



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

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ADVENT: LOVE

December 22, 2024 – 10:00 a.m.

Children are invited to start in worship at 10:00 a.m. before Sunday School. Nursery care is available during worship; please ask an usher.

Note: We will lift prayers of joy and concern this morning in worship. If you would prefer 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 the Advent unison prayer.

PREPARING FOR WORSHIP

PRELUDE

The Shepherds at the Manger, Franz Liszt

FRAMING WORDS / WELCOME

Rev. Brent Damrow

GATHERING IN WORSHIP

TOLLING OF THE HOUR / TIME OF REFLECTION

SHARING WHAT WE BRING

The Lord's Prayer

Our God, who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

SONG *Rejoice, Rejoice, Believers* verse 4 See insert

TIME WITH CHILDREN *Church* Pastor Brent

CANDLE LIGHTING LITANY Salt Project— Love Jeremy Ridenour

One: Because too many people are wandering in the wilderness, because too many people are sitting in the valley of the shadow of death, because too many of our conversations are laced with conflict and bitterness, we light candles...

All: Because people all over the world are suffering, and we're often too distracted to notice, we light candles...

One: One for hope, one for peace, one for joy, and one for love...

(Light the fourth candle in the Advent wreath.)

All: May the light from these candles overwhelm the world.

One: May the light from these candles illuminate the valley of the shadow of death.

All: And may the fire from these candles burn away whatever would prevent God's love from being born among us.

One: Friends, be not afraid, even now — even now — God's love is overwhelming the world, on earth as it already is in heaven!

*PASSING OF THE PEACE

Children are invited to go to Sunday School.

CONTEMPORARY READING

Liza Catino

The Risk of Birth, Christmas, 1973, by Madeleine L'Engle

This is no time for a child to be born, With the earth betrayed by war & hate
And a comet slashing the sky to warn That time runs out & the sun burns late.
That was no time for a child to be born, In a land in the crushing grip of Rome;
Honour & truth were trampled by scorn – Yet here did the Saviour make his
home. When is the time for love to be born? The inn is full on the planet earth,
And by a comet the sky is torn – Yet Love still takes the risk of birth.

*HYMN

Love Come Down at Christmas

See page 5

THE GIFT OF THE WORD

SCRIPTURE READING Micah 5:2-5a

Terry Wise

SERMON *Drawing Near*

Pastor Brent

*HYMN *Little Bethlehem of Judah*

See page 6

MOMENT FOR MISSION The Christmas Fund

Rev. Dr. Rick Floyd

OFFERING OURSELVES AND OUR GIFTS

ADVENT UNISON PRAYER by Kate McIlhagga

Elizabeth Young

Now is the time of watching and waiting, a time pregnant with hope

A time to watch and pray as love comes our way.

Christ our Advent hope,

Remind us to prepare for your coming;

Remind us to prepare for this time

When the soles of your feet touch the ground,

When you will become one of us, to be a one with us.

May we watch for the signs, listen for the messengers,

Wait for the good news to slip into our world, our lives.

Christ our Advent hope, help us to clear the way for you;

To clear the clutter from our minds,

To sift the silt from our hearts,

To move the boulders that prevents us meeting you.

May sorrow take flight, your people sing a song of peace

May hope be born again through your love poured out for us. Amen.

CALL TO THE OFFERING

OFFERTORY *In the Bleak Midwinter*, poem by Christina Rossetti;
music by Harold Darke Rich Geiler, *tenor*

*DOXOLOGY *Advent*

Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Praise God, all creatures
here be - low. Praise God above, ye heaven - ly host. Praise
Fa - ther, Son, and Ho - ly Ghost. Re - joice! Re - joice! Em -
man - u - el Shall come to thee, O Is - ra - el.

Chords: Am Bm7 Em Am Em B7 Em A7 D Em
D Bm G C Am D7 G D Em Bm G
C D7 Em D G C G Am Em Bm Em

*UNISON PRAYER OF DEDICATION from *Spacious Faith*

**Holy One, this Advent season we wait in peace and we give in peace.
A peace deeper than our anxiety and fear.
A peace growing from our trust in your loving power.
Bless these gifts and our lives,
And use them to bring your peace to our world. Amen**

GOING FORTH INTO THE WORLD

*INVITATIONS

*HYMN

O How Shall I Receive You

See page 7

*BENEDICTION

Christmas

84

1 Love came down at Christ - mas, love all love - ly, love di - vine;
 2 Wor - ship we the God - head, love in - car - nate, love di - vine;
 3 Love shall be our to - ken; love be yours and love be mine,

love was born at Christ - mas: star and an - gels gave the sign.
 wor - ship we our Je - sus, but where - with for sa - cred sign?
 love to God and neigh - bor, love for plea and gift and sign.

Words: Christina Rossetti (1830-1894), alt.
 Music: *Gartan*, melody from *Petrie Collection of Irish Melodies, Part II*, 1902;
 harm. David Evans (1874-1948)

67. 67

The Hymnal 1982

Thank you to all who helped with today's service, including cantor Rich Geiler; Deacons Drea Pecor, Sarah Conly, and Elizabeth Young; readers Liza Catino, Terry Wise, and Jeremy Ridenour; usher Susan Moor; fellowship hour Charlotte Rodgers; greeter Carl Bradford; storytellers Elizabeth Evans and Cathy Clark. Will Curtiss is running the Livestream and Scarlett Ritcher and Rae Geddes are in the nursery.

Little Bethlehem of Judah

113

Calvin Seerveld, 1986; alt.

Mic. 5:2-4

Unison



1 Lit - tle Beth - le - hem of Ju - dah, what good news you bear!
2 Though your peo - ple suf - fer trou - ble, wait - ing for the child,
3 Long - a - wait - ed comes the Shep - herd who will rule the earth;



Out of you will come the An - cient One as heir.
Soon all strife and ha - tred shall be rec - on - ciled.
God made low has come to serve in hu - man birth.



Calvin Seerveld has held positions as professor of English literature and philosophy and, since 1972, has been senior member in the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto. He was on the committee appointed to revise the Psalter Hymnal.

Tune: WESTRIDGE 8.5.8.3.
Martin F. Shaw, 1929

Music Copyright ©, Oxford University Press.

The New Century Hymnal (1995)

The Christmas Fund has been caring for active and retired clergy and lay employees of the United Church of Christ for over 100 years, providing emergency grants, supplementation of small annuities and health premiums, and Christmas "Thank You" gift checks each December to our lower-income retirees. Please give what you can to continue supporting those who've devoted their lives to serving others.

O How Shall I Receive You

102

Paul Gerhardt, 1653

Transl. Catherine Winkworth, 1863, and others; alt.

1 O how shall I re - ceive you, how meet you on your way,
2 Love caused your in - car - na - tion; love brought you un - to me;
3 You come, O Christ, with glad - ness, in mer - cy and good - will,

blessed hope of ev - ery peo - ple, my soul's de - light and stay?
your thirst for my sal - va - tion pro - cured my lib - er - ty.
to bring an end to sad - ness and bid our fears be still.

O Je - sus, Je - sus, give me now by your own pure light,
O love be - yond all tell - ing, that led you to em - brace
In pa - tient ex - pec - ta - tion we live for that great day

to know what-e'er is pleas - ing and wel - come in your sight.
in love, all love ex - cel - ling, our lost and fall - en race.
when a re - newed cre - a - tion your glo - ry shall dis - play.

As a German Lutheran pastor serving during the Thirty Years' War, Paul Gerhardt's trials were legion. In the midst of it all, he composed more than a hundred hymns, among them some of the finest and most beloved in Christian hymnody.

Tune: ST. THEODULPH 7.6.7.6.D.
(VALET WILL ICH DIR GEBEN)
Melchior Teschner, 1615

* Tuesday, December 24: Christmas Eve Service, 5:00pm; preludes at 4:30.

* Wednesday, December 25: Merry Christmas!

The church office and building will be

closed December 25 through January 1, reopening January 2. Twelve step programs will still be held.

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

Music Notes

I invite you to come early to our Christmas Eve service, as our music making will begin at 4:30 for the 5:00 pm service. This year the preludes will feature our wonderful section leaders Amy Shake, Liza Catino, Rich Geiler and John Demler as well as our wonderful, dedicated choir. The quartet will sing "Boston" by William Billings, named for the town in which Billings was an active singing master; it tells the story of the angel announcing the Nativity to the shepherds. Other pieces include *Cantique de Noel* by Adolphe Adams, *Every Valley Shall be Exalted* from The Messiah, and *Gesu Bambino* by Pietro A. Yon. The choir has several beautiful selections by Philip Stopford and a very sweet Norwegian carol accompanied by bells. Come early, bask quietly in a very special time.

~ Tracy Wilson, Minister of Music pro tem

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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