

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
MARSHA PILACHOWSKI, LAY READER
GENE MARIE CALLAHAN, ORGANIST
OLD FIRST CHURCH CHOIR

DECEMBER 17, 2023 ~ THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

PRELUDE *Meditation on Of the Father's Love Begotten*
- Charles Callahan

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 Jim Dilley & Doris Shaw

***HYMN** *Arise, Your Light Is Come!* 411
Contemporary poet and U.C.C. minister and professor Ruth Duck was working on an adaptation of *Rise Up, O Men of God* when, she writes, "this new hymn text came to me, as if the new wine of the faith I wanted to express would not fit into the old wineskin of the earlier text." The tune by William Henry Walter was published in 1872. Walter was organist at Presbyterian and Episcopal churches in Newark, and at Columbia University.

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 Thessalonians 5:16-24 p. 961

***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 Isaiah 61:1-4; 8-11 p. 603

CHOIR ANTHEM *The Angel Gabriel* arr. John Leavitt

SERMON Who Are You

***HYMN** *People, Look East* 12
Eleanor Farjeon was an English Roman Catholic who wrote nursery rhythms 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.)

OFFERING

OFFERTORY Behold, a virgin shall conceive
O Thou That Tellest Good Tidings to Zion
recitative and aria from Messiah
- G.F. Handel
- Audrey Pietrucha, soloist

***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* - Dennis Eliot

* 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 Joyce Goeke and Mary Elizabeth Groupé.

Please join us after worship today for fellowship and refreshments at the home of Pat and Larry Ross, 1534 Bluestone Rd, Bennington.

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

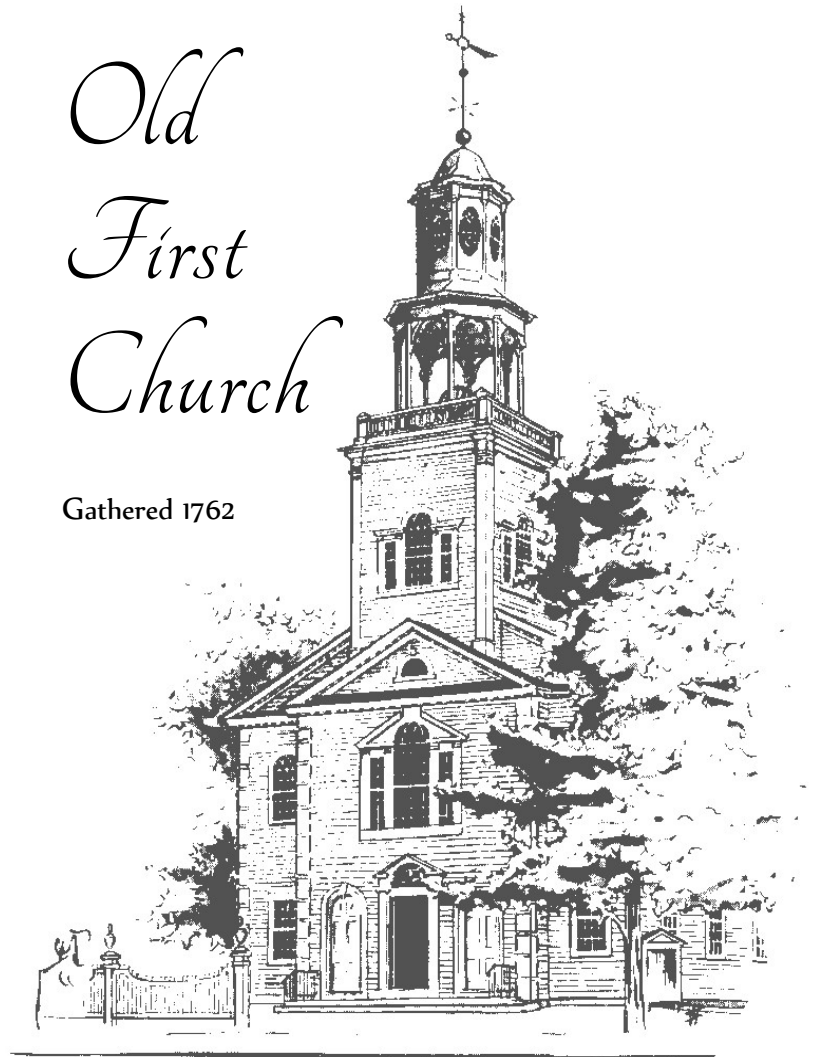
MAILING ADDRESS & CONTACT INFORMATION

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Old First Church

Gathered 1762



Watchman, Tell Us of the Night

Arise, Your Light Is Come!

Arise, your light is come!
The Spirit's call obey;
show forth the glory of your God,
which shines on you today.

Arise, your light is come!
Fling wide the prison door;
proclaim the captives' liberty,
good tidings to the poor.

Arise, your light is come!
All you in sorrow born,
bind up the brokenhearted ones
and comfort those who mourn.

Arise, your light is come!
The mountains burst in song!
Rise up like eagles on the wing;
God's power will make us strong.

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 beautiful 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

Isaiah 61:1-4; 8-11

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to provide for those who mourn in Zion— to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, to display his glory.

They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations. For I the Lord love justice, I hate robbery and wrongdoing; I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them. Their descendants shall be known among the nations, and their offspring among the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge that they are a people whom the Lord has blessed.

I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.

FIRST LESSON

Thessalonians 5:16-24

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil.

May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.

People, Look East

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. 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.
4. 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.
5. 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!