



**First Parish Church, Congregational  
On the Village Green  
Manchester-by-the-Sea, Massachusetts**

*Awaken to the Light and Love of God;  
Be a Joyful Beacon to the World*

**First Parish Church, Congregational  
United Church of Christ  
Christmas Eve Celebration  
Saturday, December 24, 2023  
7:30 PM**

**Prelude** Medley II (The First Noel It Came Upon a Midnight Clear O Come All Ye Faithful) - arr. Linda Hartman

I Wonder As I Wander – John Jacob Niles (1892-1980)

I wonder as I wander, out under the sky, how Jesus the Savior did come for to die. For poor on'ry people like you and like I...I wonder as I wander, out under the sky. When Mary birthed Jesus, 'twas in a cow's stall, with wise men and farmers and shepherds and all. But high from God's heaven a star's light did fall, and the promise of ages it then did recall. If Jesus had wanted for any wee thing - a star in the sky or a bird on the wing or all of God's angels in heav'n to sing, He surely could have it, 'cause He was the King. I wonder as I wander, out under the sky, how Jesus the Savior did come for to die. For poor on'ry people like you and like I...I wonder as I wander, out under the sky.

Rebecca Shrimpton, solo

**Call to Worship**

One: The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;

**All: those who lived in a land of deep darkness— on them light has shined.**

One: You have multiplied the joy of the nation, as at the harvest.

**All: For the yoke of their burden, and the rod of their oppressor, you have broken.**

One: For to us a child has been born for us, to us a son has been given to us;

**All: authority rests upon his shoulders – and we shall call him Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.**

One: His authority shall flourish, and there shall be endless peace in his realm.

**All: He will uphold it with justice and righteousness now and forevermore.**

**The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.**

One: O beloved people of God, the promise of the prophet lives with us!

**All: Come, let us walk in the Light of the Lord!**

[adapted from Isaiah 9:2-7]

**Greeting**

## Lighting of the Advent Candles

Nancy Peterson, Paul Driscoll, Megan and Sam Peterson

Hymn O Come, All Ye Faithful #132 PH

### Prayer for Illumination (unison)

God of our time, God of all time –

To this world that worships power, You send a child in weakness.

To these times when violence seems normal, You whisper peace.

To lives heavy with fear, You have dispatched messengers:

angels who sing to our imaginations of a different world;

shepherds who find their way into a flock as wide as the world;

sages who learn to find their way home by a new road.

Tonight, in the retelling of the ancient story and the singing of songs we know so well, be with us afresh.

And may the birth of this one holy child

teach us how to be with you, and with one another,

in a world transformed by the power of Your love

in which we all see one another as Your children, one whole

human family.

We ask it in the name of the One whose story we tell again tonight. Amen.

### First Reading from Scripture Jeremiah 31:31-34 Susan Parker

<sup>31</sup> “The days are coming,” declares the LORD,

“when I will make a new covenant

with the people of Israel

and with the people of Judah.

<sup>32</sup> It will not be like the covenant

I made with their ancestors

when I took them by the hand

to lead them out of Egypt,

because they broke my covenant,

though I was a husband to them,”

declares the LORD.

<sup>33</sup> “This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel

after that time,” declares the LORD.

“I will put my law in their minds

and write it on their hearts.

I will be their God,

and they will be my people.

<sup>34</sup> No longer will they teach their neighbor,

or say to one another, 'Know the LORD,'  
because they will all know me,  
from the least of them to the greatest,"  
declares the LORD.  
"For I will forgive their wickedness  
and will remember their sins no more."

**Anthem** Excerpts from 'Once Upon a Night' – Pepper Choplin (1957) \*\*

Listen to the Silence of the Night

See the mother now with her tiny child, softly singing while the moon starts to rise. When her lullabies calm the baby's cries, come and listen to the silence of night. Now she holds her child with a warm embrace, gazing at his face by the soft candlelight and her heart is full of this miracle as she listens to the silence of the night. Come hear the silence of the night. All the world for a moment seems peaceful and bright as we listen to the silence of the night. Silent Night....(the congregation is invited to sing "Silent Night"). Trust God's promises; they are coming true. Come and listen to the silence of the night.

Raise the Christmas Hallelujah

Down from heaven a Savior came, for He left His high and heavenly throne. Down from heaven to earth He came; as the Savior, great Messiah, He is First and Last, as the King of kings. Raise the Christmas hallelujah. Raise the celebration song. From the throne of heaven's glory, Christ came down that we may rise. So come, come, join the holy chorus. Come, come, join the heaven song. Unto us a Son is given. Unto us a Child is born. Call him Wonderful Counselor and the Mighty God, Eternal Father. Come welcome the Child so holy. Come welcome the Prince of peace. People who are walking in darkness, shadow of night, rise and see the prophet's promise. Rise and see the wondrous sight and come live in the light of Christ. Raise the Christmas hallelujah. Raise the celebration song. From the throne of heaven's glory, Christ came down that we may rise. So come join the holy chorus. Come join the heaven song. Hallelujah!

### **Second Reading from Scripture Luke 2:1-20**

<sup>1</sup>In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. <sup>2</sup>This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. <sup>3</sup>All went to their own towns to be registered. <sup>4</sup>Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. <sup>5</sup>He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. <sup>6</sup>While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. <sup>7</sup>And she gave birth to her firstborn

son and wrapped him in bands of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no place in the guest room.

<sup>8</sup> Now in that same region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup> Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. <sup>10</sup> But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid, for see, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: <sup>11</sup> to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. <sup>12</sup> This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” <sup>13</sup> And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

<sup>14</sup> “Glory to God in the highest heaven,  
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

<sup>15</sup> When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” <sup>16</sup> So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the child lying in the manger. <sup>17</sup> When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child, <sup>18</sup> and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them, <sup>19</sup> and Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. <sup>20</sup> The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told them.

**Hymn** What Child Is This #140 PH

## **A Prayer for the World**

### **Offertory**

### **Invitation**

**Meditation** Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming – arr. Christina Harmon

### **Prayer of Dedication** (unison)

Emmanuel, God-with-us –

You have heard our earnest prayer, “O come, O come” –  
and, this night, you have opened our eyes again  
to the wonder of your presence, in Jesus.

Among the carols of the angels, singing of peace and good will,  
we have heard again the call to follow him  
into the true work of Christmas:  
the healing of wounds, the righting of wrongs,  
the restoring of relationships.

May the giving of these offerings of our treasure  
help us to be with him, and open our hearts to be with You –  
this holy night, tomorrow, and in time to come. Amen.

**Hymn Hark! The Herald Angels Sing #120 PH**

**Meditation “Feather in a Gale” Rev. Rick Spalding**

**Solo** Gesu Bambino – Pietro Yon (1886-1943) (sung in Italian)

Rebecca Shrimpton, solo

English translation: In the humble hut, in cold and poverty the holy infant is born, who the world will adore. Hosanna, hosanna, sing with a joyous heart, your shepherds and angels, O King of light and love. Come let us adore the Lord. O beautiful boy do not cry, Redeemer! Your mother cradles you, kisses you, oh Savior. Hosanna, hosanna, sing with a joyous heart, your shepherds and angels, oh King of light and love. Oh come let us adore the Lord!

**Third Reading from Scripture John 1:1...16 Christiane Alsop**

In the beginning was the Word.

And the Word was *with* God, and the Word was God.

The Word was in the beginning with God.

All things came into being through the Word,  
and without the Word not one thing came into being.

What has come into being in the Word was life,  
and the life was the light of all people.

The light shines in the darkness,  
and the darkness did not overcome it.

...The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him;  
yet the world did not know him.

He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him.

But to all who received him, who believed in his name,  
the Word gave power to become children of God –  
born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of human will,  
but born of God.

...And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

And we have seen his glory, full of grace and truth.

And from his fullness we have all received grace upon grace.

**Lighting of the Christ Candle**

Silent Night, Holy Night #138 PH

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.

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.

## **Blessing**

**Closing Song** God Be with You – Ralph Vaughn Williams (1872-1958)  
God be with you 'till we meet again; by His counsels guide, uphold you, with  
His sheep securely fold you; God be with you 'till we meet again.

**Our Deacons tonight are Paul Gudonis and Sue Parker.**

**Our Preacher tonight is Rick Spalding.** Rick retired in 2018 after nearly 20 years of service as Chaplain at Williams College in western Massachusetts – where his work included encouraging spiritual life and inter-faith collaboration among students representing most of the world's great religious traditions. He had previously served congregations in Boston, New York City, and Albany, and taught at Harvard Divinity School, Andover-Newton Theological School, and Trinity School in NYC.

Since retiring, Rick has served as Interim Senior Pastor at the First Presbyterian Church of Ann Arbor, Michigan and at Old South Church in Boston. He and his partner Peter Bubriski now live in Ipswich and feel very much at home on the North Shore - perhaps partly because Rick's grandfather grew up on Bridge Street here in Manchester.

**Listening devices** are available for those in need; they are at the back of the Sanctuary. Feel free to address a Deacon should you need help.

**We thank our trumpeters Kevin Tracy and Emily Dunbar.**

**The nativity scene on the altar is in celebration of Christmas Eve.**

**Learn more about First Parish online:**

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Website [www.firstparishchurch.org/](http://www.firstparishchurch.org/)

YouTube Worship Services

*Thank you to all who donated poinsettias or to the Deacon Fund for the Christmas season. If you donated a plant, you are invited to take it with you after this celebration.*

**IN LOVING MEMORY OF**

*Annie and Bill Emslie*

Sheila Carrassi

*Eugene and Mark Kasper, Isaac and Marjorie Lance*

Tom and Lynnée Lance and Family

*Vincent Terrill*

Susan Martineau

*Larry L. Larsen*

Jolene and Kate Larsen

*Violet Tracey, Olive Figureido, Garry and Natalie Ferreira*

Paul Driscoll and Nancy Peterson

*Mr. and Mrs. Robert W. Graul, Jr.*

Robert J. Graul

*Our Aunts, Karla Moran and Martha Sundell*

Lauren and Paul Gudonis

*Pauline and Ted Bzdula*

Paula Bzdula

*Loved Ones*

Molly Tyson and Liz Loomis

*John B. Ross and Barbara P. Percival*

Pam and Chip Price

*Yvonne Van Drunen-Thomsin*

Eric and Laura Thomsin

*Mom, Dad, and Wayne*

Jan Marshall

*Antone DeMoura Jr, Florence Lincoln DeMoura, Lincoln A. DeMoura, and*

*Lincoln H. DeMoura*

David DeMoura

**IN CELEBRATION OF**

*Our Loved Ones*

Mary and David Lumsden

**IN HONOR OF**

*In honor of Susan and Jeffrey Parker*

Muriel S. Parker