



United Church of Strafford, Vermont

December 17, 2023

Fourth Sunday of Advent, Mary Sunday, Sunday of Love

MH=Methodist Hymnal; PH=Pilgrim Hymnal

December 17, 2023

Morning Worship and Children's Programs at 10:00

United Church of Strafford

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Our Church Covenant

We gather together with freedom of conscience

in a community of love and inquiry.

All are welcome, without exception.

We practice Christianity with faith and compassion.

We covenant with one another to embody the love of Christ,

to nurture contemplation and action,

and to offer our gifts, talents and energies as we are able.

“When a change wants to happen, it looks for people to act through. How do we know when a change wants to happen? We feel the want inside us.... For the change to happen through us, we need to ...break through a resistance that has been holding us back.” *Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone from Active Hope*

“The creator of the universe, comes to us in smallness, weakness and hiddenness.... When I have no eyes for the small signs of God's presence...I remain spiritually blind.... The spirit of Jesus can be encountered anytime and anywhere.... The memory of the image of God in the soul can turn my stone heart into a heart of flesh, making it flexible, receptive, open and free.... The memory of Christ is thus a healing, spiritually therapeutic memory.... In the very act of remembering Christ, we not only recall the past reality but somehow see Christ in the future event. We discern Christ in the present moment when we cease to be afraid.” *Henry Nouwen from Discernment: Reading the Signs of Daily Life*

Gathering Music

The Cantornote Church Musicians

Silent Prayer of Invocation

Pastor Tom Kinder

Prelude “Passion Chorale” with variations by Sarah Cantor

Introit “Mary Had a Baby” African-American Spiritual

Welcome and Announcements

Call to Worship

Responsive Reading *adapted from Luke 1:46-55,*
the Magnificat of Mary Joey Hawkins

Leader: “My soul magnifies you,
and my spirit rejoices in you,
the creator, redeemer and sustainer of the universe,

**People: for you have looked with favor
on the lowly state of one who serves you.**

Leader: Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed,
for you, O source of love and life and light,
have done great things in me and through me,
and holy is your name.

**People: All shall know that your mercy extends to the meek
who stand in humble awe before you
from generation to generation.**

Leader: You have shown strength with your Spirit’s arm;
you have scattered the proud
in the imagination of their hearts.

**People: You have brought down the powerful from their thrones
and lifted up the lowly;**

Leader: you have filled the hungry with good things
and sent the rich away empty.

**People: You have come to the aid
of all the hurting children of the earth,
in remembrance of your promise of mercy,
understood by the prophets of old,
for your children now and forever more.”**

***Hymn** PH #131 Lo, How a Rose E’er Blooming

Prayer of Confession (in unison)

Holy God, we confess that when your angel comes
announcing we are pregnant with God’s gifts,
telling us that we have Christ within us,
blessing us with goodness and light
to deliver to the world, so often
we do not respond as Mary did.

We disbelieve or hide in fear or make excuses.
We let our busyness or plans distract us.
Please forgive us, O God.
Help us to begin anew now.
Help us to say as Mary did,
“Here am I, the servant of the Lord;
Let it be with me according to your word.”
Help us have the courage, faith and humble love
to bring forth the gifts
you have given us to share.

Silent Prayer

Assurance of Pardon and Grace

Lighting of the Fourth Advent Candle Members of the Choir
*Please see your pew card for the Lord’s Prayer. We will read the
Traditional Version at the end.*

Anthem “Esurientes Implicit Bonis” from *Magnificat* J.S. Bach
BWV 243, No. 9

*“He has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.”*

Scripture Luke 1:26-45

Sermon Could Emmanuel Come to Help Us Now?

***Hymn** We Need a Transformation *hymn folder*

Sharing of Joys, Concerns, Prayer Requests and Reflections

Has anything happened to you or those you know that leads you to
believe that there is another realm where the dead or beings exist
who can sometimes cross over into our realm? Have you ever felt
help come from beyond, from a higher power or the dead? What are
we waiting for this Advent—what do we need Jesus to be or do?

Time of Prayer

Call to Offering

*Congregational Sung Benediction

May Clouds Part, Showing Stars Above *see page four*

Silent Prayer *We invite you to end the service in a spirit of prayer.*

Postlude “Veni Emmanuel” with variations by Sarah Cantor

** Those who are comfortably able may stand.*

Past sermons are available on the back table.

Video recorded services, sermon texts and bulletins are available on our website unitedchurchofstrafford.com.

See us on **Facebook** at United Church of Strafford

Sign up for **weekly emails** about upcoming worship and other news at unitedchurchofstrafford@gmail.com

ADVENT

May Clouds Part, Showing Stars Above

Thomas Cary Kinder, 2008, 2015



May clouds part, show - ing stars a - bove. The stars of hope, peace,
Go now and pass love's bless - ing on; Go forth and shine like



joy and love. May those in dark - ness see their light
Christ - mas dawn. Christ gives you light to bring to birth:



To help them through the long - est night.
Good will toward all and peace on earth.

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Thank you to the The Cantornote Church Musicians, including Sarah Cantor, Susan Hodges, Rachel Kurland, Sara Lisniansky and Amber Wylie!

Mission Committee Update: Helping Children with a Parent in Prison, Victims of Domestic and Sexual Violence, New Refugee Arrivals in VT and Displaced People and Refugees Around the Globe This month, on behalf of our church, the Mission Committee has proudly supported the following four big-hearted, hard-working organizations:

- 1. Camp Agape Vermont** which provides a week of free overnight summer church camp for Vermont children with a parent in prison. (This is a collaboration between the United Methodist, the UCC and the Episcopal churches of Vermont.)
 - 2. Safeline** which is located in Chelsea, VT and works “to end physical, emotional and sexual violence against women and children.”
 - 3. U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants** (VT Field Office in Colchester, VT) which helps “hundreds of new refugee arrivals secure safe housing, enroll in school, get jobs, improve language skills and begin to thrive in communities across Vermont.”
 - 4. International Rescue Committee** which helps support “displaced people and refugees worldwide,” providing “health care, education, safe spaces, emergency aid and more.”
- Please let any one of us know if you have other ideas for us. With love and gratitude, Danette Harris, Maggie Hooker and Cameron Speth

Story Sundays Continue Rachel Guaraldi leads worship for children and all ages on the second Sunday of each month. The services focus on a big question or theme that they explore through stories, songs and reflections. The next Story Sunday will be Martin Luther King Jr. Sunday, January 14th.

Childcare We welcome children of all ages to the United Church of Strafford! Childcare is available during the church service for children second grade and younger.

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Pastoral Care: Those in need can reach out to Deacons Becky Bailey (rbailey@sover.net), Debby Richie (dc.richie@hotmail.com), and Cameron Speth (cece@speth.com) or call the church number.

Fulfilling Our Vision Committee Update: You can find the Future Directions Vision we are working to fulfill printed on the pew card. Our Native American Reparations Fund has been established, with a generous start-up donation from a member of our congregation. If you would like to contribute, please make your donation to The United Church of Strafford and indicate "Reparations." We are exploring various ways to use this fund. Our first intent is to support Abenaki needs and wishes here in Vermont. We will provide periodic updates, although confidentiality will be needed in some cases, as with the Deacons Fund. We are also working to fulfill the Implementation Plan for our Open and Affirming Covenant. You can find the link to both the covenant and the plan near the top of the Welcome Page of our website. Keep your eyes and ears open for welcoming language, fresh signs, community building, and active kindness in our church space and beyond! FOV meetings will resume the first Tuesday evening of every month, beginning in February. Please contact Kate Reimanis with any questions or ideas.

Daily Meditation Sessions Our Heartfulness Circle offers an informal meditation gathering on Zoom every evening from 7:30 to 8:10 PM. On Thursdays we have an extended session starting at 7:00 PM. See our website Welcome page for the Zoom link and details.

Haiku by Herbert A. Goertz:

Turkeys one two three
flew into the apple tree
shaking down the fruit.

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Advent, Christmas & Epiphany Services & Events Calendar

Sun. Dec. 17 Fourth Sunday of Advent, Mary Sunday

Lighting the candle of Love and celebrating Mary, the mother of Jesus, and the model she serves for our spiritual lives; Cantornote Church Musicians

Sun. Dec. 24 NO 10:00 AM Service, only the 5:30 PM

Sun. Dec. 24 Christmas Eve Service 5:30 PM

Picture excited and awe-filled children, a sanctuary lit entirely by candles, beloved lessons and carols and gorgeous instrumental and choral music provided by Annemieke McLane, our choir and friends, in a service timed to allow you to have all your other Christmas Eve traditions as well.

Sun. Dec. 31 Sunday after Christmas, 10:00 AM Zoom-only gathering to read aloud a beloved Christmas story for all ages, hear some beautiful music, share our joys, concerns, prayer requests and reflections and say Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to one another.

Sun. Jan. 7 Epiphany Sunday The Magi follow the star...

Sun. Jan. 14 Story Sunday and Martin Luther King Jr. Sunday

Next Concerts here by pianist Annemieke McLane. Admission by donation, 20% goes to the church's Manheim Fund for the Arts.

Sunday afternoons at 4:00 PM:

January 21 "Healing Powers of Music"

February 4 "All Bach"

March 17 "French Connections"

Friday afternoons at 7:00 PM:

April 5 "Moon and Stars"

May 10 "New Duos"

June 21 "Summertime"

***We are an Open and Affirming Congregation.
Whoever you are, wherever you are on life's journey,
you are welcome here!***

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