

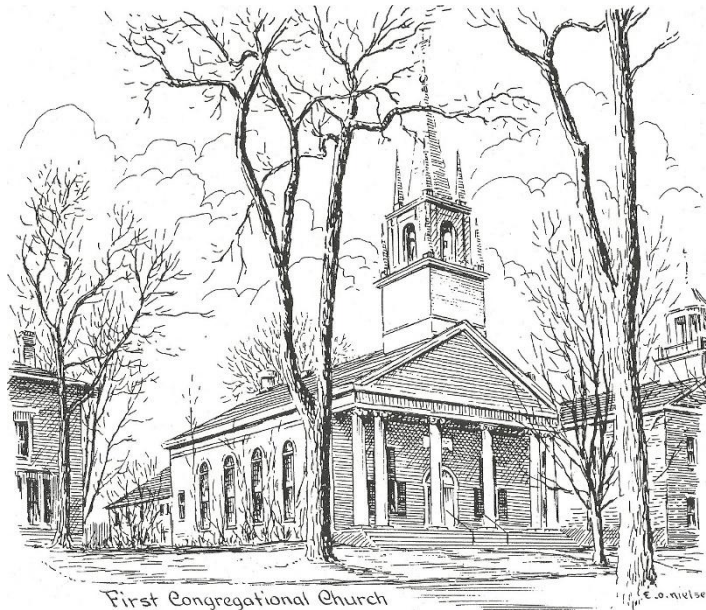
First Congregational Church

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

An Open and Affirming Church

PO Box 350, 28 High Street, Wiscasset, Maine 04578

207-882-7544, www.uccwiscasset.org



We welcome you to the First Congregational Church of Wiscasset.

VISION: We are on a journey to reflect God's love, embracing diversity and affirming the dignity and worth of all.

MISSION: Together we strive to praise God, grow in faith, cultivate love, spread joy, care for all people and God's creation, promote peace, and do justice.



January 4, 2026

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

We welcome all to our worship service, whether present in the sanctuary, joining us on streaming video, or watching our service in the future.

FOR YOUR CONTEMPLATION

“Action is always superior to speech in the Gospels, which is why the Word became flesh and not newsprint.”
Colin Morris

PRELUDE *Prelude on "O Morning Star"* Franklin Ritter

RINGING OF THE BELL

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

* CALL TO WORSHIP

L: On this day, we remember the gift of God's Word,

P: who gathers us together from the farthest parts of the world to worship in joy and hope.

L: On this day, we remember the simple graces of the bread and the cup,

P: those plain gifts shaped by God's love into nourishing hope.

L: On this day, we remember the gifts of water and oil,

P: cleansing us in the baptismal pools, anointing us as God's children.

* OPENING HYMN *I Danced in the Morning* No. 206

INVOCATION TO PRAYER

JOYS AND CONCERNS: After each Joy or Concern, Please respond:

Pastor: “God,” Congregation: **“Hear our prayer.”**

LIGHTING OF THE PEACE CANDLE

Global Mission Partner Prayer this week: **Morocco**

MORNING PRAYER FOLLOWED BY SILENT PRAYER

SCRIPTURE LESSON John 1:1-18, NRSV Updated

Liturgist: This is the Word of God. **People: Thanks be to God.**

* HYMN *Morning Has Broken* No. 258

SERMON ‘God Steps into the Mess’

OFFERTORY PRAYER

OFFERTORY

Communion, Op. 8

Louis Vierne

* PRESENTATION WITH THE DOXOLOGY

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;

Praise God, all creatures here below;

Praise God for all that love has done;

Creator, Christ, and Spirit One. Amen.

DEDICATION PRAYER

SACRAMENT OF EUCHARIST

WELCOME

GREAT PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

L: May the God of newness be with you.

P: And also with you.

L: People of Christmas, offer your hearts to God.

P: We lift them to the One who comes,

L: new hope and life cradled in loving hands.

P: People of the Holy One of Bethlehem, sing glad praises to our God.

L: We come, for we have received the good news,

P: we have believed the Word, we are given joyful songs to sing.

Call to Reconciliation

Have we really been to Bethlehem? Have we worshiped at the manger? Have we changed, for the better? Or have we simply gone back to being the people we were before the joy, the peace, the gifts of Christmas? Let us confess how we have not lived as those who have seen the Baby, as we pray together, saying,

UNISON PRAYER FOR FORGIVENESS

God of Christmas: we still are playing with our new toys, the creche figures have not been put away; we have the stacks of Christmas cards, but we memorize the words sin has taught us; we set limits on who we will love, we make promises we cannot keep, we fail to see the pain and hurt we cause.

God of the angels and shepherds, forgive us. Your Word has come to reshape our lives; your Light has come to show us the way home; your Son has come to make us your family. Have mercy and make us new people. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen.

SILENCE IS KEPT

ASSURANCE OF PARDON

Like the Baby of Bethlehem, we are born anew. God's forgiveness cradles us; God's love is poured out on us. What a marvelous gift - forgiveness! Filled with hope and new life, we can sing God's praises forever. Amen.

EUCCHARIST PRAYER

mystery we call faith:

**At the beginning of time, Christ was the Word of creation;
at the right time, Christ was the Word of redemption;
at the end of time, Christ will be the Word who brings us home.**

CONTINUED EUCCHARIST PRAYER 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.

WORDS OF INSTITUTION

SHARING OF THE BREAD AND JUICE

THANKSGIVING PRAYER

COMMISSIONING

* CLOSING HYMN *Go, Tell It on the Mountain* No. 160

BENEDICTION AND BENEDICTORY RESPONSE

**Go now in peace. Never be afraid. God will go with you each hour of every day.
Go now in faith, steadfast, strong and true. Know God will guide you in all you do.
Go now in love, and show you believe. Reach out to others so all the world can see.
God will be there watching from above. Go now in peace, in faith, and in love.**

POSTLUDE

March of the Three Kings

Bizet/arr. Pierce

You are invited to sit for the postlude.

* * * * *

“Our worship ends, let our service begin”

John 1:1-18

The Word Became Flesh

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it.

There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.' ") From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is the only Son, himself God, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

This is the Word of God.

Thanks be to God.

New Revised Standard Version Updated Version

Minister and Teacher: Rev. John Hogue
Music Director: Joel Pierce

Those serving you today:
Ushers: Beth Maxwell and Linda Wallace
Reader: Martha Speed
Online Streaming: Dewey Harris

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Communion Sunday: We are now serving all gluten free (gf) elements during communion, and “the cup” contains grape juice.

Please join us for fellowship, coffee or tea, and refreshments in Fellowship Hall following worship.

Please take note of the colored paper prayer slips in the pew rack. These are for you to write a word or phrase of prayer or concerns. Fold it and place it in the offering plate. It will only be shared with Rev. John.

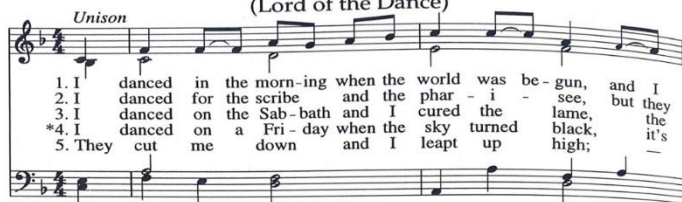
Happy January Birthday to Susan Attwood, Ken Cooper, Natalie Dunbar, Lisa Hargreaves, Dewey Harris, Mark Light, Deb Myers

Help Yourself Shelf January Wish List

* jarred spaghetti sauce * 1lb. white rice * drink mixes * canned chicken * tuna *
* cereal * SPAM * mayo * baked beans * toothpaste * dish soap * cat litter *

I Danced in the Morning (Lord of the Dance)

Unison

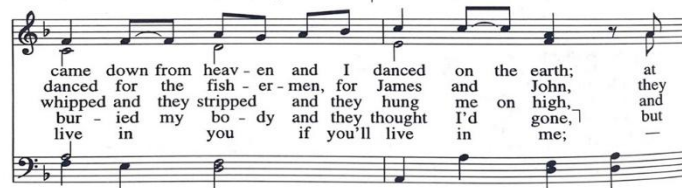


1. I danced in the morn-ing when the world was be-gun, and I
 2. I danced for the scribe and the phar-isee, but they
 3. I danced on the Sab-bath and I cured the lame, the
 *4. I danced on a Fri-day when the sky turned black, it's
 5. They cut me down and I leapt up high;

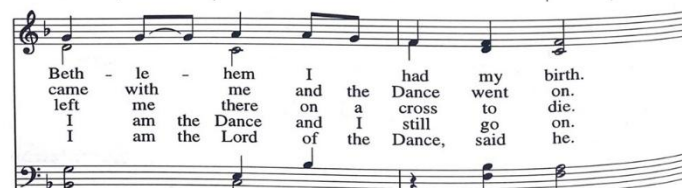
* Stanza 4, up to bracket (), may be sung in F minor



danced in the moon and the stars and the sun, and I
 would not dance and they would-n't fol-low me; I
 ho-ly peo-ple said it was a shame; they
 hard dance with the dev-il on your back; they
 I am the life that-'ll nev-er, nev-er die; I'll

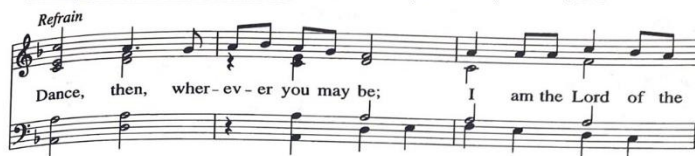


came down from heav-en and I danced on the earth; at
 danced for the fish-er-men, for John, James, and they
 whipped and they stripped and they hung me on high, I
 bur-ied my bo-dy and they thought I'd gone, but
 live in you if you'll live in me;



Beth-le-hem I had my birth.
 came with me and the Dance went on.
 left me there and on a cross to die.
 I am the Dance and I still go on.
 I am the Lord of the Dance, said he.

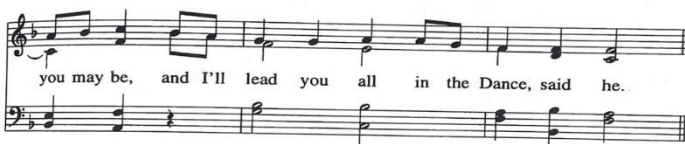
Refrain



Dance, then, wher-ev-er you may be; I am the Lord of the



Dance, said he, and I'll lead you all, wher-ev-er



you may be, and I'll lead you all in the Dance, said he.

Morning Has Broken

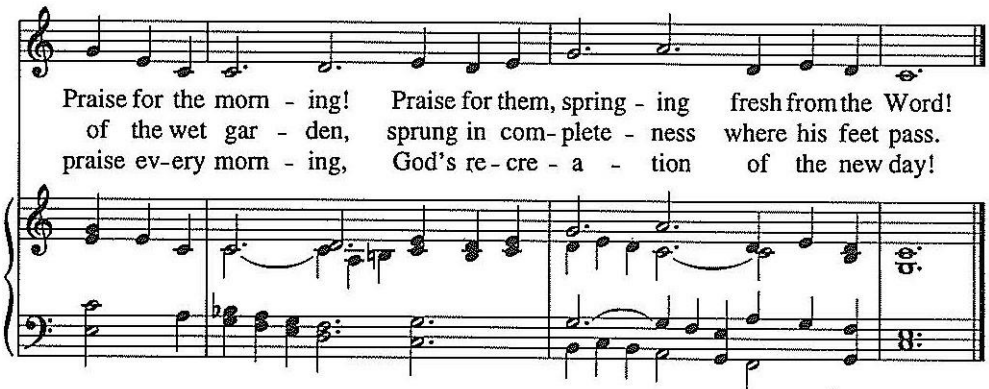
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1. Morn-ing has bro - ken like the first morn - ing, black-bird has
 2. Sweet the rain's new fall sun-lit from heav - en, like the first
 3. Mine is the sun - light! Mine is the morn - ing born of the



spo - ken like the first bird. Praise for the sing - ing!
 dew - fall on the first grass. Praise for the sweet - ness
 one light E-den saw play! Praise with e - la - tion,



Praise for the morn - ing! Praise for them, spring - ing fresh from the Word!
 of the wet gar - den, sprung in com-plete - ness where his feet pass.
 praise ev-ery morn - ing, God's re-cre - a - tion of the new day!

WORDS: Eleanor Farjeon, *Enlarged Songs of Praise*, 1931

MUSIC: Traditional Gaelic melody, harm. David Evans, *Revised Church Hymnary*, 1927

BUNESSAN
 55.54D

Rev. John Hogue, 'God Stepped into this Mess' John 1:1-18

Jan.4,2026

We have countless paintings through the generations from the Christmas narrative in Mathew, Luke accounts but hardly any from the gospel according to John. Some say it is abstract, philosophical but for those who are creative like myself, it is beauty that intensifies the mystery of our faith. There are so many themes in this text that it makes our head spin. It is kind of like going to visit a smorgasbord with its tables filled with food and you are invited to eat all you can eat. Ever been to Shady Maples restaurant in East Earl PA, (Lancaster County -Amish Country)you know what I am talking about . When you look at the tables of food, a person just doesn't know where to begin. So a person often overeats at a smorgasbord because the price is the same if you eat little or lots. The tendency is to pile on too much food. Also, at a smorgasbord, you can nibble on this and you nibble on that, so you take several little globs of almost everything. So you have a little pile of this and a little pile of that, and you end up with little piles of food all over your plate.

But today, we are just going to nibble, for this familiar text for Christmas is like a buffet table with too much food on it. We just don't know where to begin. So I am going to focus on one serving.

The Gospel according to John teaches us before the world began, Jesus was the logic of God, the mind of God, the brilliance of God. In the beginning was the logic, and the logic was with God, meaning Jesus, and the brilliant logic became flesh and lived among us. So Jesus existed far before measured time began and Jesus is the logical master mind of creation.

The brilliant logical mind of the universe became flesh, a human being.

Now, when the Greek language uses the word, "flesh," it uses the word, "sarx," from which we get our word, sarcophagus. The Greek word, "flesh," doesn't simply refer to our skin and bones and body that we can touch; the word, "flesh," in Greek, refers to the totality of who we are; it refers to our mind, body and spirit. In Hebrew and Greek, a human being is composed of three parts: body, mind and spirit, and we still are. So that the Bible is saying that the brilliant logical mind of the universe is a full human being, flesh.

Now, why is this so important?

The text is saying that the master intelligence behind the universe did not stay up in the safety of heaven, that God did not remain living up there in heaven, far away from the evil and suffering of earth, that God didn't live in some kind of eternal suburb, safe from it all. God didn't live away from the rough and tumble of the world, but God came down here to this earth to suffer like we do.

The famous Rocket scientist from WWII defected to the US Robert Oppenheimer said, "I quote: 'The best way to send an idea is to wrap it up in a person.' Theologically we call that incarnation. Meaning in 'the flesh'. God broke the silence. Or as a little girl expressed it in this way, through her eyes, " Some people couldn't hear God's inside whisper so God sent Jesus to tell them out loud.' That is the blessing and gift from our text.

Yet I get it. Life can be tough. Life can be dark. The darkness can be overwhelming.

Some folks have been having a bad year. Maybe there is financial pressure. Maybe you are anxious about tariffs. Or anxious about other items. Maybe you are grieving someone who always used to sit at the Christmas table with you and won't be there this year. Maybe a relationship is under strain. Tragically more people consult divorce lawyers on January 2nd than on any other day of the year. Maybe life is good, but it is still just hard getting everything done. A young mother loves her baby.... But you wish she would get some sleep. One loves their job - but you are soooo glad to have a few days off. We are human. I do know that our sinfulness, our selfishness - damages our relationships, creates a blockage between us and God. There are people who are not talking to a close relative at Christmas time. If our family relationships are perfect, before we begin to boast - we all have other relationships, whether with colleagues, neighbours, ex-friends we no longer talk to ... that are far from perfect.

Human beings are broken creatures. Our sinfulness, our selfishness - damages our relationships and damages our relationship with God.

Why did the word become flesh? Because we need someone to put those damaged relationships right. In the agonising pain of broken relationships with each other ...and with God, we need someone to bring life.

Christmas seemed so much simpler when we were a six year old ripping the wrapping paper off.

Christmas wasn't easy for Mary and Joseph. Struggling with other people's opinions of them because Mary is pregnant out of wedlock. Forced to travel from one end of the country to the other because of a government census. After the birth, fleeing the country to escape persecution from Herod, living as asylum seekers in Egypt. And before

that - the birth. No maternity hospital. No proper bed. Just off the side room of a home to give birth to a baby in.

However, some gifts are more than just a gift. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

This reminds me of the parable of the very rich but unhappy king. Unhappy because he was all alone in an empty palace. How he longed for a wife with whom he could share his life.

Then one day the king saw the most beautiful woman he had ever seen, riding through the streets. Enquiries revealed she was a peasant girl, but the king's heart was captivated. He would make sure that each day he rode past her house in the hope of catching a glimpse of his love.

But the king had a problem. How would he win her love? He could draw up a royal decree commanding her to become his queen. But then he could never be sure he had won her love, for she would be required to obey a royal decree.

Perhaps he could call on her and try to win her over, appear in all his regal glory and sweep her off her feet. But no, then he could never be sure whether she had married him only for his power and riches.

Finally he came upon the perfect plan. He would come to her as a peasant. That was the only way to truly win her love. So he abandoned his palace and his riches and his comfort and put on the clothes of a peasant. He went and lived among the peasants. He worked with them, shared their sufferings, danced at their feasts, until finally he won the heart of the woman who had captured his heart.

So it is with God. Christ became one of us, lived among us, worked among us, suffered with us, danced with us. All in order to win our hearts.

God's gift, in the midst of the chaos of life, in the midst of the darkness - is to become flesh. To become one of us. And step by step - to put it right. "The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.

In the midst of whatever we fear - God brings hope. The hope that comes from knowing the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.

There is a famous parable by theologian Soren Kierkegaard I wish to share with you.

At the end of time, billions of people were scattered on a great plain before God's throne. Most shrank back from the brilliant light before them. But some groups near the front talked heatedly - not with cringing shame, but with belligerence.

'Can God judge us? How can he know about suffering?' snapped a young Albanian. He removes his shirt to reveal a bullet scarred back. 'In Kosovo we endured terror... shootings... torture!'

In another group an aged aboriginal woman pulls a crumpled, tear stained photograph from her pocket. 'What about this?' she demanded, 'This is my precious child. I have not seen her since the day she was stolen away for no crime but being black!'

In another crowd, a pregnant schoolgirl with sullen eyes. 'Why should I suffer?' she murmured, 'It wasn't my fault.'

Far out across the plain there were hundreds of such groups. Each had a complaint against God for the evil and suffering he permitted in

this world. How lucky God was to live in heaven where all was sweetness and light, where there was no weeping or fear, no hunger or hatred. What did God know of all that people had been forced to endure in this world? For God leads a pretty sheltered life, they said. So each of these groups sent forth their leader, chosen because he had suffered the most. A Jew from the horrors of the holocaust, a person from Hiroshima, a horribly deformed arthritic, a thalidomide child. In the center of the plain they consulted with each other. At last they were ready to present their case. It was rather clever. Before God could be qualified to be their judge, he must endure what they had endured. Their decision was that God should be sentenced to live on earth – as a man!

‘Let him be born into a hated race. Let the legitimacy of his birth be doubted. Give him a job so difficult that even his family will think him out of his mind when he tries to do it. Let him be betrayed by his closest friends. Let him face false charges, be tried by a prejudiced jury and convicted by a cowardly judge. Let him be tortured.

‘At the last, let him see what it means to be terribly alone. Then let him die. Let him die so that there can be no doubt that he died. Let there be a great host of witnesses to verify it.’

As each leader announced his portion of the sentence, loud murmurs of approval went up from the throng of people assembled. And when the last had finished pronouncing the sentence, there was a long silence. No-one uttered another word. No-one moved. For suddenly all knew that God had already served his sentence. Source: Illustrations Unlimited, page 302. “A retelling of a story by Soren Kierkegaard.”

Or perhaps this is more relevant for our time of 2026. 18 month old Johnnie was in trouble. Crying on the top of his lungs. Johnnie was

jumping frantically up and down in the playpen and when he saw Grandpa, he yelled with his arms extending from the edge of the playpen, "OUT". Only natural from grandfather to reach down and lift him out of his predicament but mother stepped in and said, "No Johnnie, you are being punished- so you must stay in."

Grandfather was at a loss to know what to do. The child's tears and chubby hands reached deep into his heart. Could not overstep his bounds with his daughter and challenge the discipline. Love found a way. The grandfather could not take his grandson out of the playpen so he climbed in with him. That is what Jesus did for us - He climbed among and in with us. 'The word made flesh and dwelt among us.'

Go Tell It On The Mountain

A D A E A
 Go, tell it on the moun-tain, O-ver the hills and ev-'ry- where;

4 A D A F#m Bm A/E E7 A
 Go, tell it on the moun-tain that Je-sus Christ is born. While
 The
 Down

8 A D E A
 shep-herds kept their watch-ing Over si-lent flocks by night, Be-
 shep-herds feared and trem-bled When lo! A-bove the earth, Rang-
 in a low-ly man-ger Our hum-ble Christ was born, And

12 A F#m7 B7 E E7
 hold, through-out the heav-ens Thereshone a ho-ly light.____
 out the an-gel chor-us That hailed our Sav-ior's birth:____
 God sent us sal-va-tion, That bles-sed Christ-mas morn:____

16 A D A E A
 Go, tell it on the moun-tain, O-ver the hills and ev-'ry- where;

20 A D A F#m Bm A/E E7 A
 Go, tell it on the moun-tain that Je-sus Christ is born.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Saturday, January 10

The French tradition of baking the Galette des Rois, the Three Kings Cake, will be demonstrated. There will be a free will offering for our mission funds. Margot Stiassni-Sieracki will show how to bake this special treat to celebrate the Twelfth Day of Christmas. The demonstration will begin at 1:30 p.m. Slices of the cake made by Margot will be served during Fellowship Hour on Sunday.

On the Sunday after Epiphany, January 11, a special Sunday service will be held to receive white gifts. This represents the arrival of the three kings presenting gifts to the infant Jesus. Gifts can be animal food packages wrapped in white paper, or a monetary gift in a white envelope. The organizations chosen for the donations are the Animal Shelter, a heating fuel fund, and Ecumenical Council for Homeless Prevention (ECHP). Any undesignated money will be evenly divided among the three groups.

Our Choir will be taking a break this winter and not singing as a group in January and February. This is part of a yearlong experiment which started with the Choir singing over the whole summer. Joel will continue to accompany services on our wonderful new organ and occasionally soloists and duets will sing. Volunteer instrumentalists are gladly welcomed during this time. The Choir will begin rehearsals as Easter approaches.

First Congregational Church UCC
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Music Director: Joel Pierce
Sexton: Mary McKinney
Office Administrator: Beth Maxwell
Church Office Email – fccw@myfairpoint.net
Church Office Phone – 207 882-7544
Church Website – www.uccwiscasset.org

Sunday, January 4	Sunday Worship 10:00am Coffee Hour in Fellowship Hall following Worship
Monday, January 5	Rev. John's Office Hours 9:00am – 12:00pm Office Hours 9:00am – 12:00pm Garden Club of Wiscasset Board Meeting 9am followed by potluck lunch Mah Jongg 3:00 – 5:30pm
Tuesday, January 6	Rev. John's Office Hours 9:00am – 12:00pm Office Hours 9:00am – 12:00pm
Wednesday, January 7	Rev. John's Office Hours 9:00am – 12:00pm Office Hours 9:00am – 12:00pm Organ Society Business Meeting 9:30am Feed Our Scholars packing 11:00am in the activity room
Thursday, January 8	Office Hours 9:00am – 12:00pm Garden Club of Wiscasset Meeting 11am – 2:30pm
Saturday, January 10	Galette des Rois demonstration – 1:30pm
Sunday, January 11	Sunday Worship 10:00am White Gift Sunday Coffee Hour in Fellowship Hall following Worship

