

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH  
*of Los Angeles*

*The Light of Epiphany*

*4 January 2026*



*Advent Starry Night 4* © 2010 Virginia Wieringa,  
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## 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 ~

*Please note that our services are live streamed at [fccla.org/live](http://fccla.org/live).*

## Organ Prelude Concert

**Dr. Christoph Bull, Organist-in-Residence**

Carol Medley:

DIVINUM MYSTERIUM, 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

**Rev. Laura Vail Fregin**

### Words of Gathering

**Rev. Fregin & Rev. Jerod Yates**

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 Christmas**

*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. Fregin

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**

*"Joyful, Joyful"*

Laude, Molly Pease, Soloist, Dr. Fahad Siadat, Assistant Director

arr. MARK SHAIMAN

**\*The Lord's Prayer**

**Rev. Yates**

*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.*

**\*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**

**Rev. Fregin**

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]

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*

**A Reading From the Gospel**      *The Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 2*

**Rev. Yates**

This is the Gospel of Grace.  
*Thanks be to God!*

**Prayers with the People**

**Rev. Fregin**

**Invitation to Silence and Prayer**

*After the silence, we invite you to come and light candles for  
the prayers of your hearts and for the life of the world.*

*Silence*

**Prayer of Our Hearts**

**Rev. Fregin**

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**

*"The Three Kings"*  
Laude, Scott Graff, Soloist

PETER CORNELIUS

**Sermon**

*The Light of Noticing*

**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 they're given,  
our gifts show gratitude. You are invited to visit our website at fccla.org/give.  
Our hospitality team will also bring baskets for your in-person gifts during the Offertory.*

**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]

**\*Offering Prayer**

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

**Rev. Yates**

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

*Please be seated*

## Life at First Church

Rev. Fregin

### 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 both now,  
all in all the days to come!*

### 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.

### Postlude

Dr. Christoph Bull, Organist-in-Residence

Fugue in C Major (Dietrich Buxtehude)

### Inside The Music

"In "The Three Kings," Cornelius, writing in the 19th century, pairs a new melody with the 16th century "How Brightly Shines The Morning Star" by Nicolai. The result is a delightfully dramatic contrast. Nicolai's hymn, sung by the choir, holds place for the star. The music depicts the star as stable, clear, and ever-present. Their text reminds us of the Christmas story, our place therein, and the love that resides at its center. The soloist sings Cornelius' ranging melody. His music leaps and turns across the staff. It is the music of a pilgrimage, of people who are seeking something of which they are confident, but don't know exactly where to find it. Cornelius' text for this line tells the Wise One's story. The two

narrative threads grow closer together as the song nears its end. The choir sings “inly feed us, rightly lead us” as the soloist sings “the star of grace will lead thy heart to its resting place.” The journeywork of the solo line has entered the star’s visage just as the star’s centering presence has become a home for the seekers. In a truly 19th century poetic turn, the piece ends with the chorus singing it’s fullest moment on “praise thy love overflowing,” and slowly returning from their climax to their more centering dynamic. The soloist delivers a favorite line of Cornelius’ era “offer thy heart!” As the two lines merge, the love that is at the center of the story greets the seeker’s heart, offering love as the ultimate gift. The exclamation point is important, as it seems to signify the belief that people hadn’t considered this option. Far from being facetious, I interpret the common 19th century phrase as a recognition that people so easily forget to center love. Christmas gives us a moment to renew our focus on love. The promise of the season all too quickly gets consumed in the rush of returning to our patterns. As we enter the season of light, let us remember that the stories we live by are complicated, and an exclamation point on our dedication to love might be just the encouragement we need.”

~ Dr. David Harris

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