



First Congregational Church of Anoka United Church of Christ

An Open and Affirming Congregation

January 1, 2023 ♦ First Sunday after Christmas



This bulletin is designed to assist you as you watch our livestreamed worship service, whether you follow along live or view it at a later time.

The stream can be found on our YouTube channel at this location:

<https://www.youtube.com/@AnokaUCC>

Welcome & Announcements

If you are a guest with us today, welcome! If you are comfortable sharing your information with us, there are cards in the pew holders that you can use for that purpose (place them in the offering plate).

If you would like to join our mailing list, email office@uccanoka.org and ask to be added.

Prelude

Koki Sato

The Church Bell Rings

* Carol

“O Come, All Ye Faithful” #135 (*alt.*)

**O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant, O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem!
Come and behold him, born the king of angels: O come let us adore him,
O come let us adore him, O come let us adore him, Christ the Lord!**

**Sing choirs of angels, sing in exultation, sing all ye citizens of heaven above!
“Glory to God, all glory in the highest!” O come let us adore him,
O come let us adore him, O come let us adore him, Christ the Lord!**

**Yea, Lord, we greet thee, born this happy morning, Jesus, to thee be all glory given;
Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing; O come let us adore him,
O come let us adore him, O come let us adore him, Christ the Lord!**

* Opening Psalms (100 and 150)

One: Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth.

Many: We worship you, O God, with gladness and singing!

One: Know that the LORD is God. It is God who made us. We are God’s people and the sheep of God’s pasture.

Many: We enter God’s gates and courts with thanksgiving and praise. We thank you, O God, and bless your name!

One: For the LORD is good, and her steadfast love endures forever.

Many: God, your faithfulness lasts through all generations!

One: Let us sing psalms and songs to the Lord!

Many: Praise the LORD! Praise God in the sanctuary and in the firmament! Praise God for mighty deeds and surpassing greatness! Praise God with trumpet sound, with lute and harp! Praise God with tambourine and dance, with strings and pipe! ⁵ Praise God with clanging cymbals, with loud clashing cymbals! ⁶ Let everything that breathes praise the LORD! Praise the LORD!

Carol

“Joy to the World!” #132 (*alt.*)

Joy to the world! The Lord is come; let earth receive her king!

**Let every heart prepare him room, and heaven and nature sing,
and heaven and nature sing, and heaven, and heaven and nature sing.**

**Joy to the earth! The Savior reigns! Let all their songs employ;
while fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains repeat the sounding joy,
repeat the sounding joy, repeat, repeat the sounding joy.**

**He rules the world with truth and grace and makes the nations prove
the glories of his righteousness and wonders of his love,
and wonders of his love, and wonders, wonders of his love.**

A Time for Children (10:30)

*ADVISORY: The livestream of the service continues during the Children's Time;
if your child sits facing the Pastor their face shouldn't appear on camera.*

The Baptism of Amelia Rose Twite (b. 6/3/22)

Parents: Cassandra and Jacob Twite

Godparents: Molly and Garret Leonard

Introduction

One: In the sacrament of baptism, we are following an ancient custom. Mary and Joseph brought the infant Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem to be blessed and named as God's own. In the early Christian church, entire households, including children, were initiated into the faith through baptism. When John baptized Jesus, this is what Jesus came to know in that moment: after he was baptized and while he was praying, he knew God loved him deeply.

We believe God made human life to be good and that children share in the original blessing of all living things. In this moment of dedication and grace we praise the goodness of God.

Questions and Promises of Parents

One: As parents, do you desire to have your child baptized into the faith and family of Jesus Christ? If so, please say, "We do."

Parents: We do.

One: Will you raise Millie in a home where trust is cultivated, love is your guiding principle, and a spirit of grace prevails? If so, please say, "We will."

Parents: We will.

One: Will you participate in communities and provide opportunities for Millie to encounter that which is sacred and worthy in life and where they may learn and appreciate the Christian heritage? If so, please say, "We will."

Parents: We will.

One: Will you teach Millie to follow in Christ's way, to resist evil, to stand up against injustice and to serve others? If so, please say, "We will."

Parents: We will.

One: Remembering God's great love for us, will you teach Millie to love others with all their strength, soul, heart, and mind? If so, please say, "We will."

Parents: We will.

Questions of Sponsors

One: As Millie's sponsors, do you promise, with God's help, to guide and encourage the spirit of this child and to help their parents keep the promises they have made? If so, please say, "We do."

Sponsors: We do.

Congregational Promise

One: Let us, the community of First Congregational Church, pledge our love and support to this family.

Many: We covenant with you on behalf of your child. We rejoice in the hope and love which they represent. We unite with you to labor and pray for their spiritual growth, that they may know and trust the goodness of God. On behalf of the whole church of Jesus Christ, we welcome them.

Baptismal Prayer

One: Let us pray. Creator God, loving parents have come into your presence this morning. Fill them with your wisdom so they may teach Millie to know and love God. May they and their child be ever conscious of the beauty of the world and the goodness that surrounds them. May they have the courage to face evil and the faith to transcend it. Grant them strength of body and clarity of spirit, that that they may enjoy fullness of years and live to do your will in faithfulness.

As the Baptismal waters are blessed:

Recalling now your endless and boundless love, we ask that you bless this water, that it might be for us both symbol and substance of your love, reminding us to be your servants to the world for all our days. Amen.

Baptism

One: What name have you given your child?

Parents: Amelia Rose Twite

One: Amelia Rose Twite, I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, One God, Mother of us all.

Congregational Blessing

One: Let us now, as the people of God and the Body of Christ, bless this child together:

Many: May your names be honored and respected for wisdom and good deeds. May God's blessing be upon you, now and always. May you be a joy to your families and may you bring blessing to humanity and glory to the name of God. We welcome you into our midst on behalf of the whole church of Jesus Christ.

Hymn of Blessing

“Away in a Manger” #137

**Away in a manger, no crib for his bed,
the little lord Jesus lay down his sweet head.
The stars in the sky looked down where he lay,
the little Lord Jesus, asleep on the hay.
The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes,
but little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes.
I love thee, Lord Jesus, look down from the sky,
and stay by my cradle 'til morning is nigh.**

Sunday School is on holiday break today.
Activity bags are available in the back of the sanctuary for those who might enjoy them.

Special Music

“Ripple”

Hunter/Garcia

Alice and Randy Getchell; Mike Benz

*If my words did glow with the gold of sunshine / And my tunes were played on the harp unstrung
Would you hear my voice come through the music / Would you hold it near as it were your own?
It's a hand-me-down, the thoughts are broken / Perhaps they're better left unsung
I don't know, don't really care / Let there be songs to fill the air
Ripple in still water / When there is no pebble tossed / Nor wind to blow
Reach out your hand if your cup be empty / If your cup is full may it be again
Let it be known there is a fountain / That was not made by the hands of men
There is a road, no simple highway / Between the dawn and the dark of night
And if you go no one may follow / That path is for your steps alone
Ripple in still water / When there is no pebble tossed / Nor wind to blow
You who choose to lead must follow / But if you fall you fall alone
If you should stand then who's to guide you? / If I knew the way I would take you home*

Sermon

Rev. Chris McArdle

Carol

“Good Christian Friends, Rejoice” #129 (alt.)

**Good Christian friends, rejoice with heart and soul and voice;
give ye heed to what we say: Jesus Christ is born today!
Ox and ass before him bow, and he is in the manger now.
Christ is born today! Christ is born today!**

**Good Christian friends, rejoice with heart and soul and voice;
now ye hear of endless bliss; Jesus Christ was born for this!
God has opened heaven's door, and we are blessed forevermore.
Christ was born for this! Christ was born for this!**

**Good Christian friends, rejoice with heart and soul and voice;
now ye need not fear the grave; Jesus Christ was born to save!
Calls you one and calls you all to gain the everlasting hall.
Christ was born to save! Christ was born to save!**

Offering

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Thank you for your gifts to our ministries!

You may also set up online giving at uccanoka.org or text your gift to the church using the Text-to-Give number above; both services are provided by Vanco. Thank you!

Offertory

Koki Sato

Refrain

“Angels We Have Heard on High” #125 (v.4)

**See the babe in manger laid whom the choirs of angels praise.
Mary, Joseph, lend your aid, while our hearts in love we raise.
Gloria in excelsis Deo! Gloria in excelsis Deo!**

Prayer of Our Savior (unison)

*The Prayer has many versions; pray whichever you desire (debts, sins, trespasses, etc.).
We affirm that God has many names, so use one of the suggested or another of your choosing.*

Our Father/Mother/Creator, 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.

Benediction

Carol

“Angels We Have Heard on High” #125 (vv. 1-3)

**Angels we have heard on high, sweetly singing o’er the plains,
and the mountains in reply echo back their joyous strains.
Gloria in excelsis Deo! Gloria in excelsis Deo!**

**Shepherds, why this jubilee? Why your joyous strains prolong?
Say what may the tidings be, which inspire your heavenly song.
Gloria in excelsis Deo! Gloria in excelsis Deo!**

**Come to Bethlehem and see him whose birth the angels sing;
come, adore on bended knee, Christ, the Lord, the newborn King!
Gloria in excelsis Deo! Gloria in excelsis Deo!**

Postlude

Koki Sato

You may be seated as you listen to the Postlude. If you choose to depart at this time, please speak gently as you exit out of respect for those who choose to listen.

Acknowledgements

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Sermon Text

Like many of you who have been members of this church for a long time, “my” hymnal is the *Pilgrim Hymnal*, the hymnal of the Congregational Church that was first printed in 1904. This was the hymnal in the pews of the First Congregational Church of Crete, Nebraska. This was the hymnal that I would do pencil rubbings on so that the cross on the cover was transferred to my bulletin. I used to be able to tell you without looking what hymn kicked off the Christmas section—it’s #116, “Angels We Have Heard on High.”

The *Pilgrim Hymnal* was my first and primary source of religious education, in many ways more enduring than Sunday School or Bible Study, because the stories of our faith are contained in those pages. Often unconsciously, I learned those stories through the repetition of beloved hymns like “Be Thou My Vision,” “Christ the Lord Is Risen Today,” “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,” and of course all those Christmas hymns. The hymnal even fed my youthful patriotism, inasmuch as there’s a whole section in there with national hymns that includes “My Country ‘Tis of Thee” and the National Anthem.

Funny enough, I only discovered just how formative the *Pilgrim Hymnal* was for me when I botched my second-level oral exams in seminary. What my teachers realized was that though I professed to have come to a particular theological point of view that was the product of my progressive education, there was a deeper foundation upon which it sat that I later realized was based in that hymnal. I just didn’t know it! Once I did, I was able to unpack all that stuff I had inherited and decide what parts to embrace and what parts to jettison as the product of an unhelpful theology.

I suppose that’s what the committee was trying to do when the *New Century Hymnal* was assembled for its 1995 publication. Whether they conveyed that to the general membership of the denomination is another matter entirely! For this I can tell you: even though there were little paperback samplers in our pews for some time before our church switched from *Pilgrim* to *New Century*, those samplers didn’t really touch on Christmas.

Uh oh.

After we got home from Christmas Eve worship on that first year with the new hymnal, my dad admitted that he had almost gotten up and walked out of church. He wasn’t the only one; I think he had already water-cooled with several other folks at church who were equally put out about the changes to the traditional Christmas carols. I wasn’t really in disagreement with them, either. It took me a LONG time before I understood what the hymn committee was trying to do and regard it with some grace. I can do that now, and in fact I love the *New Century Hymnal*. But that doesn’t stop me from using different lyrics at Christmastime.

In a nutshell, the framers of the hymnal were trying to move the church away from language that upheld patriarchy. That meant that they stopped almost all gendered references to Jesus, such as in the change from **the babe, the son of Mary** to the “child” of Mary. They removed gendered references to God, as well, and they removed references to monarchy because that was always about kings. Anything that sounded vaguely militaristic was changed or removed like “Onward Christian Soldiers.” They even tried to largely end any use of the word “Lord,” believing that it invoked a slave-master relationship that was offensive to our black neighbors. Given my own experience of black worship and the kind of language

used in those services, I'm not certain they asked many black people what they thought about that particular change.

All of that change was laudable—but when those changes were also applied to traditional Christmas hymns, rebellion sprouted up among the pews of the local congregations, including mine! It certainly didn't help that by that time our pastor was operating a bit too authoritatively, because he made the unilateral decision to stack all of the *Pilgrim Hymnals* in the back of the church and let members take them home. They eventually got their hands on a bunch of *Pilgrim Hymnals* from another church that was getting rid of them, but that took time. In the meantime, that change was hard to accept.

I mostly just wanted to share that story with you today, but I suppose there's something to it. The *New Century* assemblers did their job with the very best of intentions, but it nonetheless carried unintended consequences. Isn't that true all over the place? Something that was intended to be whole ended up feeling broken, or to put it another way, something that was intended to bring about a fuller wholeness in the singer ended up breaking them a bit in the jarring lyrics of something unfamiliar.

That song from Alice and Randy and Mike, "Ripple" by the Grateful Dead, isn't in any way a Christmas song, but I insisted that they still sing it today. The lyrics made me think of this whole flap about the *New Century Hymnal* and the way it changed familiar lyrics. Some in the church thought that the *New Century* songs were best left unsung, and while that argument won in some churches, I'm glad it failed in others. That hymnal did make some good changes, after all. I far prefer to sing, "Good Christian Friends, Rejoice" instead of "Good Christian Men, Rejoice" or the way my former pastor's wife had us do it, "Good Christian Folk, Rejoice." Navigating these efforts to let our lyrics lead us into a more expansive understanding of God's love isn't a simple highway!

In the end, that second verse really gets at it, with the first part of the verse speaking to the conflict, and the second part to the gracious resolution:

**It's a hand-me-down, the thoughts are broken
perhaps they're better left unsung
I don't know; don't really care;
let there be songs to fill the air.**

Let there be songs to fill the air. In the theology I embrace, the Holy Spirit plays a role in *all* music. All of it. Music is the language of the Spirit, of God's holy breath. Music transports us. It can sometimes carry us into thin spaces where we can more easily feel the presence of God, even if that music is subversive or disturbing. It's not for nothing that I routinely tell people who are planning for funerals that they can choose any songs they want. One of the most moving musical experiences I've ever officiated in a funeral was when my church President's young son tragically died on Easter day. At his funeral, we processed into the community gymnasium behind the casket while Ozzy Osbourne's *Crazy Train* was playing over the assembly. Unusual? Yes. Holy? For certain. We did what needed to be done so that we could best hear the voice of the Spirit coming from within us.

That's why we still sing lyrics from *The Pilgrim Hymnal* at Christmastime, or at least I start with them and modify where I think the *New Century* got it right. The Spirit speaks as much from our past as it does our present. It speaks from old, browning pages with allegedly-backwards lyrics as much as it does from crisp, white, 21st-century pages with a more intentionally progressive theology. It speaks through "LORD" as well as "Sovereign." It sings to us in the dark of night between the dusk and the dawn.

Good Christian Friends, let us rejoice with heart and soul and voice. Let's embrace the movement of the Spirit in lyrics old and new. In dead languages and living languages. In tunes from Lowell, Mason, Wesley, and Watts, and tunes from Ozzy Osbourne and Jerry Garcia. For all lyrics written with love glow with the gold of sunshine, and are fit for us to proclaim the birth of the Sun of Righteousness!

Amen!

◆ **First Congregational Church UCC, Anoka, MN** ◆

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Director of Music Ministries – Don Shier

Keyboardist – Koki Sato

Moderator – Terja Larsen



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First Congregational Church, UCC of Anoka is an Open and Affirming Christian Community for all. We affirm that the image of God is most fully reflected in diversity. We invite all people to share their energy and talents in full participation with our community. We welcome all individuals and families of any sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, gender expression, relationship status, race, national origin, socioeconomic status, age, mental and physical health or ability, or belief. Together, we celebrate these and all other facets of one's essential being.