

Order of Worship
The First Sunday after Christmas
December 31, 2006
10 o'clock in the morning



Welcome to this Service of Worship at First Congregational Church as the old year draws to a close and we share in the afterglow of the Christmas event. May the songs that are sung, the prayers in which we share, and our common aspiration be a source of strength, seeing and renewal for all of us in the days and year before us.

First Congregational Church of Greenwich declares itself to be open and affirming; open to all for participation, membership, leadership and employment, and affirming of all who wish to join us as children of God. We continue to give thanks for God's guidance in our journey of faith.

PREPARING FOR WORSHIP

PRELUDE

John Stansell, organ

The Old Year Now is Passed Away *Johann Sebastian Bach*

CALL TO COMMUNITY

PRAISING GOD

CALL TO WORSHIP

NOTHING HERE.....

***OPENING HYMN AND PROCESSION**

Angels, From the Realms of Glory

Pilgrim Hymnal 117

to the tune REGENT SQUARE

OPENING PRAYER

O God, by the leading of a star
you showed to peoples of the earth
that your love takes form in our human lives.
Lead us, who know you now by faith,
to your presence that we may see
your glory face to face.
May the light of your Son
kindle kindness in our hearts

and shine forth through faith-filled lives,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

CONFESSING TO GOD

CALL TO CONFESSION

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

We confess,
O God of the Christmas message of Hope,
that we have often surrendered to the darkness
turning away from the light you bring in Christ.

We confess,
O God of the Christmas song of Joy,
that we are captive to discordant notes of complaint,
refusing to sing because we fear our harmonies.

We confess,
O God of the Christmas promise of Peace,
that we are a battlefield of conflicting desires,
ignoring that kind of surrender which carries
the seed of Victory.

Forgive us this day as manger-memories begin to fade,
for all in our lives which denies the Hope, the Song,
the Peace, which Christ brings
for we would be restored to a right spirit this day.
In the spirit of Christ we pray. Amen.

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 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.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE

Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia.

HEARING GOD'S WORD

FIRST LESSON

Beth Beam

Ephesians 5: 8 - 14

For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light—for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, 'Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.'

SCRIPTURE ANTHEM

When God's Time Had Ripened *Alfred Fedak*

When God's time had ripened, Mary's womb bore fruit,
Scion of the Godhead, sprung from Jesse's root:
So the True Vine branches from the lily's stem,
The Rose without blemish blooms in Bethlehem.

More than mind can fathom, limit or untwine,
This mysterious yoking, human and divine,
But what reason fetters faith at length unlocks,
And wise hearts discover truth in paradox.

As the Bread of heaven, that we might be fed,
Chose a manger cradle in the House of Bread*,
So had Life Eternal mingled in the womb
With our mortal nature to confound the tomb.

For this swaddled infant in a humble place
Holds our hope of glory and our means of grace;
In the Love enfleshed here dawns the world's rebirth,
Promise of salvation, pledge of peace on earth.

Carl P. Daw, Jr.

*Bethlehem in Hebrew means “house of bread”

SECOND LESSON

Matthew 2: 1 - 12

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, ‘Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.’ When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:
“And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who is to shepherd my people Israel.”

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, ‘Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.’ When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

*SERMON HYMN

It Came Upon the Midnight Clear
to the tune CAROL

Pilgrim Hymnal 129

SERMON "Bethlehem and Back"

Dr. David D. Young

RESPONDING TO GOD

***AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

The star of Divine Promise shines before us still. Over a world of mute hopes, dim visions, dark fears, still the light shines. In a world shrouded by darkness both tragic and willful, still we proclaim: Our light has come. The glory of God shines upon us. For One born of God is born of our own flesh, and the One is light for our lives. As we receive the light and let it shine through us, it rises as a beacon for a darkened world. The peoples shall stream toward its promise; meek and mighty alike share in its dawning brightness. Then all shall say: Arise! The glory of God is upon us!

***Gloria Patri** (*Pilgrim Hymnal 513*)

Glory be to the father, and to the Son, and to the Holy ghost; As it was in the beginning, is now, and every shall be, world without end. Amen. Amen.

CALL TO OFFERING

OFFERTORY ANTHEM

The Chancel Choir

Now Greet the Swiftly Changing Year *Alfred Fedak*

(text and tune are at New Century Hymnal 431)

***DOXOLOGY** (*Pilgrim Hymnal 515*)

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**

SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER (seated)

PRAYER OF CONSECRATION

SERVING OF THE BREAD AND CUP

Those receiving communion are asked to come forward by the center aisle, receive the bread, proceed to the cup for intinction, then return to their seats by the side aisles.

UNISON PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

Glory to you, O God, our Emmanuel. who has fed and nurtured us by

word and sacrament. Now, empower us by your Spirit to live to your glory, to serve in your name, to bring justice and freedom for all. In the name of Jesus, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

GOING FORTH TO SERVE GOD

***CLOSING HYMN AND PROCESSION**

On This Day Earth Shall Ring

Pilgrim Hymnal 136

to the tune PERSONENT HODIE

***CLOSING SENTENCES**

Leader: Lord, loosen in me the hold of visible things;
Help me to walk by faith and not by sight;

People: *I would, through thickset veils and coverings,
See into the chambers of the living light.*

Leader: Lord, in the land of things that swell and seem,
Help me to walk by the other light supreme,

People: *Which shows thy facts behind my vaguely hinting dream.*

-George MacDonald

***BENEDICTION**

POSTLUDE

In Thee is Gladness *Johann Sebastian Bach*

Ushers: Peter Schay, Bobbie Littlefield, Ken Olsson, William and Mary Jane Penwell

Deacons Serving Communion

Greeters and Coffee Hour Hosts: Olga, Chris, Meg and Sherman Hartwell and Meg Sherman

Calendar

THIS WEEK

The Church Offices will be closed tomorrow for New Year's Day.

NEWS AND NOTICES

Hospital Admissions

Are you or a loved one going into the hospital? If so, would you please contact the church office at 637.1791. Or upon admission, please list First Congregational Church of Greenwich as your church affiliation. Similarly,

if you know someone who is homebound and would benefit from a Clergy or Parish Nurse visit, please let the church know.

Individual Counseling for Medicare Part D

Half hour sessions will be offered right here at church, thanks to some volunteers who have generously offered their time, talents, and laptops. Contact Parish Nurse Sue Asselin to reserve a time, or leave a message on extension 21 and the Wellness Committee will return your call.