



*The First Congregational Church  
of the United Church of Christ  
Stockbridge, Massachusetts*

**THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT – JOY**

*December 15, 2024 – 10:00 a.m.*

Note: We will not lift prayers of joy and concern this morning in worship. If you want to submit a prayer to be read, please write it on one of the prayer slips in the folders in each pew and return it to the prayer box in the Narthex or give it to a Deacon before our prayer time.

### **PREPARING FOR WORSHIP**

PRELUDE      *Three Noël's*, by Candeille, Franck, Traditional      Tracy Wilson

WELCOME      Rev. Brent Damrow

TOLLING THE HOUR

## GATHERING IN WORSHIP

INTROIT	<i>Rejoice, Rejoice, Believers</i> verse 3	See insert
SCRIPTURE READING	Zephaniah 3:14-20 <i>A Song of Joy</i>	Rich Geiler
REFLECTION	<i>Joy</i>	Pastor Brent

## TELLING THE STORY

THE CHRISTMAS PAGEANT See insert

\*CANDLE LIGHTING LITANY Salt Project – Joy

One: When I look around, I see shadows of sadness, families who have lost loved ones, people in prison, people who are isolated and feel on their own...

**All: When I look around, I see shadows of grief, people dreading the holidays because of painful memories, or because they don't want to spend another Christmas alone...**

One: In the face of sadness, we light a candle of joy...

**All: In the face of grief, in the face of loss, we light a candle of joy...**  
(Light the third candle in the Advent wreath.)

One: May the light from this candle overwhelm the world.

**All: May the light from this candle say to all that God's joy is coming, on earth as it already is in heaven.**

One: Friends, be not afraid, God's joy is at hand!

\*HYMN *Lift Up Your Heads, O Mighty Gates* vss. 1 & 2 See page 9

\*ADVENT UNISON PRAYER written by Christine Sine Drea Pecor

**The coming of our Lord is near, and we wait in joyful expectation,**

**Draw close, Lord Jesus Christ,**

**Shed your light on all that is filled with darkness.**

**The coming of our Lord is near, and we wait with hope filled hearts,**

**Draw close, God's beloved son,**

**Teach us the wonder of your all embracing love.**

**Come Lord Jesus Come. Amen**

\*PASSING OF THE PEACE

## CELEBRATING OUR CHURCH FAMILY

HONORING LONG-TIME MEMBERS

Patty Strauch & Gary Cilley

One: We give thanks for the *Cloud of Witnesses* who surround our church in faith, hope and love.

**All: We remember those whose journey with this local church has been long, good, and true.**

One: Through their lives and dedication, we have the ability to run the race God has set before us.

**All: Through their ongoing presence we continue to learn how to better live into our mission to be Christ's love.**

Sung Response      *We are one in the Spirit*

**We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord, (2 times)**

**And we pray that one day unity will be restored.**

**And they'll know we are Christian by our love, by our love**

**Yes they'll know we are Christians by our love.**

One: In the Bible, numbers matter – they carry significance and meaning. The number 70 really matters.

**All: It is a number of fullness and goodness. Jacob's descendants in Egypt numbered 70. Moses brought 70 elders with him up to the top of the mountain.**

One: Jesus sent out 70 disciples to proclaim the good news and taught us to forgive fully by doing so 70 times 7. Psalm 90 proclaims that 70 years is a life of fullness and death.

**All: We give thanks for those in this congregation who have been part of our shared life for 70 or more years and the fullness of their presence now too.**

*(Brent invites all who have been members for 70 years or more to stand/raise their hand)*

Sung Response        *We are one in the Spirit*

**We will walk with each other, we will walk hand in hand, (2 times)  
And together we'll spread the news that God is in our land.  
And they'll know we are Christian by our love, by our love  
Yes they'll know we are Christians by our love.**

One: The number 40 in the Bible is used to convey a sense of discovery, change, and new life that leads to the fulfillment of God's purpose.

**All: For 40 days, Moses was up on the mountaintop receiving instructions from God for a new way of living. For 40 years Moses led the people in the wilderness wandering, learning, and becoming the people of God that they might find a new home.**

One: For 40 days Jesus spent time in the wilderness praying, fasting, and being tempted that he might launch his ministry of healing, grace, and hope.

**All: We give thanks for those in this congregation who have been part of our shared life for 40 or more years and for the ways they help us to keep responding to God's ongoing invitation of becoming.**

*(Brent invites all who have been members for 40 years or more to stand/raise their hand)*

Sung Response        *We are one in the Spirit*

**We will work with each other, we will work side by side, (2 times)  
And we'll guard human dignity and save human pride..  
And they'll know we are Christian by our love, by our love  
Yes they'll know we are Christians by our love.**

One: Biblically, the number 20 conveys a sense of coming of age.

**All: It is used to indicate an ideal time of waiting and preparation.**

One: Jacob waited for 20 years in service of his Father-in-Law to find freedom and new life.

**All: We give thanks for those in this congregation who have been part of our shared life for 20 or more years, for all they have leaned and shared and for the ways they help us be a better and more loving church.**

*(Brent invites all who have been members for 20 years or more to stand/raise their hand)*

Sung Response        *We are one in the Spirit*

**All praise to the Father, from whom all things come,  
And all praise to Christ Jesus, God's only Son,  
All praise to the Spirit who makes us one.  
And they'll know we are Christian by our love, by our love  
Yes they'll know we are Christians by our love.**

READING        *At Last the New Arriving* by Gabrielle Calvocoressi        Susan Moor

Like the horn you played in Catholic school  
the city will open its mouth and cry  
out. *Don't worry 'bout nothing. Don't mean  
no thing.* It will leave you stunned  
as a fighter with his eyes swelled shut  
who's told he won the whole damn purse.  
It will feel better than any floor  
that's risen up to meet you. It will rise  
like Easter bread, golden and familiar  
in your grandmother's hands. She'll come back,  
heaven having been too far from home  
to hold her. O it will be beautiful.  
Every girl will ask you to dance and the boys  
won't kill you for it. Shake your head.  
Dance until your bones clatter. What a prize  
you are. What a lucky sack of stars.

#### WELCOMING OF NEW MEMBERS

Kirsten Fredsall; Asa, Hannah, and Maryphena (Phena) Peabody; Emilie White

#### STATEMENT OF OUR PURPOSE AS A CHURCH

Pastor Brent

Our purpose as a Church is to carry on the mission and ministry that God initiated in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, whom we recognize as the Christ. Our purpose is to represent Christ, God's saving and healing love, both locally and in the wider world.

## LITANY OF INTENT

David Anderegg

One: Friends in Christ, we are all received into the church through the sacrament of Baptism. These people have found nurture and support in the midst of the family of Christ.

**Many: They have been led by the Spirit to affirm their Baptisms and to claim in our presence their covenantal relationship with Christ and the members of the Christian church.**

One: They are here as we are here, to endeavor to love God with all our hearts, and all our souls and all our minds. God help us.

**Many: They are here, as we are here to endeavor to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. God help us.**

One: You who are joining, we rejoice in your pilgrimage of faith which has brought you to this time and place.

**Many: We give thanks for every community of faith which has been your spiritual home and we celebrate your presence in this household of faith.**

## QUESTIONS OF THE CANDIDATES AND CONGREGATION

### \*CONGREGATIONAL STATEMENT OF COVENANT

As we strive to fulfill our purpose, we covenant:

**To worship together on a regular basis;**

**To strive to grow spiritually;**

**To open ourselves to follow God's leading in our lives both individually and as a community of faith;**

**To give support to and receive support from one another through life's trials and transitions;**

**To support and participate in the wider Christian community; and to support the institution of this church with our time, resources, and skills.**

## GREETING OF CHRISTIAN LOVE

Drea Pecor

On behalf of this church family we welcome you. We look forward to our journey of faith together. We give thanks for the chance to learn with you and grow with you - to deepen our faith, to broaden our minds and open our hearts. May God bless and enrich our time together.

\*HYMN

*What Gift Can We Bring?*

See page 10

## OFFERING OUR GIFTS

### CALL TO THE OFFERING

OFFERTORY

*A Virgin Unspotted, trad., arr. Young*

*Amy Shake, soprano; Rich Geiler, tenor*

\*DOXOLOGY

Praise God from whom all bless - ings flow. Praise God, all crea - tures

5 Am Bm<sup>7</sup> Em Am Em B<sup>7</sup> Em A<sup>7</sup> D Em  
here be - low. Praise God a - bove, ye heaven - ly host. Praise

10 D Bm G C Am D<sup>7</sup> G D Em Bm G  
Fa - ther, Son, and Ho - ly Ghost. Re - joice! Re - joice! Em -

15 C D<sup>7</sup> Em D G C G Am Em Bm Em  
man - u - el Shall come to thee, O Is - ra - el.

Words: Thomas Ken, 1674  
Music: 15th Century French

VENI EMMANUEL  
LM with Refrain

Text and tune adapted by Dean McIntyre, The United Methodist General Board of Discipleship, PO Box 340003, Nashville TN 37203-0003. Telephone 615-340-7073. Website <http://www.umcworship.org>. Email address: [music@gbod.org](mailto:music@gbod.org). Text and tune are public domain.

\*UNISON PRAYER OF DEDICATION

**Holy One, this Advent season we wait in joy, and we give with joy. Joy for all you have given us; joy because of your sacred promises. Receive these generous offerings, and use them to spread your joy in our world. Amen.**

**GOING FORTH INTO THE WORLD**

INVITATIONS

\*BENEDICTION

\*BENEDICTION RESPONSE     *Joy to the World*     See page 11  
(Please see music notes on back page.)

POSTLUDE     *Choir Amen, by Lutkin*



**Thank you** to all who helped with today's service, including Deacons David Anderegg, Gary Cilley, and Drea Pecor; usher Jo Ann Levitt; readers Rich Geiler, Patty Strauch and Susan Moor; fellowship hour Holland and Don Eaton; greeter Jill Fleming; pageant director Elisabeth Bellows. Will Curtiss is running the Livestream; Scarlett Ritcher and Rae Geddes are in the nursery.

**Christmas Eve at The First Congregational Church**



Join us for a family friendly candlelight service of lessons and carols on Christmas Eve at 5:00 PM. Special music will include choir and harp.

Preludes will begin at 4:30 PM. Volunteers are still welcome so call the church office if you can lend a hand.



## Verses

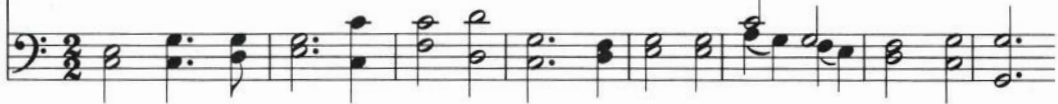
## Lift Up Your Heads, O Mighty Gates

1 &amp; 2

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*Georg Weissel, 1641**Transl. Catherine Winkworth, 1865; alt.**Ps. 24:7-10*

- 1 Lift up your heads, O might-y gates; be-hold the glo - rious Rul - er waits!
- 2 Fling wide the por - tals of your heart; make it a tem - ple, set a - part
- 3 Re - deem - er, come! I o - pen wide my heart to you; here, Christ, a - bide!
- 4 So come, my Sov - ereign; en - ter in! Let new and no - bler life be - gin;



The Sov - ereign One is draw - ing near; the Sav - ior of the world is here.  
 From earth - ly use for heaven's em - ploy, a - dorned with prayer and love and joy.  
 Let me your in - ner pres - ence feel; your grace and love in me re - veal.  
 Your Ho - ly Spir - it guide us on, un - til the glo - rious crown be won.



*Georg Weissel, a Lutheran pastor, served a church in Königsberg, East Prussia. He wrote some twenty hymns, most of them for the great festivals of the church year. This hymn was written for Advent.*

Tune: TRURO L.M.  
*Thomas Williams' Psalmodia Evangelica, 1789*

# What Gift Can We Bring?

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Jane Marshall, 1980

1 Sam. 9:7; 1 Cor. 3:8-9; 1 John 4:13-16

*Unison*

1 What gift can we bring, what pres - ent, what to - ken?  
2 Give thanks for the past, for those who had vi - sion,  
3 Give thanks for to - mor - row, full of sur - pris - es,  
4 This gift we now bring, this pres - ent, this to - ken,

What words can con - vey it, the joy of this day?  
who plant - ed and wa - tered so dreams could come true.  
for know - ing what - ev - er to - mor - row may bring,  
these words can con - vey it, the joy of this day!

When grate - ful we come, re - mem - bering, re - joic - ing,  
Give thanks for the now, for stud - y, for wor - ship,  
The Word is our prom - ise al - ways, for - ev - er;  
When grate - ful we come, re - mem - bering, re - joic - ing,

what song can we of - fer in hon - or and praise?  
for mis - sion that bids us turn prayer in - to deed.  
we rest in God's keep - ing and live in God's love.  
this song we now of - fer in hon - or and praise!

Jane Marshall received the first "Woman of Achievement" award at Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, where she teaches. She wrote this hymn for the twenty-fifth anniversary of her home church, Northaven United Methodist Church in Dallas.

Tune: ANNIVERSARY SONG 11.11.11.11.  
Jane Marshall, 1980

## Joy to the World!

ANTIOCH CM with repeat

Attr. George Frederick Handel, 1742

Arr. Lowell Mason, 1836

Isaac Watts, 1719; alt.

1. Joy to the world! the Lord is come: Let earth re -  
 2. Joy to the world! the Sav - ior reigns: Let us our  
 3. No more let sins and sor - rows grow, Nor thorns in -  
 4. He rules the world with truth and grace, And makes the

ceive her King; Let ev - ery heart pre - pare Him room,  
 songs em - ploy; While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains  
 fest the ground; He comes to make His bless - ings flow  
 na - tions prove The glo - ries of His righ - teous - ness,

And heaven and na - ture sing, And heaven and na - ture  
 Re - peat the sound - ing joy, Re - peat the sound - ing  
 Far as the curse is found, Far as the curse is  
 And won - ders of His love, And won - ders of His  
 And heaven and na - ture sing,

And

sing, And heaven, and heaven and na - ture sing.  
 joy, Re - peat, re - peat the sound - ing joy.  
 found, Far as, far as the curse is found.  
 love, And won - ders, won - ders of His love.

heaven and na - ture sing,

**Reminder: This church is a latex,  
peanut, and tree-nut free zone for  
ALL events.**

### **Poinsettias**

We invite you to help transform the sanctuary on Christmas Eve. Donate one or more poinsettias to the church in honor or memory of someone who is in your

heart this Christmas. You can then choose to take your plant home or let us to bring it to someone who could use some joy.

There are paper forms in the JE Room or just call Will in the church office. The gifts will be listed in the Christmas Eve bulletin. Deadline: December 16.

### **Music Notes ~ Tracy Wilson, Minister of Music pro tem**

Isaac Watts (1674-1748), a prolific hymn writer and Congregational minister, wrote the poem *Joy to the World* in 1719 based on Psalm 98 and never intended for it to become a Christmas hymn. In using Psalm 98, rather than sticking with the original Old Testament text, he adjusted it to refer to the work of Jesus as revealed in the New Testament. Over a century later, Lowell Mason set the poem to an arrangement of a tune (Antioch) attributed to G.F. Handel. The poem/hymn *Joy to the World* is one of the world's favorite Christmas carols, but note how the text celebrates Jesus's role as King of both church and the whole world.

*Welcome! We are Open and Affirming, which means that we invite persons of every sexual orientation, gender identification and expression, racial and cultural identity, age, physical ability, economic circumstance, faith background and family structure to share fully in the ministry, leadership and fellowship of this congregation's life in Christ.*

*As followers of Christ and committed to Isaiah's charge to "maintain justice and do what is right," we acknowledge with gratitude and humility that we are learning, speaking, gathering, and worshiping on the ancestral homelands of the Mohican people, who are the indigenous peoples of this land. Despite tremendous hardship in being forced from here, today their community resides in Wisconsin and is known as the Stockbridge-Munsee Community. We pay honor and respect to their ancestors past and present as we commit to building a more inclusive and equitable space for all.*

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