

First Congregational Church

Gathered in 1723

An Open and Affirming Congregation



Night Visions

**Fourth Sunday of Advent: Love
December 18th, 2022**

Deacon's Quote of the Day

*"Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way.
The Lord be with all of you."
2 Thessalonians 3:16*

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PRELUDE

“Bring a Torch, Jeanette, Isabella” by E. Hovdesven

WELCOME, ANNOUNCEMENTS, DEACON’S GREETING & *PASSING OF THE PEACE

PASTORAL GREETING

LIGHTING OF THE ADVENT WREATH:

The Candle of Love

The Ebers Family

Family: This week we light the candle of Love, the warmth of God’s love given to us in the cries of a newborn babe. Together we pray: Bless the hands smooth, supple that create with power, rough, weathered that touch with integrity; scarred, bent that move with grace; dark, pale that work for justice. Bless the hands shackled, free that point toward peace; graceful, longing that tend the weary; young, old that feed the children; yours, mind that move the world.

Many: **God of Love who set the world into motion, in you is the turning of the world, and in every moment somewhere the day is turning to darkness. Bless those who welcome it, who long for it; bless those who fear it and bid it quickly pass. And those who touch with delight in the night, bless; and those who cry out as the shadows give way to terror, bless too. Make us bold in the darkness to protect each other’s slumber, and make us courageous in the night to be guardians of your love.**

Family: Hope breaks in as firefly, piercing the darkness. The light of peace, like the North Star, guides us. The light of joy is like a sparkler on a hot July evening, the light of love is the warmth of a glowing fire beside which we find comfort and the abundance of God’s love.

The Candle of Hope: Lyons (O Worship the King, All Glorious Above!) by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette

The candle of hope we light in this hour
Proclaims that the Lord is coming in power.
We wait for a future, now hidden from view,
When Christ in his glory will make all things new.

The candle of joy reminds us to sing,
For God is at work to do a new thing.
The proud will be humbled; the lowly will rise.
God's kingdom is one of delight and surprise.

The candle of peace shines bright with God's plan;
The wolf will lie down and dwell with the lamb.
Our guns and our weapons, our hatred and war,
Will give way to gardens that heal and restore.

The candle of love tells what we are worth:
God loves us so much, God came to the earth!
An angel brought news of a child who would be
The one who would save us and set us all free.

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: Come away from the time of weariness. Dare to accept the energy God offers you.

Many: **Restore our energy, O Source of all power. Let your love flow through us.**

One: Come away from all your insignificant distractions. Dare to let God show you a larger picture.

Many: **Help us to examine the flow of our lives. Reveal to us what is really important.**

One: Come away from the scorn of enemies. Seek the one who offers us a new vision.

Many: **Lead us to think of others in new ways. Let us find grace and peace in Emmanuel.**

* HYMN

“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” (NCH 116) vs. 1, 6 and 7

CALL TO CONFESSION

How often we have chosen evil and refused what is good. The result of our choices is not what we intend. Listen, God is waiting to share pardon with all who have erected barriers to shut out God’s love.

UNISON CONFESSION

O God, you have called us to be apostles of your grace, but we have been judgmental instead of gracious. We condemn in others what is also in us. We refuse to listen to others’ pain or to understand the source of their tears. We avoid those who are angry or scornful or embittered. It is easier to diminish the feelings of others than to offer true empathy. Yet you come to us, Emmanuel, and we want to repent. You reach out to us, and our hearts melt. We want to embrace your love.

GOD'S FORGIVENESS

God's promises are fulfilled. We awaken from the nightmare of our neglect to a vision of what may yet be. We arise from our preoccupations with immediate problems to catch the larger vision and purpose God sets before us. Jesus is coming to save us from our sins. Emmanuel, God with us.

CHOIR ANTHEM SENIOR MOMENT

(All who wish may come forward.)

"Cradle Song" by G. Near

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 1:18-25

YOUTH PROGRAM: NIGHT VISIONS A PLAY

HYMN

"Gentle Joseph, Joseph Dear" (NCH 105)

JOYS AND CONCERNS

PASTORAL PRAYER

THE LORD'S PRAYER

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 trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us,
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power,
and the glory, forever. Amen.

CALL TO OFFERING

In thanks for all God's gifts, and in response to the tears of so many of God's children, we now gather all that we have brought to share, praying that these resources will accomplish much good among us and far beyond our individual reach.

OFFERTORY

Offertory on "Rocking" by D. Paxton

***DOXOLOGY** *Tune: Veni Emmanuel*

Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Praise God, all creatures here below. Praise God above ye heavenly host. Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

• PRAYER OF DEDICATION

Loving God, we would not weary you with empty words or with routine tips of obligation. You have granted us life with such abundant possibilities that we can never do enough to express our gratitude. We have searched in the darkness for meaning and your light has dazzled our eyes. May these gifts of love be a light to others along life's path. Amen.

*** HYMN**

"It Came Upon the Midnight Clear" (Pilgrim 129)

BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE

"Angels from the Realms of Glory" by R. Thygerson

** Please stand if you are able*

***The Advent Candle Lighting Liturgy and cover images are adapted from Night Visions by Jan Richardson. Liturgy adapted from Taught by Love: Year A by Lavon Bayler.*

The Minister is Rev. Holly MillerShank.

The Director of Music is Curtis Smith.

The Deacon is Nancy Burnett.

The Reader is Mary Innis.

The Greeters today are Scott and Cindy Fountain.

*The altar flowers this morning are given to the glory of God
by the congregation.*

Prayers and Calendar

PRAYER REQUESTS

Karen Ruiz, Ken Hsu, Rebecca and Jennifer MacKenzie, Barbara Harlow, Bonnie Gibbs, Wendy and Tom, Lisa DiPilato, Florence Stowe, Dot Perkins.

The people of Ukraine and other countries in our world dealing with war & unrest.

The mission & works of the First Congregational Church of Shrewsbury.

Those within our church family and all faith communities and beyond, who are dealing with illness, caregiving, grief, mental health, unemployment, hunger, and homelessness in their daily lives.

Also, government officials, first responders, health care workers, military personnel, and all who protect and care for us.

THIS WEEK'S AT FCC

Every morning, 7am: AA, Cushing Hall

Sunday, 12/18—4th Sunday of Advent:

- 9:30am: Worship Service
- 11am: Prayer Group, Parlor
- 11am: Training Choir and Youth Singers
- 7pm: Youth Group
- 7pm: AA, Adkins Room

Monday, 12/19:

- 10:30am: Parkinson's Chorus, Gifford
- 7pm: Shrewsbury Jammers, Chapel

Tuesday, 12/20:

- 7pm: Council Meeting, Adkins Room

Wednesday, 12/21:

- 10am: Martha Circle, Gifford Hall
- 7pm: Parish Pealers, Sanctuary

Thursday, 12/22:

- 7:15pm: Senior Choir, Choir Room

Friday, 12/23:

- 3:30pm: Chimers, Chapel
- 7pm: Caroling on the Common

Saturday, 12/24—Christmas Eve:

- 5pm: Outdoor, family-oriented service
- 7pm: Indoor service featuring lessons and carols
- 11pm: Indoor service with candlelight and handbells

Sunday, 12/25:

- 9:30am: Information Worship Service in the Chapel, NO Sunday School
- 7pm: NO Youth Group
- 7pm: AA, Adkins Room

**The office will be closed from 12/26/22
to 01/02/2023.**