



**New**  
**Beginnings**

**Music To Prepare Us For Worship**

Sarah Sharp, Musician

**Welcome**

NEW YEAR 2021 BLESSINGS on this first Sunday in January! **Thank you** for beginning your New Year in worship at Ottawa First United Methodist Church. What do you think? I don't think there's ever been a more welcomed New Year than the New Year 2021. And, I wonder...does our ancient and eternal God have a **New Year** message for us? Got me thinking, 2020's shifted our thinking; 2020's made us more determined than ever to live keeping the hope, love, peace and joy of Christmas alive all year long! So, let's worship with the hope of hearing God speak to us on this day of new beginnings. We begin with the song entitled just that, "This is the Day of New Beginnings."

**Opening Song** "This is the Day of New Beginnings"

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**Pastoral Prayer & Lord's Prayer**

Loving God, Creator of every hour, You are eternal. You are our alpha and omega and yet You know no beginning or end. Hear our New Year praise for you and all you've done to bring us to today. After a year like last, we've learned to place all our hope in you, whatever our future holds. After a year like last, we know we can trust you're holding us, always holding us in your strong, beyond capable hands. You are always with us. You provide. You lead us in your good and perfect way

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who is Jesus Christ. Thank you for sending him to earth to be one of us. And, thank you Jesus for showing us God's great love. We're ever so grateful you placed your loving spirit in our hearts. Jesus, you author and perfect of every new beginning. And, so we enter this New Year confessing to you what we've done that has not been your will or way. We've done what we shouldn't do. We've left undone what we should do. We've thought too highly of ourselves and not cared enough for others. We've also thought too little of ourselves and allowed ourselves to be written off as worthless. Forgive us LORD! Cleanse our hearts and keep our mind focused on your goodness and truth. We have hope for the New Year 2021 because yours is a steadfast love that endures forever! You make all things new: and so we pray this New Year for restored peace where there's been hatred; for reduced tension where there's been anger; for rekindled relationships where there's been hostility; for relieved suffering where there's been illness and violence. Finally, God, we pray for a recreated, united nation for the good of the people and for world peace. God, hear our prayers and send your Holy Spirit to empower us to live as your witnesses, sharing your love with the world around us. Lord, on this day of new beginnings, your disciples pray in the name and spirit of Christ who us taught to pray you, praying...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 trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. AMEN

### **The Invitation to Give Our Gifts & Tithes**

Christmas has come and gone but every truth of Christ's birth remains. God is close to us. God loves us. God gives us so many gifts...gifts of family, friends, church, food, shelter, work, play, time, and health. God's also given us this opportunity to give a gift to support the mission and ministry of Ottawa First United Methodist Church, a church that helps others in Ottawa and beyond. Should God prompt you to give a gift, you're invited to send your gift to the church or go online and use our secure online paypal giving option. Now, let's pray to thank God for this gift giving opportunity as we dedicate our gifts to the work of the Church in prayer.

### **The Prayer of Dedication**

Holy God who gives and then gives more: it's the offering time again. Even though we're not in- person at church; even though we can't pass and place our gifts in the offering plate, we send our gifts not just to maintain the building but to support the church' mission and ministries, here in Ottawa and around the world. But, the gifts

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we send are not the only gifts we have to offer you. You've given each of us spiritual gifts and talents not to make us rich but to make the world richer, more compassionate and more just. Help us use our time on earth wisely and when we do, open our eyes to the glimpses of heaven on earth our gifts bring to our community and our world. In our glorious Savior's name, we pray. Amen

**Today's Scripture Readings** Isaiah 43: 14-19 Pastor Cheri, Liturgist

This is what the LORD says— your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel:

“For your sake I will send to Babylon and bring down as fugitives all the Babylonians, in the ships in which they took pride. I am the LORD, your Holy One, Israel's Creator, your King.” This is what the LORD says— he who made a way through the sea, a path through the mighty waters, who drew out the chariots and horses, the army and reinforcements together,

and they lay there, never to rise again, extinguished, snuffed out like a wick:

“Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.

Lamentations 3: 19-26

I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me. Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, “The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him.”

The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD.

**The Message** “New Beginnings” Pastor Cheri

Dear friends in Christ, New Year 2021 greetings. Grace, mercy, peace and love, from God our Creating Father, from Jesus Christ, God's Son, our Savior, and from God's Most Holy Spirit. I wish you joy in the New Year! I pray you know good health and peace unending in all your relationships. I pray you find fulfillment in every aspect of your lives. I pray you'll be part of what God calls us to do as a church in this New Year. May 2021 be a year of renewed health and prosperity! This is my prayer for you, your family and for God's church, Ottawa First UMC. The end! Do I really need to say more?

In all seriousness, I've been reflecting on THIS particular New Year. I realized I really like beginnings. I think I like beginnings better than endings. Although, I'm sure we'd all agree we were WAY more than ready for 2020 to end.

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We'd certainly like Covid to end! Still, when it comes to years on the calendar, I like beginnings more than endings. What I appreciate about beginnings is they're newness, a New Year's like a painter's blank canvas, open to creative possibility and opportunity. New Year's begin with hope for better tomorrows. Are you feeling hopeful? You heard Isaiah... forget the former things; don't dwell on the past. God's doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? God makes a way in the wilderness. God's ways are like streams in the wasteland; refreshing, places to pause beside waters moving forward always forward with the beautiful rhythm of life. Indeed God led us forward through 2020's wilderness wastelands to a New Year. We also heard the prophet Jeremiah's lament; have hope: because of the LORD's great love (even if 2020 felt all consuming) we were not consumed. God's compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is God's faithfulness. That's today's Good News, no matter how all consuming hard life can be; God's mercies are new every morning. God's compassions never fail us. The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him. Would you agree? No matter what happened in 2020, we received mercy upon mercy, God's new every morning mercies. God is so faithful. Ya know, on second thought, the reason I like beginnings more than endings has more to do with past difficulties coming to an end. Don't ya wonder? Will 2021 be another year of more adjusting, worrying, pivoting, adapting, changing, fearing, persevering, cancelling, postponing and isolating? Who isn't ready to put all that behind us? Reminds me of an old Irish New Year's tradition. Irish tradition has us opening our door at midnight on New Year's Eve. The idea: let the old year out and the New Year in. Well, to let 2020 out we shoulda' opened ALL our windows, ALL our doors, even the garage door to let it all out? If only I'd told you this last Sunday? If only our putting 2020 behind us were that simple. Now, we have every reason to say: hindsight really is 2020! Ain't that the truth!

Carol Pearse made a Facebook post that suggested we order shirts that say: "the first rule of **2021** don't talk about **2020!**" Who wants one? 2020's messes and stresses are history and while Isaiah did say "forget the former things; do not dwell on the past." We can't erase the past but we certainly CAN learn from it. We learned how isolation and quarantine slowed time for us; gave us MORE reasons to talk to God in prayer. **2020** gave us time to reflect on all our blessings; even though we felt cursed. We knew **moments** we wished would end and **moments** we wished would NEVER end. **Moments** of deep sorrow and moments of great happiness and joy. There were **moments** we just knew God was with us and **moments** we felt God

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was nowhere to be found. There were **moments** of fretting anxiety and **moments** of calm, peace. **Moments** of uncertainty and **moments** we clearly knew where we were headed, **moments** of loneliness and **moments** of connection even though we were apart. I'll never forget the early Fall day we discovered the church's media computer crashed. Everything worship was gone. Of course, that would happen the week we'd celebrate the life and love of our dear Coleen Spurling! Of course, our media computer would crash. It was 2020. Made me think of the time years ago when my personal computer crashed.

At that time, I was bi-vocational and very new to ministry. Two careers meant: I didn't have spare time. I was sure my computer's death meant I lost everything including the sermon I'd preach that week. I didn't have TIME to re-write it. I unplugged everything and took my hard drive to a computer guru. That computer guru SAVED my life! Unlike the church's computer he retrieved ALL of my files; all of church, all of my Speech Pathologist school job, all of my seminary class work, all my pictures, EVERYTHING. Between my computer experiences and last year when everything came crashing down on us; we have a better appreciation for how very fragile life can be, how life can all come crashing down again. One nasty computer virus, one fried hard drive, one Covid virus mutation and we're back to where we began last March. Like my computer has an external hard drive that backs up all my files, we need a back-up plan for life, a really strong, fail safe, maximum capacity back up plan for our lives and living, one that's durable, resilient and reliable!

We've been with Luke all of Advent. When Luke tells the story of that first Christmas, Luke fills us in on all those details we love to hear. The story of a manger, and a young couple, and shepherds and Wise Men; it's a story we never tire of hearing. But when John wrote his gospel, John has a whole different approach to Christmas. John begins his Christmas account with three simple words: "In the beginning." In other words, John wants us to know Jesus didn't just appear on earth at Christmas; Jesus was always part of God's plan, **before** time's beginning, **before** there were days and nights, **before** there were roads, **before** there was Bethlehem, Jesus was with God in the beginning, before anything else existed. John's way of saying Jesus is not just God's back-up plan. Jesus is God's plan to save. Present at Creation, Jesus came to earth to serve, heal and minister to all people. Before he returned to God in heaven he left us His amazing, loving Spirit in us to serve, heal and minister to all people so everyone will know God's salvation plan. John also said: Jesus was in the world, and the world came into being through

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Him, yet the world did not know him. First century people lived in a state of oblivion as to how God was in the world! Like much of our world today, the world then did not know him. Jesus came to his own people and his own people would not accept him. Most people didn't have a clue. Yes, they thought Jesus was wiser than most. Yes, they admired him for his teaching. Yes, they were astonished by his miracles, but they didn't really know who he was. Only a few recognized him as God! But to all who received him, to all who believed in his name, his love united them and brought them in to the family of God. Everyone of us saved! Mission accomplished! That's what Jesus came to do. From the beginning, Jesus was God's plan to save us and love all people into God's family. All who believe in him and follow him, we're not strangers to God or to each other, we're God's children. That my friends, is even more New Year's Good News. You and me, we're God's family, beloved siblings of Jesus Christ.

Could there be any better New Year news? None of us starts this New Year alone. Jesus is with us every moment of every day into the coming year and beyond into eternity. He's our Prince of Peace in a world of chaos and confusion. He lights our every darkness. Among people who are destined to die - and that's all of us; we're all destined to die – Jesus is life eternal. Don't be haunted by your past, Jesus is your path to forgiveness. In Him, with Him and because of Him we know a more hope-filled future; one filled with blessing, love and grace.

So, let's return to my computer analogies for just a moment. When we changed church computers; it was because everything was wiped out; the church's data was gone. When life wipes us out; we're forced to change. That was 2020. My computer held the only record of so much of my life and it was gone until the computer guru saved my files! God's plan to save us is Jesus Christ Jesus; he's the strongest, most fail safe, maximum capacity back, durable, resilient and reliable plan ever! Computers fail us, sometimes we can save what's lost sometimes nothing's salvageable. Thank God, God gave us our very own hard drives, it's called our brain. Our brains hold all our past. They're called memories. We can retrieve what's salvageable, useful and helpful. And, we can also remember what wasn't salvageable, useful or helpful, what we'd like to forget but can't, the mixed up, messed up, hard parts of our past only Jesus can save, restore, redeem and make new. 2020 was a year of essential work and essential workers. But, every year, Jesus is God's essential worker, essential to God's plan to save us!

That computer guru gave me a **new** beginning on a **new** computer with my **old** files but God gives us a **new** beginning with a fresh, **new**, very clean slate

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because God loves us so much God sends new mercies every morning. God's compassion never fails. So, on this day of new beginnings; with a blank canvas before us, receive God's gift of a new life in Christ! I close today's sermon with an Apache prayer that goes like this. Look behind and be filled with gratitude. Look forward and be filled with vision. Look upward and be filled with strength. Look inward and discover peace. New Years blessings to you and your family! No matter what comes our way in 2021, know God's new and unfailing mercies every day. Amen

### **Holy Communion**

We begin this first Sunday in the New Year 2021 by celebrating the nourishing, sustaining, forgiving and uniting sacrament of Holy Communion. If you don't already have bread and juice, stop the recording now and get some. Now will you please join in our responsive Great Thanksgiving as is printed on the screen.

### **The Great Thanksgiving**

Dearly beloved, who do you belong to?

**We belong to God.**

Where are you from?

**We are from Ottawa, Streator, Serena, Harding, Earlville, Sheridan, Utica and all around the La Salle county.**

Where are you going?

**Heading for heaven. We're on the Way and in the Way.**

Then lift up your hearts. God is walking with us.

**Our hearts trust God is with us through everything.**

We are your people, O God. Your unending love makes us siblings in Christ.

Salvation glory and power to you, O God. Jesus, our redeemer reigns. Jesus, Holy Child, shares our load and bears our burdens. Straighten us up and make us whole.

**You break our addictions and free us from sin. Your blood washes us clean; your life redeems us all.**

We remember the night Jesus gave himself to us. When he took bread and gave thanks.

**We remember. We will never forget.**

He took the cup and gave thanks.

**We remember. We will never forget.**

He gave it to his friends: this is my sacrifice. Drink. Live. Remember.

**We remember. We will never forget.**

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God, send us your Holy Spirit. Make this bread and the cup be for us a symbol of Christ's body broken and blood spilled for us, the most generous of all sacrifices. **And, so now come to us Holy Spirit each in our own homes and transform our lives in our receiving and remembering all Christ does for us.**

From the grain of the field, this bread is gathered.

**Jesus is the true Bread of Life. We share the Bread of Life.** (Bread is eaten)

From the fruit of the vine, this cup is filled.

**Jesus is the true Vine. We share the cup of our Salvation.** (Cup is drank)

We praise you, O God for your call on our lives and for this year filled with new beginnings.

**For by this sacrament of Holy Communion we are joined with all heaven's saints. We are united with you, O God and with each other in our sharing this sacred time together yet apart but united as siblings in Christ Jesus. May it be so, AMEN**

### **Prayer following the Receiving of Holy Communion**

Eternal God, we have received your loving grace. We've heard you whisper new mercies into this New Year, 2021. Your love and light illumines all the dark places of our lives and in this Holy meal we found the path to your cleansing, healing and forgiving love who is Jesus Christ. With hearts healed; we receive that certain hope, that hope that conquers our fears, and floods us with faith. For all we received from you today and always we thank you. Now, go with us, O God into this New Year. Show us every day that your mercies are new and unfailing! Thank you most, merciful Savior, Jesus! AMEN

**Closing Song** "Christ Be With Us" (sung to the tune of Come, Thou Long Expected #196)

1. Christ be with us, Christ behind us, Christ before us-all around! Christ in busy, noisy cities, Christ where hardly rings a sound. Jesus, you're our Lord and Savior; on your love we can depend. Help us see your presence clearly in each stranger and each friend.

2. Christ in lines of people fleeing, praying that a war will cease; Christ in battered women's shelters, looking for a place of peace. Christ with people sick or dying, loved ones trying hard to cope- In this world of so much suffering, Christ, you give your people hope.

3. Christ with children who must struggle, working hard for daily food; Christ in classrooms, learning, growing, asking questions, seeking good; Christ in diners,

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waiting tables; Christ in homes where children play-In this world of people working, Christ, you work through us today.

4. Christ with all who keep on struggling, helping others to be free; Christ with churches working, searching for a greater unity; Christ, in bread and wine, be with us, giving strength for each new day-In this world of daily crosses, be our joyful, living Way.

### **Benediction & Sending Forth**

God's mercies are new every morning.

God's compassions never fail.

God has claimed you and called you.

You are never alone.

We are siblings in Christ Jesus.

Know New Year and every year hope.

Live every day in His unfailing mercy, peace and love.

### **Music After Worship**

Sarah Sharp, Musician