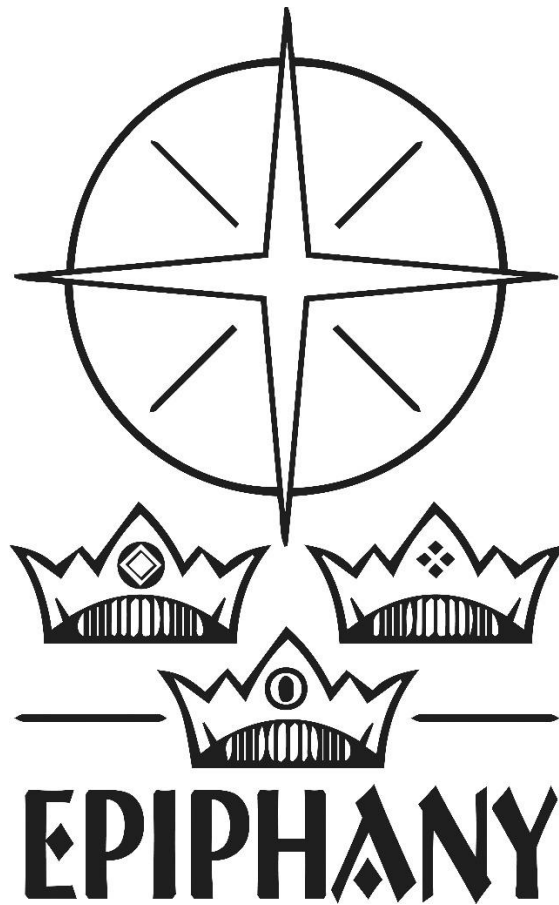


January 5, 2025 ~ 11:00 a.m.  
**First Congregational UCC ~ Sarasota**



1031 S. Euclid Ave. Sarasota, FL 34237 ~ (941) 953-7044  
[www.uccsarasota.com](http://www.uccsarasota.com)

**January 5, 2025**

**11:00 a.m.**

*"And now we welcome the new year, full of things that have never been"* **Rainer Maria Rilke**

PRELUDE

*Andante – piano sonata no. 3 in F minor*

Brahms

INVITATION to WORSHIP

One: For the first time in 2025,

**Many: We gather to worship with full voice, open hearts, with both uncertainty and curiosity for what the coming days will bring.**

One: For the first time in 2025,

**Many: We gather at Christ's table to be fed by a feast of unceasing grace and unconditional love.**

One: For the first time in 2025,

**Many: We gather letting the truths of God's arrival in a messy manger linger in our lives.**

One: Come, people of God to worship the One who is our help in ages past and our hope, peace, joy, and love for the year to come.

**Many: Alleluia and Amen!**

\*OPENING HYMN

*We Three Kings*

**We three kings of Orient are; bearing gifts we traverse afar,  
field and fountain, moor and mountain, following yonder star. *Refrain***

*Refrain: O star of wonder, star of light, star with royal beauty bright, westward leading,  
still proceeding, guide us to thy perfect light.*

**Born a King on Bethlehem's plain, gold I bring to crown him again,  
King forever, ceasing never, over us all to reign. *Refrain***

**Frankincense to offer have I; incense owns a Deity nigh;  
prayer and praising, voices raising, worshiping God on high. *Refrain***

**Myrrh is mine; its bitter perfume breathes a life of gathering gloom;  
sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying, sealed in the stone-cold tomb. *Refrain***

**Glorious now behold him arise; King and God and sacrifice:  
Alleluia, Alleluia, sounds through the earth and skies. *Refrain***

\*OPENING PRAYER

**God of new beginnings, there is *so much* stirring in our hearts, souls, bodies, minds, and lives this day. We lug in the luggage of life past pains and desires to rewind time to some idyllic idea of what was (but might not have ever been). We lug in the luggage of life plans we have been plotting for a new year, our desire to grow. We lug in the luggage of life the nagging, needling question: Who are You, God, calling *me* to be? On this Epiphany Sunday, we worship with the Wise Ones beholding Your beautiful vulnerability and eternity dancing in Jesus' eyes. Renew and restore a Spirit of hope, peace, joy, and love**

**that will ground and guide us this year. Traveling God, go with us every day, we pray.  
Amen.**

\*RESPONSE

Star-Child (vs. 1, 3, 5)

See insert

**Star-child, earth-Child, go between of God, love Child, Christ Child, heaven's lightning rod: This year, this year let the day arrive when Christmas comes for everyone, everyone alive!**

**Grown child, old child, memory full of years, sad child, lost child, story told in tears: This year, this year let the day arrive when Christmas comes for everyone, everyone alive!**

**Hope-for-peace Child, God's stupendous sign, down-to-earth Child, Star of stars that shine: This year, this year let the day arrive when Christmas comes for everyone, everyone alive!**

POEM

*A Blessing for Epiphany*

Jan Richardson

ENGAGING SCRIPTURE

Matthew 2

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, magi from the east came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star in the east and have come to pay him homage." When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him, and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it has been written by the prophet: 'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.' " Then Herod secretly called for the magi and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage." When they had heard the king, they set out, and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen in the east, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road. When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the magi.

SERMON

*Searching for the Sacred this Year*

OFFERING/ANTHEM

*Goin' to Bethlehem*

Althouse

\*DOXOLOGY/PRAYER OF DEDICATION

**To God, all glorious heavenly Light, To Christ revealed in earthly night,  
To God the Spirit now we raise, Our joyful songs of thankful praise.**

CELEBRATION of HOLY COMMUNION

One: God who continually creates amid the chaos,

**Many: Draw near to recreate us this day through bread and juice.**

One: God who redeems us from past pain,

**Many: Draw near to teach us the timeless truth of this accepting, affirming table.**

One: God who goes before us into the future,

**Many: Draw near to reassure our quivering uncertain souls that we are not alone.**

PRAYERS of the PEOPLE and LORD'S PRAYER

**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.**

\*CLOSING HYMN

*I Am the Light of the World*

#584

*Refrain: I am the light of the world! You people come and follow me! If you follow and love you'll learn the mystery of what you were meant to do and be.*

**When the song of the angels is stilled, when the star in the sky is gone, When the sages and shepherds have found their way home, the work of Christmas is begun. *Refrain***

**To find the lost and lonely one, to heal the broken soul with love, to feed the hungry children with warmth and good food. To feel the earth below, the sky above! *Refrain***

**To free the prisoner from all chains, to make the powerful care, To rebuild the nations with strength of good will, to see all God's children everywhere! *Refrain***

**To bring hope to every task you do, to dance at a baby's new birth, To make music in an old person's heart, and sing to the colors of the earth! *Refrain***

\*BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE

*Improvisation*

Stephen Fancher

**ANNOUNCEMENTS ~ January 5, 2025**

**Last Sunday for Christmas Love Offering** ~ With each Love Offering we support each of our three covenants. This year we have chosen: African American Studies at the Betty J. Johnson Library ~ Racial Justice Covenant; ALSO Youth ~ Open and Affirming Covenant; Sarasota Bay Estuary ~ Creation Justice Covenant. All Faiths Food Bank, All Faiths Backpack Program, Baby Basics, Resurrection House, Family Promise; SURE (Sarasota United for Responsibility and Equity; Second Chance Last Opportunity; UCC Christmas Fund. **Please turn in your gift today.**

**CALLING ALL BUCKET FILLERS ~ JOIN A TEAM IN 2025 ~Yes, YOU! We are blessed with so many opportunities to serve.** There is joy in doing what we can to make a difference. **Won't you join us? What You Can Do:** Go to: [uccsarasota.com](http://uccsarasota.com); Select: About Us (at the top) and "Organization" from the dropdown menu; Scroll to: "Discover our Church's Organizational Structure ~ Check out the committees, groups and teams to learn more and open the "Statement on Structure" for specific tasks and meeting information. Contact a member of the Nominating Committee for more information: Carol McCloud, Harold Mezile, Nancy Morris

**Year-End Contributions** ~ According to the IRS, the year a contribution can be deducted is based on the date when the donor relinquishes control of the money. That means we will be handling your contributions as follows:

	IRS Deduction Year
Checks dated December 2024 received by the Church in December 2024	2024
Checks dated December 2024, postmarked in 2024 received by the Church in January 2024	2024
Checks dated December 2024 received in offering plate January 2025 (backdated)	2025
Checks dated December 2024, postmarked in 2025 received by the Church in January 2025(backdated)	2025
Checks dated January 2025 received in offering plate December 2024 (post-dated)	2025
Checks dated December 2024 received in 2024 as a pre-payment of 2025 pledge	2024

**The Wayless Way Offering ~ Your Life as a Curriculum ~ NEW offering for 2025** ~ The event will be **hybrid** (in the Oasis Center and Zoom). **January 6<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> & 27<sup>th</sup> 4 p.m. – 5:15 p.m.** As we begin a New Year, we will listen to our lives as one way God shows up. Beginning on Epiphany, January 6<sup>th</sup>, we will gather to open our hearts to God through prayer, hymns, and scripture; Family Systems Theory (January 13<sup>th</sup>); Praying the Wayless Way (January 20<sup>th</sup>); and Listen/ Discerning God in our Lives (January 27<sup>th</sup>). Please note, while there is a thread that will connect each week, you are welcome to attend when you are able without missing a beat. **For more information and to register for the conversation, please contact Pastor Wes.**

Women's Association Program for **Tuesday, January 7, 2025** ~ **Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) from Immokalee, FL.** Our presenter will be **Silvia Perez, Senior Staff Member of the CIW.** She will be ably assisted by **Giselle Ramirez, Campaign Coordinator and Translator.** Silvia's presentation will provide: 1. an overview of the formation of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers; 2. an account of the victories of the Campaign for Fair Food; 3. background information on the creation of the Food Program; 4. an update on the fight for farm worker human rights today. **All are welcome.** Come to Fellowship Hall at 11:30 am, enjoy lunch at 12 noon (\$15), and our program at 12:30. Please call the church office, 941-953-7044. We are asking for donations of printer paper and/or other office supplies for the CIW staff.

**Drumming as a Spiritual Practice** ~ **Tues 1/7/25 at 3pm** in the Chapel. Drums provided. New drummers welcome. Contact Lindsey Huddleston for more information (630-338-9294)

**Sacred Conversations on Race ~ January 8 and 22 at 3 p.m.** ~ hybrid and Oasis Center. On January 8 we will discuss the poem, *Joy is the Justice We Give Ourselves* and on January 22 we will discuss *Letter from the Birmingham Jail*. ALL are welcome.

**Artful Prayer ~ Thursday, January 9<sup>th</sup> 2 p.m.** ~ **Oasis Center or Zoom ~ Prayers of Gratitude for the New Year** ~ *Led by Lindsey Huddleston.* We usually have New Year's

Resolutions. Let's add prayers of GRATITUDE as we begin 2025. Come and share fun, creative, and imaginative ways to inspire our sense of Thanksgiving for the blessings in our lives. This practice positively changes our mindset. For those at home on Zoom, have paper, crayons/markers, or colored pencils available. Contact Pastor Wes for the Zoom link.

**Prayer Shawl Ministry ~ Wednesday January 15th 2:00-3:30 pm in the Oasis Center** Calling all knitters and crocheters! Come for creativity and conversation. Refreshments will be served. Contact Lindsey Huddleston (630-338-9294) for more information.

"Unveiled Strength: Portraits of Intimacy and Vulnerability," featuring evocative works of award-winning Bradenton-based artist Gary LaParl, will be on display from December 15, 2024, to January 16, 2025, at the Lexow Gallery at Unitarian Universalist Church of Sarasota. This collection of portraits explores complex themes of male relationships and vulnerability, inviting viewers to engage with deep, often overlooked aspects of masculinity. **The evening reception is Friday, January 10, 5-7 p.m.**

**NEXT UCC MEN'S BREAKFAST ON JANUARY 18** ~ and all the men of the congregation are invited to join for breakfast in Syster Hall then. Coffee will be on at 8 am and **breakfast served at 8:30.** After breakfast, **Tara Maffei, Executive Director of Family Promise of Sarasota-Manatee,** will share how her organization helps to ensure that children and their families have safe, stable housing. You may register by Thursday, January 16 by calling Sherry at the church office at 941-953-7044. We hope to see you there!

**January 18 ~ Bobby Jo Valentine in concert at 4 p.m. in the sanctuary.** Bobby Jo offers catching songs with good tunes and intelligent, thoughtful lyrics in the tradition of Bob Dylan, Cat Stevens and Bruce Hornsby. A free will offering to benefit ALSO Youth.

**January 19<sup>th</sup> Syster Hall @ Noon "The Church as Eco-System" Robert E. Shore-Goss and Sarah J. Melcher will speak on January 19<sup>th</sup>** "The Church as Eco-System." We will explore the history of the land First Congregational United Church of Christ occupies, who lived there before us, how they cared for the land, and be a sustainable presence on the land the church occupies.

**ANNUAL MEETING ~ JANUARY 26<sup>TH</sup> ~ Noon ~ Sanctuary or Livestreamed** This year at our annual meeting we will vote on: ***Financial Reports 2024, Budget 2025, Nominating Report (Leadership Team) 2025.*** We will celebrate the work of this past year: Sacred Conversations on Race, Bible Study, Artful Prayer, Drumming, Choir, worship, new members, and the vital/vibrant Spirit that guides our church. The Annual Report will be posted on the website **January 12<sup>th</sup>.** Financials available via email or in the church office. Paper ballots are available in the office to vote beforehand. Questions? See Moderator Harold Mezile.

### **THIS WEEK**

**Sunday, January 5, 2025 ~ Stephen Fancher organist and Communion**

9 a.m. ~ Worship, Chapel

11 a.m. ~ Worship, Sanctuary and Online

Noon ~ Fellowship Time ~ Birthday Sunday

**Monday, January 6, 2025**

Facilities and Grounds, 10 a.m., Oasis Center and Zoom  
Racial Justice Mission Group, 11 a.m., Zoom  
Food and Hunger Group, 11:30 a.m., Oasis Center and Zoom

**Tuesday, January 7**

Drumming as a Spiritual Practice, 3 p.m., Chapel  
Tuesday Night Bible Study, 6:30 p.m., Zoom

**Wednesday, January 8**

Bible Study, 11 a.m., Oasis Center and Zoom  
Worship Team, 1 p.m., Oasis Center and Zoom  
Sacred Conversations on Race 3 p.m., Oasis Center and Zoom  
Choir Rehearsal, 7 p.m., Chapel

**Thursday, January 9**

Artful Prayer, 2 p.m., Oasis Center and Zoom

**Sunday, January 12, 2025 ~ Glenn Priest organist**

9 a.m. ~ Worship, Chapel  
11 a.m. ~ Worship, Sanctuary and Online  
Noon ~ COLLAGE, Syster Hall