



December 24, 2023, 5:30 PM  
*Sunday 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.*

***United Church of Strafford, Vermont***

December 24, 2023, 5:30 PM

Christmas Eve Candlelight Service

*All carols will be from the red or blue Pilgrim Hymnal (PH)*

*All Bible readings are from the King James Version.*

“We are all meant to be mothers of God. What good is it to me if this eternal birth of the divine Son takes place unceasingly, but does not take place within myself? And, what good is it to me if Mary is full of grace if I am not also full of grace? What good is it to me for the Creator to give birth to his Son if I do not also give birth to him in my time and my culture? This, then, is the fullness of time...”

*Meister Eckhart (1260-1328)*

**Gathering Music**

Annemieke McLane

**Prelude** “Peace, Peace” Rick Powell and Sylvia Powell  
arr. Fred Bock

**Silent Prayer of Invocation**

Pastor Tom Kinder

**Introit** “A Little One” Lucy Holstedt      Becky Bailey, Soloist

**Welcome and Announcements**

**Children's Time**

**Lord's Prayer**

*Please see your pew card for the Lord's Prayer. We will read first the Traditional Version and then the New Version.*

**Carol** PH #129 It Came Upon the Midnight Clear *verses 1, 3 & 4*  
*(seated)*

**Responsive Reading** *from Isaiah 9* Kate Reimanis, Reader

**Leader:** The people that walked in darkness  
have seen a great light.

**People:** **They that dwell in the land of the shadow of death,  
upon them hath the light shined.**

**Leader:** For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given:  
and the government shall be upon his shoulder.

**People:** **And his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor,  
The mighty God, The everlasting Father,  
The Prince of Peace.**

**Leader:** Of the increase of his government and peace  
there shall be no end, upon the throne of David  
and upon his kingdom,

**People:** **To order it and establish it with judgment  
and with justice from henceforth even for ever.**

**All:** **The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.  
Alleluia!**

**\*Carol** PH #132 O Come, All Ye Faithful *verses 1, 2 & 3 only*

**First Lesson** Luke 1:26-35, 38 Amber Wylie, Reader

**Anthem** “Wexford Carol” traditional Irish 12<sup>th</sup> Century  
arr. Elaine Hagenberg

**Second Lesson** Luke 2:1, 3-7 Danette Harris, Reader

**\*Carol** PH # 120 Hark! the Herald Angels Sing *verses 1 & 3 only*

**Third Lesson** Luke 2:8-16 Rod Smolla, Reader

**\*Carol** PH #130 Joy to the World! The Lord Is Come

**Fourth Lesson** Reflection on John 3:16 Tom Kinder, Reader

**Call to Offering**

**\*Carol** PH #128 In the Bleak Mid-Winter *verses 1, 3 & 4 only*

**Fifth Lesson** John 1:1-5, 10-14 Rev. Deadra Ashton, Reader

**Lighting of the Christ Candle** The Hawkins Family

**Reflection** “What Child Is This?” Rev. Tom Kinder

*This, this, the Spirit’s gift,  
The Way of Love whose light we lift;  
This, this, earth’s hope of peace:  
This light we bear like Mary.*

### **LIGHTING OF THE CONGREGATION’S CANDLES**

The ushers will bring the flame from the Christ candle to the person sitting at the end of each pew who will pass it to the next person, and so on. Remember to tip only unlit candles!

Once all candles are lit, we will have the Benediction. Then we will sing verse one of Silent Night. (The words are on the back of this bulletin.) During the second verse, we will begin our recessional out of the church, and we will keep singing until all are outside. You are welcome to take your candle home, or you may leave it in the receptacle outside.

### **Benediction**

**Carol** Silent Night, Holy Night *(the words are printed at the end of the bulletin on page seven; sing verse one seated, and verses two and three as the recessional)*

*\* Those who are comfortably able may stand.*

**Past sermons** are available on the back table and on our website.

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

Look for updates on our **website**: [unitedchurchofstrafford.com](http://unitedchurchofstrafford.com)

Sign up for **weekly emails** about upcoming worship and other news

at [unitedchurchofstrafford@gmail.com](mailto:unitedchurchofstrafford@gmail.com)

Please let us know if you need to be added to our **mailing list**.

**Thank you to the to Annemieke McLane and the choir!**

**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.

**Upcoming Special Services**

**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.

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

**Sun. Jan 14 Martin Luther King Jr. Sunday**

**Sun. Jan. 21 Story Sunday**

**Next Concerts** Admission by donation, 20% goes to the church's Manheim Fund for the Arts. The following all feature pianist Annemieke McLane:

*Sunday afternoons at 4:00 PM:*

January 21 "Healing Powers of Music"

February 4 "All Bach"

March 17 "French Connections"

*Friday evenings at 7:00 PM:*

April 5th, with Jim Schley and Becky Bailey

May 10th, with Jeremiah McLane

June 21 "Summertime"

**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. If you would like to contribute, please make your donation to The United Church of Strafford and indicate "Reparations." 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 on the Welcome Page of our website. Please contact Kate Reimanis with questions or ideas.

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**Ushers and Greeters This Evening:** Charlotte Reimanis, Erik Reimanis, Kate Reimanis, Debby Richie and Cameron Speth.

**Thank you** to Vin Wylie, Zoom Master and Recording Engineer!

**Nursery for this service** Please feel free to take your child out the door by the pulpit to our nursery in the Parish Hall. The service will be broadcast over a speaker there. Listen for the fourth verse of the Carol "In the Bleak Mid-Winter," and come back into the sanctuary then if you can. The candle lighting will begin shortly thereafter.

**The offering this evening** is going entirely to the Deacon's Fund of this church that provides assistance to people in need in the community, including helping people keep their homes heated or their cars on the road or their prescriptions filled and many other basic necessities. Please keep us in mind if you know of someone in need or if you could use assistance. Our contact information is on the cover of this bulletin. Thank you for your contributions!

**Children's Programs** We offer childcare during our 10:00 AM Sunday service every week and on the Second Sunday of every month have a **Story Sunday** for all ages. (See below.)

**Story Sundays Continue** Rachel Guaraldi leads worship for children and all ages usually 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 the third Sunday in January, the 21st.

**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 Zoom session starting at 7:00 PM. See our website Welcome page for the Zoom link and details.

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***Open and Affirming Covenant***  
*Adopted unanimously at Annual Meeting*  
*on September 17, 2023*  
*after a well-informed, careful process*  
*open to our entire church family.*

We, the members of the United Church of Strafford, Vermont, regard all people as beloved children of God. We give thanks for the many and diverse gifts of God among us.

We declare ourselves to be an Open and Affirming congregation. We welcome and accept into full participation, membership and leadership, people of every sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, race, ethnicity, faith background, political affiliation, age, marital status and family structure, physical or mental abilities, education and economic status. We acknowledge with humility that this list is not exhaustive and that the terms are in some cases harmful and evolving social constructs. We honor the worth and dignity of all people. We affirm all relationships founded on the principles of love, justice, the Golden Rule and treating others as they wish to be treated.

We commit ourselves to integrate the spirit of this covenant into all aspects of our church life. We pledge to work to end oppression, discrimination and hateful behaviors whenever we encounter them, and, guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit, to help create the beloved community of God's realm on earth.

Whoever you are, wherever you are on life's journey, you are welcome here.

***Silent Night, Holy Night***  
*(verse one seated, verses two and three as recessional)*

Silent Night, holy night,  
All is calm, all is bright  
Round yon virgin mother and child,  
Holy infant, so tender and mild.  
Sleep in heavenly peace,  
Sleep in heavenly peace.

**\*Recessional** *(led by the ushers)*

Silent Night, holy night,  
Shepherds quake at the sight,  
Glories stream from heaven afar,  
Heavenly hosts sing alleluia;  
Christ the Savior is born!  
Christ the Savior is born!

Silent Night, holy night,  
Son of God, love's pure light  
Radiant beams from thy holy face,  
With the dawn of redeeming grace,  
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth,  
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.

**Haiku by Mel Goertz:**

The sun just came out.  
The wild turkeys stopped feeding  
to feel the warmth of the sun.

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