



# Congregational Church of Burlington

Established 1774

January 2018

## Pastor's Message

Have you ever experienced something so wonderful that you wished it would last forever? Alas, too many of our wonderful experiences don't last more than a few minutes, few hours, or at most, a few days. Fortunately, Christmas is not one of those experiences. The good news of God's gift to us of Jesus Christ, which we celebrate on Christmas day, is a gift that keeps on giving for the following eleven days.

Long after our Christmas Day gifts were opened and the boxes and wrapping paper thrown away; long after our Christmas dinners were eaten, and our guests went home, and even long after many of our Christmas trees and their decorations came down and were stored away, the church's Christmas season continued...December 26, 27, 28, and 29, to the first Sunday of Christmas.

This year on Sunday, December 31, our Gospel lesson was from Luke 2:22-40. In it Mary and Joseph went with their little more than a month-old Baby Jesus, for Mary's service of purification. Seven days after Jesus' birth he was circumcised and formally named. Thirty-two days later, or forty days after giving birth, Mary went to the temple with her husband Joseph and Baby Jesus to be declared virtually pure and to give her offering of two turtle doves. There the Holy Family met a devote man named Simeon who saw Jesus as the Christ, and a prophetess named Anna who declared him to be the same. December 31 also found some churches holding what were called "Watch Night" services. Beginning sometime in late evening, and continuing until midnight, these services helped worshippers watch in celebration as the old year went out and the New Year came in.

From January 1 until January 5, Christians are then asked to go back to the time before Jesus' birth and travel with the Magi (Wise-Men) to the place in Bethlehem where Jesus was born. Then, on the 12<sup>th</sup> day of Christmas, (also known as Epiphany, or Three-Kings Day) which falls on Saturday this year, we hear the story of the Magi's arrival at the stable in Bethlehem and the presentation of their most precious gifts to the Christ child.

What is so wonderful about the twelve days of Christmas is that it gives us time to reflect on God's gift to us of Jesus, and how we will respond with gifts of our own. The 12<sup>th</sup> day of Christmas gives us the example of the Magi's giving the best of what they had to Jesus. Their example causes us all to ask, "What are we giving to Jesus and those he has called on us to serve?" Are we giving our best, or only what is left over after we have taken care of ourselves and our families?

After you exchanged gifts with your family on Christmas day, did you think about what you could give to others on the following 12 days of the Christmas season? If you had the means, did you designate a different charity to donate to on each of the 12 days? Did you try to do at least one act of kindness for each of the 12 days of Christmas; or say prayers for at least one person every day for 12 days; or did you do something for your church for 12 days?

As the old song goes "Christmas really is the most wonderful time of the year." What makes it wonderful, as old Ebenezer Scrooge found out, is giving to others as our God and Christ give to us.

MERRY CHRISTMAS

Wendell M. Taylor, Pastor