

EPISTLE

December 2019



Bradford Congregational Church – UCC
An Open & Affirming Congregation!
Bradford, VT (802) 222-4034

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Word from the Pastor

The Church, of all the institutions in the world, is the only one that sees beyond the celebration of Christ's birth to a larger and fuller vision. For the Church, this season of advent is not a commemoration of what happened long ago in some obscure Judean town, but the affirmation that it will happen yet again. The words we proclaim in the Lord's Prayer, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" are awaiting their final fulfillment and the Church lives in expectancy. We profess that Christ will come again and perfect justice and perfect love will govern the world. We have the audacity to proclaim that God is not done yet.

The secular observance of Christmas has removed this futuristic gaze. It is a celebration of what happened long ago. It does not look ahead. It turns and looks to the past. I suppose this is comforting. We can wrap the season in a cozy reminiscence of a past that commemorates what has happened but places little demand on the present. We are called by the secular world to remember rather than reform.

God's expectation of us is far more demanding than a reenactment of Jesus' birth. It calls us to look again for the inbreaking of God, to see in the ordinary, the veiling of God's mysterious presence. We do not know where Christ will come again, where the incarnate presence of God will make itself known. But we are called to expect it, to hone our senses, that our hearts and minds be quickened for the One who comes again. Advent is a time of introspection when we are called to ask ourselves if our lives are

attuned to God's coming. Because the fact of the matter is that most folks slept undisturbed when the first Christmas came long ago. Our task is to awaken to a presence that is about to come. Let us then live lives of expectant hope. Rather than celebrating what has been, may we live into the future of what will be.

Faithfully,
Pastor Jeff

From your Diaconate

There are a few copies of the perpetual Advent Family Devotional calendars on the sanctuary back table. Now out of print, these wonderful guides to keeping our focus during ther Advent season are hard to find online, but our intrepid Bridget Peters kept up the search and found these few. We are hopeful that every family in our congregation now has a copy!

ADVENT DEVOTIONALS, sponsored by your Board of Deacons, will be offered following our service of worship on **December 1st and 15th** in the vestry and will feature a potluck meal and a program for children. During Advent, Pastor Jeff will develop a sermon series with the overall theme of "Living In The Midst Of The Wait." Our sessions will build on this theme. Please plan on joining us as we seek to bring a spiritual understanding to the four Sundays in Advent; activities for the children will be provided. Pastor Jeff's outline of the discussions are below.

Living in the Midst of the Wait

Introduction to Session One, Dec 1 .,, Pastor Jeff

I would like to explore what it means for us to wait for the Kingdom of God. If we bring to Advent an awareness of what it means to wait in everyday life, then there are certain conditions which must be assumed:

- First, when we have to wait for an event, a physical object, or a person, we wait knowing what it is we are expecting. You cannot wait for what you do not know. Suppose you are waiting for guests to arrive. You have to know they are coming before you can say you are waiting for them.
- Second, you have some idea of what your guests' arrival will look like. There will be an unfamiliar car in your driveway or other telltale signs that people are on the premises.
- Third, you know where to expect your guests — they will, in all probability, come to the front door so you know when the doorbell rings that it is, most likely, your guests. But we are waiting for Christ to come again, for His Kingdom to be established.

So for our session today, let these be our guiding questions: 1. What is it that you are waiting for? Can you give any background? What drove you to wait for this particular thing? 2. When will you know that your wait is over?

Living in the Midst of the Wait

Introduction to Session Two, Dec 15 ... Pastor Jeff

In our last meeting, we discussed the nature of waiting. In this session I would like us to explore how we are to fashion our lives as Christians when what we longed for does not come into being. A gardener plants a seed and must wait for a plant to appear. Indeed, the gardener may not be privy to the moment the seed sends forth roots. The gardener must live trusting in what cannot be seen.

- How does this apply to your waiting for Christ and His Kingdom? Jesus states in Mark 1:15 "The kingdom of God is at hand."
- If this is true, when in your life have you experienced God's kingdom.
- A gardener cares for the seed by ensuring it is watered and not choked by weeds. If the kingdom of God is at hand, what must you do to care for God's kingdom?



December Schedule of worship:

Dec 1 – 10 am First Sunday of Advent (HOPE candle)

Part 1 potluck lunch and Advent discussion

Dec 8 – 10 am Second Sunday of Advent (PEACE candle)

Dec 15 – 10 am Third Sunday of Advent (JOY candle)

Pageant in worship service

Part 2 potluck lunch and Advent discussion

Dec 22 – 10 am Christmas Sunday (LOVE candle)

Dec 24 6:30 pm Candlelight Christmas Eve service

Dec 29 – 10 am service of Christmas carols

A reminder: every Communion Sunday the small "Diaconate Fund" envelopes are placed in the pews. It is through your generosity that the Fund is available for helping those in need, be it heating oil, electricity, shelter, food, or medicine. Every donation, no matter its size, is graciously accepted!

If you know of someone in our area who is in need, please contact any Deacon, Pastor Jeff, or our church's Care Coordinator Carole Taylor.

Keeping warm: this is a reminder that if you ever feel chilly in the sanctuary there are fleece throws hanging on the coat rack near the entrance. Please use them!

Do you have a spiritual concern? We urge you to contact Pastor Jeff or any one of us on the Diaconate to listen to you, pray with you and for you in confidence.

Blessings to you all, from your Board of Deacons

Musically speaking ...

The holiday season is now upon us to help dispel the gloom brought on by foul weather and short days! Specifically the Christmas Season begins officially with Advent on 1 December.

The music will become ever more "Christmasy" as the season progresses. We will introduce Advent (Hope) on the newly restored Steinway piano with a piece by Edvard Grieg entitled "Bell Ringing" which will morph into a version of "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel." The choir anthems sung during 1, 8, and 22 December will be new arrangements of familiar Christmas tunes. Bridget Peters will bring the children together with the choir to sing in support of the Advent theme of "Joy."

The organ music will emphasize chorale preludes based on historical hymn tunes. The choir will sing Christmas carols as Gathering music during the last two Sundays of Advent. The music on Christmas Eve will be filled with anticipation with Betsy Alexander singing "O Holy Night" by Adolph Adam. She will join Bridget Peters in singing "The Virgin at the Cribb" by Cesar Franck. Finally, on the last Sunday of December the congregation will be invited to a hymn sing. The music during this season will be glorious!

We at the Bradford United Church of Christ are blessed to have a faithful choir of five talented members: Janice Blake, Joan Osgood, Bridget Peters, Martina Stever, and Marcia Tomlinson. The speed with which the choir learns music continues to amaze me, and with just five members!

For the month of December I will be available to help the choir with new music on Saturdays at 2 p.m. Anyone who would like to augment the choir during this season please see me after the Dec.1 service.

Advent I, Hope (1 Dec.)

Introit: "All Glory be to God on High" PH #2

Anthem: "Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence" Arr. Michael Bedford

Advent 2, Peace (8 Dec.)

Introit: "Watcher, Tell Us of the Night" NCH #103

Anthem: "The Holly and the Ivy" trad. arr. Walford Davies

Advent 3, Joy (15 Dec.)

Gathering music: three Christmas carols to be determined

Introit: "My Heart Sing Out with Joyful Praise" NCH #104

Anthem: We join the children led by Bridget Peters in singing "Away in a Manger"

Advent 4, (Love) (22 Dec.)

Gathering music: three Christmas carols to be determined

Introit: "Gentle Joseph, Joseph Dear" NCH #105

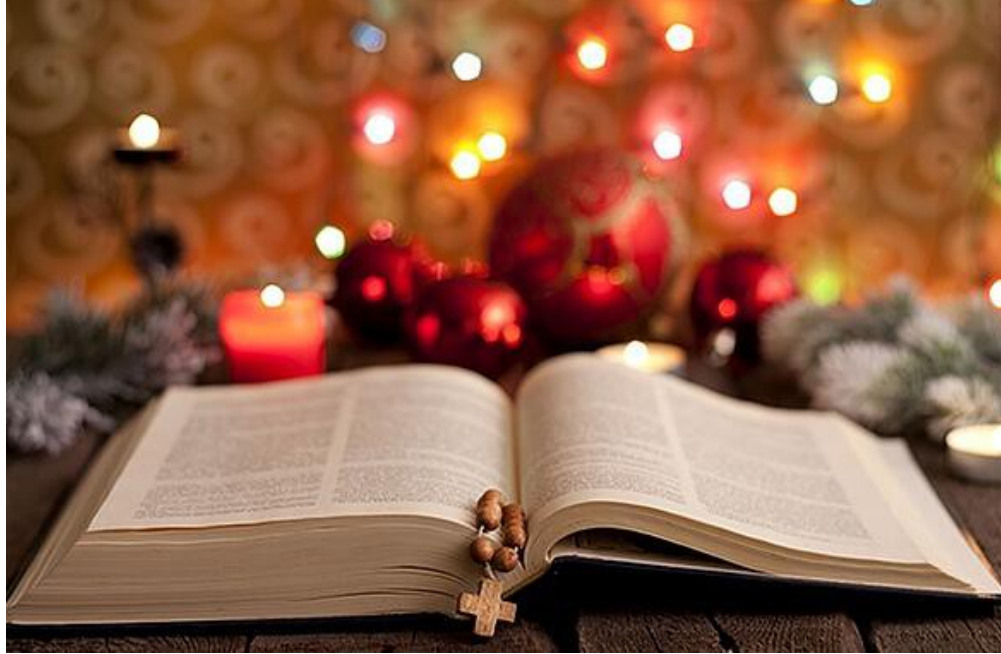
Anthem: "Fum, Fum, Fum" trad. Catalan carol; arr. William Llewellyn

John Atwood

ADULT STUDY

REFLECTION TIME takes place each Sunday from 11:30 a. m. until 12:30 p.m. alongside the coffee hour following church. It is a time to share our reflections about the service that Sunday. It is very informal and open to anyone who wants to discuss the sermon or elements of the service that moved them.

The sessions are facilitated by the Pastor Jeff and are sponsored by the Board of Deacons.



Lectionary Readings DECEMBER (Year A)

Dec. 1 First Sunday of Advent ... HOPE

Isaiah 2:1-5 (a vision of place of universal peace, Mt. Zion)

Romans 13:11-14 ("put on Christ" and live as the people of light)

Matthew 24:36-44 (be vigilant, be prepared, awaiting the joy)

Psalm 122

theme hymn: Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus

Dec 8 Second Sunday of Advent ..., PEACE

Isaiah 11:1-10 (envision a time of justice and peace)

Romans 15:4-13 (live in unity and harmony)

Matthew 3:1-12 (reoriented through baptism)

Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19

theme hymn: On Jordan's Bank the Baptist's Cry

Dec 15 Third Sunday of Advent ... JOY

Isaiah 35:1-10 (ALL shall be transformed)

James 5:7-10 (cultivate patience)

Matthew 11:2-11 (what did you expect him to be?)

Psalm 146:5-10

theme hymn: Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence

Dec 22 Fourth Sunday of Advent/Christmas Sunday ... LOVE

Isaiah 7:10-16 (behold ... a virgin shall conceive ... and bear a son)

Romans 1:1-7 (we are called to belong to Christ, to proclaim the good news)

Matthew 1:18-25 (He is born, Emmanuel)

theme hymn: O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

Dec 24 Christmas Eve

Isaiah 9:2-7 (God's light shines without end)

Titus 2:11-14 (he appeared for the salvation of ALL)

Luke 2:1-14 (the angels proclaim Gloria in excelsis to the shepherds)

Psalm 96

theme hymn: Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

Dec 29 First Sunday After Christmas

Isaiah 63: 7-9 (*hesed* ... God's steadfast love)

Hebrews 2:10-18 (he totally shared humanity)

Matthew 2:13-23 (The child Jesus is brought back to Nazareth)

Psalm 148

theme hymn: Once in Royal David's City

Jan 5

Jeremiah 31:7-14 (Shout for joy ... blessed with abundant life)

Ephesians 1:3-14 (may God continue giving us discernment)

John 1:10-18 (the Word and its power)

Psalm 147:12-20

theme hymn: O word of God Incarnate

Jan 12

Isaiah 42:1-9 (he will bring *mishpat*/justice)

Acts 10:34-43 (Peter describes his transformed life)

Matthew 3:13-17 (Jesus is baptized)

Psalm 29

theme hymn: When Jesus Came to Jordan

Sunday School & Youth Group

It wasn't that many years ago when there were few children who regularly attended our church and there wasn't even a Sunday School! So we know how blessed we are to now have a regular year-round Sunday School with steady attendance, and even a new Youth Group.

The Sunday School & Youth Group worked together to make Reverse Advent Boxes. Members of the congregation will take them home to fill with non-perishable food during Advent, and then bring them back right before Christmas to be blessed in the sanctuary before they are delivered to the food shelf.



Additional teachers are needed for Sunday School. Would you be willing to teach a lesson to our wonderful kids just once? Or maybe a few times a year, or perhaps even on a monthly basis? Please talk to a Sunday School teacher, we would love to help you work with our kids!



**Prayer requests may be emailed to
our prayer group Or [here](#)**



It is our privilege to pray for you and those you care about

**We pray for each other,
without ceasing
and your prayer requests
are held in strict confidence.**

Our church is a big fan of the Creche (preschool) in India supported by Help Kids India. Here is their update after the fire that destroyed their kitchen. We were only too happy to donate to its restoration.

A new kitchen for Little Lilies Preschool. Hilda Isaac, Managing Director writes: The little lilies kitchen was destroyed in the last year November 16th Gaja cyclone. So as a daily remembrance we set the opening date to 16th of November.

Without the help of HKI, it may not be possible. The new Kitchen's roof was decorated with balloons, the door frame with floral garlands and the floor with traditional Kolam. All the parents were invited to the opening function. The kitchen was opened by me followed by a prayer. As per Tamil tradition milk is boiled and let to flow. This indicates the place will be blessed with abundance. Salt and turmeric are the first things to bring inside the Kitchen as a custom.

After the customs, the construction workers were honored by small gift of dress materials. Then all the children, parents and teachers were given a feast of Chicken curry, Rice and a sweet porridge made of vermicelli. The parents gifted the school with small Kitchen utensils. Some of the parents join together to buy some large vessels too.

The whole community feels very proud of the new kitchen. Thank you so much to everyone who made this possible.

[link to see the creche's new kitchen](#)



Would you like to share your poinsettia for Christmas Sunday and/or Christmad Eve worship service(s)? Please bring to the church kitchen the day before with a tag with your name, and pick up after the service.

Sometimes events and/or changes come up after the Epistle has been uploaded. It's always good to check the Weekly Email for last minute updates.

To be added to the **Weekly Email** list, [click here](#). If you have an area event to list in the weekly Email's "Around Town" section, please let us know (send to mccmarciam3@gmail.com)!

This Epistle is a monthly publication of the Bradford Congregational Church. It is uploaded just before the 1st of each month. The deadline to submit news or articles to mccmarciam3@gmail.com is the 25th. Anyone wishing to receive the email delivery of the Epistle may request it by emailing the church email below.

Some helpful links:

- our website is <http://bradforducc.org/>
- our church's email is bradfordvtucc@gmail.com
- Click on [EPISTLE](#) to read back issue of this newsletter
- our Sunday School, Music and Missions are at [Programs](#)
- Past Sermons can be accessed at [News & Sermons](#).
- our congregation's activities are listed on our [online calendar](#)
- our Facebook page link is [Bradford Congregational Church](#)