

# HAPPY NEW YEAR

# 2021

*New Year's Resolutions*

**Rollstone Congregational Church**  
United Church of Christ  
199 Main Street, Fitchburg, MA

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Church Organist and Musician: Gavin Klein

# *Second Sunday after Christmas*

## **January 3, 2021**

**Prelude:**

**Auld Lang Syne**

**Cooper Peers**

### **Let Us Rejoice as We Worship:**

When the song of the angels is stilled,  
when the star in the sky is gone,  
when the kings and princes are home,  
when the shepherds are back with their flocks,  
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 the people,  
to make music in the heart.

### **Opening Hymn: “On This Day Earth Shall Ring”**

On this day earth shall ring  
with the song children sing  
to the Lord, Christ our King,  
born on earth to save us;  
him the Father gave us.

#### *Refrain:*

Id-e-o-o-o, id-e-o-o-o, id-e-o,  
gloria in excelsis Deo!

His the doom, ours the mirth;  
when he came down to earth,  
Bethlehem saw his birth;  
ox and ass beside him  
from the cold would hide him.

#### *(Refrain)*

God’s bright star, o’er his head,  
Wise Men three to him led;  
kneel they low by his bed,  
lay their gifts before him,  
praise him and adore him.

#### *(Refrain)*

On this day angels sing;  
with their song earth shall ring,  
praising Christ, heaven's King,  
born on earth to save us;  
peace and love he gave us.

*(Refrain)*

### **A Time of Prayer:**

O Lord, we have come. Come, now, to us. Send upon us your Grace for you have called us to be its stewards. Speak to us your Word for you have summoned us to be its witness. Show us your Body for you have made us to be its members. Let the working of your power be seen among us, O God, that our works might declare your Presence among the nations. Amen.

### **A Reading from the Scriptures:**

**Luke 2:41-52 (NIV)**

41 Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. 42 And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. 43 When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. 44 Assuming that he was in the group of travellers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. 45 When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. 46 After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. 47 And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. 48 When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, 'Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety.' 49 He said to them, 'Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?' 50 But they did not understand what he said to them. 51 Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart.

52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favour.

**Musical Interlude: Variation 1 and 2 on Il Est Ne le Divin Efant      Dubois**

### **The Message: "The Resolution to End All Resolutions"**

Did anyone come down to breakfast on New Year's morning and announce -- "I'm so hungry, I feel as if I haven't eaten since last year!"?

It's fun to play with all the brand-new possibilities open to you on January 1. Go jogging this morning, and you've exercised every day this year. Get through lunch without eating potato chips or a candy bar, and this year reflects a whole new healthy and perfectly-kept diet regime. So far this year, perhaps you have

never cussed at someone, never yelled at the kids, never forgotten to floss, never thrown your dirty clothes on the bathroom floor and never forgotten to read the Bible in the morning!

On January 1 your whole life can be transformed. For one day at least, all your good intentions can be jump-started, and all your bad habits can be unplugged. At least for a few hours (or minutes?), the year is a perfect reflection of your best self.

But January 1 is followed inevitably by January 2 and January 3. Someday soon you will opt for staying in a cozy bed a few more minutes rather than plunging out into the cold on that jog. Pretty soon candy wrappers will start appearing in your desk drawer again. By the 4th or 5th, you will surely have been aggravated enough at a bad driver or a dropped glass or a stubbed toe to have let loose a blue streak of bad words or unsanctified thoughts. By the 7th, your socks are back on the bathroom floor and your dental floss is gathering dust. By the 10th you fall asleep before you can even get the Bible open.

For all but a few of us, most New Year's resolutions get packed away with the last of the Christmas decorations. By Epiphany our behavior and the whole New Year are just as tarnished as they were before January 1.

The problem with most of our resolutions is that they are too safe, too sensible and too self-centered. We resolve to make tiny cosmetic changes in our lifestyles -- but refuse to consider restructuring our lives and changing the paradigms by which we live. Luke's single story about the boy Jesus offers us an example of what it would mean if we were to transform our lives by making the ultimate resolution, the mother of all New Year's resolutions, the resolution that ends all resolutions -- to declare that from this day forward we will be "about our Father's business."

Joseph and Mary, their friends, neighbors and relatives, all made the required pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the Passover feast. But as soon as the allotted time for the holiday was over, they hit the road -- anxious to get back to all the chores and responsibilities that filled their lives. Joseph, a craftsman working with stone and wood, undoubtedly had projects awaiting his attention. Mary would have had the hundreds of time-consuming tasks it took to keep her family fed and clothed. Like most of us at the end of an extended vacation, they were probably looking forward to getting back to the comfortable familiarity of their own hearth and home.

But the young Jesus refuses to let his relationship with God be regulated according to some prearranged, culturally imposed schedule. Instead of going along with the return-to-business-as-usual attitude, Jesus answered the most important call of all -- to be about his Father's business. What would it mean if we were to act in a similar fashion?

What would it mean to live, not according to human expectations or cultural patterns, but according to what God required of us? What does it mean to be about God's business, rather than other people's business, or even other people's definition of God's business? Jesus discovered at this early age that answering

God's expectations can get you in trouble -- even with your own family. In fact, focusing on God's business may put an unexpected crimp in the family business. "Business-as-usual" may not be the way God does business. And the world and the church find that unnerving.

The ultimate New Year's resolution does not challenge us to cut fat grams, or quit smoking or get to aerobics class twice a week. The ultimate resolution a Christian can make is to live in the light of divine intentions, not human inventions. The New Year's resolution to end all resolutions is to live under the umbrella of God's expectations and to make it my business and your business to be a part of God's business.

But this just begs a bigger question: What is God's business?

God's business is transformation. An electrical transformer takes high voltage and transforms it into energy that we can use in our everyday lives. Without a transformer, there could be no light in the darkness, no safety in the storm. At Bethlehem, God came to us and gave us Jesus the Christ, who transforms in his life the love and power of God into the impulses of grace and salvation that the world desperately needs.

So what does the Christian who resolves to be a part of God's transforming work on January 1 do on, January 2? There are two essential requirements: First, we must go deeply into the Word. Second, we must go widely into the world.

**1. The Word.** When the young Jesus felt called to live beyond business-as-usual and answered the call of God's business, he first went to the temple. In other words, he steeped himself in the meanings and messages of God's Word. Knowing what God intends for men and women, learning what God has already said and done and promised for this world, is a necessary first step in the transformative process.

**2. The World.** Being about God's business doesn't mean we do nothing but sit in the temple -- in the church -- all day long and discuss theology. Remember that while Jesus started out in the temple, he then obediently followed Joseph and Mary back out into the world.

We cannot be a part of transforming the world unless we stand in its midst. That is the trouble with our traditional New Year's resolutions -- they never step outside the confines of our own self-centered existence.

What if instead of resolving to lose 10 pounds this year, you resolved to eat according to a diet that could sustain the whole world?

What if instead of resolving to get more exercise this year, you resolved to exercise some spiritual muscles and organized a prayer-chain across your community?

What if instead of resolving to spend less time in front of the TV and more time reading some good books, you resolved to teach those struggling with illiteracy to read those books to you?

What if instead of resolving to spend more “quality time” with your family, you resolved to take your whole family on a mission project for a week, or a month or even longer?

Your life, your commitment to the ultimate resolution, can help the love of God through Christ to transform the world. While today is January 3. A fresh New Year still lies unblemished before us. What do you resolve to be on January 3rd, 5th, 10th and for the rest of your life?

**Musical Interlude: Variation 3 on Il Est Ne le Divin Efant Dubois**

**A Time of Prayer** – *let us remember all of our brothers and sisters on the prayer list, especially those who are having a difficult time during this period of social distancing. Please share your prayer concerns so that they may be added to the prayer list by emailing your concern to Pastor Dave at [dbhanks92@comcast.net](mailto:dbhanks92@comcast.net) or by calling him direct at 978-821-9571. He is available every evening and on weekends. During this time we suggest that you create a prayer partner with whom you can pair up until we are able to worship together at the church.*

Lord of Light and Life,

To you even the darkest nights of our souls are as bright as noonday, for you are able to see where our sin-dimmed sight cannot. Help us then to trust you to lead us through the times of thick shadows, when vision fails and reason stumbles, when what we thought was certain cannot be found, when that which we thought was forever turns out to be fleeting, when that which we thought of as security turns out to be empty of hope. Illumine our waking and working with the light of your Presence so that we can see the path to which your purpose calls us.

As your birthing star once revealed your Presence to the world, work through your church to shine the revealing light of your truth into every dark corner of injustice, bigotry, greed and deceit until every one knows that the Son of God has come to reclaim the earth. And now we pray as he taught us to pray by saying ..... “Our Father, 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.”

**Sharing in the Breaking of the Bread and the  
Receiving of the Cup of Forgiveness**

Let us confess our sins.

Lord God of Christmas, as we have crossed over to another year. We thank you for giving us another year of life. You have given us many gifts during the last year; and yet we realize that we have often failed to use those gifts or our lives as creatively and constructively as we might have.

Now give us the care to shape the moments of this new year into tender,

gentle expressions of concern. May the year be fulfilled with achievements: wrongs corrected, friendships deepened, the disheartened encouraged. Help us to energize your love, even as you became love to us. For we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

### Words of Assurance

As Mary, Joseph and Jesus settled in Nazareth, help us, God, to let you take up residence in each one of our hearts. Forgive us our failures, our weaknesses, our fears and our doubts. In the name of the babe of Bethlehem, the Prince of Peace, we are now made new and whole. Amen.

We remember that on the night of betrayal and desertion, Jesus took bread, gave you thanks, broke the bread, and gave it to his disciples saying, "This is my body broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

In the same way, Jesus took a cup, after supper saying: "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

Through the broken bread we participate in the body of Christ.  
Through the cup of blessing we participate in the new life Christ gives.

Eat this bread, for it is the body of Christ, broken for you.  
Drink of this cup, for it is the blood of Christ, shed for you.

Holy God, we thank you for having invited us to this table where our eyes and hearts have been opened to the gifts you offer to us through Jesus Christ. May this season of Christmastide strengthen our faith, increase our love for one another, and let us show forth your praise in our lives. Amen.

### **Closing Hymn: "This Is a Day of New Beginnings"**

This is a day of new beginnings,  
time to remember, and move on,  
time to believe what love is bringing,  
laying to rest the pain that's gone.

For by the life and death of Jesus,  
love's mighty Spirit, now as then,  
can make for us a world of difference  
as faith and hope are born again.

Then let us, with the Spirit's daring,  
step from the past, and leave behind  
our disappointment, guilt and grieving,  
seeking new paths, and sure to find.

Christ is alive, and goes before us

to show and share what love can do.  
This is a day of new beginnings;  
our God is making all things new.

**Benediction:**

Let us go into the new year confident and full of faithfulness. Let us go forth celebrating the great good news that Jesus Christ is born. Let us go forth now with the mighty blessings of the eternal God. Amen.

**Postlude:**

**Postlude in D Major**

**John Subert**



## PRAYER LIST

Amy Belli  
Carolyn Barney  
Jack Brigham  
Becky Colwell  
Maureen Daoust  
David Dufour  
Diana Escarbie  
Cathy Fontaine  
Chuck Funk  
Bob and Pat Goguen  
John Hanks, Jr.  
Linda Hurd  
Family of Mary Jackson  
Tom Kazanjian  
Sarah Kee  
Colin Lajoie  
Bob and Doris Lane  
Diane Lane Cormier  
Linda Long  
Lorraine Michaud  
Audrey Painchaud  
Maria Piazza  
Emma Pollice  
Melanie Pouliot  
Jackie Reiss  
Martha Quinn  
Del Sampson  
Elwin Shepard  
Ron Smith  
Diane Staples  
Carter Stansel  
Carole Ann Sumner and Henry  
Donna Thorne  
Daniel Tousignant  
Marilyn Wales  
Mary Wayman

All who are experiencing difficult times and situations

All who are lonely or depressed

All who are personally dealing with the affects of the COVID-19 Virus

All medical personnel – doctors, nurses, testing staff, first responders