

First Congregational Church Weekly Newsletter

East Longmeadow, MA

March 18, 2026



HOLY WEEK

PALM SUNDAY March 29 at 10 am

Celebrating the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, palm branches will be given out to the congregation.

MAUNDY THURSDAY April 2 at 7 pm

A service of readings and the Lord's Supper.

EASTER SUNDAY April 5 at 10 am

Uplifting preaching, warm fellowship and inspiring hymns will make this a memorable day.

PASTORAL MEDITATION by Reverend Thomas Hawkins

THE GREEN HEART OF A SNOWDROP

Last Sunday afternoon, I mentioned to someone at our Lenten workshop that I'd seen a crocus in the south-facing garden behind the education building. It was my first real sighting of spring flowers. She responded that it's not only crocus that are appearing but snowdrops. On blustery, cloudy March days, snowdrops as well as crocus are welcome sights.

The Greek poet Homer mentions snowdrops in his 7th-century BCE epic "*The Odyssey*," according to some scholars. When Circe has given Odysseus' crew a magic potion to turn them into pigs, Hermes comes to the rescue by giving Odysseus an antidote that will protect him from becoming just another pig in Circe's herd. From Homer's description, the antidote seems to fit a snowdrop: "The root was black but the flower was white as milk. The gods call it Moly and it is difficult to mortals to dig it up." The snowdrop's scientific name is *Galanthus*, which means "milky flower." Originally growing in Turkey, Iran, and the Caucasus, snowdrops were likely common in Greece when Homer wrote his epic poem.

Gradually they spread further westward into the rest of Europe, probably reaching the British Isles in the 1500s thanks to monks and nuns who planted them in their monastery gardens. Christian monastics had a fondness for snowdrops both because of their delicate, white flowers and their medicinal uses. Snowdrops contain galantamine, an alkaloid used in the treatment of mild to moderate Alzheimer's disease. Galantamine works by inhibiting enzymes that break down acetylcholine, a neurotransmitter essential for memory and cognitive function. This discovery underscores the snowdrop's role as a healer that medieval herbalists would likely have understood.

Like most flowers popular among Christian monastics, snowdrops attracted legends and folk tales during the Middle Ages. One early legend tells how Eve was pining for the beautiful flowers of Eden after she and Adam had been expelled from the Garden. She was shivering in the cold of their first winter outside Eden; and an angel, seeing her shivering as she knelt in the snow, caught a snowflake as it fell to earth, breathed life into it, and transformed it into a snowdrop. Wanting to comfort the miserable Eve, the merciful angel gave it to her as a gift of hope. Consequently, forever after that, the snowdrop was said to break the spell of winter and offer divine mercy.

In France, snowdrops are called "perce-neige" – snow piercers – because their hardened leaf tips can pierce through frozen soil and crusty snow. Emerging in late winter when snow may still blanket frozen ground, snowdrops are a symbol of resilience and perseverance. Even in the coldest, darkest times, life finds strength to push through obstacles and flourish in spite of hardship.

As 19th-century poet Alfred Lord Tennyson says in his poem "To A Snowdrop":

Many, many welcomes,
February fair-maid!
Ever as of old time,
Solitary firstling,
Coming in the cold time,
Prophet of the gay time,
Prophet of the May time,
Prophet of the roses,
Many, many welcomes,
February fair-maid!

English poets like William Wordsworth, Christina Rossetti, and Mary Webb all wrote lovingly of snowdrops and saw them as brave harbingers of spring, as symbols of resilience in the face of bleakness. Snowdrops were signs of hope for better times and of the gentle yet persistent force of life itself.

Snowdrop blossoms have bell-shaped blooms that droop from a slender green stem. These blooms have three larger petals on the outside and three smaller, inner ones that are usually tipped with green, which gives the appearance of a small green heart nested within a snow-white canopy. For many gardeners and nature lovers, this green heart represents the human heart's courage to move beyond difficult, seemingly impossible, circumstances and still blossom or flourish.

In 1996, a shooter walked into a school in Dunblane, Scotland, and killed 16 first-graders and their teacher. He wounded another 13 victims, among whom were three teachers. This shocking school killing triggered a movement that sought legal changes to reduce the owning, buying, or selling of handguns. The Scottish press called it the Snowdrop Movement because the killings coincided with the blossoming of snowdrops. Out of crisis and despair, new beginnings of a more compassionate and safe human community were born. One writer described snowdrops as late-winter's white candles of hope.

The tiny, green heart of a snowdrop was particularly important to Scottish poet Kate McInmhagga, a Church of Scotland minister and member of the Iona Community. She struggled with cancer and its medical treatment for many years before her death in 2002. The green heart on the underside of the snowdrop captured Kate's imagination and symbolized God's purposes at work in her life and ours: A green heart alive with the desire to push toward life and light, warmth and love, always creating an aura of purity and freshness around it in spite of harsh, inhospitable conditions.

Wild Goose Publications, the publishing arm of the Iona Community, issued a collection of her meditations, prayers, and poems after her death entitled "The Green Heart of a Snowdrop." It includes a Lenten poem on snowdrops. Amid our unpredictable March weather and during our unsettled, dark times, the snowdrop's green heart speaks of Christ's greening power in a sometimes inhospitable world and uncertain times:

Into the dark world a snowdrop comes:

a blessing of hope and peace

carrying within it a green heart:

symbol of God's renewing love.

Come to inhabit our darkness,

Lord Christ,

for dark and light are alike to you.

May nature's white candles of hope

remind us of your birth

and lighten our journey

through Lent and beyond. Amen.

On the Lenten journey with you.

Pastor Thomas

SUNDAY WORSHIP in the sanctuary or livestream link: <http://www.facebook.com/churchontherotary/>

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Your Mission and Outreach team has an opening. This is a wonderful opportunity for you to join us in doing the important work supporting various needs in our community and the world. It is an extremely joyful, rewarding experience.

We usually meet the first Monday of each month at 10:00 in the church library but we are happy to meet on Sundays after coffee hour if that time works better for you. We welcome your interest and we would love to answer any of your questions.

PRAYER

This week's prayer anticipates this coming Sunday's scriptures from Ezekiel and John 11.

God of Consolation and Compassion, your Child Jesus comforted the grieving sisters, Martha and Mary; and your word alone brings life to dry bones and weary souls. You call us forth from painful places as you called Lazarus forth from the tomb. When we see nothing but despair or hopelessness, guide us to find signs of your power and faithfulness in the green heart of a snowdrop. Amen.



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