

The Bell Tower

Newsletter of the First Congregational Church of Hatfield, UCC

2020

January

No. 1

The Epiphany's Challenge

The word *Epiphany* is derived from two Greek words, which translate as *to show upon*, or, in other words, *to make manifest*. In our Christian tradition, the Epiphany refers to Jesus' manifestation to all the world through the story of the Bethlehem star and the Magi. This is a story told only by Matthew who wishes to impress upon the reader the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy that "Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn."

Matthew, which often comes as a surprise to many, shares nothing with us about the private details of Jesus' birth. He focuses on its universal significance and the expansion of God's People. If we are allowed a bit of freedom to interpret hints offered in the text, Matthew's birth account jumps from Jesus' conception to a full two years later.

Chapter One conveys the account of an angelic visit to Joseph as he prepares to "dismiss [Mary] quietly" for her supposed infidelity as Mary discovers that she is with child.

Chapter Two tells us that the Magi inform King Herod they [the star at its Herod plots this threat to his rule and he asks the Magi about "the exact time when the star appeared."



"observed [the Messiah's] rising." to remove

When the Magi are warned of the tyrant's duplicity, Herod then decides to massacre all the baby boys of Bethlehem "two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the Magi." We may infer from this that when the Magi enter "the house" of the Holy Family that Jesus is a toddler some two-years of age.

For Matthew the import of Jesus' birth is the Epiphany, the manifestation, to all the world that God's prophecy has been fulfilled, that God's Messiah has come, that the reign of the "king of the Jews" has been inaugurated.

We hear this story again from the perspective of the world's largest religion, but let us try to appreciate the audacity of Matthew's words.

At 2:2 the Magi make reference to the "king of the Jews." Matthew intentionally does not use this title again until Chapter 27 when it is repeated three

times in the account of Jesus' crucifixion.

King Herod tried to murder Jesus recognizing His birth as a threat to his reign, and Herod failed. Pilate murders Jesus trying to end His threat to the Roman Empire at the height of its hegemony, and Pilate failed.

Matthew is writing his Gospel to a handful of the earliest Christians who are barely noticed as anything more than a curiosity by their neighbours. And yet the bookends of "king of the Jews" at the beginning and end of his Gospel, hold between them the audacious story of Jesus' life and mission.

Those first Christians, the first followers of a man from Nazareth crucified outside of Jerusalem with barely any mourners, trusted that His life from conception to cross was a divine Epiphany, was God's manifestation of Himself to all the world, was the initiation and fulfillment of God's universal reign.

That reign would not emerge without conflict and opposition. It is a telling statement, however, that when the political and religious leaders hear that the Christ, the Messiah has been born, both groups are "frightened." Just like at the cross when Sanhedrin and Pilate conspire, so it happens here.

This is a worrisome indictment that people of faith and institutions of faith may become more wedded to their established and accepted perspectives, teachings and practices than they are to God's disruptive, contravening revelation. They may become champions of a status quo that preserves their niche when in fact God's reign is meant to disrupt.

In Matthew's passage on the judgment of the nations, Jesus demands, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these, you did it to me." The Epiphany to the nations is that God expects, demands, that the powerful empathize with the powerless, and religion must stand prophetically, even if alone and unpopular, to call the powerful to task when this is ignored. [This is 50 years old, but still relevant, and still maybe offensive, but with that warning you may wish to listen to Lenny Bruce's routine starting at the 5:15 minute mark – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PIU7Up-onu0>] The decorations will be put away, but Jesus' birth is always an Epiphany meant to challenge and change the world.

JANUARY EVENTS

- Sun. 5th Hampshire Association Youth Group from 5:30 – 7:30pm.
Mon. 6th Epiphany – the 12th day after Christmas
Exploring the Bible study group meets from 7 – 8:00pm.
Wed. 8th Monthly meeting of the Board of Trustees at 7:00pm.
Thur. 9th Rev. Randy attends Hampshire Association Clergy Committee of Practice meeting at noon.
Rev. Randy participates in the Hampshire Association Church and Ministry Committee meeting at 5:30pm in Easthampton.
Sun. 12th Church Council meets after Service in the church parlor.
Mon 13th Volunteer opportunity at the Food Bank from 1 – 4:00pm.
Real Folk annual meeting at 6:30pm.
Sat. 18th Week of Prayer for Christian Unity begins.
Sun. 19th Annual Congregational Meeting after morning Service.
Mon. 20th Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day
Exploring the Bible study group from 7 – 8:00pm.
Tue. 21st Rev. Randy attends the HEADS Up meeting at the Elementary School at 6:00pm.

REGULAR GATHERINGS

Sundays: Worship Service begins at 10:00am. Sunday School at 10:15 am. Chat and Coffee at 11:00am.

Tuesdays: Yoga classes are offered every Tuesday in the church parlor at 5:30pm.

Wednesdays: Hatha Yoga classes take place every Wednesday at 6:00pm.

Thursdays: Choir rehearses in the sanctuary at 6:30pm.

Saturdays: AA meets at the church every Saturday at noon.

“Reality will sweep you away like a wild flood only if you submit to it and act as it expects you to.” - Imprisoned Turkish journalist Ahmet Altan.

ASSOCIATION YOUTH GROUP

The Hampshire Association Youth Group has grown in size. We now gather regularly with others from Hadley, South Amherst, Southampton, Westhampton, Granby and Easthampton. We meet on the first Sunday of the month from 5:30 – 7:30pm. The group is open to Middle and High School students.

EPIPHANY

Matthew tells a different story about the birth of Jesus than does Luke. Luke’s story is of the angels and the shepherds. Matthew shares a story of the star and the Magi. The church celebrates the arrival of the Magi in Bethlehem on the twelfth day after Christmas, or January 6th. They bring gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. The gold symbolizes Jesus as the Son of David, the frankincense as the Son of God, and the myrrh – the burial spice – as the Son of Man. Epiphany is the continuation of our celebration of Jesus’ birth among us. In January, the world moves on quickly from the Christmas message – not the church. The awe and wonder of Christmas is too sacred to let pass quickly.

WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

During the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, Christians are reminded of Jesus’ prayer for His disciples that “they may be one so that the world may and Christians come together to pray for their has been adopted by the United Church of denomination. The “United” of our title refers separate churches together as one, and that respecting the presence of Christ in all observance is taken from Acts 28:2: “The world becoming increasingly frayed and divided, churches will gather in prayer asking for God’s grace and guidance so that we may show Christian kindness and welcome to all people, wherever they may be from, whoever they may be. May this be our prayer, as well.



believe” (see John 17.21). Hearts are touched unity. This passage from the Gospel of John Christ as a biblical foundation of our to the fact that we have brought four, we are a strongly ecumenical body, Christian churches. The theme of this year’s natives showed us unusual kindness.” In a

REAL FOLKS ANNUAL MEETING

The annual meeting of Real Folks will take place on Monday the 13th at 6:30pm. The calendar for the new year will be set and an election of officers will take place. This organization is open to all the women of the church. If you have any questions, please call Marty Zigmont at 247-5453.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE

The Nominating Committee has begun its work of seeking volunteers to serve on the various committees of our congregation. The Annual Meeting will take place on January 19th. If you would like to become more active in our church, please reach out to those on Nominating and if you are approached about serving take it as a compliment that we see great potential in you.

ANNUAL CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

The Congregational way is fundamentally democratic. Each congregation decides its course in covenant with other congregations. All of the members of the church through their sacred baptisms are the ministers of the church. All members have a sacred responsibility to lead the church. On January 19th we will first gather for worship and then stay together to plan for 2020. Officers will be elected, reports shared and decisions made. It is hoped that all of our members will choose to participate in this process.

EXPLORING THE BIBLE STUDY GROUP

The Massachusetts Bible Society's Executive Director Rev. Anne Robertson has authored a three-volume text called *Exploring the Bible*. If you have ever wanted to know more about the Bible in general, this study group may be what you are looking for. Why not pop in and see what it's about? If you like it, you can buy the books at that time or borrow the set we have in the church's library. We'd love to see you.



FOOD BANK VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers from our church gather with Linda Milewski at the Western Mass Food Bank on the second Monday of the month to help this worthwhile organization. However, that day is a holiday in November so we will gather one day later on Tuesday. If you can share three hours of your time or even an hour or two, it will help our neighbours who struggle to feed their families. Please speak with Linda about this.

BULLETIN COVERS

A sign-up sheet is available in church. Special bulletin covers are used several times a year. If you would like to donate a set for any given occasion, it will be acknowledged in church. The cost is \$10.

SANCTUARY CLOCK

In the 1890's, the Real Folks group donated an E. Howard Gallery Clock to the church. It has been repaired and restored by *The British Clock Maker* in Newfane, Vermont. Ray and Richard Bates are a father and son team who have been in the high-end clock repair business for over half a century. This clock is an heirloom that the congregation should be proud of. Accordingly, we are budgeting the funds to restore this clock to its original condition as part of our congregation's 350th anniversary. The final cost is \$3,350. Real Folks has made a generous pledge toward this cost. We are also asking our members to consider a donation. If you would like to help in this way, your generosity will be much appreciated.

REQUESTS

- Some of our members have breathing problems that are aggravated by perfumes and other scents. Please keep this in mind when getting ready for church. We appreciate your attentiveness to the needs of others.
- Please remember to close and latch the kitchen door when leaving the building. The wind has blown the door open already this winter and we do not need the extra heating cost. Thanks.

VIEW CHURCH SERVICES ON-LINE AND ON TV

We air our Services twice a month on public access television. They take place on alternate Sundays. This allows people to see what happens inside our church building and it also reaches into the homes of people who are unable to be with us in church. The recorded Services air on Hatfield Community Television on Saturdays and Sundays at 8 am and 4 pm. All of our taped Services may also be seen at: <https://www.youtube.com/user/FCAT-Media/videos> or at <https://www.youtube.com/user/HatfieldCommunityTV>. We could use the help of a few more volunteers to operate the camera on a rotating basis during the Services. If you could help, please speak to Rev. Randy.

HATFIELD'S 350TH

The town's 350th Committee is looking for farms, even dogs and horses. They will be. The Committee is hoping to print an anniversary book. Please contact Cher Nicholas at CherNicholas@comcast.net.



old photos of town buildings, people, copied and returned to you. The book. Please contact Cher Nicholas at CherNicholas@comcast.net.

The Committee is taking reservations for a walking tour of historic homes of Hatfield. It will take place on April 25, 2020 and is limited to 35 participants. They are sure this will be filled. I've already signed-up. If you would like to participate, please contact Cher Nicholas at the email above.

Full Event Schedule

- ✓ December 31, 2019 - *New Year's Eve Gala*
- ✓ April 25, 2020 - *Historic Homes Tour*
- ✓ May 16, 2020 - *Farm 5K Run/Walk*
- ✓ May 21, 2020 - *HHS Annual Meeting and presentation, "A History of the Connecticut River"*
- ✓ May 31, 2020 - *Incorporation Day*
- ✓ June 13, 2020 - *350th Parade*
- ✓ June 20, 2020 - *Strawberry Festival (partnership w/ Hatfield PTA)*
- ✓ August 22, 2020 - *Summer Celebration*
- ✓ September 12, 2020 - *Barn Mural Wagon Tour*
- ✓ October 3, 2020 - *Tractor Parade*
- ✓ October 10, 2020 - *Bonfire (partnership with Hatfield Firefighters Association)*
- ✓ October 11, 2020 - *Wagon Ride Historical Tours*
- ✓ October 17, 2020 - *Hatfield Cemetery Tours*
- ✓ November 19, 2020 - *350 Years of History Presentation*
- ✓ December 19, 2020 - *Luminarium/Fireworks*

CONTACT INFO: HATFIELD CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

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Facebook: www.facebook.com/First-Congregational-Church-of-Hatfield-UCC

Pastor: Rev. Randy Calvo 413-824-1630 randyc1897@gmail.com

Committee Chairpersons:

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Music Minister, Anthony Tracia 781 738-6284

Real Folks Society, Martha Zigmont 413 247-5453

Benevolence, Amy Novak 413 210-3965

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