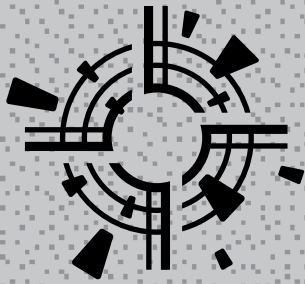


Child of Blessing Lectionary Resource



PRESBYTERIAN
ASSOCIATION OF
MUSICIANS



Central to the church's worship is the proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ, shaping the people of God for lives of faith and faithfulness.

If younger members of the church are dismissed during this part of the service, they are denied this vital opportunity for formation.

How might sermons address a wider range of ages and experiences?

Contents

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25	Season of Christmas
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THEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Each installment of this resource will feature a theological concept that has implications for multigenerational worship. Use this as a prompt for small group conversation in your community.

Central to the church's worship is the proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ, shaping the people of God for lives of faith and faithfulness. If younger members of the church are dismissed during this part of the service, they are denied this vital opportunity for formation. "How are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard?" (Rom. 10:14).

What is lost or gained when children are excused from part of worship?
How might sermons address a wider range of ages and experiences?

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David Gambrell

INTRODUCTION TO LITURGY

This resource is designed to help worship leaders, musicians, and preachers engage worshipers of all ages in the full life of the liturgy. The goal is to make worship embodied, multisensory, and participatory so that everyone in the room can encounter the living God together.

Each week of this installment includes a call to worship/candle lighting liturgy, a confession and pardon sequence, and a Word section with sermon notes, children's book connections, dramatic reading ideas, images/visuals, and suggestions for congregation participation.

This resource is designed to be flexible so that you can adapt it for your context. These notes are offered not as scripts but as invitations.

VISUALS & TANGIBLE OBJECTS

Most weeks include suggestions for images or videos related to the texts. For congregations without screens, images can be printed in the bulletin, posted at the entrance to the worship space, emailed to members before Sunday, or shared on social media. The goal is for everyone to arrive with something to look at and hold in mind.

BODY MOVEMENT & EMBODIED PARTICIPATION

- Stand, sit, turn, gesture—let us participate in worship as full bodies.
- Incorporate American Sign Language signs for key words (peace, love, joy, hope, light)
- Light candles, hold hands, physically move to a new seat or space
- Younger/ Not-Yet-Disabled worshipers can assist those with limited mobility

CALL & RESPONSE

Throughout the calls to worship and sermon times, consider using simple call-and-response phrases that become familiar across the season. Examples:

- Leader: 'Are you awake?' // All: 'We are awake and watching.'
- Leader: 'What are we waiting for?' // All: 'The light that is coming.'
- A repeated sound or gesture (e.g., a sung response, a clap pattern, a word shouted together)

CREATING & RESPONDING IN REAL TIME

Consider the creative capacity already in the room. Worshipers of all ages — including children, people with limited verbal expression, and those who process kinesthetically — can engage the Word not only by hearing it but by making something in response to it. This does not require art supplies or special skill. A piece of paper and something to write with is enough.

- Invite worshipers to draw or write a single word, image, or symbol during the sermon. At a designated moment, use what they've created — ask someone to share, collect them as an offering, display them together, or invite people to carry them home as a reminder.
- Ask everyone to draw or write their response to one question before the sermon begins. Revisit those responses at the end: Did anything shift? What do you see now that you didn't see before?
- Use the bulletin itself as a creative surface. Fold it into something — a boat, a star, a simple box — as a tactile metaphor during a sermon moment. Let the act of making become part of the meaning.
- Have worshipers write a name on a slip of paper — someone they are praying for, someone they want to carry with them — and take it home. This is an act of intercession that extends worship beyond Sunday.
- Drawing during the sermon is not distraction. It is often how many of us listen best. Provide paper and crayons without instruction and let people make what they make. Ask them afterward: What did you draw? Tell me about it.
- The key is to close the loop: whatever you invite people to create, find a way to honor it — in the service, in the sending, or in the week that follows.

LISTENING GAMES FOR CHILDREN (AND ADULTS)

- Ask worshipers to count how many times they hear a word (e.g., 'light,' 'wait,' 'come').
- Invite children to look for a specific color in the sanctuary.
- Ask everyone to find something in the space that represents the theme for the day.

A NOTE ON LICENSING

If using images, songs, video clips, or children's books, ensure you have appropriate licensing and attribution.

A NOTE ON SENSORY & NEURODIVERGENT CONSIDERATIONS

Worship engages the whole person — body, mind, and spirit. For some, stillness and silence will be most helpful for engagement. For others, movement, sound, or tactile engagement will be most beneficial. A truly welcoming worship space makes room for all ways of being.

As you incorporate multisensory elements in this resource (sound cues, movement, visual prompts), consider the following:

- Give advance notice. If a moment will include a sudden or loud sound (such as an alarm clock, music cue, or congregational response), offer a brief heads-up: “In a moment, you’ll hear a loud sound...” This allows worshipers to prepare rather than be startled.
- Offer opt-out language. Participation is always an invitation, never a requirement. Use language like: “You are invited to...” or “Join in as you feel comfortable...” This honors those who may engage internally, quietly, or in ways not immediately visible.
- Normalize movement and varied responses. Some worshipers listen best while moving, fidgeting, drawing, or shifting positions. Others may vocalize, echo words, or respond in ways that are less predictable. These are not distractions from worship — they are forms of engagement. You might say explicitly: “However you need to be in your body today is welcome here.” Foster a culture that honors all ways of being present.
- Create multiple points of access. Whenever possible, offer more than one way to participate — speaking or listening, moving or remaining seated, writing or simply reflecting. This ensures that no single way of engaging is centered as “correct.”
- Extend grace to the room. A space where people of all ages and abilities are fully present will not always be quiet or orderly. That is not a failure of worship — it is a sign of life.

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INTRODUCTION TO MUSIC

Children are immensely capable musical participants. Children pick up and remember musical lines and lyrics easily, and are often much more capable of mastering advanced melodies and rhythms than some traditional children’s music can imply. The good news for incorporating children in worship is that, truly, any music can be children’s music if approached with children’s learning styles in mind.

However, some types of songs and compositional styles are more hospitable and immediate for children (and, honestly, adults as well) to learn, which allows them to participate more fully and quickly.

Many beloved hymns, from “Amazing Grace” (John Newton) to “Go, My Children, with My Blessing” (Jaroslav Vajda), are written in strophic form with new lyrics for every verse, sung to a repeated melody. These are great song forms for participation—but only for those who are literate and can easily read words on sight. Children who are only learning to read (as well as adults with limited literacy, language, or vision) often struggle to keep up with every word.

However, most children are not highly literate, either as music readers or—importantly—as text readers. When considering children’s participation, text is often a greater stumbling block for children’s participation than melody or rhythm in our song choices.

Songs with repeated lyrics foster much greater participation for children—and for everyone. These songs may still contain theological depth and nuance and be musically rich and satisfying. Different forms of songs with repeated lyrics include the following:

Call-and-Echo Songs

These songs do not require any memorization. With call-and-echo songs, a leader sings a line, and the congregation echoes it back. With call-and-response songs, a leader sings a line, and the congregation sings a repeated response.

If I Take the Wings of Morning/Psalm 139, John Hermanson, *Are the Morning Stars Still Singing?*

I Will Call Upon the Lord, Michael O'Shields, GTG 621 (call-and-echo in the first half)

Chants or Cyclical Songs

The lyrics and melody are the same on each repetition. The canon of music from the Taize community is an example of this form, but many composers have written chants and cyclical songs that are satisfying and beautiful to sing.

Examples include:

Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying, by Ken Medema, GTG 469

This is Christ's Body, by Anne Krentz Organ, ACS 967

Rounds, Partner Songs, and Layered Songs

Resemble chants or cyclical songs, but can be layered in various ways to create beautiful harmonies. Examples include:

Rounds (melody sung in canon):

Farewell, Good Friends, Hebrew blessing and Israeli melody, GTG 540

Be Still and Know, by John Bell, GTG 414

Partner Songs (more than one melody that can be sung simultaneously):

You Are Holy, by Per Harding, GTG 596

What Does the Lord Require of You? by Jim Strathdee, GTG 70

Layered Songs (melody and parts):

Open My Heart, by Ana Hernández, ACS 1079

Hallelujah, by Abraham Maraire, arr. Patrick Matsikenyiri, GTG 590

Zipper Songs

Lyrics change minimally from verse to verse, either repeating a new phrase multiple times or "zipping" in a new word or short phrase to the same lyrical form. Examples include:

Love, Take a Walk with Me, Charles Murphy, available at Music that Makes Community
Give Us Light/Jyothi dho Prabhu, Charles Vas, GTG 467

Verse and Chorus Hymns

Lyrics vary on verses, but songs have long choruses or refrains that are the same every repeat. Examples include:

Make A Way, Kate Bluett, Isaac Wardell, and Paul Zach of The Porter's Gate, Integrity Music

Many and Great, Ricky Manalo, CSP, Oregon Catholic Press

I, the Lord of Sea and Sky, Daniel Schutte, GTG 69

OTHER WAYS TO INVOLVE CHILDREN IN WORSHIP MUSIC:

PRIORITIZE AURAL LEARNING

In Western music, a high priority is placed on literacy, both for text and music. But many people in our congregations do not read music, and some do not read words, either. It is not our job as congregational music leaders to teach these skills, but rather to find ways to involve the maximum number of people in participating in congregational music, regardless of their musical or literary skills. Relying instead on aural skills, or “learning by ear,” helps to involve more people. Aural learning is supported by repetition, scaffolded teaching (ex. teach short phrases on the first time, then longer phrases until the congregation masters a whole song), predictable forms (see zipper songs above), and multisensory learning (ex. Gesturing a melodic contour for a visual representation).

A wellspring aural music already exists in the Christian tradition. Many global musical traditions, from many African traditions to Indian classical music, Scots-Irish folk songs to African American hymns, prioritize aural learning skills over reading music. Many of the resources provided below draw from these traditions.

TAKE TIME DURING WORSHIP TO TEACH TEXT AND MUSIC

When learning a new song in worship, reserve a few minutes to teach it to the congregation. Sometimes teaching feels like it interrupts the flow of worship, but with practice, teaching can become an integrated part of the worship experience.

I recommend teaching songs by rote with as little speaking or explaining as possible. Instead, simply point to yourself while you sing one phrase at a time, then gesture to the congregation to sing the phrase back to you. Use your hand to offer a visual contour of the melody line. Keep the tempo consistent as you teach the whole song, allowing the congregation to “get into” the music right away. Children and adults in the congregation will not necessarily know the whole song by the end of this teaching time, but they will have a few tools to build upon as they sing the hymn.

REPEAT A SONG FOR MULTIPLE WEEKS

Children can likely pick up at least portions of a wordy, strophic hymn by ear so long as it is repeated for a few weeks with a little call-and-response teaching.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

GTG	Glory to God, Westminster John Knox
ACS	All Creation Sings, Augsburg Fortress

Season of Advent

Liturgy

SEASONAL PROJECTS THAT GROW WEEK BY WEEK

The following three ideas are not tied to any single Sunday. They are intended to be woven through the entire Advent season and beyond. Each one begins early and builds toward a moment of revelation or sharing. Read all three before Advent 1, decide which ones, if any, you want to try, and plan accordingly. They will require advance preparation and a few simple materials. Brief notes appear in the relevant Sunday sections as a reminder of when each project peaks or transitions to its next phase.

Project 1

Yarn in the Manger: Together We Make a Bed for Jesus

Begin: Advent 1 or any Sunday in Advent

Peak moment: Advent 4 or Christmas Eve

Place an empty manger — a simple wooden box, a basket, or even an overturned stool lined with cloth — at the front of the worship space at the beginning of Advent. Leave it empty and in plain sight. Don't explain it yet. Let the emptiness do its work.

Each Sunday as part of the response time or the sending, invite every worshiper to come forward and lay a small piece of yarn or other textile-based material in the manger. Provide pre-cut lengths of yarn or pieces of fabric — six to eight inches — in a basket at the door or at each pew. Colors can be consistent (purple and blue for Advent) or varied. The choice is yours.

Week by week, the manger fills. What was empty becomes full. What was bare becomes soft. The congregation, together, makes a bed for Jesus.

Invite families to bring their own materials. Encourage the congregation to note moments of hope throughout the week and “gift” a strand to someone, for them to place in the manger during the next service.

Accessibility note

Younger participants — children who are mobile and eager — can serve as runners, carrying yarn forward on behalf of those who cannot easily leave their seats. Frame this not as an accommodation but as a ministry: ‘Some of us will walk this yarn forward for someone else. That is also an act of love.’ No one should be singled out or directed toward the ‘helper.’ Simply invite the whole congregation, and let it unfold naturally.

By Advent 4 or Christmas Eve, the manger is full. The baby, when placed in it, rests on what the congregation has made together. This is not a metaphor — it is a physical, embodied truth about what the church does: we make room.

Materials needed

- pre-cut yarn lengths or fabric pieces (6–8 inches),
- basket for distribution,
- empty manger or manger-like vessel at the front

Timeline

Begin Advent 1 or 2; allow the manger to fill gradually; full by Advent 4 or Christmas Eve

Project 2: Hope, Joy, Peace, Love from Advent to Epiphany

Begin: Advent 1

Collect: Throughout Advent

Reveal and give away: Epiphany

Each Sunday in Advent, invite worshipers to write or draw a word on a slip of paper or a star-shaped card during the sermon, prayers of the people, gathering, or sending. The prompt changes weekly:

Advent 1: a word or image for HOPE — what are you hoping for this season?

Advent 2: a word or image for PEACE — where do you most need peace right now?

Advent 3: a word or image for JOY — where have you found unexpected joy?

Advent 4: a word or image for LOVE — who or what does love ask of you?

Provide star-shaped paper if possible — this is the long arc toward Epiphany. Plain slips of paper work equally well and can be transferred to star shapes later. Have crayons, markers, or colored pencils available. Keep the invitation low-pressure: ‘Write a word, draw an image, or simply hold the paper and think. Whatever feels true to you.’

Collect the stars or slips each week in a basket or bowl in a dedicated space. They accumulate through Advent — unseen, unnamed, a growing pile of the congregation’s inner life.

On Epiphany Sunday, distribute the collected stars back to the congregation, shuffled and distributed randomly. Each person receives a stranger’s hope, a neighbor’s prayer for peace, a child’s drawing of joy. This is their “star word” or “star image” for the new year: a word that came from within the body of Christ, offered anonymously, received as a gift.

The theological weight here is considerable: the words we carry privately through Advent become gifts to others at Epiphany. What the Magi followed across distance, we follow through each other. The star leads us to one another.

Materials needed

star-shaped paper or plain slips, markers or crayons, collection basket, envelopes if you want to mail stars to absent members at Epiphany

Timeline

Introduce Advent 1; collect each week; mix and redistribute at Epiphany

Tip: Have a few extra blank stars at Epiphany for visitors or latecomers who didn't participate through Advent

Project 3: Collage + Artist Collaboration

Begin: Advent 1

Collect: Throughout Advent

Reveal: Christmas Eve, First Sunday of Christmas, or Epiphany

This project requires a willing artist. Before Advent begins, identify someone in or connected to your congregation — a visual artist, a quilter, a graphic designer, a collage-maker — who is willing to receive the congregation's contributions and work with them to create something. The final image or piece is not predetermined. It will emerge from what people bring.

Each Sunday in Advent, set out paper in four colors, one for each theme. Worshipers write or draw on them during the sermon, a time of reflection, the prayers of the people, or at the door on the way in or out using the following or other prompts:

HOPE — a word, a symbol, a small drawing

PEACE — a word, a wish, a shape

JOY — something that delights you, a memory, a color

LOVE — a name, a gesture, something irreplaceable

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Collect the pieces of paper each week and give them to the artist. The artist's task is not to illustrate a concept but to receive these small offerings and let them become something. They might arrange them into a mosaic, photograph and composite them, or weave them into a textile or a collage. The finished piece may become part of worship on Christmas Eve, during the season of Christmas, or on Epiphany.

Resources needed

pieces of paper in four colors, pens or markers, a collection system (envelopes or folders by week), a committed artist (Planning note: confirm the artist's participation and the reveal date before the first Sunday of Advent.)

If no artist is available: the pieces of paper can be displayed without transformation. The congregation's offering is still visible and beautiful.

If you cannot find an artist: ask a different question. Is there a quilter, a scrapbooker, a photographer, an elementary or middle schooler who loves collage, a retired teacher who likes to arrange things? The "artist" does not need a professional identity — they need willingness, time, and the freedom to let the material lead. Some of the most moving responses will come from people who don't consider themselves artists at all.

Ideas for Communion

Consider ways to involve children in the sharing of Communion on a regular basis. Include children and their families in the preparation and clean-up of the elements before and after worship.

If some children leave the sanctuary during the service, find a way to bring them back in to participate in Communion.

Invite children to move closer to the table during worship. If your church has a practice of inviting children forward for a children's message during the service, invite children to stand in a circle around the table during that time. Let them see the elements up close. Explain what will happen later in the service.

Find times to practice the responses in the Great Thanksgiving ("and also with you") so congregants of every age will be ready to participate.

GREAT THANKSGIVING FOR ADVENT

The introductory dialogue may be included here:
The Lord be with you ...

We give you thanks, O God,
for the new day you have promised—
when people will do what is right,
all creatures will live in peace,
and a little child will lead us.

The Sanctus may be sung or spoken:
With angels, saints, and all creation,
we join the hymn that never ends:
Holy, holy, holy Lord ...

We give you thanks for Jesus,
who is coming soon to save us—
from the first to the last,
from the beginning to the end,
from A to Z, Jesus is Lord.

The words of institution may be spoken here.
A memorial acclamation may be sung or spoken:
Great is the mystery of faith ...
Pour out your Holy Spirit, O God,
as we share this bread and cup—
bring us together as one body,
sharing the good news of Jesus
and working for good in the world.

Prayers of intercession may be included here.
 Hear our prayers for the world you love ...
 Help us to wait with patience and hope,
 watching and working for the day
 when all of your promises come true.
 For the meal we are about to share
 and for every gift of your grace
 we give you thanks, O God,
 through Jesus, in the Spirit,
 now and always. **Amen.**
The great Amen may be sung or spoken.

WORDS OF INSTITUTION

*For use at the invitation to the table,
 during the Great Thanksgiving,
 or at the breaking of the bread*

At this table, we remember
 how Jesus took bread, blessed it,
 broke it, and shared it with everyone,
 saying: This is my body, given for you.
 At this table, we remember
 how Jesus took the cup,
 saying: This cup is the promise
 that I will love you always.
 At this table, we look forward
 to the great meal we will share
 with the whole family of faith
 when Jesus comes again.

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Music

GATHERING

Call to Worship/Candle Lighting (Choose one to sing throughout Advent)
 One Light, Lorraine Nelson Wolf (download available at nelsonwolf.com)
 Come, Come Emmanuel, COME, COME, EMMANUEL, GTG 91
 In Silence We Wait, IN SILENCE, WE WAIT, ACS 998
 Come Light of Lights, Ruth Cunningham in *Singing in Community: Paperless Music for Worship*

Opening Hymn (Choose one for each Sunday of Advent)
 Make A Way, Kate Bluett, Isaac Wardell, and Paul Zach of The Porter's Gate,
 Integrity Music
 Awake, Awake, John Hermanson in *Isaiah: Is This the Fast We Choose?*
 While We Are Waiting, Come, WAITING, GTG 92
 Come Now, O Prince of Peace, O-SO-SO, GTG 103

O Lord, How Shall I Meet You, VALET WILL ICH DIR GEBEN, GTG 104
 We Wait the Peaceful Kingdom, MERLE'S TUNE, GTG 378

Kyrie/Petition (Choose one to sing throughout Advent)

In a Far-Off Place, TENTH NIGHT, ACS 908

How Long?, Verse 1 (m. 1-14), Mark A. Miller in *Roll Down, Justice! Sacred Songs of Social Justice*

Gloria/Response to Forgiveness (Choose one to sing throughout Advent) "Glory to God/Gloria a Dios, GLORIA A DIOS, ACS 911

Jesus, Jesus, O What a Wonderful Child, WONDERFUL CHILD, GTG 126

WORD

Hymn Responding to the Word (Choose one to sing throughout Advent)

Light Dawns on a Weary World, TEMPLE OF PEACE, GTG 79

My Soul Cries, Out with a Joyful Shout, STAR OF THE COUNTY DOWN, GTG 100

Blest Be the God of Israel, MERLE'S TUNE, GTG 109

O Day of Peace, JERUSALEM, GTG 373

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EUCCHARIST

Doxology (Choose one to sing throughout Advent)

Heaven is Singing for Joy/El Cielo Canta Alegría, ALEGRIA, GTG 382

Glory to God/Gloria, Gloria, GLORIA (Taizé), GTG 583

Glory to God/Gloria a Dios, MACHU-PICHU, GTG 585

Communion Hymns and Responses (Choose one to sing throughout Advent)

Come to the Table, INVITATION, ACS 961

In This Feast of Love, TASSA POYDASSA, ACS 962

This is Christ's Body, BROKEN AND BLESSED, ACS 967

Come to the Table, COME TO THE TABLE, GTG 508

SENDING

Sending/Closing Hymn (Choose one for each Sunday of Advent)

The Kingdom is Coming, Isaac Wardell, Jessica Fox, Kate Bluett, Liz Vice, Paul

Zach, and Wendell Kimbrough of The Porter's Gate, Integrity Music

You Will Go Out in Joy, John Hermanson in *Isaiah: Is This the Fast We Choose?*

Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus, HYFRYDOL, GTG 82

Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates, TRURO, GTG 93

Soon and Very Soon, SOON AND VERY SOON, GTG 384

Love Divine, All Loves Excelling, HYFRYDOL, GTG 366

..... Playlist Link

Use this QR code to access a Spotify playlist that includes recordings of many of these

suggestions. This playlist can be shared with congregants, especially those with children, so that families can play music in the car or at home between services. This may help children to learn music for worship and feel more included during worship.



NOVEMBER 29, 2026

First Sunday of Advent

Color: Purple or Blue

- | | |
|----------------------|---|
| Isaiah 64:1–9 | Tear open the heavens and come down; save us from our sin. |
| Psalms 80:1–7, 17–19 | Restore us, O God; let your face shine, and save us. |
| 1 Corinthians 1:3–9 | God will strengthen you while you wait for Christ's coming. |
| Mark 13:24–37 | In those days the stars will fall from heaven; keep awake. |

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Ideas

The color for Advent is purple or blue. Invite children to look for this color in the sanctuary during worship. You can also do this with a word or phrase that will be repeated throughout the service.

CALL TO WORSHIP/CANDLE LIGHTING

Can be led by 1-3 leaders

We come in the between time:

between what was and what will be,

between the world as it is – and the world as it should be.

We are waiting.

The light is coming

Light the first candle.

One candle burns. It is enough.

We are waiting.

The light is coming.

CONFESSION AND PARDON

We are waiting.

The light is coming.

God hears us as we pray,

Merciful God,

we confess our sin,

what we have done that has hurt others

and what we have not done to help others.

We have not loved you

with our whole heart and mind and strength.

We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.

Forgive us.

Help us to become your followers

and to love as you do.

We are waiting.

The light is coming.

God is love. God is with us.

In the name of Christ, we are forgiven. **Amen.**

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THE WORD*Themes*

Wakefulness and attention. The repeated command is 'Keep awake.' Both Isaiah and Mark speak to absence, longing, and promise.

Question for the Congregation

What does it mean to be truly awake?

Movement

Throughout the sermon or at one point in the sermon, consider inviting the whole congregation take a deep breath together, cued by a word or phrase you repeat. This might be "Keep awake" or another word or phrase consistent with your sermon content.

Children's Literature Connection

"The Invisible String" by Patrice Karst

Reflects on the invisible connection that holds us to those we love even across distance. The longing and absence in Isaiah speaks to how God holds us and doesn't let go.

Tangible/Visual Connections

1. At the start of the sermon, ask what congregants use as an alarm clock. Depending on your context, this may look like "show and tell" or you may decide to "plant" a few people to bring their alarm clock. You might also ask worshipers to make the sound of their alarm clocks when you say "awake."

Note: if you use the sound of an actual alarm clock, which can be loud, consider giving a “heads-up” before loud sounds to support the sensory needs of your congregation and potential visitors.

2. “Tear Open the Heavens” by Lauren Wright Pittman (digital painting, 2020). Use this image as bulletin cover art or display during the reading from Isaiah. Be sure to obtain permission/purchase the image at sanctifiedart.org/image-licensing-library

DECEMBER 6, 2026

Second Sunday of Advent

Color: Purple or Blue

Isaiah 40:1–11	Comfort my people; a voice cries: prepare the way of the Lord!
Psalms 85:1–2, 8–13	God will speak peace; faithfulness and righteousness will meet.
2 Peter 3:8–15a	God is patient with us, but the day of the Lord is coming.
Mark 1:1–8	In the wilderness, John baptizes and proclaims the one to come.

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Idea

Place rocking chairs in the sanctuary to include families with babies or those who need movement.

CALL TO WORSHIP/CANDLE LIGHTING

Can be led by 1–3 leaders

We come to seek God's peace:

peace that is deeper than fear,

peace that makes way in the wilderness,

peace and comfort for all God's children.

We are waiting.

The light is coming.

Light the second candle.

Two candles burn. It is enough.

We are waiting.

The light is coming.

CONFESSION AND PARDON

We are waiting.
The light is coming.
 God hears us as we pray,

Merciful God,
we confess our sin,
what we have done that has hurt others
and what we have not done to help others.
We have not loved you
with our whole heart and mind and strength.
We have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.
Forgive us.
Help us to become your followers
and to love as you do.

We are waiting.
The light is coming.
 God is love. God is with us.
 In the name of Christ, we are forgiven. **Amen.**

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THE WORD

Themes

Beginnings

Question for the Congregation

Mark 1:1 announces ‘the beginning of the good news.’ Ask: ‘Has anything ever had a beginning in your life that turned out to be really important?’

Linking Texts

MARK 1:1-8 / ISAIAH 40:1-11: John the Baptist appears suddenly, urgently, and Mark quotes Isaiah to explain him. A powerful opportunity to show how the Hebrew scriptures and the Gospel read each other.

Dramatic Reading

Before reading Mark 1, have someone read aloud only Isaiah 40:3-5 in a slow, resonant voice, as if calling from far away. Then begin Mark 1:1 immediately with no pause.

Call & Response

Every time you say “prepare,” invite the congregation to respond, “God’s way”

Children’s Literature Connection

“We’re Going on a Bear Hunt” by Michael Rosen

You can’t go over it, you can’t go under it... you have to go through it.
 Advent is a going-through time.

Third Sunday of Advent

Color: Purple or Blue

Isaiah 61:1–4, 8–11 The spirit of the Lord is upon me; I will rejoice in my Savior.

Psalms 126 When the Lord restored our fortunes, we shouted with joy.

or Luke 1:46b–55 My soul magnifies the Lord, who has done great things.

1 Thessalonians 5:16–24 Rejoice, pray give thanks; may God keep you until Christ's coming.

John 1:6–8, 19–28 John came to testify to the light, so that all might believe.

Idea

The third week of Advent traditionally focuses on joyful celebration in anticipation of Christ's birth. This week, consider having (or creating) ribbon dancers that congregants can wave during an opening or closing hymn. If your church uses a pray-ground or invites activity in the pews, children can make their own ribbon dancers using small dowel rods, pre-cut ribbons, and tape. Encourage participants to make two: one to keep and one to share; then pass them out during a moment that makes sense for your congregation (during the offering or the final hymn).

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CALL TO WORSHIP/CANDLE LIGHTING

Can be led by 1-3 leaders

The spirit of the Lord is upon us:
to bring good news to those who are hurting,
to set free those who are bound,
to proclaim the joy of the Lord.
We are waiting.
The light is coming.

Light the third candle.

Three candles burn. It is enough.
We are waiting.
The light is coming.

CONFESSION AND PARDON

We are waiting.
The light is coming.
God hears us as we pray,

**Merciful God,
 we confess our sin,
 what we have done that has hurt others
 and what we have not done to help others.
 We have not loved you
 with our whole heart and mind and strength.
 We have not loved out neighbors as ourselves.
 Forgive us.
 Help us to become your followers
 and to love as you do.**

We are waiting.
The light is coming.
 God is love. God is with us.
 In the name of Christ, we are forgiven. **Amen.**

THE WORD

Themes

Joy is not passive. It is not the absence of suffering.

Linking Texts

Isaiah 61 / Luke 1:46b–55 (The Magnificat): These two texts belong together. Isaiah announces the anointed one; Mary sings that the reversal has begun.

John 1:6–8, 19–28: John the Baptist's task is to point, not to be pointed to. 'I came to testify to the light.'

Questions for the Congregation

Where have you found unexpected joy this Advent?
 Who has shown you what it means to live with joy?

Children's Literature Connection

1. "Change Sings: A Children's Anthem" by Amanda Gorman
 Pure Magnificat energy. Read it before or after the Magnificat.
2. "The Story of AND" by Sandy Eisenberg Sasso
 Joy AND sorrow, praise AND lament.
 This is the texture of the Magnificat.

Visual Connection

Whether or not you use "Change Sings" by Amanda Gorman, consider showing a clip of her reading "The Hill We Climb" or an image of her reading while you read Mary's Magnificat. Both are young women speaking truth to power in verse.

Fourth Sunday of Advent

Color: Purple or Blue

2 Samuel 7:1–11, 16 The Lord will build a house for David and his descendants.

Luke 1:46b–55 My soul magnifies the Lord, who has done great things.

or Psalm 89:1–4, 19–26 I will sing of God’s steadfast love and faithfulness to David.

Romans 16:25–27 Glory to God for the mystery now revealed to all peoples!

Luke 1:26–38 The angel Gabriel appears to Mary; her child will be God’s Son.

CALL TO WORSHIP/CANDLE LIGHTING

Can be led by 1–3 leaders

A voice came to a young woman.

Surprised and afraid, she said: “Here I am.”

Love makes room. Love is on the way.

We are waiting.

The light is coming.

Light the fourth candle.

Four candles burn. It is enough.

We are waiting.

The light is coming.

CONFESSION AND PARDON

We are waiting.

The light is coming.

God hears us as we pray,

Merciful God,

we confess our sin,

what we have done that has hurt others

and what we have not done to help others.

We have not loved you

with our whole heart and mind and strength.

We have not loved out neighbors as ourselves.

Forgive us.

Help us to become your followers

and to love as you do.

We are waiting.

The light is coming.

God is love. God is with us.

In the name of Christ, we are forgiven. **Amen.**

THE WORD

Themes

LUKE 1:26–38: The Annunciation is one of the most familiar stories and one of the easiest to domesticate. Resist taming it; Mary's 'let it be' is an act of extraordinary courage.

Rather than focusing on virtues we tend to ascribe to Mary, consider the grace given regardless of Mary's goodness. Nadia Bolz-Weber writes about the Annunciation on her Substack (2025), "I wonder: If I had been in her place, which would be harder for me to believe: The part about a virgin giving birth to a king? Or the part where the angel said I was favored? I mean, if an angel came to me and said, "Greetings, favored one," I'd be like, you've got the wrong girl....But...Mary trusted the word from the angel, telling her that she was favored. And maybe that trust is what made her favored...Nowhere does it say that the angel Gabriel just waited and waited until he found a girl who had diligently worked on her virtues hard enough that she had made herself worthy to be the Godbearer... the really outrageous act of faith on Mary's part was trusting that she had found favor with God."

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Questions for the Congregation

1. Use the practice of Lectio Divina, or slow, contemplative reading, on the Luke 1 text. Invite hearers to wonder where they see God in the story and where they see themselves in the story. You might ask the congregation what feelings emerge as they hear the text.
2. 2 Samuel 7: God refuses to be housed. 'Are you the one to build me a house?' Ask: 'Where do we try to contain God?'
2 Samuel 7: God flips the script, saying 'The Lord will make you a house.' Ask: 'Are you willing to live in the shelter God provides you?'

Children's Literature Connection

1. "Not a Box" by Antoinette Portis
A rabbit insists the box is more than it appears. Mary holds something the world cannot yet see.
2. "A Very Big Problem" by Amy-Jill Levine
A funny, theologically rich book about a problem that requires everyone's help. Consider the congregation's role in making room for the holy.

Tangible/Visual Connection

If your congregation uses bulletins, invite them to use this 2D surface to make a 3D sculpture, a container, during the first part of the service. No additional instruction is needed here--let each person figure out how they want to turn a piece of paper into a container.

During the sermon, invitation to discipleship, or at the end of worship, invite them to crush their container as a way to physically commit to refusing to contain God.

Season of Christmas

Liturgy

GREAT THANKSGIVING FOR CHRISTMAS

The introductory dialogue may be included here:

The Lord be with you ...

We give you thanks, O God,
for light shining in the darkness—
from the first day of creation
to the flicker of a tiny candle,
you give light and life to the earth.

The Sanctus may be sung or spoken:
With angels, saints, and all creation,
we join the hymn that never ends:
Holy, holy, holy Lord ...

We give you thanks for Jesus,
who is the light of all the world—
Jesus is your word come to life,
your beloved child of blessing,
full of glory, grace, and truth.

The words of institution may be spoken here.
A memorial acclamation may be sung or spoken:
Great is the mystery of faith ...

Pour out your Holy Spirit, O God,
as we share this bread and cup—
bring us together as one body,
sharing the good news of Jesus
and working for good in the world.

Prayers of intercession may be included here.
Hear our prayers for the world you love ...
Help us to welcome the child in the manger,
singing with the shepherds and angels,
“Glory to God in the highest!”

For the meal we are about to share
and for every gift of your grace
we give you thanks, O God,
through Jesus, in the Spirit,
now and always. Amen.
The great Amen may be sung or spoken.

Music

GATHERING

Call to Worship (Choose one to sing throughout the season.)

Dream On, Dream On, verse 1, DREAM ON, GTG 383

Raise a Song of Gladness/Jubilate Deo, JUBILATE DEO, GTG 155

God is Here Today/Dios está aquí, DIOS ESTA AQUI, ACS 993

Opening hymn (Choose one for each service during the season.)

Jesus, the Light of the World, WE'LL WALK IN THE LIGHT, GTG 127

There's a Star in the East, FOLLOW, GTG 135

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing, MENDELSSOHN, GTG 119

O Come, All Ye Faithful, ADESTE FIDELES, GTG 113

Kyrie/Petition (Choose one to sing throughout the season.)

A Stable Lamp is Lighted, verses 1 & 4, ANDUJAR, GTG 160

Who Would Think that What Was Needed, verse 1, WHITE ROSETTES, GTG 138

Gloria/Response to Forgiveness (Choose one to sing throughout the season.)

He Came Down, HE CAME DOWN, GTG 137

On This Day Earth Shall Ring, verse 1, PERSONENT HODIE, GTG 141

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WORD

Sung Prayer for Illumination (Choose one to sing throughout the season.)

Give Us Light/Jyothi dho Prabhu, JYOTHI DHO, GTG 467

Open My Heart, OPEN MY HEART, ACS 1079

Hymn Responding to the Word (Choose one for each service of the season.)

My Lord! What a Morning, MY LORD, WHAT A MORNING, GTG 352

Lead Me, Guide Me, LEAD ME, GUIDE ME, GTG 740

Goodness is Stronger than Evil, GOODNESS IS STRONGER, GTG 750

I Will Call Upon the Lord, I WILL CALL, GTG 621

Away in a Manger, MUELLER, GTG 115

EUCHARIST

Doxology: (choose one to sing throughout the season)

"Glory to God, Whose Goodness Shines on Me, GLORY TO GOD (Vasile), GTG 582

"Glory, Glory, Glory, CUEQUITA, GTG 584

Communion Hymns and Responses: (choose one to sing throughout the season)

All Belong Here, Lenora Rand and Hannah Rand of The Many, in *Songs for the Holy Other*

Come to the Table of Grace, TABLE OF GRACE, GTG 507

The Open Table, Mark A. Miller in *Roll Down, Justice! Sacred Songs and Social Justice*

For Everyone Born, verses 1 & 5, SOMOS EL CUERPO DE CRISTO, GTG 769

SENDING

Sending/Closing Hymn (Choose one for each service of the season.)

Angels We Have Heard on High, GLORIA, GTG #113

O Come, All Ye Faithful, ADESTE FIDELES, GTG #133

Now Go in Joy, JUNKANDO, GTG #745

Good Christian Friends, Rejoice, IN DULCI JUBILO, GTG 132

Joy to the World, ANTIOCH, GTG 134

Playlist Link

Use this QR code to access a Spotify playlist that includes recordings of many of these suggestions. This playlist can be shared with congregants, especially those with children, so that families can play music in the car or at home between services. This may help children to learn music for worship and feel more included during worship.



Nativity of the Lord / Christmas Eve

Color: White and Gold

Isaiah 9:2–7 Light shines on people in darkness; a child has been born for us.

Psalms 96 Sing a new song to the Lord, all the earth; declare God's glory.

Titus 2:11–14 The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all.

Luke 2:1–14 (15–20) Jesus is born in Bethlehem; angels tell shepherds the good news.

Ideas

When adults involved with Child of Blessing project have been asked to share a memory from worship as a child, one of the most frequent responses has involved lighting candles and singing "Silent Night" on Christmas Eve. This simple, accessible tradition unites all generations. Encourage young worshipers to use a real candle. Teach them how to hold it upright once it is lit. If possible, consider using children as your ushers, the ones who help spread the flame to all worshipers.

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CALL TO WORSHIP/CANDLE LIGHTING

Can be led by 1-3 leaders

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.

For a child has been born for us:

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

We are waiting. Now the night is here.

We are waiting. The light is here.

Light the Christ candle.

This is the light that darkness cannot overcome.

Glory to God in the highest!

Peace to all people on earth!

CONFESSION AND PARDON

Even on days of celebration,

In the light of God's love, we realize our own imperfection.

So we come to God in prayer,

trusting that we will find forgiveness and rest.

Loving God, thank you for sending Christ to live with us.
 Forgive us when we do not follow your ways of peace:
 when we do not love as you love.
 Change our hearts. Shape our actions.
 Point us again toward the mercy of Christ,
 who has come to light our way.

Hear the good news!
 The Lord has come into our broken world, to bring healing.
 The Lord has come to show us mercy and peace.
 The Lord has come with never-ending love.
 Truly, in Jesus Christ we are forgiven. Thanks be to God. **Amen.**

THE WORD

Themes

God chose ordinary: a census, a barn, shepherds (night-shift workers, children, male and female). Luke 2:1-20: This is a night for telling the story, not dissecting it. Let the narrative carry worship.

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Call and Response

Isaiah 9:2-7: The names of the child make a wonderful spoken response
 After each name, invite the congregation to respond: 'Thanks be to God.'

Dramatic Reading

Invite worshipers to act out the story as you narrate it. They can stay where they are or come forward. Assign roles according to sections in the sanctuary or worship space, for example, shepherds (left section), angels (right section), Mary, Joseph, and a baby. Let people laugh and wonder together.

Tangible Connection

Place various props throughout the worship space or under seats and as they are mentioned in the text, ask for the items to be held up or brought forward. Feel free to let worshipers interpret for themselves when they might offer their items in the story, recognizing that there may be several appropriate places depending on how the story is interpreted. Items could include a clipboard, blanket, manger, shepherd staff, angel halo, etc.

Children's Literature Connection

"Brown Baby Jesus" by Dorena Williamson

A luminous, theologically grounded picture book.

"The Little Drummer Boy" illustrated by Ezra Jack Keats

Focus on what we have: not wealth, but presence and gifts to give.

DECEMBER 27, 2026

First Sunday of Christmas

Color: White and Gold

Isaiah 61:10–62:3	The Lord will give you a new name; you will be a crown of beauty.
Psalms 148	Praise the Lord, all creation! God is exalted in heaven and earth.
Galatians 4:4–7	Through the Son and the Spirit, we may call God Abba, Father.
Luke 2:22–40	Jesus is presented in the temple; Simeon and Anna rejoice.

Ideas

SPECIAL CONSIDERATION: EXPERIMENTING WITH ORDER OF SERVICE

The Sunday after Christmas is often attended by the most committed members plus out-of-town visitors. It is, paradoxically, both intimate and unpredictable. This makes it ideal for experimentation. You may consider holding this service in a space with more flexible seating arrangements, like a fellowship hall or multipurpose room.

Consider one of these experiments:

REVERSE ORDER: Begin with the sermon or reflection, then move backward through the liturgy—from Word to Table to Gathering. End with a Call to Worship as a sending. This reframes the whole service as ‘now we go back into the Christmas story equipped.’

STORY CIRCLE: Arrange chairs in a circle (or concentric circles). Let the service be more conversational. Read Luke 2:22–40 and ask: ‘When have you seen something you had waited a long time for? How did it feel?’ Invite responses. Preach in the round.

PRAYER WALK: Create stations around the sanctuary representing different moments in the Christmas story. Worshipers move at their own pace with printed guides. Music plays softly throughout. Gather for a brief word and benediction at the end.

CALL TO WORSHIP/CANDLE LIGHTING

Can be led by one or two readers.

Christmas is not over.

The light is still burning.

The story is still being told.

All creation sings:

Mountains and hills. Fire and hail. Young and old.

Praise the Lord!

Let us worship the One
who is still being made known to us.
Praise the Lord!

CONFESSION AND PARDON

Even on days of celebration,
In the light of God's love, we realize our own imperfection.
So we come to God in prayer,
trusting that we will find forgiveness and rest.

**Loving God, thank you for sending Christ to live with us.
Forgive us when we do not follow your ways of peace:
when we do not love as you love.
Change our hearts. Shape our actions.
Point us again toward the mercy of Christ,
who has come to light our way.**

Hear the good news!
The Lord has come into our broken world, to bring healing.
The Lord has come to show us mercy and peace.
The Lord has come with never-ending love.
Truly, in Jesus Christ we are forgiven. Thanks be to God. **Amen.**

THE WORD

Themes

Recognition.

Luke 2:22-40: Simeon and Anna are the patron saints of patient, persistent waiting. This text is a gift after the busyness of Christmas.

Galatians 4:4-7: 'God sent his Son... so that we might receive adoption as children.' The word 'Abba'—Daddy, Papa—is intimate and startling. Ask: 'What does it mean to you that you can call God by that name?'

Psalms 148: Everything praises. Mountains and snow and wild animals and old and young. Assign different sections of the congregation to different verses—the children do the animals, the elders do the mountains, everyone together for the final verse.

Questions for the Congregation

Simeon and Anna see the child and know. When have you had a moment of recognition—'this is it, this is what I've been waiting for'?

Children's Literature Connection

"Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge" by Mem Fox

An elderly woman has lost her memory, and a small boy helps her find it by gathering meaningful objects. Simeon and Anna are figures of living memory. This book honors both the old and the young and the way they make meaning together.

Second Sunday of Christmas

Color: White and Gold

Jeremiah 31:7–14 God will bring the people home, turning their mourning into joy.
Psalm 147:12–20 The word of the Lord goes forth; God fills us with good things.
Ephesians 1:3–14 We were chosen in Christ from the beginning to give glory to God.
John 1:(1–9) 10–18 Those who trust in Christ have power to become children of God.

Epiphany of the Lord

Isaiah 60:1–6 Arise, shine; your light has come; the glory of the Lord appears.
Psalm 72:1–7, 10–14 May the king reign forever and deliver the needy.
Ephesians 3:1–12 An ancient mystery is revealed; Gentiles are fellow heirs in Christ.
Matthew 2:1–12 Following a star, wise men visit Jesus and bring him gifts.

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CALL TO WORSHIP/CANDLE LIGHTING

Arise, shine.

Our light has come.

Seekers gather from near and far.

Arise, shine.

Our light has come.

Let your heart thrill and rejoice.

Arise, shine.

Our light has come.

CONFESSION AND PARDON

Even on days of celebration,
In the light of God's love, we realize our own imperfection.
So we come to God in prayer,
trusting that we will find forgiveness and rest.

**Loving God, thank you for sending Christ to live with us.
Forgive us when we do not follow your ways of peace:
when we do not love as you love.
Change our hearts. Shape our actions.
Point us again toward the mercy of Christ,
who has come to light our way.**

Hear the good news!
 The Lord has come into our broken world, to bring healing.
 The Lord has come to show us mercy and peace.
 The Lord has come with never-ending love.
 Truly, in Jesus Christ we are forgiven. Thanks be to God. **Amen.**

THE WORD

Theme

Seeking and finding. The Magi didn't know exactly what they were looking for until they found it.

Question for the Congregation

This is also a story about welcome: the holy family receives foreign travelers. Who is welcomed in your congregation?

Children's Literature Connection

"Baboushka and the Three Kings" by Ruth Robbins

The classic Russian folktale of a woman who almost followed the Magi. A gorgeous, underused Epiphany text opening conversation about seeking, timing, and what we miss when we wait too long.

"Lullaby for the King" by Nikki Grimes

A stunning, spare retelling of the Magi's journey in verse, beautifully illustrated. Could be read aloud during the candle lighting or as part of the sermon.

"Whoever You Are" by Mem Fox

About the universality of human experience across difference. The Magi are strangers; the child receives them.

Time After Epiphany

Music

GATHERING

Call to Worship (Choose one to sing throughout the season.)

Come, All You People/Uyai Mose, UYAI MOSE, GTG 388

Thank You for this Day, Spirit, from the Native American Church Movement,
adapted by Jorge Lockward, available at Music that Makes Community
(musicthatmakescommunity.org)

Opening Hymn (Choose one for each service during the season.)

Love, Take a Walk with Me, Charles Murphy, available at Music that Makes Community

Waters of Love, Maren Haynes Marchesini

I Was There to Hear Your Borne Cry, WATERLIFE, GTG 488 (Baptism of the Lord)

God of Great and God of Small, GOD OF GREAT AND SMALL, GTG 19

All Things Bright and Beautiful, ROYAL OAK, GTG 20

Will You Come and Follow Me, KELVINGROVE, GTG 726

Kyrie/Petition (Choose one to sing throughout the season.)

Lord, Have Mercy, KYRIE ELEISON, GTG 577

Be Still and Know, PSALM 46, GTG 414

Gloria/Response to Forgiveness (Choose one to sing throughout the season.)

What Does the Lord Require of You? Mark A. Miller in *Roll Down, Justice! Sacred Songs and Social Justice*

Hallelujah, HALLELUJAH (Maraire), GTG 590

What Does the Lord Require of You?, MOON, GTG 70

WORD

Sung Prayer for Illumination (Choose one to sing throughout the season.)

Open My Eyes, Jesse Manibusan

Come and See, COME AND SEE, ACS 976

Hymn Responding to the Word (Choose one for each service of the season.)

I, the Lord of Sea and Sky, HERE I AM (Schutte), GTG 69

Take Me to the Water, TAKE ME TO THE WATER, GTG 480

You Have Put on Christ, BAPTIZED IN CHRIST, GTG 491

Alleluia, Praise to God/Aleluya Y'in Oluwa, Emmanuel Badejo in *More Voices*

If I Take the Wings of Morning/Psalm 139, John Hermanson in *Are the Morning Stars Still Singing?*

Longing for Light, We Wait in Darkness, CHRIST, BE OUR LIGHT, GTG 314

Give Thanks for Those Whose Faith Is Firm, REPTON, GTG 731

Sung Prayers

Prayers of the People, *Table Prayer*, Ruth Duck and Mark A. Miller, Hope Publishing

Come, Bring Your Burdens to God/Woza Nomthwalo Wakho, WOZA NOMTHWALO WAKHO, ACS 1009

Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying, CHILDREN PRAYING, GTG 469

EUCCHARIST

Doxology (Choose one to sing throughout the season.)

Glory to God, Whose Goodness Shines on Me, GLORY TO GOD (Vasile), GTG 582

Glory, Glory, Glory, CUEQUITA, GTG 584

Communion Hymns and Responses (Choose one to sing throughout the season.)

We Are Coming, Lord, To the Table, Sierra Leone, Music that Makes Community

Feed Us with Hunger for Justice, HUNGER FOR JUSTICE, ACS 968

Many and Great, Ricky Manalo, CSP, Oregon Catholic Press

SENDING

Sending/Closing Hymn (Choose one for each service of the season.)

Go On Your Way with Joy, My Friends, Kerri Meyer, in *Singing in Community*

Deep Peace, DEEP PEACE, ACS 1018

Farewell, Good Friends, SHALOM CHAVERIM, GTG 540

May the Love of the Lord, SOON TI, GTG 549

Go, My Children, With my Blessing, AR HYD Y NOS, GTG 547 (Baptism of the Lord)

I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light, HOUSTON, GTG 377

Go to the World!, SINE NOMINE, GTG 295

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Playlist Link

Use this QR code to access a Spotify playlist that includes recordings of many of these suggestions. This playlist can be shared with congregants, especially those with children, so that families can play music in the car or at home between services. This may help children to learn music for worship and feel more included during worship.



JANUARY 10, 2027

Baptism of the Lord

Color: White

Genesis 1:1–5 Over the deep and formless waters, God speaks: Let there be light.

Psalm 29 Give glory to God; the voice of the Lord is over the waters.

Acts 19:1–7 Paul baptizes new believers in Jesus' name; they receive the Spirit.

Mark 1:4–11 Jesus is baptized; the Spirit descends; a voice says: You are my Son.

Have a bowl of water visible at the front throughout the service on this day and always.

CALL TO WORSHIP

You are God's child.
I am God's child.
 You are fully loved.
I am fully loved.
 We are God's family.
We are God's family.
 Let us worship God!
Let us worship God!

THANKSGIVING FOR BAPTISM

Leader 3 would be especially suited for a child or youth. Parts for Leaders 1 and 2 could be combined, if not enough readers are available.

Leader 1: In the beginning darkness covered the face of the deep,

Leader 2: and then: a wind from God, a voice.

Leader 3: Let there be light.

Leader 1: The voice of the Lord is over the waters.

The voice shakes the wilderness.

Leader 2: The voice says:

Leader 3: You are my Beloved.

Leader 1: Jesus came to the water to be baptized.

Leader 2: The Spirit descended like a dove. And the voice spoke:

Leader 3: You are my Beloved.

Leader 1: Before the healing, before the teaching,
 Jesus was named beloved, chosen.

Leader 1: ...So with thanks, let us pray:

Leader 2: Loving God, you have created the whole world,

All: **and called it good.**

Leader 3: You have made each of us,

All: **and called us good.**

Leader 1: In our baptism, you have claimed us as your children.

Leader 2: You have filled us with the gifts of your Spirit.

All: **We belong to you.**

Leader 3: Help us to grow strong in your love.

All: **Help us to live as your children.**

Leader 1: Keep your Spirit close to us forever.

Leader 2: Teach us how to share your good news.

Leader 3: Help us to love others,

All: **as you love us.**

Leader 1: Trusting that you hear our prayers, we pray now using the words

Christ has taught us, saying:

The Lord's Prayer may be spoken.

As a way to remember the gift of baptism, you may invite worshipers to come forward and touch water in the baptismal font or be anointed by the leaders. Consider singing a beloved hymn ("Jesus Loves Me," "Seek Ye First," or something your congregation knows by heart), or having an instrumentalist play.

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CONFESSION AND PARDON

We know that "all have sinned and fall short of God's glory."

But we also know that all are loved, and all are forgiven.

So in faith, let us pray together:

God, you love us as your own children.

Forgive us when we fail to love you in return.

God, you have welcomed us into your family.

Forgive us when we do not welcome others.

Fill us with your peace. Set us on your path.

Help us to share your love with all people. Amen.

Hear the good news: Nothing can separate us from God's love in Christ

Jesus our Lord: not death or life, not angels or rulers, not present things or future things, not powers or height or depth, or anything else in all creation.

There is nothing you can do to make God love you less.

Know that you are forgiven, and be at peace.

THE WORD

Themes

Identity. Before Jesus does anything in Mark—before any miracle or teaching—he is named Beloved.

Mark 1:4–11 and Genesis 1:1–5 are in deep conversation. Both are about beginnings, and both reference water and voice. Mark's opening evokes creation: the Spirit hovering over water, the voice of God, light breaking through.

Psalm 29 is wild and physical. The voice of the Lord breaks cedars, flashes fire, shakes the wilderness. Read it as pure poetry; let it be loud in places and quiet in others. This is not a calm text.

Questions for the Congregation

Did you know that before Jesus did a single miracle, God said this about him? And did you know God says the same thing about you?

His baptism happens before his ministry. What would it mean to lead your life from that identity rather than toward it?

What would it mean to start each day remembering that you are baptized?

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Dramatic Reading Idea

Read Genesis 1:1–5 slowly with pauses. Then read Mark 1:4–11 immediately after without announcement—let it feel like a continuation. The congregation should feel the texts rhyming.

Tangible Connection

Include a remembrance of baptism and incorporate touching the water. Have a bowl of water at the entrance or in the center of the space. Invite worshipers to touch the water and say quietly or aloud: 'I am beloved.'

Children's Literature Connection

"On the Night You Were Born" by Nancy Tillman

The birth of a baby causes jubilation throughout all of creation — polar bears dance, geese fly home to celebrate, and the night wind whispers "Life will never be the same." The book echoes the voice at the Jordan—before the ministry begins, before you've done anything, you are already known and celebrated.

Second Sunday after Epiphany

Color: Green

1 Samuel 3:1–10 (11–20) The boy Samuel hears God calling and replies: Speak, Lord.

Psalms 139:1–6, 13–18 O Lord, you search me and surround me; I praise you.

1 Corinthians 6:12–20 Your body is a temple of the Spirit; you were bought with a price.

John 1:43–51 Jesus calls Philip; Philip in turn calls Nathanael: Come and see.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Lord, you know me completely.

Lord, you know me completely.

You know when I sit down and when I stand up.

Lord, you know me completely.

You know my thoughts, and every word before I say it.

Lord, you know me completely.

You surround me in your love, no matter where I go.

Lord, you know me completely.

39

CONFESSION AND PARDON

We know that “all have sinned and fall short of God’s glory.”

But we also know that all are loved, and all are forgiven.

So in faith, let us pray together:

God, you love us as your own children.

Forgive us when we fail to love you in return.

God, you have welcomed us into your family.

Forgive us when we do not welcome others.

Fill us with your peace. Set us on your path.

Help us to share your love with all people. Amen.

Hear the good news: Nothing can separate us from God’s love in Christ
Jesus our Lord: not death or life, not angels or rulers, not present things
or future things, not powers or height or depth, or anything else in all
creation.

There is nothing you can do to make God love you less.

Know that you are forgiven, and be at peace.

THE WORD*Theme*

1 Samuel 3:1-10: This is one of the most accessible biblical narratives for children—it centers a child protagonist, it's dramatic, and it's honest about uncertainty.

Question for the Congregation

(John 1:43-51)

When did someone invite you to come and see something?

How did it change you?

(1 Samuel 3:1-10, 11-20)

In this story, it took two people (Samuel and Eli) to hear and understand

God's words. How can we help each other listen for God's voice?

Dramatic Reading

You need a 'Samuel' (invite a child), an 'Eli' (an elder or adult), a narrator, and God. The repeated calls and responses are easy to learn on the spot. See appendix for an example.

Visual Connection

Show a sign or powerpoint slide that reads GODISNOWHERE.

Invite the congregation to read the text, letters smooshed together. Do they read "God is now here" or "God is no where"? How does our perception between the two change based on circumstances? And how will we live based on which we believe?

Call & Response

Practice together before the reading. The leader calls 'Samuel! Samuel!' and the congregation responds: 'Here I am!' Do this three times, then read the text. Every time, throughout the sermon, when the congregation hears Samuel, invite them to respond 'Here I am!'

Children's Literature Connection:

"The Rabbit Listened" by Cori Doerrfeld

After something goes wrong, every animal offers advice, but only the rabbit simply sits and listens. Samuel hears a voice because Eli teaches him to stop and listen. This book is about the gift of being truly heard.

"Wonder Walkers" by Micha Archer

Two children walk and wonder about everything they see. Psalm 139 is wonder: 'Where can I go from your Spirit?' Invite the congregation to wonder together.

Third Sunday after Epiphany

Color: Green

Jonah 3:1–5, 10 God sends Jonah to Nineveh; the people repent and God forgives.
Psalm 62:5–12 My soul waits in silence for God; God is my rock and salvation.
1 Corinthians 7:29–31 The present world is passing away; let go of earthly attachments.
Mark 1:14–20 Jesus calls four fishermen: Simon, Andrew, James, and John.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Jesus says: Follow me.
We will follow.
Drop your nets.
Change your plans.
Jesus says: Follow me.
We will follow.

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CONFESSION AND PARDON

We know that “all have sinned and fall short of God’s glory.”
But we also know that all are loved, and all are forgiven.
So in faith, let us pray together:

God, you love us as your own children.
Forgive us when we fail to love you in return.
God, you have welcomed us into your family.
Forgive us when we do not welcome others.
Fill us with your peace. Set us on your path.
Help us to share your love with all people. Amen.

Hear the good news: Nothing can separate us from God’s love in Christ
Jesus our Lord: not death or life, not angels or rulers, not present things
or future things, not powers or height or depth, or anything else in all
creation.
There is nothing you can do to make God love you less.
Know that you are forgiven, and be at peace.

THE WORD

Themes

Mark 1:14–20: The call of the first disciples is almost absurdly brief. Jesus says ‘Follow me’ and they follow. Just like that. Mark wants us to feel the immediacy.

Jonah 3: Our reluctance does not stop God’s purposes. The whole city of Nineveh repented. Ask:

1 Corinthians 7:29–31: ‘The present form of this world is passing away.’ Paul’s urgency mirrors Mark’s.

Question for the Congregation

(Mark) What would you have to leave behind to follow Jesus?

(Jonah) When have you been led—maybe reluctantly—to exactly the right place?

(1 Corinthians) If time were shorter than we think, what would matter more? What would matter less?

Tangible Connection

1. Bring a fishing net or a piece of rope or twine. Let people handle it during the reading. What’s in your net? What have you caught? What might you need to let go of?
2. Invite the congregation to tally the verbs or movement words during a segment of worship. Invite worshipers to stand and move their bodies as if they are enacting the story when heard aloud. Ask them to name what they feel in their body after this experience.

Visual Connection

“The Calling of Saint Matthew” by Caravaggio (1599–1600, Contarelli Chapel, Rome). Matthew points to himself: Me? – Use this image to guide worshipers through the practice of Visio Divina, asking where they see God in the image and where they see themselves. Have you ever been interrupted by something extraordinary in the midst of the ordinary? Are you able to believe you are called?

Children’s Literature Connection

“What Do You Do with a Problem?” By Kobi Yamada

A child tries to avoid, ignore, and escape a looming problem. It grows as they run from it, exactly like Jonah, until they finally turn and face it and discover something unexpected inside it.

“Grumpy Monkey” by Suzanne Lang

A monkey insists he’s fine and doesn’t want to do anything different, until he finally admits he isn’t fine and goes on an adventure. The resistance to following is real, funny, and honest.

Dramatic Reading

This script includes the stories of both Jonah and the calling of the first disciples in Mark's Gospel. It includes a variety of voices and could serve as a children's message and/or an introduction into the sermon.

- Voice 1: The time is fulfilled.
The kingdom of God has come near.
Repent. Turn. Believe the good news.
- Voice 2: God sent Jonah to Nineveh and Jonah went the other direction.
Jonah ran from what God asked him to do.
- Child/Youth: God said: Follow me.
But God loved Jonah too much
to let that be the end of the story.
- Leader 1: And then — Jonah went.
- Child/Youth: Immediately.
- Voice 1: Jesus walked by the sea.
He saw Simon and Andrew casting their nets
- Child/Youth: Jesus said: Follow me.
- Voice 2: Immediately they left their nets.
- Child/Youth: Immediately.
- Voice 1: We deliberate.
We want to go the other direction.
- Voice 2: And still the invitation comes:
- Child/Youth: Follow me.
- Voice 1: Leave what you have been holding.
- Child/Youth: Immediately.
- Voice 2: Repent. Turn. Believe the good news.

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JANUARY 31, 2027

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany

Color: Green

Deuteronomy 18:15–20 The Lord says: I will raise up a new prophet to speak my word.

Psalm 111 Praise the Lord; the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom.

1 Corinthians 8:1–13 Concerning food and idols: knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.

Mark 1:21–28 Jesus casts out an unclean spirit; all are amazed at his authority.

CALL TO WORSHIP

What is this?
 A new teaching with authority.
Teach us, Lord.
We are willing to be astonished.
 We come not to have all the answers
 but to be amazed.
Come, let us worship with open hands.

CONFESSION AND PARDON

We know that “all have sinned and fall short of God’s glory.”
 But we also know that all are loved, and all are forgiven.
 So in faith, let us pray together:

God, you love us as your own children.
Forgive us when we fail to love you in return.
God, you have welcomed us into your family.
Forgive us when we do not welcome others.
Fill us with your peace. Set us on your path.
Help us to share your love with all people. Amen.

Hear the good news: Nothing can separate us from God’s love in Christ
 Jesus our Lord: not death or life, not angels or rulers, not present things
 or future things, not powers or height or depth, or anything else in all
 creation.
 There is nothing you can do to make God love you less.
 Know that you are forgiven, and be at peace.

THE WORD

Themes

Authority and amazement.

Mark 1:21–28: The crowd was ‘astounded’ at Jesus’ teaching ‘for he taught them as one having authority.’ Then immediately, an unclean spirit disrupts—and Jesus addresses it directly.

Deuteronomy 18:15–20: God says: ‘I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet.’ What does it look like when someone speaks with divine authority, versus human authority, versus false authority?

1 Corinthians 8: ‘Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.’ Ask worshippers: A text about using knowledge in service of love rather than ego.

Questions for the Congregation

(Mark) When was the last time something truly amazed you? When did you last feel amazed in worship, or by a teaching, or by an encounter with the holy?

(1 Corinthians) What’s the difference between showing off what you know and actually helping someone?

Children’s Literature Connection

“Where the Wild Things Are” by Maurice Sendak

Max roams to a wild place, is proclaimed king, then comes home. The unclean spirit is wild and disruptive; Jesus speaks to the wildness and it quiets. The sermon is in the going-home. Love is what you come back to.

“Stone Soup” by Jon J. Muth

Three monks arrive in a reluctant village and create abundance through invitation and sharing. ‘Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.’ Stone Soup is a parable of what love actually builds.

FEBRUARY 7, 2027

Transfiguration of the Lord

Color: White

2 Kings 2:1–12 After crossing the Jordan, Elijah ascends to heaven in a chariot.

Psalms 50:1–6 From the storm and fire, God calls: gather up my faithful ones.

2 Corinthians 4:3–6 We know the glory of God through the face of Jesus Christ.

Mark 9:2–9 On a high mountain with Moses and Elijah, Jesus is transfigured.

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CALL TO WORSHIP

On bright mountaintops,
Surrounded by God's glory,
We are willing to be astonished.
In ordinary life:
Weary, wonderful, and in between,
We are willing to be astonished.

CONFESSION AND PARDON

We know that “all have sinned and fall short of God's glory.”
But we also know that all are loved, and all are forgiven.
So in faith, let us pray together:

God, you love us as your own children.
Forgive us when we fail to love you in return.
God, you have welcomed us into your family.
Forgive us when we do not welcome others.
Fill us with your peace. Set us on your path.
Help us to share your love with all people. Amen.

Hear the good news: Nothing can separate us from God's love in Christ
Jesus our Lord: not death or life, not angels or rulers, not present things

or future things, not powers or height or depth, or anything else in all creation.

There is nothing you can do to make God love you less.
Know that you are forgiven, and be at peace.

THE WORD

Themes

2 Kings 2:1–12: Elisha asks for ‘a double portion of your spirit’—not possessions, not safety, but spirit. The mantle falls. What do we inherit from those who have gone before us in faith?

‘Only Jesus’ is the final image of Mark’s Transfiguration. 2 Corinthians says we see ‘the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ.’ Transfiguration Sunday stands between the bright Christmas season and the Lenten journey. Use this service to help the congregation turn the corner together.

Mark 9:2–9: The Transfiguration is the hinge of the Gospel of Mark, the moment of dazzling revelation just before the turn toward Jerusalem and the passion. Peter wants to build three tents and remain on the mountain, but he cannot stay on the mountain.

Question for the Congregation

When have you had a mountaintop experience—spiritual, relational, creative—and wanted to stay? What brought you back down? What did you bring with you?

Auditory Connection

After the benediction, invite the congregation to sit quietly for 60 seconds instead of having a recessional. The silence honors the weight of what the disciples saw—and what we are about to enter.

“Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus” Helen Lemmel (1922)

This song turns the corner from the mountain toward the cross, which is exactly where Transfiguration Sunday leads. Sing just the chorus, slowly, as the final moment of worship after the benediction silence. Let it be the last thing the congregation carries out and into Lent.

Dramatic reading

Voice 1: They went up the mountain,
just Jesus, and Peter, and James, and John.

Child/Youth: and suddenly--

Voice 2: his clothes became dazzling white,
whiter than anyone could bleach them.
Elijah and Moses appeared.

Voice 1: The disciples did not know what to say.

Child/youth: and suddenly—

Voice 1: a cloud overshadowed them.

Voice 2: And from the cloud, a voice:
This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to him.
Child/Youth: and suddenly-
Voice 1: looking around,
Voice 2: they saw no one with them any more.
All: Only Jesus.

Silence — at least five seconds.

Child/Youth: Peter wanted to stay.
Voice 1: He wanted to build three tents,
right there on the mountain.
Voice 2: We understand that impulse.
But the road goes down to the valley.
Voice 1: We have spent this season following the light.
Voice 2: We have seen something,
and now we are asked to carry it —
Voice 1: back down into Lent,
into the hard work of love.

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APPENDIX

Dramatic Reading for January 17th: The Call of Samuel (1 Samuel 3:1-4:1)

VOICES: Narrator
 Samuel
 Eli
 God

Narrator: Samuel was a child. He lived and served in the Lord's temple under a priest named Eli. The Word of the Lord was rare in those days. Nobody had seen a vision from God, or heard God's voice, for a long time.

One night, Eli – who was very old, and whose eyesight was getting worse and worse – was lying down in his room. Samuel was lying down in the temple. Then the Lord called out to him:

God: Samuel! Samuel!

Narrator: Samuel ran to Eli's room.

Samuel: Here I am! You called me!

Eli: I didn't call you. Go lie back down.

Narrator: He went to lie back down. The Lord called again.

God: Samuel!

Narrator: Samuel ran back to Eli's room.

Samuel: Here I am! You called me!

Eli: I didn't call you. Lie down again.

Narrator: Samuel went to lie back down, and the Lord called for him a third time.

God: Samuel!

Narrator: Samuel went back to Eli's room a third time.

Samuel: Here I am! You called me!

Narrator: Eli started to figure out that the Lord was calling the boy. So Eli said to Samuel:

Eli: Go lie back down. And if you hear that voice again, stay where you are and say: "Speak, Lord. I'm listening."

Narrator: So Samuel went back to his bed one more time.
The Lord called again:

God: Samuel! Samuel!

Samuel: Speak, Lord. I'm listening.

Narrator: The Lord had a challenging word to tell Samuel.

God: I am about to do something in Israel that will come as a big surprise. I am going to punish Eli's children. His sons have not been following my ways. They speak things that are not true. They cannot follow in their father's footsteps, and they cannot serve as my priests.

Narrator: Samuel lay there until morning. When Eli woke up, Samuel was worried. He was scared to tell Eli what he'd heard from God. This was really bad news for Eli and his family. But Eli wanted to know what God said to him.

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Eli: Samuel, what did God tell you last night? Please do not hide it from me. I want to know everything!

Narrator: So Samuel told him everything. He was nervous about how Eli might react, but Eli said:

Eli: It is the Lord. Let God do what seems right to him.

Narrator: As Samuel grew up, God stayed with him and continued speaking to him. Everyone in Israel knew that Samuel was a trustworthy prophet of the Lord, and that God was speaking to Israel through him.



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