

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
REG JONES, LAY READER
GENE MARIE CALLAHAN, ORGANIST

DECEMBER 10, 2023 ~ SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

PRELUDE *Prepare the Way* - Ben Logan

OPENING WORDS (responsive)

Love and faithfulness meet this day.

Righteousness and peace come together.

Let us wait with hope this season.

The darkness shall give way to light.

LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT CANDLE Kate Musso

***HYMN** *On Jordan's Bank the Baptist's Cry* 10

Charles Coffin, mid-18th century rector of the University of Paris, wrote the Latin text. John Chandler, vicar of Witley, England, translated the hymn and published it in *Hymns of the Primitive Church*, mistakenly thinking Coffin's hymn was ancient. The tune is from Hamburg, 1690, and harmonized in 1847 by William Monk, choirmaster of King's College, London.

OPENING PRAYER (unison)

We come with thanksgiving,
for the beauty of this day,
for the wonder of life,
for the fellowship of this place,
for the freedom to meet and worship,
and for the Gospel message of this Advent Season.

So we rejoice,
as we journey through Advent in worship and in faith.

Make us ready for the your coming, O Lord.

We confess that we have sinned against you,
And done what is not right in your sight.

We are sorry and repent.

Have mercy on us according to your love.

Renew a right spirit within us

And lead us to the joy of your coming this season,
in Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

ASSURANCE OF PARDON AND *GLORIA PATRI (579)

FIRST LESSON Mark 1:1-8 p. 812

***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).

SECOND LESSON Isaiah 40:1-11 p. 581

SERMON The Beginning

***HYMN** *Rejoice! Rejoice, Believers* 15

The author was Lorenz Lorenzen, who Latinized his name to Laurentius Laurenti, and became a cantor and director of music in Bremen, where he died in 1722. The translation by Sarah Borthwick Findlater (1823-1907), along with other translations of hers and her sister's, was published in the Free Church of Scotland's *German Hymns from the Land of Luther*. The Welsh folk melody was first published in 1865. The name is probably that of a farm, but it could mean the “Church of St. Gloffan.”

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)

OFFERING

OFFERTORY *People Look East* - Paul Taylor

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

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

***HYMN** *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel* 9

The roots of this hymn go back to the 9th century and a series of seven Advent antiphons sung at vespers, all beginning with “O” (e.g., O Root of Jesse, O Dayspring, O Emmanuel). Arrangement of the hymn developed in the 12th, 13th and 18th centuries. The tune is French, originally sung at funerals, and was adapted by an Anglican priest, son of a congregationalist minister, who established a plainsong choral tradition in 19th century English churches.

BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE *"Sleepers, Wake!" A Voice Astounds Us*
- JS Bach arr. Gilbert M. Martin

* 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 Mary Elizabeth Groupé and Pat Ross. Ushers and greeters for today's service are Pat and Larry Ross.

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

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 and the singing of the Bennington Children's Chorus.

The Christmas Eve service takes place on Sunday, 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.

Keep the church's blanket drive for the homeless, as well as hats, mittens, gloves, scarves, socks and jackets for the grade school kids in mind when you are shopping or doing your fall cleaning of closets. All items should be new or gently used and can be left in the Narthex for Jeannette or Anastasia to pick up and distribute to those in need.

UPCOMING MEETINGS & EVENTS: *(All meetings are open to members of the church)*
Choir practice, Sunday mornings, 9:45 AM in the choir loft
12/18 Trustee Meeting, 5:30 PM, Church
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!

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.

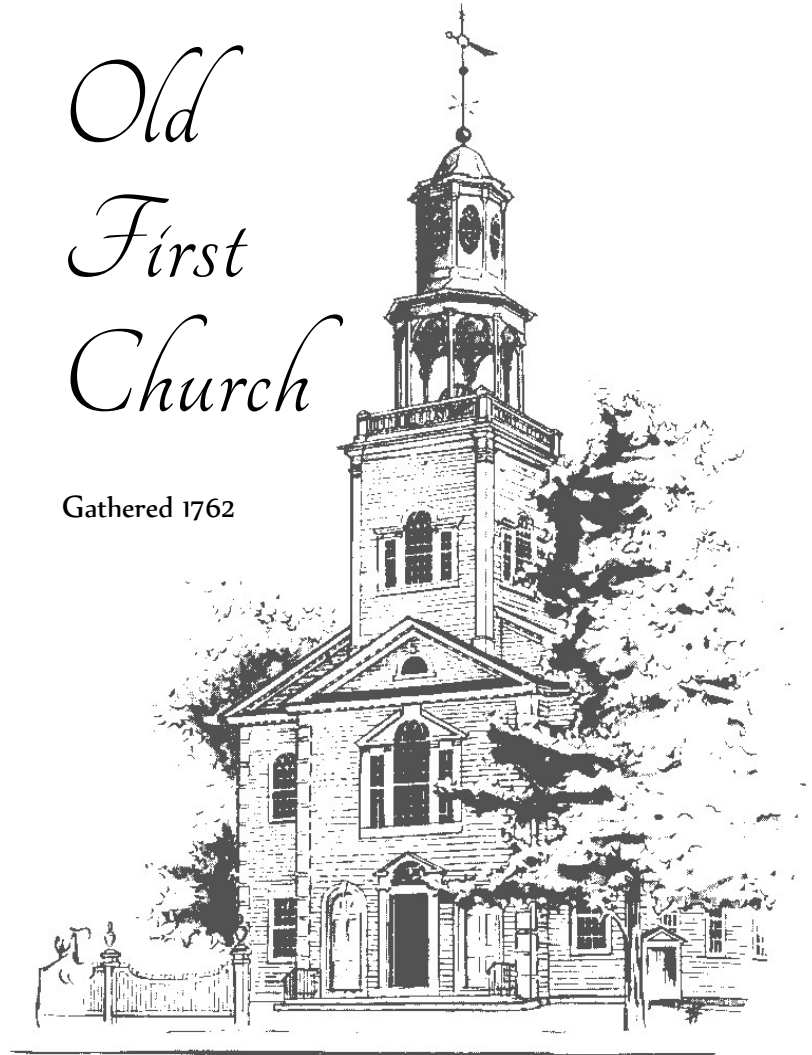
FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

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

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Old First Church

Gathered 1762



Comfort, Comfort You My People

On Jordan's Bank the Baptist's Cry

On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry
announces that the Lord is nigh;
Awake and harken, for he brings
glad tidings of the King of kings!

Then cleansed be every life from sin;
make straight the way for God within,
and let us all our hearts prepare
for Christ to come and enter there.

We hail You as our Savior, Lord,
our refuge, and our great reward;
o let Your face upon us shine
and fill the world with love divine.

All praise to You, eternal Son,
whose advent has our freedom won,
whom with the Father we adore,
and Holy Spirit, evermore.

FIRST LESSON

Mark 1:1-8

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.
As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,

“See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way;
the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
‘Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight,’”

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

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.

SECOND LESSON

Isaiah 40:1-11

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

A voice cries out: “In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.” A voice says, “Cry out!” And I said, “What shall I cry?” All people are grass, their constancy is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand forever.

Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings, lift it up, do not fear; say to the cities of Judah, “Here is your God!” See, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep.

Rejoice! Rejoice, Believers

Rejoice! rejoice, believers,
and let your lights appear;
the evening is advancing
and darker night is near.
The Bridegroom is arising
and soon He will draw nigh;
Up, watch with expectation,
at midnight comes the cry.

See that your lamps are burning,
replenish them with oil;
Look now for your salvation,
the end of sin and toil.
The marriage feast is waiting,
the gates wide open stand;
Arise, O heirs of glory,
the Bridegroom is at hand!

Our hope and expectation,
O Jesus, now appear;
arise, Thou sun so longed for,
above this shadowed sphere!
With hearts and hands uplifted,
we plead, O Lord, to see
the day of earth's redemption,
and ever be with Thee!

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

O come, O come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear.

[Refrain]

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel!

O come, Thou Day-spring, come and cheer
Our spirits by Thine advent here;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
And death's dark shadows put to flight. [Refrain]

O come, Desire of nations, bind
All peoples in one heart and mind;
Bid envy, strife, and discord cease;
Fill the whole world with heaven's peace. [Refrain]