



First Congregational Church of Lebanon

United Church of Christ – Open and Affirming

The Fourth Sunday of Advent

December 20, 2020

“There is nothing so secular that it cannot be sacred,
and that is one of the deepest messages of the Incarnation.”

–*Madeleine L’Engle*

All hymns are included after the order of worship, on pages 6-9.

Prelude *Vom Himmel Hoch* J. Pachelbel / G. Böhm / J. S. Bach

Call to Worship (*Unison*; Luke 1:46b-55, The Magnificat)

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.

Hymn 114 (p. 6) *Return, My People* Repton

Prayer of Invocation

God, though we worship in places near and far today, we welcome your Spirit as it joins us together as one people. Lift up our worship, inspire our prayers, infuse them with your grace, your love, your power. We pray these things in your Son’s name. Amen.

Gloria (*Unison*)

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

A Liturgy for Advent

The Mason Family

An Advent Reading

Isaiah 7:10-16. ¹⁰Again the Lord spoke to Ahaz, saying, ¹¹Ask a sign of the Lord your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven. ¹²But Ahaz said, I will not ask,

and I will not put the Lord to the test. ¹³Then Isaiah said: “Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals, that you weary my God also?
¹⁴Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel. ¹⁵He shall eat curds and honey by the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. ¹⁶For before the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted.

The Lighting of the Advent Candle

An Advent Prayer (Unison)

Holy God, in this season of anticipation, help us to be patient.

Loving God, in this time of watching, help us to see clearly.

Healing God, in these weeks of preparation, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart and mind and strength. We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. Open our hearts to you, that we may receive your forgiveness, be redeemed by your reconciling love, and make ready our hearts for the arrival of the Light of the World.

Responsive Hymn (p. 7) O Come, O Come, Emmanuel (vv. 1-4) Veni Emmanuel

Words of Welcome; Our Ministry and Mission

While we are not meeting in person, all are encouraged to stay in touch with one another by phone, email, or written cards. If you wish to organize a Zoom conference or phone meeting, please contact the Rev. Steve Silver (603-448-4281/silver@fycleb.org), and he'll get you set up and ready to go.

Musical Offering “Rejoice Greatly, O Daughter of Zion” (Messiah) G. F. Handel

Children’s Moment

Are you ready? Are you really ready for the arrival of the baby Jesus? I’m not. Sure, our services are pretty much set; but what about my heart and soul? This is a pretty big deal. No—actually, it’s a huge deal. This Christmas Eve I hope you’ll be able to look beyond the familiar, to see the amazing thing that God does by coming to us in human form. It’s bigger than Marvel movies or great special effects. It’s something that changes the world. Whether kids or adults, we may not be fully prepared, but that’s okay. God knows he’s dealing with average people, like you and me. To God, each of us is special anyway. And he’s coming to be with us. Now that’s Good News!

Scripture Lessons

2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16. Now when the king was settled in his house, and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him, ²the king said to the prophet Nathan,

“See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent.” ³Nathan said to the king, “Go, do all that you have in mind; for the Lord is with you.”

⁴But that same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan: ⁵Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the Lord: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? ⁶I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle. ⁷Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, “Why have you not built me a house of cedar?” ⁸Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the Lord of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel; ⁹and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. ¹⁰And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly, ¹¹from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house. [...] ¹⁶Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.

Luke 1:26-38. ²⁶In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. ²⁸And he came to her and said, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.” ²⁹But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³²He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” ³⁴Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” ³⁵The angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. ³⁶And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. ³⁷For nothing will be impossible with God.” ³⁸Then Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her.

Sermon

“The Most Important Conversation”

Stephen R. Silver

Musical Offering

“He Shall Feed His Flock” (Messiah)

G. F. Handel

Sharing of Joys and Concerns; Pastoral Prayer

As we hold our community members in prayer, please exercise care and discretion when sharing, as what seems public for you may be private for others. Help us keep our weekly prayer list current by contacting Rev. Silver or the church office to confirm or remove names on the list.

On this day we offer our ongoing prayers for Pete, Lloyd, Arlene, Ruth, Evelyn, Jim, Barbara, Greg, Jon, Larry, Edith, Jan, and Closey.

We pray for all those fighting the coronavirus or other illnesses, whether of mind, body, or spirit.

We pray for all those struggling with financial challenges, reduced hours and unemployment, and fears about the future.

We pray for the healthcare workers and first responders who are on the front line dealing with this pandemic.

We pray for reconciliation and healing in this time of racial tension.

We pray for wisdom and humility from all our leaders.

Today we offer the following prayer:

Advent God, we come to you with joy and with awe this day, readying ourselves for the gift of Jesus, who will bring us peace and comfort and redemption. We know that we are not wholly ready; that we are still too attached to our ways, our grudges, our failings; and that we will need to let go of them so that we can receive the Christ-child in our hearts. Help us to repent, to prepare in these last days, so that we may be ready for the arrival of your Son, our Savior.

We pray this, and all the joys and concerns we hold in our hearts, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer (*Unison*)

Our Father, 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 debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil; for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Offering of Gifts

Remembering those who are without, who are in need, who are often ignored, we invite your support of our ongoing ministry in and for the community. Please mail in your offering as you are able.

Musical Offering *The Little Road to Bethlehem*

M. Head

Doxology (*Unison*)

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow,
Praise Him, all creatures here below,

Praise Him above, ye heavenly host,
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

Prayer of Dedication (*Unison*)

Holy One, you shared with us in the baby Jesus a gift that blesses and changes our lives. With thanks, we present this offering as a sign of our commitment to share with others what you have shared with us. In the name of the Christ child we pray, Amen.

Hymn 114 (p. 8) *Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates* Truro

Benediction

My friends, life is short. We do not have too much time to gladden the hearts of those who travel the way with us. So, be swift to love, and make haste to be kind.

Now go forth with the love of God, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, this day and forevermore. Amen.

Postlude *Noël Étranger* L.-C. d'Aquin

Music notes: English composer and celebrated soloist Michael Head (1900-76) was associated with the Royal School of Music. The postlude, by 18th-century French composer Louis-Claude d'Aquin (1694-1772), is one of a large group of organ variations based on French carols—so tuneful and merry that they were banned from church services for a time.

* * *

Leading Worship This Week

The Rev. Stephen R. Silver, Pastor

Ernie Drown, Organist • Beth Hilgartner, Soprano • Linda Radtke, Contralto
Brian Clancy, Tenor • Karen and Chris Chase, Liturgists

Joys, Concerns, and Prayer Requests

If you wish to have a **joy, concern, or prayer request** lifted up in the service, or if you know of anyone who may need special prayers, a card or phone call, or some other form of pastoral care, please email prayer@fccleb.org, or contact the church office or the Rev. Steve Silver directly.

THE CHRISTMAS FUND

We are grateful to accept donations to the UCC's Christmas Fund, also known as the Fund for the Veterans of the Cross or Emergency Fund. This program offers compassionate, grateful support for retired clergy and their families with pension, healthcare, and emergency assistance.

Please contribute as you're able to this vital denominational offering, either by check to FCC (memo "Christmas Fund") or online at www.pbucc.org/index.php/christmas-fund-home. Thanks!

*Joel 2:12-23; Isa. 11:1-12**James F. D. Martin, 1981; alt.*

1 Re - turn, my peo - ple, Is - ra - el, with pen - i - ten - tial tear;
 2 Fear not, be - lov - ed, hear - ken now: our God has done great things!
 3 Then to the faith - ful of the earth the call of God rings clear:

just as the proph-et did fore - tell the ad - vent of Em-man - u - el,
 Your vin - di - ca - tion shall pour down like rain up-on the bar - ren ground,
 "Re - turn, my peo - ple, claim your worth, pre-par - ing for your Sav - ior's birth;

God's reign on earth is near! God's reign on earth is near!
 glad tid - ings to you bring, glad tid - ings to you bring.
 my reign on earth is near. My reign on earth is near."

This new Advent text by United Church of Christ minister James Martin is set to a tune by British composer Charles Hubert Hastings Parry, who is also known for his symphonies, organ works, and cantatas.

Tune: REPTON 8.6.8.8.6.6.
 C. Hubert H. Parry, 1888
 Alternate tune: REST

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

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Latin: c.9th century

Tr. John M. Neale, 1818-1866, Sts. 1,2, alt.

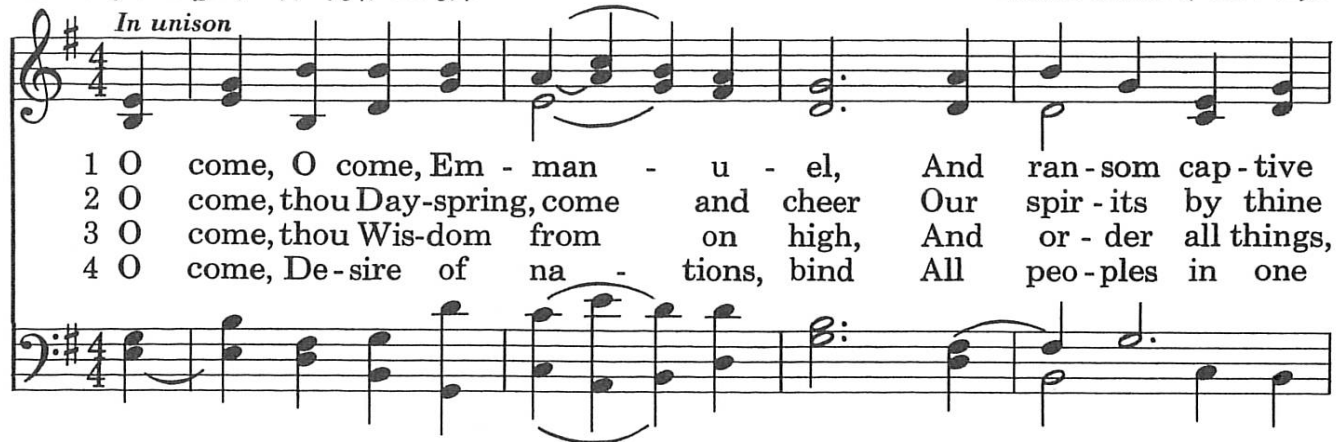
Tr. Henry S. Coffin, 1877-1954, Sts. 3,4

VENI EMMANUEL 8.8.8.8.8.8.

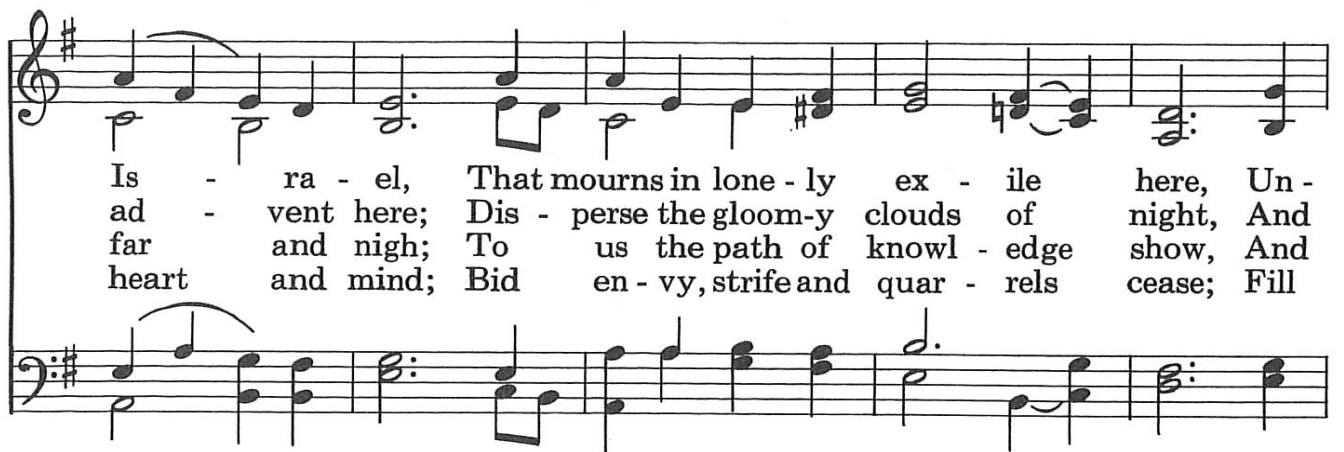
Adapted from Plainsong

Thomas Helmore, 1811-1890

In unison



1 O come, O come, Em - man - u - el, And ran - som cap - tive
2 O come, thou Day - spring, come and cheer Our spir - its by thine
3 O come, thou Wis - dom from on high, And or - der all things,
4 O come, De - sire of na - tions, bind All peo - ples in one

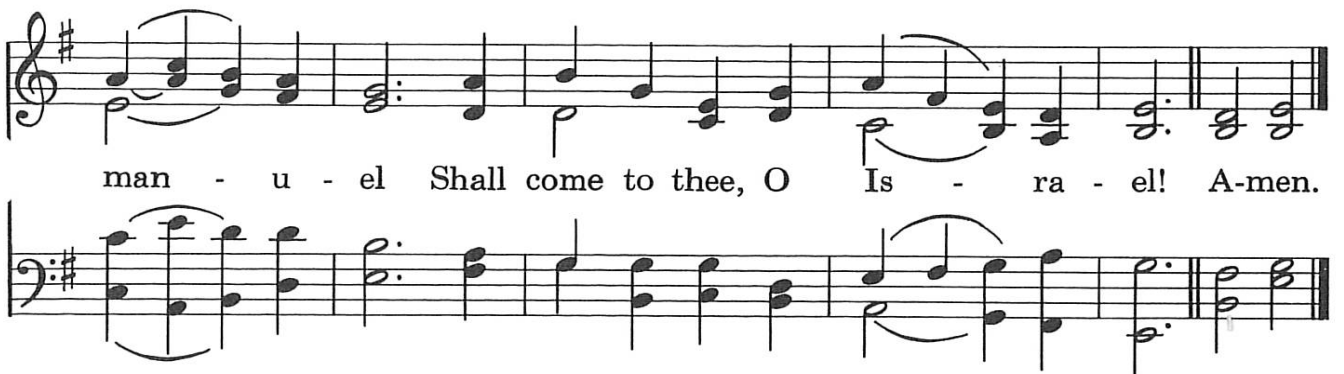


Is - ra - el, That mourns in lone - ly ex - ile here, Un -
ad - vent here; Dis - perse the gloom - y clouds of night, And
far and nigh; To us the path of knowl - edge show, And
heart and mind; Bid en - vy, strife and quar - rels cease; Fill

REFRAIN



til the Son of God ap - pear.
death's dark shad - ows put to flight.
cause us in her ways to go. Re - joice! Re - joice! Em -
the whole world with heav - en's peace.



man - u - el Shall come to thee, O Is - ra - el! A - men.

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Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates

Based on Psalm 24

Georg Weissel, 1590-1635

Tr. Catherine Winkworth, 1827-1878

TRURO L.M.

Thomas Williams', "Psalmodia Evangelica," 1789

1 Lift up your heads, ye might - y gates; Be - hold the
 2 Fling wide the por - tals of your heart; Make it a
 3 Re - deem - er, come! I o - pen wide My heart to
 4 So come, my Sov - ereign; en - ter in! Let new and

King of glo - ry waits! The King of kings is
 tem - ple, set a - part From earth - ly use for
 thee; here, Lord, a - bide! Let me thy in - ner
 no - bler life be - gin; Thy Ho - ly Spir - it

draw - ing near; The Sav - ior of the world is here.
 heaven's em - ploy, A - dorned with prayer and love and joy.
 pres - ence feel; Thy grace and love in me re - veal.
 guide us on, Un - til the glo - rious crown be won. A - men.



CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICES AT FCC

Family Service with "Pageant," 5:00 pm (on Zoom)

Our beloved service for families and the young-at-heart—in an improvised, online format!

Candlelight Communion Service, 11:00 pm (on Zoom)

A service of light, word, and song, celebrating Christ's birth with holy communion.

Service of Lessons and Carols (on YouTube)

The story of our Savior's birth in Scripture and traditional carols—available to watch anytime.



Merry Christmas!

While we have no poinsettias in our Sanctuary this year, we are grateful to all those who offered contributions to our **OPEN DOOR MINISTRY** in loving honor or memory of all those listed below.

IN HONOR OF...

DeAnn Clancy and Sandy Driscoll—*Brian, Amy, Katie, and Grace*

All first-responders, medical personnel, and teachers—*Marcia Corkins and Pete Mason*

Betty Adams, Ike's mother—*Linda and Ike Jacobs*

The caring, kind, compassionate congregation of FCC-Lebanon—*Barbara H. Jones*

Phyllis, Ron, Kathy, and Aunt Jeanie—*Deb and Jon Scott*

Our families—*The Silver Family*

IN MEMORY OF...

Florence and Bill Beckett—*Kathy Beckett*

Our parents, and a cherished friend, Laura Place—*Kathy and Warren Belding*

Grandma Callahan and Roy Westmoreland—*The Callahan Family*

Grandma Zickler, as she joins our other grandparents, and our fathers—*Brian, Amy, Katie, and Grace*

Linda's parents and grandparents; Ike's cousin Gayle Cavalier; the Places and Howards; Gracie Morse; Claude Young; and so many other loved ones who are also gone but never forgotten—*Linda and Ike Jacobs*

Emily and Earle Pike; Ruth and Ralph Hammond—*Gloria and Phil Hammond*

My parents, Helen and Alfred Walling—*Susan Pratt*

Our daughter, Carol S. Mistretta, and our son, Charles L. Sargent—*Barbara and Gordon Sargent*

Ken, Jim, Roger, and our grandparents—*Deb and Jon Scott*

Our loved ones—*The Silver Family*

My mother, Eunice Sleeper—*Jerry Sleeper*



First Congregational Church of Lebanon

PO Box 230
10 South Park St
Lebanon NH 03766

Weekly Worship Resources Enclosed!

DATED MATERIAL—Please Deliver Promptly

Do you use email? Contact church@fcclieb.org to receive this and other communication by email.

Welcome!

We are a Christ-centered community that celebrates the love of God. Although we are of varied minds, with varying measures of belief and unbelief, we are one body, bound together in Christ. We recognize the uniqueness of every individual as God's beloved child. We seek to respond faithfully to God's call for justice for all creation. We strive in word and deed to be faithful to Jesus' model of loving acceptance. We seek to create a sanctuary where all will know they are welcome and included.

No matter your age, gender identity, sexual orientation, marital status, race or ethnicity, physical or mental ability, or economic circumstance, you are invited into the full life and ministry of First Congregational Church of Lebanon, including its worship, sacraments, and rites.

Join us as we grow together in God's love.

First Congregational Church of Lebanon

The Rev. Stephen R. Silver, Pastor

Ernie Drown, Organist and Choir Director • Nancy Parsons, Church School Superintendent
Barbara Teeter, Chair of Deacons • Linda Jacobs, Chair of Church Council • Barbara Jones, Moderator
Brian Clancy, Church Administrator

Church Office Hours: Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, 9:00-12:00 (or by appointment as needed)
603-448-4281 • church@fcclieb.org • prayer@fcclieb.org • music@fcclieb.org • www.fcclieb.org