

Greetings members and friends of the First Congregational Church of Shelburne,

This Sunday is the Fourth and final Sunday in Advent. The attached worship resource follows the Advent Service video. This Sunday we light the candle of Love.

Christmas Eve: We are offering two worship opportunities. There will be a prerecorded Christmas Eve service from our sanctuary. The link to this YouTube video will be posted on our church web page. On Christmas Eve, at 7 PM. we will be gathering through Zoom for a service that will include prayer, scripture, music, and candle lighting. The link to this service will be available by December 24th. If you plan to participate, please have a candle ready to light.

Sunday after Christmas, December 27. In next week's email note, there will be a link to the December 27 video and another link to the order for that service in PDF. This service has been produced by our Conference and I hope to take advantage of this opportunity.

Prayer Requests: There were three prayer requests that were sent out last Sunday. Here is one more for your prayer life this week. **Barbara Goodchild** is scheduled for outpatient hernia surgery on December 22. Please offer prayers for a successful surgery and quick recovery.

Wishing you peaceful last days of Advent in the midst of an otherwise tumultuous month.

Pastor Rob

Welcome to the Fourth Sunday of Advent

December 20, 2020

Good Morning to our members and friends at home,

This Sunday marks the fourth and final Sunday of Advent. With only days to go before Christmas Day, our question comes to us from the Christmas Story as the shepherds are visited by the heavenly host, *Who is this child?* While not specifically asked by the shepherds, it is included in their decision to go to Bethlehem and see for themselves.

Prayer Requests: We are accepting requests for prayer (healing, comfort, thanksgiving, and others). Please send your requests to the Pastor at pastor01089@gmail.com. Requests will then be sent out through our email list to the congregation for our common prayer life during the week. PLEASE remember that all prayer requests received become public knowledge. If you are uncertain if your request for another might be confidential, do not send it.

Lighting of the Advent Wreath: The Candle of Love

Call to Worship (Responsive, L=Leader, P=People) Isaiah 9:6

L To us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder and his name shall be called:

P Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Opening Hymn: #117, *Angels, From the Realms of Glory*

Unison Morning Prayer and Lord's Prayer

As a mother loves her son, so, O God, do you love your creation and your people. As a father reaches out to his children, so, O God, do you reach out to us. As you reach out to us in love, we pray for your gifts of the Holy Spirit that we may be renewed for ministry in the name of Christ, who taught us to pray saying...*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.*

Prayers of the People

Loving God, to you be all honor, glory and power, to you be all praise and thanksgiving. For without your love, without your compassion, without your desire to reach out in the person of Jesus of Nazareth and without your gift of the Holy Spirit, we, your children, would be lost, far from home, without hope and unsure of your love. And I wonder, O God of love, how I have responded to the blessings I thank you for. I wonder how often I have been a disappointment, how often your love became a love of sadness at my foolishness, my arrogance and ignorance all rolled into one, with a touch of bitterness and a clever show of condescending contempt for my sisters and brothers. I wonder, O God of love, how often I have confessed that like your Apostle Paul "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate." I wonder why it is I understand who is my neighbor, and then pretend that they are not important. More times than I wish to remember. And you, God of love, ask a different question, you ask, ***do you love me?*** Do, I love you? Yes, Lord, I do, at least I desire in my heart to love you. And then you say, as you did to Peter, ***then, feed my sheep.*** If I feed the hungry, clothe the naked, comfort those who mourn, bring cheer to the broken of heart, does this then mean I love you?" ***Yes,*** you say, to tend to the needs of all those who are in need, those beyond your family and friends, beyond your neighbors and your community, ***to the ends of the earth,*** you say. To the least, you say. How often, I wonder have you been disappointed in the small pickings my love for you has produced. Grant, O God, that my love for you may bear more fruit for the building up of the body of Christ, for the coming of your Kingdom, for bringing a little more of your love into this world. Do I love you? Yes, Lord, you know that I do. And more than that, I know that you love me. I rejoice in your love, I sing your praises for this love, I cannot count the ways that your love has touched me, in plenty and in want, in sickness and in health, in my joy and in my sorrow, Your right hand holds me, and even my darkness is not dark to you. Your love brings its own light that lifts me up and sets my feet on solid ground and lights the way before me. To live into your love is to feel your arms around me, to live into your love, to know that I am where you desire me to be, that I am listening for your prompting voice, and that I have taken hold of the gifts of your Holy Spirit. To live into

your love, is to love those around me, those I know, those I shall never meet, those whom you love as you love me. To live into your love is to feed your sheep, wherever I may find them. Do I love you? Yes, Lord, and I know you love me.

So, hear these my prayers, for those we love, for those we do not know and who work on our behalf, for those in need, even to the ends of this earth... Gracious God, who loves us and all the rest, we know that all things are possible with you, even to bring our love beyond the places it is usually kept. These prayers we offer in Christ's name, Amen.

Scripture Reading: Luke 2:8-15

One of the most familiar biblical scenes is that of the shepherds in the fields outside of Bethlehem and the arrival of the heavenly host. Over the centuries, artists have portrayed that passage, musicians have created compositions based on it and carolers sing about it every year. The image that is often brought to mind is the shepherds looking up at one angel surrounded by the glowing figures of hundreds, even thousands more. The shepherds, after listening to the angel and hearing the song of the heavenly host, decide to make the journey to Bethlehem to see for themselves who this child is.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 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: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

"Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"

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."

Here ends the scripture lesson for today.

Sermon: *The Questions of Advent: Who Is This Child?*

This sermon may be viewed in this Sunday's YouTube video.

The link to this video may be found on our web page, shelburnechurch.org.

Hymn: #116, *Angels We Have Heard on High*

Benediction: Handley C.G. Moule, 1841-1920

The blessing of the Lord rest and remain upon all his people,
in every land and of every tongue.
The Lord meet in mercy all who seek him;

The Lord comfort all who suffer and mourn;
The Lord hasten his coming, and give us,
His people, Love, by all means. Amen.