Carol Poppe, David Roberts, and guest Aidan Forrest, its director and our organist Gene Marie Callahan, Mary Elizabeth Groupé, viola, Perri Morris, cello, Francois Secordel, violin and Harriet Welther, violin.

The sketch on the front cover is by Sarah Jane White, a graduated member of the Bennington Children’s Chorus. Sarah sketched this scene at our Candlelight Service of Lessons and Carols 2013. Our thanks to her for permission to reprint her work as part of tonight’s order of service.

God’s grace to all this Advent-Christmas season!

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

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

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