

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
of Los Angeles

An Epiphany Celebration

January 5th, 2025



Star of Mother of the World, Nicholas Roerich 1924

540 S. Commonwealth Avenue, Los Angeles, California 90020
Telephone 213.385.1341 – www.FCCLA.org

The Gathering of the People

First Congregational Church of Los Angeles is a safe place for all people, and we celebrate our diversity of race, creed, age, ability, gender, religion, cultural background, sexual orientation, gender identities and expressions... We extend a warm welcome to all this morning and especially those who are with us for the first time. Your presence both enriches us and this time of celebration together ~

Organ Prelude Concert

Dr. Christoph Bull, Organist-in- Residence

Carol Medley:

STILL STILL STILL, JOSEPH LIEBER JOSEPH MEIN, CRANHAM, GARTAN,
ORIENTIS PARTIBUS, IN DULCI JUBILO, AWAY IN A MANGER,
O JESULEIN SÜSS, KINGS OF ORIENT, GO TELL IT ON THE MOUNTAIN

Puer natus in Bethlehem (Dietrich Buxtehude) and Improvisation

The Star Proclaims (Flor Peeters)

Break Forth, O Beauteous Heavenly Light (Friedrich Wilhelm Marpurg)
and Improvisation

Chiming of the Hour

Welcome

Words of Gathering

Rev. Laura Vail Fregin & Greyson Kentopp

As we gather together in this sacred space,
We acknowledge the presence of God, our Eternal source of wisdom.
*We are grateful this morning
that the New Year brings new light,
new hope, and, most of all, new questions.*

Where God's light shines, possibility opens,
a way, a word, a child, a gift.
We find paths where before there were only walls.
We hear the call of God's claim on our lives.
We remember a child born with a promise
that will transform hearts forever after.
*We accept the gifts that have been given,
needing and receiving them over and over again.
What God brings to us in Epiphany is possibility,
a threshold that we can step over into wholeness.*

What is revealed there may not be what we expected
as surely as what the shepherds and the sages saw
was unexpected and puzzling.
But the revelation of God's word made flesh
helps us live with all of our deepest questions.
*We give thanks to God for the unexpected,
for the light that opens us up, leads us on,
and keeps us always seeking after God's call on our lives.*

Together, on this morning that has never been before,
let us give thanks for the opportunity
to open our hearts, our minds, and our bodies
to the light of the Holy One!

May it be so.
May it be so for all of us!

Please stand now in body or in spirit for our Hymn of Gathering

***Hymn of Gathering**

Epiphany Carol

BEACH SPRING

Every Nation sees the glory of a star that pierced the night.
As we tell the wondrous story we are bathed in radiant light.
Star sent forth from highest heaven, dancing light of God's design,
shine upon us on the gift that's given: Word of flesh now born in time.

Every tongue shall sing the praises of your birth in deepest night.
You are healing for the ages; you are the Christ, our God's delight.
You proclaim within your being all our hopes, our great desires.
You shall live to rise, redeeming all who follow with their lives.

Once again may we discover Word made flesh sent from above.
In our neighbor, sibling, family, in the lonely and unloved.
May we touch you, may we hold you, may we cradle you with care
as we learn to love each other, bringing hope out of despair.

Gather, God, the world together in the brightness of your day.
Fill our hearts with joy forever: help us walk the holy way.
May your justice rule the nations; may all people live as one.
Now we see our true salvation in the glory of this One.

-Lyrics by Francis Patrick O'Brien [adapted]

***Prayer of Awareness**

Rev. Chad Tanaka Pack

O Star-flinging God,
whose light dances across eternity,
dazzle us in your presence
this new year.
Open our hearts to the mystery of your love.

Awaken us to your presence,
knit to the ordinary.
Reveal to us what is possible, but not yet present.
Heal us, that we might be healers.

Reconcile us to you and to ourselves,
that our living might be reconciling.
Stop us often, we pray
with news that is good
with hope that holds
with truth that transforms with a Word
tailored to this path we are on together.

*May words of grace guide our steps
like the sun by day
and the north star by night,
as we travel into this gift of a new year.*

[Glenn Mitchell]

May it be so.

*May it be so for all of us!
Amen and Amen.*

***Introit**

"Glory To God"

Laude, Dr. Fahad Siadat, Assistant Director

G.F. HANDEL

***The Lord's Prayer**

*Our [God], who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name,
thy kindom 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 kindom,
and the power, and the glory,
forever. Amen.*

Greyson Kentopp

***Gloria Deo**

Glory be to God, and to the Christ and to the Holy Ghost,
As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be.
World without end, Amen, Amen.

***Passing of the Peace**

Whichever way we turn, O God, there is your face:
in the light of the moon and patterns of stars,
in scarred mountain rifts and ancient groves,
in mighty seas and creatures of the deep.

Whichever way we turn, O God, there is your face:
in the light of eyes we love,
in the salt of tears we have tasted,
in weathered countenances east and west,
in the soft skin glow of the child everywhere.

Whichever way we turn, O God, there is your face,
there is your face
among us. [jphilipnewell]

Rev. Tanaka Pack

Today and in all the days to come,
may the love and peace of God be with you.
And also with you!

You are invited to share this ancient greeting with a bow.

Please be seated

Reading from Our Religious Tradition *from the Gospel of Matthew*

This is the Gospel of Grace.

Thanks be to God!

Greyson Kentopp

Prayers with the People

Invitation to Silence and Prayer

Silence

Rev. Tanaka Pack

Prayer of Our Hearts

Holy One, closer to us than our own hearts,
farther from us than the most distant star,
you are beyond naming.

May your powerful presence become obvious
not only in the undeniable glory of the sky,
but also in the seemingly base and common
processes of the earth.

Give us what we need, day by day,
to keep body and soul together,
because clever as you have made us,
we still owe our existence to you.

We recognize that to be in harmony in this world,
we must live peaceably and justly with
other human beings,
putting hate and bitterness behind us.

We are torn between our faith in your goodness
and our awareness of the evil that exists in your creation,
so please deliver us from the temptation to despair.

*Yours alone Holy One, is the universe
and all its majesty and beauty.*

So it is...so may it be.

Amen and Amen.

[adapt/Jim Burklo]

Meditation Anthem

"Come Unto Me"
Laude, Molly Pease, Soloist

Sermon

Ladder to the Light

Rev. Fregin

Invitation to Generosity

At First Church, we consider every pledge, tithe, offering and contribution a gift for the life of our community of faith. No matter how it's given, our gifts show gratitude. You are invited to visit our website at fccla.org/give. Our hospitality team will also be available at the exits when the service ends with baskets to collect gifts.

Rev. Tanaka Pack

Offertory

"Bring a Torch, Jeannette Isabella"
Laude

arr. ALICE PARKER & ROBERT SHAW

***Doxology**

From all that dwell below the skies,
let the Creator's praise arise!
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Your name shall sound and praises soar
till suns shall rise and set no more.
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

[adapt/Isaac Watts, 1719]

***Prayer of Offering**

Greyson Kentopp

Holy One,
light of the world,
be present in us this morning.

Rooted in your love,
filled with your peace,
illumined by your grace,
may we always be.

Kindle our hearts into quiet strength,
calm our spirits in to restoration
that we may give all that we are
and all that we have,
to bring wholeness to your world again.
Amen and Amen!

Please be seated

Life at First Church

Rev. Fregin & Rev. Tanaka Pack

Words of Blessing

Rev. Fregin

When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the magi and princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flock,
The work of Christmas begins:
To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among others,
To make music in the heart.

[Howard Thurman]

May it be so!

May it be so for all of us!

Choral Response

"In Dulci Jublio"
Laude

TRADITIONAL CAROL

*"In sweet rejoicing, now sing and be glad! Our hearts' joy lies in the manger;
And it shines like the sun in the mother's lap."*

*Hymn for the Journey

As with Gladness

DIX

As with gladness sages bold did the guiding star behold;
as with joy they hailed its light, leading onward, beaming bright;
so, true Morning Star, may we evermore your splendor see.

As with joyful steps they sped to that lowly manger bed,
there to bend the knee before One whom heaven and earth adore;
so may we with willing feet every seek your mercy seat.

As they offered gifts most rare at the manager plain and bare,
so may we with holy joy, pure and free from all's alloy,
all our costliest treasures bring, Christ, to you from whom they spring.

Please be seated for the Postlude

Postlude

Dr. Christoph Bull, Organist-in-Residence
WACHET AUF (Karl Karow)

Inside The Music

"The last Sunday of Christmastide is always a wonderful moment to revisit favorite carols we haven't yet sung. Today we feature some more of my favorites that you might have less experience with. Bernice Johnson Reagan's "Come Unto Me" may be my new favoritest Christmas carol. I love so much about it. She achieves such a warmth and ease that the incredibly important text almost seems to evaporate into the music. And, unlike a lot of other settings that use the third person pronoun "he/him" ("come unto him and he will give you rest"), Johnson Reagan uses first person pronouns as the text appears in the Bible ("come unto me and I will give you rest"). Not only is her version more accurate to the original text, it moves the energy of the words in a different way. The singer now inhabits the divine grace of the words as well. We are brought into direct relationship with God as practitioners in the cause of peace. I've always loved "Bring a Torch" and "In Dulci Jubilo" for their medieval triple time lilts. "Bring a Torch" comes from France in the 17th century, and "In Dulci Jubilo" is one of the first Christmas carols we know about. Christmas carols were initially sung as a way to tell the Christmas story to people outside of church settings. At the time, only Latin was able to be sung in the church. Carols were typically sung in the vernacular of the area, since many people couldn't understand Latin. "In Dulci Jubilo" mixes the vernacular German with some Latin phrases. "Bring a Torch" tells the story just after the birth through a mythical other "Jeanette Isabella," a milkmaid who has been called to come see the baby. I love her story, and the thought of a child running to witness the birth through her child-like lens. Even today in Province, where the song originated, kids dress up like the characters in the song for Christmas festivities." ~ Dr. David Harris