

Narrative Lectionary Worship Resources



Program 1, 2026-27 (Fall through Christmas)

Narrative Lectionary Worship Resources

September 13, 2026—January 3, 2027

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Choral Music/Special Music

Guest Speakers/Announcements



Scripture Readings

Text: Genesis 6:5-22; 8:6-12; 9:8-17

⁵The Lord saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually.

⁶And the Lord was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. ⁷So the Lord said, “I will blot out from the earth the human beings I have created—people together with animals and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.”

⁸But Noah found favor in the sight of the Lord.

⁹These are the descendants of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God. ¹⁰And Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

¹¹Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight, and the earth was filled with violence. ¹²And God saw that the earth was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted its ways upon the earth.

¹³And God said to Noah, “I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence because of them; now I am going to destroy them along with the earth. ¹⁴Make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and out with pitch. ¹⁵This is how you are to make it: the length of the ark three hundred cubits, its width fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits. ¹⁶Make a roof for the ark, and finish it to a cubit above; and put the door of the ark in its side; make it with lower, second, and third decks. ¹⁷For my part, I am going to bring a flood of waters on the earth, to destroy from under heaven all flesh in which is the breath of life; everything that is on the earth shall die. ¹⁸But I will establish my covenant with you; and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons’ wives with you. ¹⁹And of every living thing, of all

flesh, you shall bring two of every kind into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female. ²⁰Of the birds according to their kinds, and of the animals according to their kinds, of every creeping thing of the ground according to its kind, two of every kind shall come in to you, to keep them alive.

²¹Also take with you every kind of food that is eaten, and store it up; and it shall serve as food for you and for them.”

²²Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him.

⁶At the end of forty days Noah opened the window of the ark that he had made ⁷and sent out the raven; and it went to and fro until the waters were dried up from the earth. ⁸Then he sent out the dove from him, to see if the waters had subsided from the face of the ground; ⁹but the dove found no place to set its foot, and it returned to him to the ark, for the waters were still on the face of the whole earth. So he put out his hand and took it and brought it into the ark with him.

¹⁰He waited another seven days, and again he sent out the dove from the ark; ¹¹and the dove came back to him in the evening, and there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf; so Noah knew that the waters had subsided from the earth. ¹²Then he waited another seven days, and sent out the dove; and it did not return to him any more.

⁸Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him,

⁹“As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, ¹⁰and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. ¹¹I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.”

(continued)



Scripture Readings

Text, continued

¹²God said, “This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: ¹³I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, ¹⁵I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. ¹⁶When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.” ¹⁷God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.”

Secondary Text: Matthew 8:24-27

²⁴A windstorm arose on the sea, so great that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep. ²⁵And they went and woke him up, saying, “Lord, save us! We are perishing!” ²⁶And he said to them, “Why are you afraid, you of little faith?” Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a dead calm. ²⁷They were amazed, saying, “What sort of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?”



Scripture Readings

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator, God

Narrator: The Lord saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the Lord said,

God: I will blot out from the earth the human beings I have created—people together with animals and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.

Narrator: But Noah found favor in the sight of the Lord. These are the descendants of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God. And Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence. And God saw that the earth was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted its ways upon the earth. And God said to Noah,

God: I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence because of them; now I am going to destroy them along with the earth. Make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and out with pitch. This is how you are to make it: the length of the ark three hundred cubits, its width fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits. Make a roof for the ark, and finish it to a cubit above; and put the door of the ark in its side; make it with lower, second, and third decks. For my part, I am going to bring a flood of waters on the earth, to destroy from under heaven all flesh in which is the breath of life; everything that is on the earth shall die. But I will establish my covenant with you; and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your

wife, and your sons' wives with you. And of every living thing, of all flesh, you shall bring two of every kind into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female. Of the birds according to their kinds, and of the animals according to their kinds, of every creeping thing of the ground according to its kind, two of every kind shall come in to you, to keep them alive. Also take with you every kind of food that is eaten, and store it up; and it shall serve as food for you and for them.

Narrator: Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him. At the end of forty days Noah opened the window of the ark that he had made and sent out the raven; and it went to and fro until the waters were dried up from the earth. Then he sent out the dove from him, to see if the waters had subsided from the face of the ground; but the dove found no place to set its foot, and it returned to him to the ark, for the waters were still on the face of the whole earth. So he put out his hand and took it and brought it into the ark with him. He waited another seven days, and again he sent out the dove from the ark; and the dove came back to him in the evening, and there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf; so Noah knew that the waters had subsided from the earth. Then he waited another seven days, and sent out the dove; and it did not return to him any more. Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him,

God: As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.

(continued)



Scripture Readings

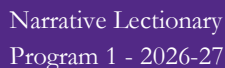
Dramatic Reading, continued

Narrator: God said,

God: This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.

Narrator: God said to Noah,

God: This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.



Flood and Promise, Genesis 6:5-22; 8:6-12; 9:8-17

[illegible]



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: We have been tasked with managing the violence of humanity as we lean into God's promise that all people are God's people.

God was grieved by the violent nature of humanity. After being thrown out of the Garden of Eden, people struggled to find food, clothing, and shelter. It's easy to see how humanity could turn violent so quickly. Fear and desperation can stop people from using their critical thinking skills, and the necessity of peaceful community can seem less important than survival. Although this grieved God, God chose not to eliminate humanity. Instead, God made a covenant with Noah and his descendants (presumably all humanity, as Noah's family were the only remaining people on the earth). God would never again destroy the world by flood, and Noah's family would belong with God.

It's likely that God still did not want humanity to be sinful or violent. Although God made a covenant with Noah not to solve the problem of violence with the utter destruction brought about by God's grief and wrath, the problem of violence remained. As humanity continued to be violent, it would be up to Noah and his descendants to manage the problem of violence. It seems this may be part of God's covenant; God handed the responsibility for human affairs back to humans.

We're living in a culture right now that seems to have forgotten its responsibility to manage its violence.

The entire world feels different, as if the reins and boundaries that had been restraining humanity's darker nature have been broken through. It's frightening just to walk through the world, particularly since the polarization of ideologies has drawn us farther from each other. Not only might we be afraid for our physical safety, but now we are also reluctant to engage in conversations with strangers and sometimes even friends and family out of fear that constructive disagreements might fall to violence of words or fists.

Even Christianity itself has fallen to polarization of ideologies. We wonder, "what *kind* of Christian are you?" This polarization (perhaps even within your own congregation) makes it difficult even to lean into faith for answers. Explore the core of God's promise and the implication that we are now responsible for carrying out God's mission to curb violence and find another way to settle our disputes. How might you contribute to peaceful resolutions within your setting?

—Dr. Kimberly Leetch

Scripture Summary

God promised Noah and his descendants never to destroy the world again for its violence. Noah and his descendants were tasked with tending to all living things, including the violent tendencies of humanity.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

L: Do not be afraid.

C: The storm is so great! We are perishing!

L: Our God can calm any storm within us.

C: Save us, O God, from our fear.

Confession and Forgiveness

P: We confess our sins before God and one another.

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: Creating and renewing God,

C: You have made us in your image to carry your life-giving love as a blessing to all the world. Yet we fail again and again to live out your call. We place our trust in money and possessions, in flawed people and broken relationships, in the things that cannot sustain us. We do the things we do not want to do, and we fail to do the things we know you would have us do. Forgive us for all the ways we fall short. Open our eyes, hearts, and minds to your presence, and re-create us in your image each day, for the good of all that you have made.

P: The God whose love outpoured caused the world to be continues to pour this creative love on us. The God whose love outpoured in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ continues to pour this redeeming love upon us. Children of God, know that you are forgiven, and go forth refreshed and ready to answer God's call to love and serve the whole of creation. In Jesus' holy name. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

L: God of promise,

C: You are not a God of destruction, but of rebirth. In your love, you protect and cherish us. Your eternal promise is to renew us and lead us into flourishing. May our gratitude for your love so spill over that we, in turn, commit ourselves to the flourishing of your whole creation. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

Holy God, all of creation—all that is—comes from you and belongs to you. Free us from our attachments to our earthly possessions, and receive from them these offered gifts out of what you have given us, for the ongoing work of your love for all the world. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: Confident that our Creator God listens and answers prayer, we pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

A brief silence.

L: Holy God, as you preserved a remnant of all that you had made through the devastating flood, call out from us what is our best, that we might will and work for the future flourishing of all. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Creation groans in agony, not from a divine flood, but from the abuse and neglect we have, in our pride and ignorance, unleashed upon it. Help us to staunch the destruction and begin a work of healing in all the earth. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: From what often seems like chaos and corruption in our government, raise up leaders who will work to preserve and protect every single person and all the world. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Hold all who suffer loss, grief, pain, trauma, and challenges of every kind, (*especially...*) Assure us that you are not a God who destroys, but a God who restores. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: As we begin our new program year, our children return to school, and we embark on new undertakings of every kind, remind us that you walk with each of us. Strengthen and inspire our work, join us in our play, and hold us in our rest. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: We praise you for all the saints who have gone before us, living out their faith in the midst of turbulent times. Strengthen us by their example to persist in love and service in the face of uncertainty. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: God who created all that is, we place all for whom we pray, both aloud and in the silence of our hearts, into your loving arms. Amen.



Liturgy

Eucharistic Invitation

The one who brings new life out of death now invites you to feast at Christ's table, where all are forgiven, restored, and strengthened for the work of following in the way of Jesus. Come and be fed, for all is prepared!

Litany

- 1: The wickedness of the earth is very great.
- 2: God's heart grieves at what God sees.**
- 1: God has promised never again to destroy us.
- 2: Yet we seem to be trying to destroy ourselves.**
- 1: What are we to do with our confusion and pain?
- 2: Turn again to the promise of God's love.**
- 1: Remember that God hung up God's weapon in the sky,
- 2: And made it a beautiful sign of hope.**
- 1: Let us, with God's help, hang up our weapons,
- 2: And be transformed.**



Creative Expression

Skit

Characters: Person 1, Person 2

Person 1: I have made such a mess out of everything.

Person 2: What are you talking about?

Person 1: My life. I feel like I've just made mistake after mistake after mistake.

Person 2: Isn't that just being human?

Person 1: Come on, [Person 2]. You know what I'm talking about. My divorce. My kids not speaking to me. My business tanking. My health tanking because I don't take care of myself. It's like everything I hoped for and tried to build just blew up in my face.

Person 2: I get it. I really do. But it's not like there's no good whatsoever in you or your life.

Person 1: I don't see it.

Person 2: That's because you're too close to it. And, if I can be honest...

Person 1: Go ahead. I can take it.

Person 2: You're kind of wallowing in self-pity about the whole thing.

Person 1: Oh I know. I see that. It's just one more thing I'm doing "wrong." I just want to start over.

Person 2: Well, that's not something we get to do. At least, we don't get to go back and do things different. But going forward? There's a whole lot of promise there.

Person 1: How so?

Person 2: Oh, [Person 1], look at yourself. You are a good and beautiful person. You have amazing gifts. And despite your self-pity I get the feeling you really want to change.

Person 1: Except I don't know how to change. I mean, is it even possible to change? I'm not so sure.

Person 2: It is. I've seen it. I've actually experienced it. But it's a lot of work. Hard work. Often painful work.

Person 1: I'm not afraid to work.

Person 2: That's good. You're going to have to be brutally honest about your past mistakes and be willing to make things right.

Person 1: Okay.

Person 2: And you're going to have to stop trying to control people and situations and just turn them over to God.

Person 1: I need to stop fighting. Stop destroying things. Focus on what's good in me and trusting that God can build from there.

Person 2: Exactly. You get to deal with and then let go of the past and create a new future. It's kind of like the Noah's ark story.

Person 1: I see that! God regrets what they did in creation and wants to wipe everything out and start over.

Person 2: But there's still a lot worth saving. And once God realizes that destruction of everything isn't the answer, new life and new creation begins.

Person 1: That's deep. No pun intended.

Person 2: Here's to a new creation, my friend.

Person 1: Hear! Hear!



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

God can create beauty out of pain.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- 4 to 5 images of tattoos done over scars (do a web search for “tattoos over scars” and you’ll get a whole bunch of options.)

Background

Humankind was wicked in Noah’s day. So wicked, in fact, God regretted having made human beings. So God made the decision to destroy humanity.

But God loved the rest of God’s creation. So God chose Noah to be the one to care for God’s creation while the rest of humanity suffered for its sin.

God decided to give humankind another chance through the descendants of Noah. When the flood ended and the water receded, God remembered Noah and his family. God hung up his bow—a weapon—in the sky as a reminder to God that God promised never again to destroy humankind by flood for its wickedness.

Set the Scene

Ask the kids if they’ve ever gotten a cut or serious injury. Do any of them have a scar? Explain what a scar is—how the body covers wounds with new tissue, and how sometimes scars can be seriously disfiguring. Without grossing anyone out, show some examples. Talk about how in today’s story, God’s creation is hurting in lots of ways, and there’s a dramatic injury that happens.

Reflect Together

Talk about how the flood destroyed everything—it was kind of like a painful wound on the earth. Can the kids imagine the total devastation? Wonder together about how God felt about God’s decision. It’s okay to wonder if God had regret.

Show the kids before-and-after images of tattoos over terrible scars. Wonder together about how beauty could be created even on such a damaged canvas. Can the kids find parallels to what happened in the story? How did God re-create beauty even from the most painful thing?

Talk about how God is always re-creating. That every single day people experience difficulties, and sometimes they leave scars. But God can take even the most painful things and begin to create new beauty out of them. Can the kids think of examples?

Close with a prayer asking God to help us transform all our hard times and injuries and scars into new, beautiful creations.

Next Week’s Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Two cell phones (working)
- A volunteer



Planning Worksheet

Preaching Themes

Kids' Storytime Ideas

Skit or Creative Ideas

Worship Setting

Props for Kids' Storytime or Skit

Hymns

Special Events (Baptism, New Members)

Choral Music/Special Music

Guest Speakers/Announcements



Scripture Readings

Text: Genesis 12:1-9

12 Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. ²I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

⁴So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. ⁵Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother’s son Lot, and all the possessions that they had gathered, and the persons whom they had acquired in Haran; and they set forth to go to the land of Canaan. When they had come to the land of Canaan,

⁶Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. ⁷Then the Lord appeared to Abram, and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built there an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him. ⁸From there he moved on to the hill country on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to the Lord and invoked the name of the Lord. ⁹And Abram journeyed on by stages toward the Negeb.

Pronunciation Guide

Haran: HAY-ruhn

Canaan: KAY-nuhn

Shechem: SHEE-kehm

Moreh: MO-reh

Bethel: BETH-el

Ai: AY-ee

Negeb: NEH-gehb

Secondary Text: Matthew 28:19-20

¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator, Lord

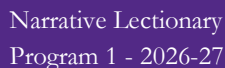
Narrator: Now the Lord said to Abram,

Lord: Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

Narrator: So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother’s son Lot, and all the possessions that they had gathered, and the persons whom they had acquired in Haran; and they set forth to go to the land of Canaan. When they had come to the land of Canaan, Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. Then the Lord appeared to Abram, and said,

Lord: To your offspring I will give this land.

Narrator: So he built there an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him. From there he moved on to the hill country on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to the Lord and invoked the name of the Lord. And Abram journeyed on by stages toward the Negeb.



The Call of Abraham, Genesis 12:1-9



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: In a time when we have the capacity to ensure all people on this earth are blessed with basic needs and even more, we can look at God's promise of land and blessings through a new lens.

To a wandering tribe, land is critically important. For Abraham and his family who had been wandering the wilderness, God's promise to establish a home for them was lifesaving. We are reading through the lens of the one to whom God promised the land; it is easy to miss that the precious land was already inhabited by Canaanites. From Abraham's perspective, God's gift of land was a blessing. From Canaan's perspective, God's interference was devastating.

Many wars throughout history have been about land. The Bible's battles were often about finding land rich in resources for God's people to thrive. As we look closer to home, America's civil war was in part about land; rich landowners needed cheap (slave) labor to work their lands to remain rich. Once slavery ended in the US, many landowners went bankrupt. Their greed had emboldened them to steal more land than they could manage by themselves. Wars in the middle east and between Russia and Ukraine are about land and the rich resources the land has to offer. It means little that there are already people in the lands that the greedy seek to steal.

What's different today is not only that there are enough resources to sustain all the people in the world, but also that we have the technological capability to distribute it. We no longer need God to displace people so that we might steal their land for its resources. God's plan has always been to bless all the people of the earth with land, shelter, food, clothing, healthcare, and yes, even the "luxuries" of entertainment, community, financial stability, emotional wellness, and more. We all seem to have forgotten that God's promise to Abraham was never intended to stop with Abraham.

In our current climate it can be challenging to preach this text, knowing that some of the countries the US is funding are engaging in war, in part, over land. But this might be a great opportunity to remind people that God's promise included blessings for the entire world. How might your community act to support those who are under attack for their land?

—Dr. Kimberly Leetch

Scripture Summary

God called Abram into a relationship of total trust. God told Abram to leave his home and strike out in order to be a blessing to the world. And without hesitation Abram went.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

- L: God has called us.
C: We are called to love and serve and do justice.
L: God has blessed us.
C: We are blessed to be a blessing to the world.
L: God has liberated us.
C: We are free to be who God created us to be.

Confession and Forgiveness

- P: We confess our sins before God and one another.
Pause for silence and reflection.
P: Creating and renewing God,
C: You have made us in your image to carry your life-giving love as a blessing to all the world. Yet we fail again and again to live out your call. We place our trust in money and possessions, in flawed people and broken relationships, in the things that cannot sustain us. We do the things we do not want to do, and we fail to do the things we know you would have us do. Forgive us for all the ways we fall short. Open our eyes, hearts, and minds to your presence, and re-create us in your image each day, for the good of all that you have made.
P: The God whose love outpoured caused the world to be continues to pour this creative love on us. The God whose love outpoured in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ continues to pour this redeeming love upon us. Children of God, know that you are forgiven, and go forth refreshed and ready to answer God's call to love and serve the whole of creation. In Jesus' holy name. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

- L: God of blessing,
C: As you called Abram and Sarai into relationship with you, and charged them with being a blessing to all of creation, remind us today and every day of all the ways in which your blessings upon us make it possible for us to bless others. May we shine as beacons of your loving grace in all we do and say. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

Holy God, you call us to trust you with our lives and our futures. In gratitude for all that you have given us, we return to you these gifts as a sign of our faith in your promises. Use them for the sake of your beloved creation, in Jesus' name. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: Confident that our Creator God listens and answers prayer, we pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

A brief silence.

L: Holy God, you called and Abram went. Inspire in us such trust in your goodness that we would drop everything to follow in your way. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: You have called us to be good stewards of all that you have created. Help us lavish the same love upon the natural world as your did in its creation. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Call all those in authority to act on behalf of those they serve with compassion and justice. Relieve them of the desire for self-promotion and turn them outward toward those who suffer. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: You have called many of us into the field of healing—body, mind, and spirit. Guide the work of all who provide care to those suffering in any way, (*especially...*) God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Help us to recognize your divine call in whatever work we do, that we might see our daily labors as an opportunity to love and serve you and our neighbor. Guide all who are discerning changes in employment or dealing with financial challenges. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: You have called all the saints in all times and places to follow where you led, and they have gone. Lead us in their path of trust and hope one day at a time. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: God who created all that is, we place all for whom we pray, both aloud and in the silence of our hearts, into your loving arms. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

The one who called Abram and Sarai to follow into the unknown also calls you to this table where Christ is made known in the breaking of the bread. Come. Join your siblings at the feast of life.

Litany

1: God called Abram,

2: And Abram answered.

1: God sent Abram,

2: And Abram went.

1: God promised blessing,

2: And Abram was blessed.

1: God made Abram a blessing,

2: And Abram's life and heritage blessed the world.

1: God calls us, sends us, blesses us, and makes us to be a blessing to the world.

2: Let us, like Abram and Sarai, go where God leads, to lavish God's love on all creation.



Creative Expression

Skit

Characters: Person 1, Person 2

Person 1: Hey there, [Person 2]. Do you have a minute?

Person 2: Sure, boss. What's up?

Person 1: I need you to transfer to the Santa Fe office and head up the team there.

Person 2: Seriously. Santa Fe? But that's... well that's an awfully long way from here.

Person 1: I know it's a lot to ask. But it's part of a really important plan.

Person 2: Why me? I mean, there are lots of folks in the company who are way more qualified.

Person 1: It's not about specific qualifications. From what I've observed, you understand what I'm trying to do here more than anyone else.

Person 2: Really? Because at the moment I'm a little flummoxed.

Person 1: (*grinning*) I don't doubt it. But seriously. You've always been faithful to the ideals of this company. You've always just trusted my lead and done what I've asked. So now I'm asking you again.

Person 2: I guess that makes some sense. I really do believe you've got something no one else has, and what you create... It's what I want to be a part of.

Person 1: Of course there's something in it for you.

Person 2: I had no doubts.

Person 1: A raise, for one thing. But also there's some land I own down there that I'd love to give to you and your spouse.

Person 2: Around Sante Fe? That's some high-value property. Are you sure?

Person 1: Absolutely. You've always talked about wanting a family. Now you can settle down and do it.

Person 2: I'd kind of given up on that, honestly. I mean, I have a ton of nieces and nephews and that's cool. But we've been trying to have kids and... well, you know.

Person 1: That's the other thing. I'll completely cover all your medical costs around fertility.

Person 2: (*shocked*) You can't be serious. That... that's too much.

Person 1: Nothing is too much. You matter to me. This matters to me. I just need you to trust me, okay?

Person 2: I do. I totally do.

Person 1: So you'll take the new job?

Person 2: When can I start packing?

Person 1: That's the spirit! We're going to do amazing things together!

Person 2: I believe it!



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

God calls us.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Two cell phones (working)
- A volunteer

Background

God promised to bless Abraham with land and descendants, which were signs of prosperity, identity, and permanence for nations in this period. But this promise was part of a covenant—Abraham had a role to play, too. First, to trust God enough to leave everything he knew and go where God sent him, and second, to be a blessing to the whole world.

Abraham blessed the world by living faithfully to God throughout his life. Through Abraham's descendants King David, and then Jesus Christ came to this world. The whole world has been blessed through Abraham, as we continue to receive those blessings even today.

Help kids understand the concept of how God calls us in lots of ways.

Set the Scene

Give one cell phone to the volunteer. Then call them and say, "I need you to quit your job, sell everything you have, and move to Siberia."

Have the volunteer visibly react to the insanity of the request, then say, "New phone, Who is this?"

Wonder together about the request. Would it matter who made it? If someone you didn't know asked you to do something crazy, would you? What if it was someone you trusted?

Would it matter what was supposed to happen when you got to Siberia? What if you knew it was going to be an amazing experience that would be good for the whole world?

Tell the kids that in the story, a man named Abram got a call like this, but not on a cell phone.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Wonder about what God was asking Abram to do. Where was he asking him to go? Why did he want Abram to go? What was Abram going to get from God as a blessing? What was Abram's job? (to bless others)

Talk about how God calls us to do hard things all the time. Give an example from your own life. It can be hard to know the right thing to do, but if we trust God, usually things turn out even better than we could have imagined! Can the kids think of any examples?

Discuss how God's call to Abram—to bless the world—is still our call today. How can we be blessings to the world? Take lots of ideas from the kids and add some of your own.

Close with a prayer asking God to help us to trust God's call, and to be a blessing to others.

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- A photo of Herman Lindsey (see "Advance Prep" for next week)



Planning Worksheet

Preaching Themes

Kids' Storytime Ideas

Skit or Creative Ideas

Worship Setting

Props for Kids' Storytime or Skit

Hymns

Special Events (Baptism, New Members)

Choral Music/Special Music

Guest Speakers/Announcements



Scripture Readings

Text: Genesis 39:1-23

39Now Joseph was taken down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there. ²The Lord was with Joseph, and he became a successful man; he was in the house of his Egyptian master. ³His master saw that the Lord was with him, and that the Lord caused all that he did to prosper in his hands. ⁴So Joseph found favor in his sight and attended him; he made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had. ⁵From the time that he made him overseer in his house and over all that he had, the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; the blessing of the Lord was on all that he had, in house and field. ⁶So he left all that he had in Joseph's charge; and, with him there, he had no concern for anything but the food that he ate. Now Joseph was handsome and good-looking.

⁷And after a time his master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said, "Lie with me." ⁸But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Look, with me here, my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my hand. ⁹He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except yourself, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" ¹⁰And although she spoke to Joseph day after day, he would not consent to lie beside her or to be with her. ¹¹One day, however, when he went into the house to do his work, and while no one else was in the house, ¹²she caught hold of his garment, saying, "Lie with me!" But he left his garment in her hand, and fled and ran outside.

¹³When she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and had fled outside, ¹⁴she called out to the members of her household and said to them, "See,

my husband has brought among us a Hebrew to insult us! He came in to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice; ¹⁵and when he heard me raise my voice and cry out, he left his garment beside me, and fled outside." ¹⁶Then she kept his garment by her until his master came home, ¹⁷and she told him the same story, saying, "The Hebrew servant, whom you have brought among us, came in to me to insult me; ¹⁸but as soon as I raised my voice and cried out, he left his garment beside me, and fled outside."

¹⁹When his master heard the words that his wife spoke to him, saying, "This is the way your servant treated me," he became enraged. ²⁰And Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined; he remained there in prison. ²¹But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love; he gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer. ²²The chief jailer committed to Joseph's care all the prisoners who were in the prison, and whatever was done there, he was the one who did it. ²³The chief jailer paid no heed to anything that was in Joseph's care, because the Lord was with him; and whatever he did, the Lord made it prosper.

Pronunciation Guide

Potiphar: POT-ih-fahr

Ishmaelites: ISH-mayehl-aits

Secondary Text: Matthew 5:11-12

¹¹"Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹²Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."



Scripture Readings

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator, Wife, Joseph, Master

Narrator: Now Joseph was taken down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there. The Lord was with Joseph, and he became a successful man; he was in the house of his Egyptian master. His master saw that the Lord was with him, and that the Lord caused all that he did to prosper in his hands. So Joseph found favor in his sight and attended him; he made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had. From the time that he made him overseer in his house and over all that he had, the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake; the blessing of the Lord was on all that he had, in house and field. So he left all that he had in Joseph's charge; and, with him there, he had no concern for anything but the food that he ate. Now Joseph was handsome and good-looking. And after a time his master's wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said,

Wife: Lie with me.

Narrator: But he refused and said to his master's wife,

Joseph: Look, with me here, my master has no concern about anything in the house, and he has put everything that he has in my hand. He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except yourself, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?

Narrator: And although she spoke to Joseph day after day, he would not consent to lie beside her or to be with her. One day, however, when he went into

the house to do his work, and while no one else was in the house, she caught hold of his garment, saying,

Wife: Lie with me!

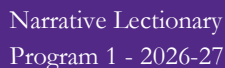
Narrator: But he left his garment in her hand, and fled and ran outside. When she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and had fled outside, she called out to the members of her household and said to them,

Wife: See, my husband has brought among us a Hebrew to insult us! He came in to me to lie with me, and I cried out with a loud voice; and when he heard me raise my voice and cry out, he left his garment beside me, and fled outside.

Narrator: Then she kept his garment by her until his master came home, and she told him the same story, saying,

Wife: The Hebrew servant, whom you have brought among us, came in to me to insult me; but as soon as I raised my voice and cried out, he left his garment beside me, and fled outside.

Narrator: When his master heard the words that his wife spoke to him, saying, "This is the way your servant treated me," he became enraged. And Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined; he remained there in prison. But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love; he gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer. The chief jailer committed to Joseph's care all the prisoners who were in the prison, and whatever was done there, he was the one who did it. The chief jailer paid no heed to anything that was in Joseph's care, because the Lord was with him; and whatever he did, the Lord made it prosper.



Joseph in Prison, Genesis 39:1-23

[illegible]



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: Joseph's story parallels the story of many who are currently legally enslaved in the US. Through all his turmoil, God continued to bless Joseph and send people to intervene on his behalf.

Joseph's story of imprisonment uncannily parallels the stories of many prison systems around the world today, most notably policing in the US. Educating parishioners and offering a God's-eye view of what can be done might be an incredible opportunity for preachers willing to look at it and bold enough to preach it.

In the US "[slave patrols](#)" were created in the 1700s to hunt runaway slaves and put down rebellions. Once slavery was abolished, militia groups fought to deny equal rights to newly freed persons. In the 1900s, police were tasked with violently preventing Black people from breaking Jim Crow laws. Still today, Black men are incarcerated at a [disproportionately high rate](#) compared to their representation of the population.

Joseph was sold into slavery by his own jealous brothers. While he succeeded there, his master's jealous wife falsely accused Joseph of attempted SA, and innocent Joseph was thrown into the King's prison. This happens to far too many in the US as well. In the US [slavery is still legal](#) within the prison system.

All that happened to Joseph eventually led him to the highest station in the land where he saved countless lives. And as God continued to bless Joseph, God also placed in Joseph's path people who were instrumental in all that happened to him. Joseph's brothers sold him. His master made him responsible for the household. The master's wife accused him. And we will later learn Pharaoh's chief cupbearer intervened and alerted Pharaoh to Joseph's fate and talent for interpreting dreams.

It's this last part that can challenge our congregations; first, to acknowledge that what Joseph endured is still happening today in our own backyards, and second, to make an action plan for how to participate in intervening, as did Pharaoh's chief cupbearer. God acted on behalf of Joseph through the actions of people. We too can either be people who remain complacent about the injustices that still occur, or we can be the people who intervene and stop such abuses of power. Consider how God's blessings that have been bestowed onto your community can be used for the greater good.

—Dr. Kimberly Leetch

Scripture Summary

Joseph's life bounced often from turmoil to blessing. God continued to bless Joseph even as he was falsely imprisoned, and God sent people to intervene on Joseph's behalf.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

L: Blessed are you when people do not like you

C: Because we work for justice.

L: Blessed are you when people do not like you

C: Because we advocate for the oppressed.

L: Blessed are you when people do not like you

C: Because we follow God's call to love the world.

Confession and Forgiveness

P: We confess our sins before God and one another.

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: Creating and renewing God,

C: You have made us in your image to carry your life-giving love as a blessing to all the world. Yet we fail again and again to live out your call. We place our trust in money and possessions, in flawed people and broken relationships, in the things that cannot sustain us. We do the things we do not want to do, and we fail to do the things we know you would have us do. Forgive us for all the ways we fall short. Open our eyes, hearts, and minds to your presence, and re-create us in your image each day, for the good of all that you have made.

P: The God whose love outpoured caused the world to be continues to pour this creative love on us. The God whose love outpoured in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ continues to pour this redeeming love upon us. Children of God, know that you are forgiven, and go forth refreshed and ready to answer God's call to love and serve the whole of creation. In Jesus' holy name. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

L: God with us,

C: Your presence never fails, even in the midst of challenges or crises. Stir up in us your fire for truth and make us willing to risk for the sake of the flourishing of others, trusting that you are with us in all things. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

Holy God, in your abundant love you sustain us even in our darkest of times. Receive these gifts out of that abundance, in gratitude for all that you have given us. Bless our offerings that they might be used to help bring about your reign of love and justice, in Jesus' name. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: Confident that our Creator God listens and answers prayer, we pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

A brief silence.

L: Holy God, like Joseph many are imprisoned falsely due to failures in our justice system. Make us to work on behalf of all who lack resources to defend themselves, to enact unbiased laws, and to elect wise and impartial judges. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Prosper the work of all those who labor in the field of environmental justice, ecosystem restoration, and all disciplines concerned with caring for your beautiful creation. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Raise up leaders like Joseph, whose trust in you compels them to be honest and just even when it lands them in trouble. Guide and protect all who are imprisoned due to standing up and speaking truth to power. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: We lift to you all those in our congregation, community, nation, and world who are dealing with illness, injury, or recovering from surgery, (*especially...*) Guide all caregivers in their service to their patients. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: All labor is worthy in your eyes, O God. Prosper the work of every hand, and give us appreciation for those who do the jobs some might deem menial or less noble. Help us to see your face in the faces of all who serve us in any way. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: Throughout history you have inspired your saints to will and to work for your good purpose, no matter how challenging life is. Inspire us by their example to follow in the way of faith and hope. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: God who created all that is, we place all for whom we pray, both aloud and in the silence of our hearts, into your loving arms. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

The one who prospered the work of Joseph's hands invites you now to this feast of forgiveness, that you might be renewed and equipped for the work God has called you to. Come into the presence of Jesus Christ and be fed. All is prepared for you.

Litany

1: Joseph's life was not easy.

2: Yet wherever he was, he kept his faith in God.

1: Joseph's work brought blessing to others,

2: Even in the midst of his own pain.

1: Remind us, O God, that you are here with us,

2: No matter what is going on around us.

1: Inspire us in our daily work, that it might be a work in, through, and for you.

2: Help us to trust that you are in all things,

1: Even when everything seems overwhelming—

2: Especially when everything seems overwhelming.



Creative Expression

Skit

Characters: Kids 1-5

Props: Desks or tables and chairs set up like a classroom.

Scene: Kids 1-4 are in detention. Kid 5 enters as indicated.

Kid 1: Well here we are again in our lovely after-school detention.

Kid 2: I do not get what is up with Ms. Kazinsky. I feel like she just makes up reasons to give me detention sometimes.

Kid 3: Oh come on. You know you totally deserve it. You're snarky and disrespectful in class all the time.

Kid 4: Well I'm definitely not sure what I'm doing here. All I did was help Marius with their questions.

Kid 3: It was a quiz, [Kid 4]. You were talking in class and basically helping Marius cheat.

(Kid 5 enters and goes to take a seat.)

Kid 1: Whoa! What are you doing in here?

Kid 2: Yeah. The biggest goody two-shoes in the whole school!

Kid 3: Did you somehow cross Ms. Kazinsky?

Kid 4: Or have you been faking being the teacher's pet all this time?

Kid 5: As if I could fake that. No, I'm here because Parker totally lied to Mr. Hernandez.

Kid 1: You're not just blaming Parker for something you did?

Kid 2: Actually, I heard about that. Parker told Mr. Hernandez that you snuck out of school and vandalized some playground equipment.

Kid 3: Why would anyone believe that, much less Mr. Hernandez?

Kid 4: What actually happened, [Kid 5]?

Kid 5: Parker wanted me to help them with their final science project and I told them I couldn't, especially because we're supposed to do it without help.

Kid 1: Yeah, I'm totally going to fail that final project. It's so hard!

Kid 2: Okay so you wouldn't help Parker. Then what?

Kid 5: They were pretty mad about it. So they just made up a story to get me in trouble.

Kid 3: There had to have been some evidence for Mr. Hernandez to have believed it.

Kid 5: Parker stole my jacket and left it at the site of the vandalism. Plus they chose a time when I had a study hall pass and wasn't in anyone's classroom because I was actually working on my project in the commons.

Kid 4: And of course no one saw you in the commons when the vandalism was happening.

Kid 5: Bingo. So here I am.

Kid 1: Aren't you furious with Parker? I mean, I can come up with a million ways for you to get even.

(continued)



Creative Expression

Skit, continued

Kid 5: No. Honestly, that's Parker's stuff. I'm going to sit here in detention and work on my project. I'm actually kind of grateful because now I have this uninterrupted time to think about it.

Kid 2: (*in wonder*) Who... *are* you?

Kid 5: (*laughing*) Just me.

Kid 3: I get why all the teachers love you, honestly.

Kid 4: And why everything you do just seems to be a cut above everyone else.

Kid 2: It's all in the attitude.

Kid 1: I'd still love to help you get even with Parker.

Kid 5: Why don't you worry about getting through this detention period? And maybe not getting in trouble all over again for causing trouble for Parker.

Kid 1: That's valid.

Kid 5: Okay. I'm going to get to work now before Ms. Kazinsky comes in and gives me another detention for talking in detention.

Kid 1: Also valid.



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

God's love brings good out of bad.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- A photo of Herman Lindsey (see below)

Background

Joseph's life had lots of ups and downs. He was born into a life of means, but then his jealous brothers sold him into slavery. In slavery he rose to the head of household, but then his owner's jealous wife made up a terrible lie that landed him in jail. In prison he rose to the head of the ranks of prisoners, but people in power forgot about him and he remained in prison many years. When finally he was released, he rose to the top of Pharaoh's governing board where he was able to save the country (and later his family) from a terrible famine. Throughout all his highs and lows in life, Joseph remained faithful to God, and God remained faithful to Joseph.

Advance Prep

Read the following article (or a similar one if you are familiar with a story like this) and print the photo.

<https://www.aclu.org/news/capital-punishment/my-journey-from-death-row-to-becoming-an-advocate-for-justice>

Set the Scene

Ask the kids if they've ever gotten in trouble for something they didn't do. What did they do? How did things turn out?

Briefly tell them the story of Herman Lindsey. Talk about how he was wrongfully convicted, but then turned what happened to good—how he has dedicated his life to helping other people to not have to have the same thing happen to them.

Tell them that in the story, Joseph also had lots of bad things happen to him. But at every step, God helped him work through his challenges for the benefit of others.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Wonder about what Joseph must have felt like, and how his trust in God helped him deal with his challenges. Return to the story of Herman Lindsey and read his quote: "If you look at the stories in the Bible, God took people and gave them an assignment. And I feel like God chose me and took me through death row to be an advocate for justice and to help people. Despite what I'm going through, that is the job I'm going to keep doing until the day I die."

Wonder with the kids about how they can look at challenges as opportunities to trust in God and maybe change things for the better.

Close with a prayer asking God to remind us that God's love can bring good out of bad things.

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Tug-o-war rope
- A very strong adult volunteer



Planning Worksheet

Preaching Themes

Kids' Storytime Ideas

Skit or Creative Ideas

Worship Setting

Props for Kids' Storytime or Skit

Hymns

Special Events (Baptism, New Members)

Choral Music/Special Music

Guest Speakers/Announcements



Scripture Readings

Text: Exodus 14:5-7, 10-14, 21-29

⁵When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, the minds of Pharaoh and his officials were changed toward the people, and they said, “What have we done, letting Israel leave our service?” ⁶So he had his chariot made ready, and took his army with him; ⁷he took six hundred picked chariots and all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them.

¹⁰As Pharaoh drew near, the Israelites looked back, and there were the Egyptians advancing on them. In great fear the Israelites cried out to the Lord. ¹¹They said to Moses, “Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, bringing us out of Egypt? ¹²Is this not the very thing we told you in Egypt, ‘Let us alone and let us serve the Egyptians’? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.”

¹³But Moses said to the people, “Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the Lord will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today you shall never see again. ¹⁴The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to keep still.”

²¹Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and turned the sea into dry land; and the waters were divided. ²²The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left. ²³The Egyptians pursued, and went into the sea after them, all of Pharaoh’s horses, chariots, and chariot drivers. ²⁴At the morning watch

the Lord in the pillar of fire and cloud looked down upon the Egyptian army, and threw the Egyptian army into panic. ²⁵He clogged their chariot wheels so that they turned with difficulty. The Egyptians said, “Let us flee from the Israelites, for the Lord is fighting for them against Egypt.” ²⁶Then the Lord said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand over the sea, so that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots and chariot drivers.” ²⁷So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at dawn the sea returned to its normal depth. As the Egyptians fled before it, the Lord tossed the Egyptians into the sea. ²⁸The waters returned and covered the chariots and the chariot drivers, the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea; not one of them remained. ²⁹But the Israelites walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.

Secondary Text: Matthew 2:13-15

¹³Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.” ¹⁴Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, ¹⁵and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, “Out of Egypt I have called my son.”



Readings

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator, Officials, Israelites, Moses, God

Narrator: When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, the minds of Pharaoh and his officials were changed toward the people, and they said,

Officials: What have we done, letting Israel leave our service?

Narrator: So he had his chariot made ready, and took his army with him; he took six hundred picked chariots and all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them. As Pharaoh drew near, the Israelites looked back, and there were the Egyptians advancing on them. In great fear the Israelites cried out to the Lord. They said to Moses,

Israelites: Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, bringing us out of Egypt? Is this not the very thing we told you in Egypt, ‘Let us alone and let us serve the Egyptians’? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.

Narrator: But Moses said to the people,

Moses: Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the Lord will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today you shall never see again. The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to keep still.

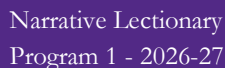
Narrator: Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and turned the sea into dry land; and the waters were divided. The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left. The Egyptians pursued, and went into the sea after them, all of Pharaoh’s horses, chariots, and chariot drivers. At the morning watch the Lord in the pillar of fire and cloud looked down upon the Egyptian army, and threw the Egyptian army into panic. He clogged their chariot wheels so that they turned with difficulty. The Egyptians said,

Officials: Let us flee from the Israelites, for the Lord is fighting for them against Egypt.

Narrator: Then the Lord said to Moses,

God: Stretch out your hand over the sea, so that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots and chariot drivers.”

Narrator: So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at dawn the sea returned to its normal depth. As the Egyptians fled before it, the Lord tossed the Egyptians into the sea. The waters returned and covered the chariots and the chariot drivers, the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea; not one of them remained. But the Israelites walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.



Rescue at Sea, Exodus 14:5-7, 10-14, 21-29

[illegible]



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: Sometimes we are called to act. This time, when the Israelites were in peril, God invited them to remain still and let God take care of them.

Last week we heard of Joseph and the many people God placed in Joseph's path who helped him succeed in saving people from famine. Today we read of Israel fleeing for their lives from slavery in Egypt. Pharaoh pursued them, and at the Red Sea they were trapped; unpassable water before them, and certain capture behind them. They reacted as most would, bitterly complaining that Moses had led them to their deaths. In contrast to the many actors involved in Joseph's success, in today's reading, Moses told the people, "The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to keep still."

Keeping still can be really hard, especially when danger looms. Many of us today are constantly in a state of panic. We sense danger as we read the news, struggle to pay bills, or languish in toxic relationships. We may be constantly tethered to our phones doomscrolling or playing mindlessly. We might be suffering with addiction or illness. It can seem as though there is never a break from the chaos that swirls around us. We might respond by overreacting or by shutting down completely. Neither is stillness.

The Israelites likely fought the urge to flee or beg for mercy. But Moses invited them to stillness. As they

watched, God performed miraculous tasks they could not have done for themselves. In their stillness, there was no complacency. Their stillness was intentional and active. They participated in their own escape, even as God removed from their shoulders the burden of the dangers and obstacles they faced.

As we struggle to keep our heads above water, we are invited to stillness. We might fight the urge flee or beg while God invites us to be still. Our bodies, minds, and spirits were not designed to sustain such consistent chaos. When we are stuck in fight/flight/freeze/fawn, our [nervous systems remain on high alert](#) and we can experience fatigue, depression, anxiety, stomach or heart problems, and more. God's invitation to be still might be the remedy we need. Invite your congregation to discover the best act of stillness they can find for themselves as they remain witnesses to the miraculous things God is doing around us.

—Dr. Kimberly Leetch

Scripture Summary

God saved the Hebrew people from the swords of the Egyptians and the drowning waters of the Red Sea. Moses invited the people to "be still" and let God do what only God can do.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

L: Our God has triumphed!

C: We have been led through the sea to safety.

L: Our God has triumphed!

C: We have been freed to be people of God!

Confession and Forgiveness

P: We confess our sins before God and one another.

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: Creating and renewing God,

C: You have made us in your image to carry your life-giving love as a blessing to all the world. Yet we fail again and again to live out your call. We place our trust in money and possessions, in flawed people and broken relationships, in the things that cannot sustain us. We do the things we do not want to do, and we fail to do the things we know you would have us do. Forgive us for all the ways we fall short. Open our eyes, hearts, and minds to your presence, and re-create us in your image each day, for the good of all that you have made.

P: The God whose love outpoured caused the world to be continues to pour this creative love on us. The God whose love outpoured in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ continues to pour this redeeming love upon us. Children of God, know that you are forgiven, and go forth refreshed and ready to answer God's call to love and serve the whole of creation. In Jesus' holy name. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

L: Liberating God,

C: You have sent us forth into a world that often seems bent on the destruction of all that is good in your creation. Free us from our fears so that we might proclaim with boldness the truth of your desire for love, justice, and peace. Open a way for us through the voices of anger and hatred that threaten to drown us, that we might pass safely to a better world. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

Holy God, you deliver us again and again from difficulties, showering us with abundant gifts. We offer now this portion of what you have given us, that it might be used according to your will for the liberation of the whole of creation. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Prayers of the Church

L: Confident that our Creator God listens and answers prayer, we pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

A brief silence.

L: Holy God, when our problems seem intractable, when no solutions appear before us, when we are in deep despair, help us to be still and trust you to fight for us. Make us to be your hands and feet in the world that we might fight for the powerless and the despairing in your name. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

(continued)



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church, continued

L: The climate crisis seems hopeless, and the laborers too few to combat it. Give us hope and then turn that hope into motivation to take whatever action is required to restore, protect, and preserve your beloved creation for generations to come. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Draw from among us those best suited to lead in trust that with you all things are possible. Make them strong in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles, that they might work tirelessly for your justice. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Walk with all who journey with physical, mental, or spiritual illness. Remind them that you share their place and feel their pain. Give them peace and strength in the midst of their challenges, (*especially...*) God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Stand with all who face oppression, injustice, poverty, or war. Stir up compassion in those whose decisions harm the lives of others. Part the sea of our unwillingness to recognize our own complicity in systems that lead to needless suffering. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: With Moses and Miriam and all the saints, we praise you, O God, for delivering us time and again from our trials and challenges. May we ever live in the conviction that you are with us. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: God who created all that is, we place all for whom we pray, both aloud and in the silence of our hearts, into your loving arms. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

The one who led Israel through the sea to liberation from slavery now invites you to this feast of liberation from sin and death. Come with your beloved siblings in Christ to share in this holy meal with one another.

Litany

1: God's people were trapped,

2: Between Pharaoh's army and the sea.

1: How often do we feel ourselves so trapped,

2: By circumstances beyond our control?

1: Moses says that God will fight for us.

2: Then why is there still so much pain?

1: It is too much for us to understand, and yet, can we find ways to trust? To have faith?

2: There are many like Moses among us.

1: And are not we each called to be a Moses?

2: To speak boldly to power, to lead others to liberation?

1: We cannot know outcomes, but we can take actions and trust God for the rest.

2: Help us to act in faith and trust, O God.



Creative Expression

Skit

Characters: Persons 1-5

Scene: Persons 1-4 are onstage. Person 5 enters later.

Person 1: Well, I guess this is the end.

Person 2: It's been a good run, I suppose. But it's a shame it has to all come crashing down.

Person 3: Why are you all being so defeatist? Where's your trust in the boss?

Person 4: Oh come on. No one can spin this. We're at the mercy of the market.

Person 1: A hostile takeover is just that: hostile.

Person 2: Public opinion has spoken. People are convinced what we're doing is wrong, and they're putting their money where their misinformation is.

Person 4: Our backs are against the wall. I'm cashing out my company stock as soon as it's legal.

Person 3: Don't give up. Seriously.

Person 5: (*entering*) Why all the long faces?

Person 1: Don't make light of this. We're all going down in flames.

Person 5: Yeah... no. I've been talking to the boss. We're going to be just fine.

Person 2: Are you kidding? That's going to take a miracle.

Person 5: You don't think the boss is capable of turning this around? Where's your faith.

Person 3: Exactly what I've been saying.

Person 4: How is she going to fix this? I feel like there's an absolute mob of people chomping at the bit to tear this company

apart into little pieces and absorb it into their conglomerates.

Person 5: Relax. Let the boss fight for us. She's got a plan to open a way between all the crazy rhetoric flying around.

Person 1: Seriously? I don't see how she can convince people that the exaggerations and misinterpretations out there aren't the real picture.

Person 5: She didn't get where she is because she's timid or lacking in creativity.

Person 2: Okay. So what's next?

Person 5: She's holding a press conference in about fifteen minutes.

Person 4: That suddenly?

Person 3: I told you we should expect the unexpected!

Person 5: She's going to expose the truth of what's going on here and we're going to walk right through the lies to the other side.

Person 1: What about all those other yahoos still shouting those lies?

Person 5: She's going to trap them in their own dishonesty and the whole thing is going to come crashing down over them.

Person 2: It sounds a little hard to believe. A bit fairy-tale, really.

Person 3: Think what you want. I trust the boss wholeheartedly. I'm ready to see her in action!

Person 5: That's the spirit! Let's get ready for the big event!

(*all exit*)



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

God frees us.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Tug-o-war rope
- A very strong adult volunteer

Background

God's people, Israel, were slaves in Egypt for over 400 years. They prayed for deliverance. Finally, God heard and answered their prayers. God sent Moses to help free the people from slavery.

Once set free from Egypt, the people fled. But Pharaoh changed his mind, and set out after the people with the plan of bringing them back to Egypt. When the people came to the Red Sea, it appeared they were trapped. But God spectacularly rescued them from their pursuers. Now they were truly free.

God still shows up in our lives to free us from the things that keep us stuck. We don't have to fight—God fights for us if we will just be still and trust.

Set the Scene

Tell the kids that God's people, the Israelites, had been slaves in Egypt for hundreds of years until God sent Moses to lead them away. But the story didn't end there!

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Ask the kids in what ways the Israelites were trapped. (*as slaves, then between the Red Sea and the Egyptian soldiers*) Could they have gotten free all by themselves? (*No. They needed help from someone stronger: God.*)

Are there things in our lives that trap us? Ask the kids to think about things like being angry or jealous or wanting to get even as being traps. These traps keep us sad and separated from other people. Can God free us from those traps? (*You bet!*)

Divide the kids into two teams (or, if you have a whole lot of kids, choose three or four per team) that are evenly matched in strength, then add one kid to one team to make them stronger. Tell the kids that the stronger team will be anger and resentment and other things that trap us like the Egyptian soldiers. The opposite team will be the people trying to be free of these traps, like the Israelites.

Have them predict what will happen in the tug-o-war. Then start the contest. (Be very careful to make sure there's no possibility of kids getting hurt during this activity). As soon as it's clear the Traps/Egyptians are winning, have them stop.

Ask your strong adult volunteer to join the weaker team. Introduce them as "God." Start the tug-o-war again and let God pull the Traps/Egyptians into the "sea," freeing the other team.

Encourage the kids to think about how when God is on their team (which God always is) they can be free next time they're feeling angry or sad. Then close with a prayer thanking God for freeing us.

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- A Bible



Planning Worksheet

Preaching Themes

Kids' Storytime Ideas

Skit or Creative Ideas

Worship Setting

Props for Kids' Storytime or Skit

Hymns

Special Events (Baptism, New Members)

Choral Music/Special Music

Guest Speakers/Announcements



Scripture Readings

Text: Exodus 19:3-7; 20:1-17

³Then Moses went up to God; the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the Israelites: ⁴You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. ⁵Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, ⁶but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites.” ⁷So Moses came, summoned the elders of the people, and set before them all these words that the Lord had commanded him.

20Then God spoke all these words: ²I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; ³you shall have no other gods before me. ⁴You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. ⁵You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, ⁶but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

⁷You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name. ⁸Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. ⁹Six days you shall labor and do all your work. ¹⁰But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. ¹¹For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.

¹²Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. ¹³You shall not murder. ¹⁴You shall not commit adultery. ¹⁵You shall not steal. ¹⁶You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. ¹⁷You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

Secondary Text: Matthew 5:17

¹⁷“Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.”



Scripture Readings

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator, God

Narrator: Then Moses went up to God; the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying,

God: Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the Israelites: You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites.

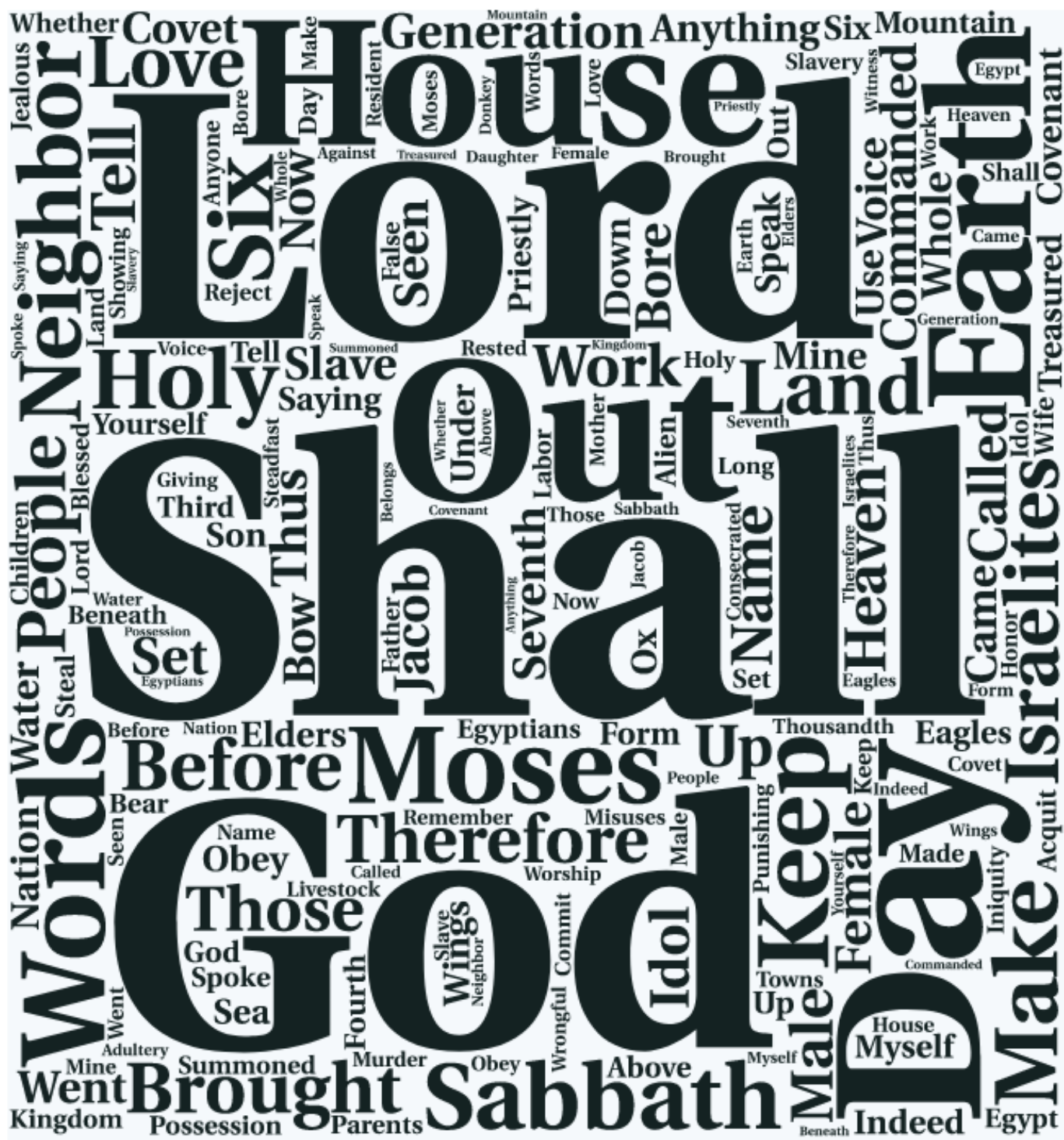
Narrator: So Moses came, summoned the elders of the people, and set before them all these words that the Lord had commanded him. Then God spoke all these words:

God: I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them;

for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments. You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name. Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it. Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.



Tag Cloud





Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: The Ten Commandments were God's gift of early governance to a displaced and weary people. We are in an era when society is being dismantled, and we have an opportunity to lean on God to help reshape what this world can be.

When the Israelites were freed from slavery in Egypt, they had never really had an opportunity to govern themselves. They were subject to the will and laws of Egypt. And while they likely had rules and norms that guided them amongst themselves, the forming of this new society was on a whole other level.

The people were given the incredible opportunity to build a society from scratch. They could decide who and how they wanted to be. Wisely, they leaned into their identity as God's chosen and allowed God to shape who and what they would become. God gave them an initial set of laws to cover the basic needs of a displaced people. They would love and serve God. They would respect their parents, their neighbors, property, and even life itself. God then went on as recorded in further chapters to spell out exactly how they would adhere to these laws, how they would enforce them, and the consequences for failing to do so. With God's guidance, they created a societal structure that would endure.

Today we are in a precarious time regarding the rules, norms, and laws of society. In the US, the entire government has undergone a dramatic shift away from the laws and norms we had come to expect, and we have not yet entered the era when the rebuilding can begin. It's important to acknowledge that, whatever one's ideology, the drastic and rapid change has been destabilizing for most of us. Hold space for your congregation to grieve what was, even as we look toward the future and dream of what could be.

Take this opportunity to dream big with your congregation about who and how you want to be. Ask yourselves if you, like the Israelites, will lean into your identity as God's children and allow God to shape the world in God's image; a world in which all people are free, equal, respected, safe, fed, clothed, sheltered, cared for, and in community. Consider what you could do now to move in the direction of shaping a world that your congregation can be proud of.

—Dr. Kimberly Leetch

Scripture Summary

God, through Moses, sent the Ten Commandments: a gift and a structure for governance for a displaced people.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

- L: Our God has freed us from bondage to sin.
C: We will worship and praise our God.
L: We shall have no other gods before our God.
C: We will turn away from the idols of this world.
L: Our God has freed us from sin and death.
C: Thanks be to God!

Confession and Forgiveness

- P: We confess our sins before God and one another.
Pause for silence and reflection.
P: Creating and renewing God,
C: You have made us in your image to carry your life-giving love as a blessing to all the world. Yet we fail again and again to live out your call. We place our trust in money and possessions, in flawed people and broken relationships, in the things that cannot sustain us. We do the things we do not want to do, and we fail to do the things we know you would have us do. Forgive us for all the ways we fall short. Open our eyes, hearts, and minds to your presence, and re-create us in your image each day, for the good of all that you have made.
P: The God whose love outpoured caused the world to be continues to pour this creative love on us. The God whose love outpoured in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ continues to pour this redeeming love upon us. Children of God, know that you are forgiven, and go forth refreshed and ready to answer God's call to love and serve the whole of creation. In Jesus' holy name. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

- L: Holy God,
C: You ask of us no more than to love you with our whole hearts, souls, minds, and strength, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. Re-awaken us daily to the truth of this command, that we might act in love toward your whole creation. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

Holy God, you are the source of all that we are and all that we have. Receive these gifts out of your own abundance as a declaration that we have no other gods but you, and use them for the flourishing of our neighbors, our communities, and our world. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: Confident that our Creator God listens and answers prayer, we pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

A brief silence.

L: Holy God, your commandments are simple and life-giving. Make us to see them not as arbitrary restrictions on behavior, but a call into the same love and compassion for our neighbors as you have for us. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Your first commandment to humankind was to care for all that you created. Make us obedient not out of fear of punishment but out of deep love for this beautiful earth and all that live on it. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Help all peoples, nations, and leaders to act on your commandment to love you and neighbor above all else, regardless of the specific way in which they understand you. Make us all partners in bringing peace to this war-torn world. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Help us to work for the health and well-being of all people, and guide us in serving those who are dealing with physical, emotional, or spiritual challenges, (*especially...*) God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: You are clear that we are not to covet what is not ours. Remind us that absolutely nothing is ours—all creation belongs to you alone. Relieve us of envy, greed, fear, and all that drives us to serve the gods of wealth and materialism. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: We remember with gratitude all those who modeled for us a life based on obedience to your good commandments. Help us live out this gratitude in our own commitment to follow your life-giving law. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: God who created all that is, we place all for whom we pray, both aloud and in the silence of our hearts, into your loving arms. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

God is the God of all creation—far greater than we can possibly comprehend. Yet God personally invites you as a beloved child to this table, where Jesus meets us and strengthens us for our life of faith. Come to the feast of forgiveness and eternal life.

Litany

1: God's commands are sure.

2: Love God with heart, soul, mind and strength.

1: Love neighbor as yourself.

2: Love is not just a nice feeling.

1: It is active. Creative. Flourishing.

2: It takes work to love God and neighbor.

1: But when we do that work, we are transformed.

2: Transform us, O God, through our practice of loving all of creation as you love us.



Creative Expression

Skit

Characters: Kids 1-4

Props: A sheet of paper, as if a long list of rules.

Kid 1: Have you seen the crazy list of rules the club president just handed everyone?

Kid 2: (*reading the list*) Reading them now.

Kid 3: (*looking over Kid 2's shoulder*) Whoa. How are we supposed to remember all these?

Kid 4: I read them. They're not that complicated.

Kid 1: Says the really smart kid in the group.

Kid 2: No, I agree with [Kid 4]. These really aren't that hard to understand.

Kid 3: Explain then, please.

Kid 4: First of all, these rules aren't supposed to be hard to follow.

Kid 1: Then why are there so many of them?

Kid 2: There really aren't. The way I see it, there are only two.

Kid 3: (*taking the sheet from Kid 2*) I count at least ten, depending on how you break them up.

Kid 4: But they're in two simple groups.

Kid 1: Say more.

Kid 2: The first few rules are about how we're supposed to put the club first. You know, treat it like it's the most important thing in our education.

Kid 3: I can get behind that. I mean, if we don't take it seriously, then what's the point of even being a part of it?

Kid 4: Then the rest of the rules are about how we're supposed to treat each other on the day-to-day.

Kid 1: I can kind of see that now. When I think of it that way, the rules are kind of simple. Basically we're just supposed to respect each other.

Kid 2: And not be jerks.

Kid 3: Well then why didn't the club president just write that? Rule one: Love the club. Rule two: Love the club members.

Kid 4: I suppose they could have. But the specifics are helpful in showing us exactly how to do that. Like what things will help our working together and what things will hurt it.

Kid 1: It makes sense.

Kid 2: There's a promise in there, too.

Kid 3: Is there? All I see are things not to do.

Kid 4: No, [Kid 2] is right. If we follow these basic rules, we'll get so many good things out of this group.

Kid 1: Like what?

Kid 2: Like a sense of belonging, and challenges that help us to be better people.

Kid 3: And we can carry these things into everything we do at school.

Kid 4: And that would make the whole school better.

Kid 1: After all, every single person in the school is really part of this club.

Kid 2: Right! All of us can learn and grow together if we follow these great rules.

Kid 3: Okay. I'm convinced.

Kid 4: Woohoo! Off we go then!

(*all exit*)



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

God's rules are really very simple.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- A Bible

Background

The people of Israel had been slaves in Egypt for over 400 years. They had forgotten how to govern themselves. Many had likely learned to worship the Egyptian gods of their masters. When they were freed from slavery they were like sheep without a shepherd.

God set out to teach them how to govern themselves under God's rule. God gave Moses Ten Commandments to bring to the people as basic tenets for living safely and peacefully. They were not restrictions as much as they were promises. In each commandment, God promises safety, God's presence, prosperity, serenity, and long life.

Set the Scene

Ask the kids how they get along with each other in school. What might happen if there were no rules? What are some rules in school that help them get along with each other?

Remind them that last week we heard about how the Israelites escaped after living in slavery for 400 years. They had absolutely no idea how to live together all by themselves! But God was going to help out.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

What were the two different types of rules God talked about in the story? (*Rules about God and rules about how to live together.*)

Open the Bible to Exodus and show the kids where these rules are in the Bible. Then show them the pages and pages and pages of rules in the rest of Exodus and Leviticus. Ask them to guess how many rules there are. (*More than 600!*) Can they memorize that many rules?

Talk about how when Jesus was asked which were the most important rules, he said just two: Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself. Sound familiar? These are the same two categories of rules in the Ten Commandments. Talk about how with every single choice we make, we can ask ourselves: "Does it show love for God and other people?" What if the answer is no? Should we make that choice?

Give the kids a few examples of choices they might have to make (you can make them simpler or more challenging depending on the age of the kids) and ask them to apply this simple test. What could their choices be? Wonder about how any choice we are faced with, no matter what it is, can be run through this exercise to help us make a better choice.

Close with a prayer thanking God for simple rules that can make living together more joyful for everyone.

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin



Planning Worksheet

Preaching Themes

Kids' Storytime Ideas

Skit or Creative Ideas

Worship Setting

Props for Kids' Storytime or Skit

Hymns

Special Events (Baptism, New Members)

Choral Music/Special Music

Guest Speakers/Announcements



Scripture Readings

Text: Joshua 24:1-15, [16-26]

24 Then Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, and summoned the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel; and they presented themselves before God. ²And Joshua said to all the people, “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Long ago your ancestors—Terah and his sons Abraham and Nahor—lived beyond the Euphrates and served other gods. ³Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River and led him through all the land of Canaan and made his offspring many. I gave him Isaac; ⁴and to Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau. I gave Esau the hill country of Seir to possess, but Jacob and his children went down to Egypt. ⁵Then I sent Moses and Aaron, and I plagued Egypt with what I did in its midst; and afterwards I brought you out. ⁶When I brought your ancestors out of Egypt, you came to the sea; and the Egyptians pursued your ancestors with chariots and horsemen to the Red Sea. ⁷When they cried out to the Lord, he put darkness between you and the Egyptians, and made the sea come upon them and cover them; and your eyes saw what I did to Egypt. Afterwards you lived in the wilderness a long time. ⁸Then I brought you to the land of the Amorites, who lived on the other side of the Jordan; they fought with you, and I handed them over to you, and you took possession of their land, and I destroyed them before you. ⁹Then King Balak son of Zippor of Moab, set out to fight against Israel. He sent and invited Balaam son of Beor to curse you, ¹⁰but I would not listen to Balaam; therefore he blessed you; so I rescued you out of his hand. ¹¹When you went over the Jordan and came to Jericho, the citizens of Jericho fought against you, and also the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; and I handed them over to you. ¹²I sent the hornet ahead of you, which drove out before you the two kings of the Amorites; it was not by your sword or by your bow. ¹³I gave you a land on which you had not labored, and

towns that you had not built, and you live in them; you eat the fruit of vineyards and oliveyards that you did not plant. ¹⁴“Now therefore revere the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods that your ancestors served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord.

¹⁵Now if you are unwilling to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.”

[¹⁶Then the people answered, “Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods; ¹⁷for it is the Lord our God who brought us and our ancestors up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight. He protected us along all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed;

¹⁸and the Lord drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore we also will serve the Lord, for he is our God.” ¹⁹But Joshua said to the people, “You cannot serve the Lord, for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. ²⁰If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you harm, and consume you, after having done you good.” ²¹And the people said to Joshua, “No, we will serve the Lord!” ²²Then Joshua said to the people, “You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the Lord, to serve him.” And they said, “We are witnesses.” ²³He said, “Then put away the foreign gods that are among you, and incline your hearts to the Lord, the God of Israel.” ²⁴The people said to Joshua, “The Lord our God we will serve, and him we will obey.” ²⁵So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and made statutes and ordinances for them at Shechem. ²⁶Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God; and he took a large stone, and set it up there under the oak in the sanctuary of the Lord.]



Scripture Readings

Pronunciation Guide

Shechem: SHEE-kehm

Terah: TEE-ruh

Nahor: NAY-kawr

Euphrates: yoo-FRAY-teez

Seir: SEE-er

Balak: BAY-lak

Zippor: ZIH-pawr

Moab: MO-ab

Balaam: BAY-lm

Beor: BEE-awr

Jericho: JEHR-ih-ko

Amorites: AM-uh-raits

Perizzites: PEHR-ih-zaits

Canaanites: KAY-nuh-naits

Hittites: HIIH-taits

Girgashites: GER-guh-shaits

Hivites: HAI-vaits

Jebusites: JEHB-oo-zaits

Secondary Text: Matthew 4:8-10

⁸Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; ⁹and he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.”

¹⁰Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! for it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’”

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator, Joshua, [People]

Narrator: Then Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, and summoned the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel; and they presented themselves before God. And Joshua said to all the people,

Joshua: Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Long ago your ancestors—Terah and his sons Abraham and Nahor—lived beyond the Euphrates and served other gods. Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River and led him through all the land of Canaan and made his offspring many. I gave him Isaac; and to Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau. I gave Esau the hill country of Seir to possess, but Jacob and his children went down to Egypt. Then I sent Moses and Aaron, and I plagued Egypt with what I did in its midst; and afterwards I brought you out. When I brought your ancestors out of Egypt, you came to the sea; and the Egyptians pursued your ancestors with chariots and horsemen to the Red Sea. When they cried out to the Lord, he put darkness between you and the Egyptians, and made the sea come upon them and cover them; and your eyes saw what I did to Egypt. Afterwards you lived in the wilderness a long time. Then I brought you to the land of the Amorites, who lived on the other side of the Jordan; they fought with you, and I handed them over to you, and you took possession of their land, and I destroyed them before you. Then King Balak son of Zippor of Moab, set out to fight against Israel. He sent and invited Balaam son of Beor to curse you, but I would not listen to Balaam; therefore he blessed you; so I rescued you out of his hand.

(continued)



Scripture Readings

Dramatic Reading continued

Joshua: (*continued*) When you went over the Jordan and came to Jericho, the citizens of Jericho fought against you, and also the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; and I handed them over to you. I sent the hornet ahead of you, which drove out before you the two kings of the Amorites; it was not by your sword or by your bow. I gave you a land on which you had not labored, and towns that you had not built, and you live in them; you eat the fruit of vineyards and oliveyards that you did not plant. Now therefore revere the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods that your ancestors served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. Now if you are unwilling to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.

[**Narrator:** Then the people answered,

People: Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods; for it is the Lord our God who brought us and our ancestors up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight. He protected us along all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed; and the Lord drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore we also will serve the Lord, for he is our God.

Narrator: But Joshua said to the people,

Joshua: You cannot serve the Lord, for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you harm, and consume you, after having done you good.

Narrator: And the people said to Joshua,

People: No, we will serve the Lord!

Narrator: Then Joshua said to the people,

Joshua: You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the Lord, to serve him.

Narrator: And they said,

People: We are witnesses.

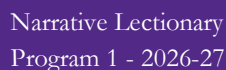
Narrator: He said,

Joshua: Then put away the foreign gods that are among you, and incline your hearts to the Lord, the God of Israel.

Narrator: The people said to Joshua,

People: The Lord our God we will serve, and him we will obey.

Narrator: So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and made statutes and ordinances for them at Shechem. Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God; and he took a large stone, and set it up there under the oak in the sanctuary of the Lord.]



Joshua Renews the Covenant, Joshua 24:1-15, [16-26]

[illegible]



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: When looking through a lens of a loving relationship, serving God ceases to be an obligation and becomes an act of love.

God's people had become complacent on the stolen lands they inhabited. They had started to adopt the ways of the people that lived there before them and of the people nearby. Most troubling to God was their willingness to turn to the gods of other people. God drew a line in the sand. God started with a recounting of all the things God had done for them. Then God's spokesperson, Joshua, told the people to choose: serve others or serve God.

It can be easy to view serving God as an obligation. Sometimes, even being asked to serve at church can feel more of a burden than a gift. Perhaps that's why Joshua started his entire talk with a recounting of all that God had done for the people. Not in a "you owe me" sort of way, but with an "I love you this much" tone. Although we are indebted to God, God does not hold that over us like a Damocles sword. We are not God's slaves. We are God's beloved children. Anyone with children knows that the scales are weighed heavily in favor of the parents serving the children far more than the children serve the parents.

That's the nature of a parent/child relationship. The parents do for the kids until the kids learn how to do for themselves. They do not owe it back; if anything they owe it forward. Since we are God's children, God will serve us far more than we will ever serve God. We do not owe it back; we owe it forward.

Looking through this lens, serving God both inside and out of the church ceases to be an obligation and becomes instead an act of love. When we are in a loving relationship, we act from a place of authenticity and desire, and so when Joshua stated, "choose... who you will serve," it was not entirely an obligation to choose. Joshua was asking people to declare whom they love and commit to serving before the community. Remind your congregation that serving God is a loving response to being first loved by God.

—Dr. Kimberly Leetch

Scripture Summary

The people of Israel were beginning to gravitate toward the gods of neighboring communities. Joshua invited the people to declare whom they love and whom they will serve.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

L: Choose this day whom you will serve.

C: We will serve God, who made us.

L: Choose this day whom you will serve.

C: We will serve God, who frees us.

L: Choose this day whom you will serve.

C: We will serve God, who calls us to love.

Confession and Forgiveness

P: We confess our sins before God and one another.

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: Creating and renewing God,

C: You have made us in your image to carry your life-giving love as a blessing to all the world. Yet we fail again and again to live out your call. We place our trust in money and possessions, in flawed people and broken relationships, in the things that cannot sustain us. We do the things we do not want to do, and we fail to do the things we know you would have us do. Forgive us for all the ways we fall short. Open our eyes, hearts, and minds to your presence, and re-create us in your image each day, for the good of all that you have made.

P: The God whose love outpoured caused the world to be continues to pour this creative love on us. The God whose love outpoured in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ continues to pour this redeeming love upon us. Children of God, know that you are forgiven, and go forth refreshed and ready to answer God's call to love and serve the whole of creation. In Jesus' holy name. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

L: God of promise,

C: Renew in us each day your covenant with us—that you will be our God and we will be your people. Open our hearts to your call to be your hands and feet in the world, to love, serve, and do justice for the flourishing of all creation. Guide us in all we do and say this day and every day. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

Holy God, we have chosen this day to serve you, rather than worldly powers and material possessions. We offer now these gifts as a sign of our faithfulness, and ask that you would bless them and use them for the good of all that you have made. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: Confident that our Creator God listens and answers prayer, we pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

A brief silence.

L: Holy God, you ask us to decide each day whom we will serve. Turn our hearts back to you and your reign of love and justice. Turn our hearts away from other gods—attention, wealth, and material possessions. Fill us with such love for you and our neighbor that we cannot help but follow in your way. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: We serve you when we care for your beloved creation. Guide us in our efforts to protect and preserve all that you have made. Fill us with wonder every day at the incredible beauty and variety all around us. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: We serve you when we participate in our own government, and elect leaders who act in love, compassion, and mercy for all your children—all people, regardless of who they are, where they come from, what they look like, or what they believe. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: We serve you when we care for those who are sick, injured, or otherwise challenged in body, mind, or spirit. May we bring comfort and hope to all who struggle, (*especially...*) God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: We serve you when we love our neighbors as ourselves. Open our eyes to all the ways in which we succeed and fail to do this, that we might discern with your wisdom how best to make choices that lead to the flourishing of all creation. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: Throughout history your saints have served you by loving you with all their hearts, souls, minds, and strength, and their neighbors as themselves. Inspire us by their lives of faith, that we, too, might choose this day to serve you. God of mercy and grace,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: God who created all that is, we place all for whom we pray, both aloud and in the silence of our hearts, into your loving arms. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

The God of the covenant invites you to this table of promises kept, where Jesus meets us in bread and wine and strengthens us for our new life in him. Come and be fed, for all is prepared for you.



Liturgy and Creative Expression

Litany

- 1: Choose this day whom you will serve.
- 2: **We choose to serve the living God.**
- 1: Is that so? Then you do not choose to serve money and material possessions?
- 2: **We choose to serve the living God.**
- 1: Then you do not choose to serve celebrity or the need for notoriety, fame, or validation?
- 2: **We choose to serve the living God.**
- 1: Then you do not choose to put other people or relationships in the place of God?
- 2: **We choose to serve the living God.**
- 1: Then you do not choose to serve corruption, self-interest, xenophobia, fascism, or charismatic leaders?
- 2: **We choose to serve the living God.**
- 1: Then put away the other gods in your lives and incline your hearts to the living God.
- 2: **We will serve and obey the living God.**

Creative Expression

Skit

Characters: Kids 1-4 (junior high or high school)

Kid 1: Let's play a game of "Would you rather!"

Kid 2: I love that idea! I'll go first. [Kid 3], would you rather eat ice cream or pizza?

Kid 3: Start off with a hard one, why don't you!
(*thinks a minute*) I think pizza. Sometimes I get brain freeze from eating ice cream too fast.
Okay. My turn. [Kid 4] would you rather... go camping or go on a cruise?

Kid 4: Cruise. Definitely. I'm not a big fan of camping. Mosquitoes like me too much. [Kid 1], would you rather have a toenail removed or have three cavities filled?

Kid 1: That's not even hard. Cavities. My mom had a toenail removed and she said the shots she had to get in her toe were more painful than anything she'd every experienced. Novocain is nothing! So, [Kid 2] would you rather have everything you want or would you rather give up some things so other people can have what they need.

Kid 2: Well this just got serious.

Kid 3: And philosophical.

Kid 4: And not really fun, honestly.

Kid 1: No, I want to know. I mean, it's a valid question for all of us, isn't it?

Kid 2: Okay. I'll play. I'm supposed to say that I'd be happy to give up some things so other people can have enough, right? But...

Kid 3: This is a game about truth, after all.

Kid 4: I think I know where you're going.

Kid 1: But...?

Kid 2: But when I think about or see things I want, I sort of forget anyone else. I just want what I want.

Kid 1: Join the human race. Am I right?

Kid 3: Well you're not wrong. I never stop to think about how getting what I want might affect other people.

(continued)



Creative Expression

Skit, continued

Kid 4: Me either. Like the other day, I wanted to get a new t-shirt and then I read an article about how the fashion industry is the most wasteful and polluting industry there is. And it bothered me. Because I still wanted that t-shirt.

Kid 1: Yeah. Sometimes it sucks to realize that what seem like simple choices can have major negative effects.

Kid 2: So we're not supposed to get anything we want?

Kid 3: I don't think that's true. Just like this game, it's all about the choices we make. It's just important to be clear about our choices.

Kid 4: I didn't get that t-shirt, by the way. I went to the thrift store and found something cool that was used.

Kid 1: That's awesome.

Kid 2: (*Kid 1*) But why did you have to get all serious about this stuff?

Kid 3: Yeah. I liked it better when it was just a fun game.

Kid 1: Because it was really on my mind. We have to be able to talk about this stuff. And I don't know about you guys, but as for me, I'm going to try to put other people's needs first and really think about them when I have to make a decision for myself.

Kid 2: I think I can get on board with that.

Kid 3: Me, too. I guess I can always talk to you guys about something I have to decide.

Kid 4: Of course! You can all talk to me about anything.

Kid 1: So are you changing your answer, [*Kid 2*]?

Kid 2: Nope. But I'm actually going to try to do what I say I'm going to do. Meanwhile, [*Kid 3*] would you rather get your leg caught in a bear trap or get hit by a car?

Kid 3: Augh! What kind of a choice is that?

Kid 4: I don't know. I still think it's easier than [*Kid 1*]'s question!

Kid 3: Yeah, that's fair. (*to Kid 2*) Do I have to gnaw my own leg off to get out of the bear trap?

Kid 2: No! You make a full recovery either way.

Kid 3: Okay. Then bear trap. It's a better story.

Kid 4: There's the bell! See you guys after school!

(*All run offstage*)



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

We can choose to put God first.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin

Background

The first generation of Israelites to be freed from slavery in Egypt proved unfaithful to God, creating and worshipping idols for themselves. As punishment, they had to wander the wilderness for 40 years.

As the next generation of Israelites was prepared to enter the promised land, Joshua called the people to account, knowing that many of them were still wanting to chase after other gods. He reminded them that God had been faithful to them and challenged them to return that faithfulness—to hold up their end of the covenant.

Help kids understand that anything can become another god, and a distraction from God's love and faithfulness.

Set the Scene

Remind the kids that last week they heard about how God's people got important rules about how to love and serve God and live with each other. But they broke the rules pretty quick and made other things their gods, instead of the actual God. This story takes place about 40 years later.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Ask the kids if any of them can name another god. If no one can come up with any, suggest a few Egyptian gods (*Ra, Osirus, Isis, Anubis, etc.*) The Israelites probably would have worshipped these gods when they were slaves in Egypt. Ask if any of the kids worships one of those gods. No? Do they worship any other gods?

Point out that anything can be a god. It doesn't have to be something with a name or a religion. It can be anything that we treat as more important than God.

Give the kids an example from your own life. Share with them something that you love to do more than any thing else, whether it's following a professional sport or making gourmet food or whatever. Is there anything wrong with that activity? (*No*) But what if you know you're supposed to pray and spend time with God, but you do whatever your favorite activity is instead? (*That activity becomes another god*)

Assure the kids that it's normal to get distracted by things in life, but that this story is a reminder for us. Every day, we can choose to put God first. We can choose to love and serve God by loving and serving others.

Close with a prayer asking God to help us choose to put God first in our lives.

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Whiteboard
- Dry erase marker
- Whiteboard eraser



Planning Worksheet

Preaching Themes

Kids' Storytime Ideas

Skit or Creative Ideas

Worship Setting

Props for Kids' Storytime or Skit

Hymns

Special Events (Baptism, New Members)

Choral Music/Special Music

Guest Speakers/Announcements



Scripture Readings

Text: 2 Samuel 11:1-5, 26-27; 12:1-9

11 In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab with his officers and all Israel with him; they ravaged the Ammonites, and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem. ²It happened, late one afternoon, when David rose from his couch and was walking about on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; the woman was very beautiful. ³David sent someone to inquire about the woman. It was reported, "This is Bathsheba daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite." ⁴So David sent messengers to get her, and she came to him, and he lay with her. (Now she was purifying herself after her period.) Then she returned to her house. ⁵The woman conceived; and she sent and told David, "I am pregnant."

²⁶When the wife of Uriah heard that her husband was dead, she made lamentation for him. ²⁷When the mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife, and bore him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord.

12 And the Lord sent Nathan to David. He came to him, and said to him, "There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. ²The rich man had very many flocks and herds; ³but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. He brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children; it used to eat of his meager fare, and drink from his cup, and lie in his bosom, and it was like a daughter to him. ⁴Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was loath to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb, and prepared that for the guest who had come to him."

⁵Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man. He said to Nathan, "As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die; ⁶he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity." ⁷Nathan said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: I anointed you king over Israel, and I rescued you from the hand of Saul; ⁸I gave you your master's house, and your master's wives into your bosom, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added as much more. ⁹Why have you despised the word of the Lord, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites."

Pronunciation Guide

Ammonites: AM-uh-naits

Rabbah: RAB-uh

Eliam: ee-LAI-um

Uriah: you-RAI-uh

Hittite: HIH-tait



Scripture Readings

Text: Psalm 51:1-9

- ¹ Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.
- ² Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin.
- ³ For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.
- ⁴ Against you, you alone, have I sinned,
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you are justified in your sentence
and blameless when you pass judgement.
- ⁵ Indeed, I was born guilty,
a sinner when my mother conceived me.
- ⁶ You desire truth in the inward being;
therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.
- ⁷ Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
- ⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.
- ⁹ Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.

Secondary Text: Matthew 21:33-41

- ³³“Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country.
- ³⁴When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. ³⁵But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. ³⁶Again he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way.
- ³⁷Finally he sent his son to them, saying, “They will respect my son.” ³⁸But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, “This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance.” ³⁹So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. ⁴⁰Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” ⁴¹They said to him, “He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time.”



Scripture Readings

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator, Reporter, Bathsheba, Nathan, David

[Narrator: In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab with his officers and all Israel with him; they ravaged the Ammonites, and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem. It happened, late one afternoon, when David rose from his couch and was walking about on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; the woman was very beautiful. David sent someone to inquire about the woman. It was reported,

Reporter: This is Bathsheba daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite.

Narrator: So David sent messengers to get her, and she came to him, and he lay with her. (Now she was purifying herself after her period.) Then she returned to her house. The woman conceived; and she sent and told David,

Bathsheba: I am pregnant.

Narrator: When the wife of Uriah heard that her husband was dead, she made lamentation for him. When the mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife, and bore him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord.]

Narrator: And the Lord sent Nathan to David. He came to him, and said to him,

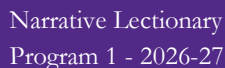
Nathan: There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. The rich man had very many flocks and herds; but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. He brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children; it used to eat of his meager fare, and drink from his cup, and lie in his bosom, and it was like a daughter to him. Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was loath to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb, and prepared that for the guest who had come to him.

Narrator: Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man. He said to Nathan,

David: As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die; he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.

Narrator: Nathan said to David,

Nathan: You are the man! Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: I anointed you king over Israel, and I rescued you from the hand of Saul; I gave you your master's house, and your master's wives into your bosom, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added as much more. Why have you despised the word of the Lord, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites.



David and Bathsheba, 2 Samuel 11:1-5, 26-27; 12:1-9; Psalm 51:1-9

[illegible]



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: David's greed caused him to commit terrible acts for his own pleasure. As our world's wealth is continually distributed unfairly, we can reflect in this moment on how we might do things differently.

One would think David would understand what it was like to live as a commoner. He was the youngest in a family of shepherds. He was unremarkable in the eyes of the prophet, Samuel, until God showed Samuel David's potential. He didn't participate in the battle against the Philistines until he stepped up to defeat their champion. He rose to power and wealth with relative ease. Still, with all that he had attained, it was not enough. He stole the wife of his soldier and sent the man to his death at the front lines of a battle.

In the US, the pursuit of happiness is baked into the fabric of society. Unfortunately, we have been spoon fed the lie that consumption is the path to happiness. We are perpetually in a state of chasing more. Yet making more money and owning more possessions seem to have the opposite of the desired effect. Those with the most seem to be the ones with the biggest appetite for more, especially at the expense of all others.

It's unlikely that David as a young shepherd would have dreamed he'd be capable of adultery and murder. But with power and money, David did not even seem to acknowledge those as horrendous actions. It was not until Samuel pointed out his sin that David even considered how his actions affected others.

Corporations and pharmaceutical companies, billionaires and generational wealth seem to hold all the cards in the US right now. The richer they all get, the more the average American gets squeezed. They don't seem to acknowledge the horrors they inflict because of their greed.

This moment in time can be a turning point in American culture. As we lean into God's rebuke, "You are the man!" we can first look at our own overconsumption and begin to make changes to our habits and routines with the intent to redistribute wealth to those who have less than we do. Then we can withhold our money from the richest by supporting small businesses and patronizing the juggernauts less. Brainstorm with your congregation ways that your church can redistribute its resources fairly.

—Dr. Kimberly Leetch

Scripture Summary

David had everything a person could want except the one thing he couldn't have: another man's wife. God bitterly condemned David's move to murder the man and take the man's wife.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

- L: God desires truth in our inward being.
- C: O God, teach us wisdom.**
- L: God cleans away our sinfulness.
- C: O God, give us gratitude and joy.**
- L: God forgives us and sets us free.
- C: O God, let us bear your love to the world.**

Confession and Forgiveness

P: We confess our sins before God and one another.

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: Loving God,

C: We have rebelled against your life-giving reign and raised up worldly kings for ourselves—people, possessions, fame. You have sent us prophets to declare to us the error of our ways and we have despised them, choosing instead to follow false prophets who tell us what we want to hear. We have failed to heed your persistent call to lives of simplicity, love, self-sacrificial service, and commitment to the flourishing of all creation. Forgive us our short-sightedness and self-focus. Draw us back to you, that we might center our lives on our relationship with you, and turn outwards in love for all that you have made.

P: Our God still reigns over all that is, and cherishes each and every one of us as beloved children. Know that your sins are forgiven, and go forth in that knowledge to serve and do justice in all the earth. In Jesus' holy name we pray. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

- L: Holy God,
- C: You hold us accountable for the ways in which we have turned away from you. Forgive us for all the ways we, like King David, fall short. Commit us to doing better—to recognizing our errors and making restitution for them. Remind us that you love us no matter what, and will be with us as we seek to grow toward your desire for us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.**

Offertory Prayer

Holy God, like King David, we have far more than we could possibly need. We now offer to you this portion of our treasure that you might bless and use it for the abundant life of this community and its ministries to those who are in need. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Prayers of the Church

L: Trusting in God's benevolent rule over creation, we pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

A brief silence.

L: Holy God, your most beloved king acted horrifically, and yet he repented and changed his ways. Make us prophets, like Nathan, unafraid to point out the abhorrent behavior of even the most powerful among us. At the same time, make us willing to see our own errors and commit ourselves to change. God of mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

(continued)



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church, continued

L: We have sinned against you in our neglect and destruction of your wondrous creation. Help us to make it right any way we can, lavishing love on this earth and everything that lives upon it. God of mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: We have sinned against you in our neglect of our neighbors, in our apathy towards our government, in our support of leaders who look out for our self-centered interests rather than the interests of our community and world as a whole. Help us to work within our systems to change them to be just and life-giving. God of mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: We have sinned against you in our neglect of public health, and in our mistreatment or neglect of our own physical and emotional well-being and that of our neighbors. Redirect us to a spirit of loving care for ourselves and all who suffer, (*especially...*) God of mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: We have sinned against you in so many ways, known and unknown. Remind us that you love us unconditionally in spite of ourselves, and that we stand before you forgiven, and that as such, your desire is for us to grow spiritually, to change for the better, and to work for the good of all creation. God of mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: We are all both saint and sinner, and we remember all the imperfect saints who have gone before us, and who have in their own ways tried to make amends for their missteps. Give us the humility to follow in their way. God of mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: Sovereign God, we lift these prayers to you, and have faith that all things are in your hands. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

The God who knows our frailties and failings invites us to this table of forgiveness and renewal in God's son, Jesus Christ our savior and friend. Come and be nourished on Jesus' own body and blood, and know that you are forgiven.

Litany

1: Have mercy on us, O God.

2: We have sinned and fallen short.

1: We have hoarded away our material possessions,

2: And taken what is not ours.

1: We have allowed some to amass great flocks,

2: And still take the precious lamb of the poor.

1: Wash us clean of our guilt,

2: That we might be fundamentally changed.

1: Transform us at our very core,

2: That we might work for your justice in all creation.



Creative Expression

Skit

Characters: Kids 1-4 (elementary)

Scene: Kids 1 and 2 onstage, Kids 3 and 4 are off.

Kid 1: What a rotten day.

Kid 2: Why do you say that?

Kid 1: Ms. Kincaid gave me until noon to turn in my science project, and I was headed to her room when [Kid 3] ran in front of me and took up her time until it was after noon and she failed me for my project.

Kid 2: Wait. Why did [Kid 3] do that?

Kid 1: They wanted extra credit on their project. So they went to talk to her and of course she spent a long time talking to them.

Kid 2: Yeah, [Kid 3] is definitely Ms. Kincaid's pet. They always have all the right answers, always get A's on every project and perfect scores on tests.

Kid 1: Nothing like me.

Kid 2: Well, you did leave turning in your project to the last possible second.

Kid 1: But I really worked hard on it. I spent so much time on it and it was so much fun! I know Ms. Kincaid would have been proud of me. The worst part is that [Kid 3] knew that. I'd talked to them about it this morning. They got in front of me on purpose so they would get the extra credit even though they knew I would fail.

Kid 2: Wow. Not cool.

(Kids 1 and 2 exit, Kids 3 and 4 enter)

Kid 4: Hey, [Kid 3]. You'll never guess what I heard.

Kid 3: What's that?

Kid 4: The definition of "entitlement."

Kid 3: I know what that means. It means you think you deserve special treatment because you're better than other people.

Kid 4: Bingo! Don't you hate it when people act entitled to special treatment?

Kid 3: Yeah. Like Gino figures everyone should just do stuff for them because they're so popular.

Kid 4: So what do you think about someone trying to get extra credit when they already got a good score even if it meant they would make another kid fail.

Kid 3: Yuck! That person would be awful! I mean, did they even... wait a minute.

Kid 4: There it is. Is this sounding familiar?

Kid 3: Oh... This is about [Kid 1] isn't it.

Kid 4: You know, [Kid 3], you already get straight A's and all the teachers and the principal love you. Why did you need to take more even when it hurt someone else?

Kid 3: Entitlement.

Kid 4: Again. Bingo!

Kid 3: I get it. Wow. I've been a real jerk. I'd better go talk to Ms. Kincaid. [Kid 1] really deserves an A on their project. Honestly, it was better than mine.

Kid 4: Well at least you're willing to make things right.

Kid 3: Thanks for being honest. I definitely don't want to be the kind of jerk Gino is.

Kid 4: Yeah. I think I might need to have a few words with Gino...

(Kids 3 and 4 exit)



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

God forgives us no matter what.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Whiteboard
- Dry erase marker
- Whiteboard eraser

Background

King David, God's golden child and Israel's most beloved king, decided he wanted another man's wife, Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah. While Uriah was away fighting one of David's wars, David got Bathsheba pregnant. When he knew it would become known, he sent Uriah to the front lines and had him killed. Then he married Bathsheba.

God, who had given David everything he had ever wanted, was furious. God sent the prophet, Nathan, to confront David. Nathan used the story of the rich and poor man to reveal to David his own sin. David repented. As a punishment, God did not let his child live. But then God forgave David and remained faithful to God's covenant with David.

Help kids to see that everyone sins and falls short, but God forgives us no matter what we have done.

Set the Scene

Ask the kids if they've ever done something they knew was wrong. Assure them it's okay—that everyone has—and give an example from your own life if the kids aren't forthcoming. Tell them they're going to hear a story about how even God's most beloved king, David, did something horrible.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Reiterate that everyone, even David, who everyone loved, does things they shouldn't. Doing things that hurt yourself or other people are called sins. Ask the kids to help you come up with examples of sins. Cover the board with them as fast as possible. Invite the congregation to help you if the kids aren't generating many ideas.

When the board is full, talk about how when we sin, it hurts our spirit—it makes our spirit stained like the ink on the whiteboard. But what happened when David realized the terrible things he did? (*He said he was sorry and promised never to do it again.*) And what did God do? (*forgave him*). When God forgives us, God wipes away all our sins. Hold up the eraser and say that it's God's love and forgiveness. Use it to wipe the whiteboard clean.

Ask if any of them has gotten someone killed so they could steal something that belonged to them. (*I'm guessing not*). So if David, who did something that terrible, could be forgiven by God, we know that there is nothing we can't be forgiven for.

Close with a prayer thanking God for forgiving us, no matter what we do.

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin



Planning Worksheet

Preaching Themes

Kids' Storytime Ideas

Skit or Creative Ideas

Worship Setting

Props for Kids' Storytime or Skit

Hymns

Special Events (Baptism, New Members)

Choral Music/Special Music

Guest Speakers/Announcements



Scripture Readings

Text: 1 Kings 3:4-9, [10-15], 16-28

⁴The king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the principal high place; Solomon used to offer a thousand burnt offerings on that altar.

⁵At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, “Ask what I should give you.”

⁶And Solomon said, “You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant my father David, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you; and you have kept for him this great and steadfast love, and have given him a son to sit on his throne today. ⁷And now, O Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, although I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. ⁸And your servant is in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a great people, so numerous they cannot be numbered or counted. ⁹Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?”

[¹⁰It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this.

¹¹God said to him, “Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches, or for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, ¹²I now do according to your word. Indeed I give you a wise and discerning mind; no one like you has been before you and no one like you shall arise after you. ¹³I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor all your life; no other king shall compare with you. ¹⁴If you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your life.” ¹⁵Then Solomon awoke; it had been a dream. He came to Jerusalem where he stood before the ark of the covenant of the Lord. He

offered up burnt offerings and offerings of well-being, and provided a feast for all his servants.]

¹⁶Later, two women who were prostitutes came to the king and stood before him. ¹⁷The one woman said, “Please, my lord, this woman and I live in the same house; and I gave birth while she was in the house.

¹⁸Then on the third day after I gave birth, this woman also gave birth. We were together; there was no one else with us in the house, only the two of us were in the house. ¹⁹Then this woman’s son died in the night, because she lay on him. ²⁰She got up in the middle of the night and took my son from beside me while your servant slept. She laid him at her breast, and laid her dead son at my breast. ²¹When I rose in the morning to nurse my son, I saw that he was dead; but when I looked at him closely in the morning, clearly it was not the son I had borne.” ²²But the other woman said, “No, the living son is mine, and the dead son is yours.” The first said, “No, the dead son is yours, and the living son is mine.” So they argued before the king. ²³Then the king said, “The one says, ‘This is my son that is alive, and your son is dead’; while the other says, ‘Not so! Your son is dead, and my son is the living one.’” ²⁴So the king said, “Bring me a sword,” and they brought a sword before the king. ²⁵The king said, “Divide the living boy in two; then give half to the one, and half to the other.” ²⁶But the woman whose son was alive said to the king — because compassion for her son burned within her — “Please, my lord, give her the living boy; certainly do not kill him!” The other said, “It shall be neither mine nor yours; divide it.” ²⁷Then the king responded: “Give the first woman the living boy; do not kill him. She is his mother.” ²⁸All Israel heard of the judgment that the king had rendered; and they stood in awe of the king, because they perceived that the wisdom of God was in him, to execute justice.



Scripture Readings

Pronunciation Guide

Gibeon: GIHB-ee-uhn

Secondary Text: Matthew 6:9-10

⁹“Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. ¹⁰Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator, Lord, Solomon, Woman 1, Woman 2

Narrator: The king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the principal high place; Solomon used to offer a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said,

Lord: Ask what I should give you.

Narrator: And Solomon said,

Solomon: You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant my father David, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you; and you have kept for him this great and steadfast love, and have given him a son to sit on his throne today. And now, O Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, although I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. And your servant is in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a great people, so numerous they cannot be numbered or counted. Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?

Narrator: It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. God said to him,

Lord: Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches, or for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, I now do according to your word. Indeed I give you a wise and discerning mind; no one like you has been before you and no one like you shall arise after you. I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor all your life; no other king shall compare with you. If you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your life.

Narrator: Then Solomon awoke; it had been a dream. He came to Jerusalem where he stood before the ark of the covenant of the Lord. He offered up burnt offerings and offerings of well-being, and provided a feast for all his servants. Later, two women who were prostitutes came to the king and stood before him. The one woman said,

Woman 1: Please, my lord, this woman and I live in the same house; and I gave birth while she was in the house. Then on the third day after I gave birth, this woman also gave birth. We were together; there was no one else with us in the house, only the two of us were in the house. Then this woman's son died in the night, because she lay on him. She got up in the middle of the night and took my son from beside me while your servant slept. She laid him at her breast, and laid her dead son at my breast. When I rose in the morning to nurse my son, I saw that he was dead; but when I looked at him closely in the morning, clearly it was not the son I had borne.

(continued)



Scripture Readings

Dramatic Reading continued

Narrator: But the other woman said,

Woman 2: No, the living son is mine, and the dead son is yours.

Narrator: The first said,

Woman 1: No, the dead son is yours, and the living son is mine.

Narrator: So they argued before the king. Then the king said,

Solomon: The one says, 'This is my son that is alive, and your son is dead'; while the other says, 'Not so! Your son is dead, and my son is the living one.'

Narrator: So the king said,

Solomon: Bring me a sword,

Narrator: and they brought a sword before the king. The king said,

Solomon: Divide the living boy in two; then give half to the one, and half to the other.

Narrator: But the woman whose son was alive said to the king—because compassion for her son burned within her—

Woman 1: Please, my lord, give her the living boy; certainly do not kill him!

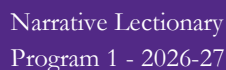
Narrator: The other said,

Woman 2: It shall be neither mine nor yours; divide it.

Narrator: Then the king responded:

Solomon: Give the first woman the living boy; do not kill him. She is his mother.

Narrator: All Israel heard of the judgment that the king had rendered; and they stood in awe of the king, because they perceived that the wisdom of God was in him, to execute justice.



Solomon's Wisdom, 1 Kings 3:4-9, [10-15], 16-28

[illegible]



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: Solomon knew his wisdom came from God and gratefully submitted his life to God's service.

Before the first king, Saul, the people of Israel did not need a king. God was their leader and God's judges, messengers, and prophets were enough for consistent governing. By the time Solomon became king, the Israelites had long since transitioned from a people in no need of a king to a great mass of people that needed a king. When God asked what God should give Solomon as he rose to power, Solomon already had enough wisdom to request even greater wisdom; specifically concerning the governing of God's people and the ability to discern right from wrong.

Solomon also had wisdom to recognize that the wisdom, riches, and ability to govern God's people had been given to him by God. This recognition led Solomon to rule justly and to walk God's path. His ability to discern God's role from his own modeled for the people how to maintain the delicate balance between master/servant, parent/child, and mentor/mentee.

Solomon also wisely governed for the good of the people. One can hope that Solomon's decision to chop a baby in two was a bluff to help discern the baby's true mother. The people were likely in awe of his wisdom, and probably a little frightened, as is the nature of a power imbalance.

Because our modern world strives for equality for all people, we have lost a little of our experience of living under another. In those places where the hierarchy still exists, such as boss/employee, corporation/individual, wealthy/poor, we view the hierarchy with bitterness and resentment. It does not feel natural to submit to a higher power with desire, respect, and love.

Solomon's enduring wisdom is an example of how to be in such a relationship with God. Solomon gratefully submitted his life to care for God's kingdom. Consider how your parishioners can view their role as subjects of God willingly and with grace. As people learn to submit themselves to God, it becomes easier to lift up those who are below them. When we cease to desire to be the wealthiest and all-powerful, and instead exist as equals with the people we encounter regularly, we move our world closer to God's kingdom.

—Dr. Kimberly Leetch

Scripture Summary

God asked Solomon what he desired from God. Solomon requested wisdom to govern God's people well. He knew that his wisdom came from God.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

- L: Our God desires to give us great gifts.
- C: Let us ask for worthy gifts.**
- L: What would you have God do for you?
- C: God, give us wisdom, love, and a commitment to do justice.**

Confession and Forgiveness

- P: We confess our sins before God and one another.
Pause for silence and reflection.
- P: Loving God,
- C: We have rebelled against your life-giving reign and raised up worldly kings for ourselves—people, possessions, fame. You have sent us prophets to declare to us the error of our ways and we have despised them, choosing instead to follow false prophets who tell us what we want to hear. We have failed to heed your persistent call to lives of simplicity, love, self-sacrificial service, and commitment to the flourishing of all creation. Forgive us our short-sightedness and self-focus. Draw us back to you, that we might center our lives on our relationship with you, and turn outwards in love for all that you have made.**
- P: Our God still reigns over all that is, and cherishes each and every one of us as beloved children. Know that your sins are forgiven, and go forth in that knowledge to serve and do justice in all the earth. In Jesus' holy name we pray. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

- L: Generous God,
- C: You offer us all we need to flourish in our lives. Open us to receive your gracious gifts, and commit us to sharing them with others, for the good of our neighbors and all creation. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.**

Offertory Prayer

Holy God, you have gifted us with material goods, and with the wisdom to use them as you would have us. Therefore we offer these gifts of our money, possessions, time, and talents—even our very selves—for your essential work of justice in all of creation. Bless them and use them according to your will. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Prayers of the Church

- L: Trusting in God's benevolent rule over creation, we pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need.
- A brief silence.*
- L: Holy God, nothing is more precious than the wisdom to discern your presence and action in the world. Help us to see you in every single human being and in all of creation, that we might act with love and justice for the flourishing of all that is. God of mercy,
- C: You hear our prayer.**

(continued)



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church, continued

L: Give us wisdom to recognize the divinity in all that you have made, from the smallest bacterium to the greatest blue whale. And then, recognizing your presence in all of it, commit us to its care and keeping. God of mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: Give us wisdom to elect and then continue to work with leaders whose goal is justice, peace, equity, and the flourishing of all people and creation. God of mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: Give us wisdom to work with medical and mental health professionals who treat us, and give wisdom to all who treat those we know and love, and those whom we do not know, (*especially...*) God of mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: Give us wisdom to love ourselves as you love us, that we might care for our physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being, and live lives of love and service to all with whom we come into contact. God of mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: Give us the wisdom of all those who have come before us, and who have lived and learned from their challenges and mistakes. Keep us ever grateful for your saints whose wisdom inspires us each day. God of mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: Sovereign God, we lift these prayers to you, and have faith that all things are in your hands. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

Woman Wisdom stands in the streets and invites you to this feast of bread and wine, which is the body and blood of Jesus, and which strengthens us in wisdom and grace to go forth and bear God's light to the world. Come with your beloved siblings to the table where Jesus meets us, for all is prepared.

Litany

1: You have given us discernment, O God,

2: That we might distinguish good from evil.

1: Yet so often we choose to look away from evil,

2: Hoping it will go away, or that others will handle it.

1: But you have given us wisdom, O God,

2: And you call us to call out the evil we see.

1: Make us bold to proclaim your love for those in poverty,

2: For those who are ignored or maligned,

1: For those suffering discrimination,

2: For those dying of preventable diseases,

1: For those in prison due to unjust laws and penalties,

2: For those in prison for crimes they did not commit.

1: Make us bold to proclaim your justice for all creation,

2: Empower us to rise up in love.



Creative Expression

Skit

Characters: Kid (high school), Grandparent (GP)

Props: A park bench

Scene: Kid is sitting on the bench, miming feeding ducks. Grandparent enters.

GP: Well here's where you've got to. I wondered where you went after breakfast.

Kid: Oh. Hey, [Grandpa/Grandma]. This is where I always go be alone and think.

GP: Did you want me to leave you to it?

Kid: Actually, would you mind sitting with me and maybe just letting me talk something through?

GP: Of course. Absolutely anything you need.

Kid: I appreciate it. I could really use your help.

GP: Name it. New clothes? Sports fees? Road trip? Cash? It's yours.

Kid: Actually, what I need is wisdom.

GP: Oh, honey, that's something that comes with age. Though I can't promise I have much of it.

Kid: You do. That's why I was hoping you could help.

GP: So what's the problem?

Kid: Well, I have these two best friends.

GP: Oh yeah. Shawn and Fatima, isn't it?

Kid: Yeah. Lately they haven't been getting along with each other and yesterday at school they confronted me and told me I had to decide which of them was my best friend.

GP: I thought they both were.

Kid: Exactly. But now that they're mad at each other, they want me to pick. And I guess that means

the other one would just...I don't know...not be my friend anymore.

GP: That doesn't sound like a good thing.

Kid: How do I decide between them? They're going to make me do it. Don't you have some wisdom for me?

GP: I think you're wiser than you think. You are my grand[son/daughter] after all. What do you think you should do?

Kid: Hmm. Maybe I'll make them decide.

GP: I like the sound of that. How?

Kid: I'll just tell them they're both my best friend but I can't pick between them. So if they can't make up with each other, I guess none of us can be friends.

GP: Whoa. That sounds like it would be a hard decision for you. You're willing to lose them?

Kid: It's not like I have them now anyway. All they do when we're together is fight. And if I picked one over the other, I'd just feel guilty and it would ruin my friendship with whoever I picked, too.

GP: And you think you're not wise.

Kid: That's wise?

GP: So wise, my dear. You really do take after me.

Kid: Thanks, [Grandpa/Grandma]. I really am grateful for your wisdom.

GP: And if it all goes south and you lose them both, you can be grateful for my double chocolate butterscotch pecan cookies.

Kid: Ooooh. Can I be grateful for those either way?

GP: You bet.



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

We can ask God for wisdom.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin

Background

Solomon succeeded David as king, and became the primary instrument of carrying out God's plan for Israel. God asked what God could give to Solomon. Instead of asking for gifts that would serve Solomon alone, Solomon asked for wisdom so that he could rule God's people wisely and with justice. Solomon's request pleased God so much, God gave Solomon wisdom as well as riches and long life.

Solomon's wisdom helped him make challenging decisions, like in the case of the two women fighting over a baby boy. Help kids see that they can ask God for wisdom whenever they are facing a difficult choice in their lives.

Set the Scene

Ask the kids to help you come up with a definition of "wisdom." It is essentially good judgment, and the ability to see things others might not be able to. We often talk about "wisdom" as being a characteristic of older people who have lots of experience, but younger people can have wisdom, too. Tell them they're going to hear a story about a wise king.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Ask kids to share examples of a time when they have had to make a difficult choice, perhaps between a sport and another activity, or between what two different friends wanted to do. Give examples from your own life to get the ball rolling if needed. What did the kids decide? Do they think it was the right decision? Did anyone help them make the decision?

Talk with the kids about how God can help us make hard decisions. Any time we are faced with one, we can pray to God for help. We can ask God for wisdom, just like Solomon did. When we pray and ask for help, sometimes the answer just becomes clearer. We might feel in our bodies what the right thing to do is. Share another personal story of a time you did this and what happened.

Reiterate that wisdom helps us make good choices so we can live in peace with other people. We can ask God for wisdom anytime, and God will listen!

Say a prayer asking God for wisdom so that we can make good choices in our lives.

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Pictures of people from lots of different ethnic backgrounds and cultures



Planning Worksheet

Preaching Themes

Kids' Storytime Ideas

Skit or Creative Ideas

Worship Setting

Props for Kids' Storytime or Skit

Hymns

Special Events (Baptism, New Members)

Choral Music/Special Music

Guest Speakers/Announcements



Scripture Readings

Text: 2 Kings 5:1-15a, [15b-19]

⁵Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man and in high favor with his master, because by him the Lord had given victory to Aram. The man, though a mighty warrior, suffered from leprosy. ²Now the Arameans on one of their raids had taken a young girl captive from the land of Israel, and she served Naaman's wife. ³She said to her mistress, "If only my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy." ⁴So Naaman went in and told his lord just what the girl from the land of Israel had said. ⁵And the king of Aram said, "Go then, and I will send along a letter to the king of Israel." He went, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten sets of garments. ⁶He brought the letter to the king of Israel, which read, "When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you my servant Naaman, that you may cure him of his leprosy." ⁷When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, "Am I God, to give death or life, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? Just look and see how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me." ⁸But when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, he sent a message to the king, "Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come to me, that he may learn that there is a prophet in Israel."

⁹So Naaman came with his horses and chariots, and halted at the entrance of Elisha's house. ¹⁰Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go, wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean." ¹¹But Naaman became angry and went away, saying, "I thought that for me he would surely come out, and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and would wave his hand over the spot, and cure the leprosy! ¹²Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of

Israel? Could I not wash in them, and be clean?" He turned and went away in a rage. ¹³But his servants approached and said to him, "Father, if the prophet had commanded you to do something difficult, would you not have done it? How much more, when all he said to you was, 'Wash, and be clean?'" ¹⁴So he went down and immersed himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; his flesh was restored like the flesh of a young boy, and he was clean.

¹⁵Then he returned to the man of God, he and all his company; he came and stood before him and said, "Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel; [please accept a present from your servant.]"

¹⁶But he said, "As the Lord lives, whom I serve, I will accept nothing!" He urged him to accept, but he refused. ¹⁷Then Naaman said, "If not, please let two mule-loads of earth be given to your servant; for your servant will no longer offer burnt-offering or sacrifice to any god except the Lord. ¹⁸But may the Lord pardon your servant on one count: when my master goes into the house of Rimmon to worship there, leaning on my arm, and I bow down in the house of Rimmon, when I do bow down in the house of Rimmon, may the Lord pardon your servant on this one count." ¹⁹He said to him, "Go in peace.]"

Pronunciation Guide

Naaman: NAY-uh-muhn

Aram: AY-ram

Arameans: her-uh-MEE-uhns

Samaria: suh-MEHR-ih-uh

Abana: AB-uh-nuh

Pharpar: FAHR-pahr

Damascus: duh-MAS-kuhs



Scripture Readings

Secondary Text: Matthew 8:2-3

²And there was a leper who came to him and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, if you choose, you can make me clean.” ³He stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, “I do choose. Be made clean!” Immediately his leprosy was cleansed.

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator, Girl, King of Aram, King of Israel, Elisha, Naaman, Servant

Narrator: Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man and in high favor with his master, because by him the Lord had given victory to Aram. The man, though a mighty warrior, suffered from leprosy. Now the Arameans on one of their raids had taken a young girl captive from the land of Israel, and she served Naaman’s wife. She said to her mistress,

Girl: If only my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy.

Narrator: So Naaman went in and told his lord just what the girl from the land of Israel had said. And the king of Aram said,

King of Aram: Go then, and I will send along a letter to the king of Israel.

Narrator: He went, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten sets of garments. He brought the letter to the king of Israel, which read, “When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you my servant Naaman, that you may cure him of his leprosy.” When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said,

King of Israel: Am I God, to give death or life, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his

leprosy? Just look and see how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me.

Narrator: But when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, he sent a message to the king,

Elisha: Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come to me, that he may learn that there is a prophet in Israel.

Narrator: So Naaman came with his horses and chariots, and halted at the entrance of Elisha’s house. Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying,

Elisha: Go, wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored and you shall be clean.

Narrator: But Naaman became angry and went away, saying,

Naaman: I thought that for me he would surely come out, and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and would wave his hand over the spot, and cure the leprosy! Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them, and be clean?

Narrator: He turned and went away in a rage. But his servants approached and said to him,

Servant: Father, if the prophet had commanded you to do something difficult, would you not have done it? How much more, when all he said to you was, ‘Wash, and be clean’?

Narrator: So he went down and immersed himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; his flesh was restored like the flesh of a young boy, and he was clean. Then he returned to the man of God, he and all his company; he came and stood before him and said,

(continued)



Scripture Readings

Dramatic Reading continued

Naaman: Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel; [please accept a present from your servant.

Narrator: But he said,

Elisha: As the Lord lives, whom I serve, I will accept nothing!

Narrator: He urged him to accept, but he refused. Then Naaman said,

Naaman: If not, please let two mule-loads of earth be given to your servant; for your servant will no longer offer burnt-offering or sacrifice to any god except the Lord. But may the Lord pardon your servant on one count: when my master goes into the house of Rimmon to worship there, leaning on my arm, and I bow down in the house of Rimmon, when I do bow down in the house of Rimmon, may the Lord pardon your servant on this one count.

Narrator: He said to him,

Elisha: Go in peace.]



Tag Cloud





Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: Naaman had to show great humility, patience, and restraint to receive healing from a prophet of Israel. Humility is hard to come by in a modern world where entitlement runs wild.

This is a story of diplomacy and humility. Israel and Aram were still in conflict when Naaman, commander for an Aramean army, sought healing from a prophet in Israel. Naaman was desperate enough to push against several boundaries. First, he learned of Elisha through a young girl that had been kidnapped and trafficked from Israel. Then, he approached his own king and commander with a request to seek help from the opposing country. It was a big deal that someone of such high position would venture into Israel's land asking for healing. He likely believed a prophet from Israel should be honored to serve a commander of Aram.

But Elisha denied seeing him in person, instead sending a messenger with instructions for how Naaman could wash in the waters of Israel. Naaman was understandably angry, as Elisha's absence would have been insulting. Still, when reminded of his predicament, Naaman did what he was told, and he was healed. To show his gratitude and humility, Naaman requested dirt so he could worship Israel's God on Israel's soil. He also asked God's forgiveness for the disrespect he would show God when necessarily kneeling before his king's god.

This entire story is fraught with peril. At any moment, a wrong word or misstep could set off further conflict. Washing in the Jordan was the easiest part of the healing journey. Swallowing pride, showing restraint, and asking for help were far more difficult.

Entitlement has been increasingly problematic in our time. Humility, deference, and restraint seem scarce. We are used to getting what we want, and right now. We have information at our fingertips. Some of us can order groceries to be delivered within two hours. We pay extra to stream ad-free because it's annoying to wait 1-3 minutes for a show to return. We've become so used to this access, it's ever harder to step back, slow down, and show humility and patience. Explore how your community's entitlement has affected the world around you, and consider how you might make changes to express humility and deference, not only to the community, but to God as well.

—Dr. Kimberly Leetch

Scripture Summary

Naaman, commander of an invading army, suffered greatly from leprosy. Humbly he approached Elisha and was granted healing.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

L: Come to the waters of life.

C: We will wash and be clean.

L: God frees us from all that separates us from our neighbors.

C: Let us live in harmonious community with all creation.

Confession and Forgiveness

P: We confess our sins before God and one another.

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: Loving God,

C: We have rebelled against your life-giving reign and raised up worldly kings for ourselves—people, possessions, fame. You have sent us prophets to declare to us the error of our ways and we have despised them, choosing instead to follow false prophets who tell us what we want to hear. We have failed to heed your persistent call to lives of simplicity, love, self-sacrificial service, and commitment to the flourishing of all creation. Forgive us our short-sightedness and self-focus. Draw us back to you, that we might center our lives on our relationship with you, and turn outwards in love for all that you have made.

P: Our God still reigns over all that is, and cherishes each and every one of us as beloved children. Know that your sins are forgiven, and go forth in that knowledge to serve and do justice in all the earth. In Jesus' holy name we pray. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

L: Loving God,

C: As Elisha crossed boundaries to heal a man from another nation, so let us cross and break down boundaries in order to bring healing and wholeness to our neighbors regardless of our preconceived notions of who they are. So open our hearts, minds, and spirits that we cannot help but pour out your love on all creation. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

Holy God, you cross our human-created boundaries to lavish your abundance on us. In gratitude we return these gifts to you. Bless and use them for the sake of those who are in need, that all might flourish according to your will. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Prayers of the Church

L: Trusting in God's benevolent rule over creation, we pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

A brief silence.

L: Holy God, as Elisha cured a non-Israelite man, may we reach out in love and service to those who differ from us, that every single person—all of your beloved children, made in your image—might experience healing and wholeness. God of mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

(continued)



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church, continued

L: All rivers and waterways are holy, O God. Help us to heal the infirmities we have inflicted upon this most life-giving resource throughout the world. God of mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: Give all who lead the humility to recognize their own limitations and the promise of your restoring grace and power. Inspire them to find joy in the work of serving others. God of mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: As you healed Naaman, an outsider, so may we strive for just medical systems that provide care to all who need it, regardless of any artificial barriers we might create. Bring hope and healing to all who struggle (*especially...*) God of mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: Naaman's pride almost prevented him from accepting your gift of healing and wholeness. Relieve us of our need to control everything, that we might humbly follow in your way to serenity and peace. God of mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: We give you thanks for all your saints whose lives demonstrate your love and strength in their overcoming of challenges. May we remember their victories and be inspired to hope and trust in you. God of mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: Sovereign God, we lift these prayers to you, and have faith that all things are in your hands. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

The God whose love knows no boundaries invites you to this table where Jesus meets you in boundless love and forgiveness, no matter who you are or even what you believe. Come and be fed with this life-transforming meal of bread and wine, for the sake of your flourishing and the flourishing of all of creation.

Litany

1: There are many forms of leprosy,

2: **Many ways we find to make those we dislike "untouchable."**

1: There are many boundaries between people,

2: **Many ways we find to make those we disagree with "bad" or "other."**

1: There are many kinds of lies and disinformation,

2: **Many ways we find to justify our sense of righteousness.**

1: There is only one cure for these diseases of the heart and soul.

2: **The only cure is love.**

1: Let us boldly step across boundaries,

2: **And touch the untouchable,**

1: With a love that has no end,

2: **From a God whose love is boundless.**



Creative Expression

Skit

Characters: Person 1, Person 2

Props: A letter

Person 1: (*waving letter at Person 2*) Can you believe this? They sent me a letter. A *letter*!

Person 2: Um... what were you expecting, exactly?

Person 1: Don't they even know who I am? I run this company! I have thirty-seven direct reports, a board of directors, and I oversee the workings of literally thousands of workers!

Person 2: Okay. I get it. You're the CEO. So, what's the big deal? They sent you a letter.

Person 1: At the very least a phone call would have been appropriate, don't you think?

Person 2: I don't know.

Person 1: When I sent you to them to ask for their input, did you make it clear who I was?

Person 2: (*testy*) Yes. Of course I did. I've been your assistant for close to a decade. I know what kind of image you want to present and I do a darn good job of it.

Person 1: Sorry. I didn't mean to question your competence. It just bugs me that they wouldn't have at least called.

Person 2: But you were hoping they'd show up in person, I'm imagining.

Person 1: Is that so much to ask? I mean, I'm a busy man. I don't have all the time in the world to mess around. If they'd dropped in and told me directly, that would have been helpful.

Person 2: If time is the issue, then why are you wasting it having a fit rather than just doing what the letter says to do.

Person 1: You're lucky I like you so much, smart aleck.

Person 2: And by the way, what *does* the letter say to do?

Person 1: I'm supposed to go to this seedy little electronics place on the west side of town. They said the person there would be able to fix the issue once and for all.

Person 2: So why haven't you left yet?

Person 1: You're starting to really bug me.

Person 2: (*smiling*) It's my favorite part of this job.

Person 1: Come on. We have in-house people who could run rings around this little dump on the west side. I'm sure of it. Why should I go all the way over there?

Person 2: If you're so sure, then why haven't they been able to fix the problem yet?

Person 1: (*sighs*) I hate it when you're right, you know that?

Person 2: That's my second favorite part of this job.

Person 1: Okay. I'll go. If these little nobody techies can actually fix the issue, I'm going to give them the biggest contract of their small-business lives.

Person 2: That's the spirit. Remember, you're just a guy with a technology problem.

Person 1: Thanks for keeping me humble. I'd better go take care of this.

Person 2: I'll be here waiting for a full report!

(*Both exit opposite sides of the stage*)



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

God's healing love is for everyone.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Pictures of people from lots of different ethnic backgrounds and cultures

Background

Elisha the prophet who succeeded Elijah, performed many miracles for the people of Israel.

In this miracle, Elisha healed the commander of a foreign army, Naaman. Naaman worshipped other gods and was from a different culture, yet Elisha extended God's love to him. God healed Naaman of his leprosy, and Naaman became a believer and follower of God.

Kids are well aware of in-groups and out-groups at an early age, and in the U.S., our culture is so deeply and implicitly biased that kids can't help but grow up with negative attitudes toward those who are different from them. Help kids see that God doesn't see those differences, but loves everyone no matter who they are.

Set the Scene

Ask the kids if they have friends who look very different from them, or follow different religions, or come from different countries. Tell them you're going to read a story about a man who was very different from the Israelites, who were God's people.

Reflect Together

Talk about how Naaman was different than God's people. He didn't look the same or speak the same language or worship the same God. Do the kids think God should have healed Naaman? Why or why not?

Show the kids the pictures one at a time and share details about the person—their ethnic background or nationality, the language they speak, their religion (if known), etc. After each one, ask if God loves them. (*Yes!*) Is anyone left out of God's love? (*No*) God's love is for everyone, no matter what.

Have a discussion about how we can show that love to people who are different from us.

Close with a prayer thanking God for including everyone in God's love.

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin



Planning Worksheet

Preaching Themes

Kids' Storytime Ideas

Skit or Creative Ideas

Worship Setting

Props for Kids' Storytime or Skit

Hymns

Special Events (Baptism, New Members)

Choral Music/Special Music

Guest Speakers/Announcements



Scripture Readings

Text: Micah [1:3-5]; 5:2-5a; 6:6-8

³ For lo, the Lord is coming out of his place,
and will come down and tread upon the high places
of the earth.

⁴ Then the mountains will melt under him
and the valleys will burst open,
like wax near the fire,
like waters poured down a steep place.

⁵ All this is for the transgression of Jacob
and for the sins of the house of Israel.
What is the transgression of Jacob?
Is it not Samaria?
And what is the high place of Judah?
Is it not Jerusalem?]

² But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah,
who are one of the little clans of Judah,
from you shall come forth for me
one who is to rule in Israel,
whose origin is from of old,
from ancient days.

³ Therefore he shall give them up until the time
when she who is in labor has brought forth;
then the rest of his kindred shall return
to the people of Israel.

⁴ And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength
of the Lord,
in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.
And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great
to the ends of the earth;

⁵ and he shall be the one of peace.

⁶ ‘With what shall I come before the Lord,
and bow myself before God on high?
Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings,
with calves a year old?
⁷ Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,
with tens of thousands of rivers of oil?
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?’
⁸ He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?

Pronunciation Guide

Ephrathah: EHF-ruh-thuh

Secondary Text: Matthew 9:13

¹³“Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, not
sacrifice.’ For I have come to call not the righteous
but sinners.”



Scripture Readings

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator 1, Narrator 2

[Narrator 1: For lo, the Lord is coming out of his place,
and will come down and tread upon the high places of the earth.
Then the mountains will melt under him
and the valleys will burst open,
like wax near the fire,
like waters poured down a steep place.
All this is for the transgression of Jacob
and for the sins of the house of Israel.

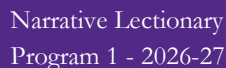
Narrator 2: What is the transgression of Jacob?
Is it not Samaria?
And what is the high place of Judah?
Is it not Jerusalem?]

Narrator 1: But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah,
who are one of the little clans of Judah,
from you shall come forth for me
one who is to rule in Israel,
whose origin is from of old,
from ancient days.

Narrator 2: Therefore he shall give them up until the time
when she who is in labor has brought forth;
then the rest of his kindred shall return
to the people of Israel.
And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord,
in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.
And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great
to the ends of the earth;
and he shall be the one of peace.

Narrator 1: 'With what shall I come before the Lord,
and bow myself before God on high?
Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings,
with calves a year old?
Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,
with tens of thousands of rivers of oil?
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?'

Narrator 2: He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?



Micah, Micah [1:3-5]; 5:2-5a; 6:6-8

A word cloud of biblical terms in various sizes and orientations. The words are arranged in a dense, overlapping manner, with some words appearing much larger than others. The colors are primarily shades of blue, green, and yellow, with some words in white. The words include:

- Before
- Shall
- Tread
- Upon
- Israel
- Place
- High
- One
- Thousand
- Melt
- Mourning
- Weep
- Lament
- Poured
- Fire
- Bow
- Judah
- Transgression
- Sin
- Come
- Earth
- Rivers
- Ramparts
- Walls
- Babylon
- Assyria
- Nineveh
- Tadmor
- Palmyra
- Hama
- Lachish
- Jerusalem
- Bethlehem
- Hebron
- Gaza
- Ashdod
- Gath
- Tyre
- Sidon
- Beirut
- Damascus



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: God expects God's people to move through the world with humility and justice. Now more than ever justice requires action.

Much like Naaman in last week's text, this passage in Micah highlights the importance of humility. Unlike the Aramean Naaman, this time it is the people of Israel that have grieved God with their wickedness. The prophet described in horrifying detail what will become of Israel due to its transgression. In response, Israel lamented the many horrible things they would have to do to make it up to God. Will a burnt offering be enough? Will rivers of oil? Or will God require a sacrifice of a firstborn child?

Thankfully, God made it clear on several occasions that God was not interested in their hollow words or actions, nor was God interested in human sacrifice. What God wanted was far simpler: for the people "do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with [their] God."

In many ways, a burnt offering would have been far easier to achieve than justice and humility. These are more than characteristics; humility and justice demand action. We're living in a frightening time right now when the doling out of petty retaliation is sold to us as justice. If you live in a community openly

affected by thinly-veiled state violence, then you know better than most how difficult true justice can be to obtain or distribute. If this hateful action and rhetoric hasn't yet started affecting your community (or you personally), it might be easy to ignore acts of justice in favor of keeping your head down and flying under the radar.

Justice requires action. We can no longer sit quietly or remain silent when injustices are being badly disguised as lawfulness. Our silence and complacency are violence now. Failing to do or speak justice is as harmful as the administration of punishment.

Explore how your congregation is responding to the abuses of power, withholding of resources, and terrorizing of communities that are on your doorstep. Consider how will you speak or act so that your words and actions become powerful tools for justice.

—Dr. Kimberly Leetch

Scripture Summary

God's people have sinned, and God is grieved. They wonder what horrific restitution they will have to endure to appease God. God expects no offerings or sacrifices, only humility and justice.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

- L: With what shall we come before our God?
- C: With mountains of material possessions?**
- L: God has told us what is good,
- C: And it is not what we might expect.**
- L: What does God require of us?
- C: Only that we do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God.**

Confession and Forgiveness

- P: We confess our sins before God and one another.
Pause for silence and reflection.
- P: Loving God,
- C: We have rebelled against your life-giving reign and raised up worldly kings for ourselves—people, possessions, fame. You have sent us prophets to declare to us the error of our ways and we have despised them, choosing instead to follow false prophets who tell us what we want to hear. We have failed to heed your persistent call to lives of simplicity, love, self-sacrificial service, and commitment to the flourishing of all creation. Forgive us our short-sightedness and self-focus. Draw us back to you, that we might center our lives on our relationship with you, and turn outwards in love for all that you have made.**
- P: Our God still reigns over all that is, and cherishes each and every one of us as beloved children. Know that your sins are forgiven, and go forth in that knowledge to serve and do justice in all the earth. In Jesus' holy name we pray. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

- L: God of promise,
- C: As the prophet Micah speaks of a coming time of peace, let us also be prophets, not only speaking your words of love and reconciliation to a world in pain, but putting into action our commitment to working for the peace you desire for all of creation. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.**

Offertory Prayer

Holy God you have told us what is good. In our desire to follow in your way, we offer these simple gifts and commit them to the work of justice, kindness, and humility that you require of us. Bless them that they might multiply your goodness in the world that you have created. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Prayers of the Church

- L: Trusting in God's benevolent rule over creation, we pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need.
- A brief silence.*
- L: Holy God, you could not be more clear in what you require of us. Remind us each day to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with you, for the flourishing of all creation. God of mercy,
- C: You hear our prayer.**

(continued)



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church, continued

L: Let us do justice on behalf of your creation, which has been poisoned and diminished by our carelessness and greed. Let us love kindness in our dealings with the natural world. Let us walk humbly and awe-filled among this astonishing garden you have planted, and where you meet us each day. God of mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: Make this simple passage from Micah the guiding principle of all who lead—justice, kindness, and humility—that they might measure their effectiveness in their work on behalf of those they serve by how well they carry these principles out. God of mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: May we walk humbly alongside and treat with lovingkindness all who are journeying with sickness, injury, addiction, mental illness, grief, and other infirmities (*especially...*) God of mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: Relieve us of the bondage of guilt and shame, O God—those voices that tell us we are not good enough, that we have not done enough, that we have not sacrificed enough. Keep us ever mindful that in you, we are enough, and that your desire is simply to be in relationship with us. God of mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: We remember with joy and gratitude all your saints who have modeled a life of justice, kindness, and humility. Inspire us by their example to follow this simple way of being in the world. God of mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: Sovereign God, we lift these prayers to you, and have faith that all things are in your hands. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

The one who desires us to walk humbly with them now invites each of you to the feast of life where Jesus, who was the humblest among us, a servant to all, meets us in the celebration of his great sacrifice for us, for the forgiveness of the world. Come and be fed on this humble meal that is so much more than simply bread and wine. All is prepared.

Litany

1: You have promised us a just ruler, O God.

2: You have promised us a time of peace.

1: Yet when we look around we are dismayed.

2: Our rulers are corrupt and untrustworthy.

1: Our society is deeply divided and anger is everywhere.

2: We are anxious, suspicious, lamenting.

1: God of Promise, what, then, shall we do?

2: We are your hands and feet in the world.

1: Breathe the Holy Spirit into our withered hearts.

2: Kindle in us a desire to work for justice.

1: Make us to walk humbly with you,

2: That we might be filled with love overflowing,

1: Love for our neighbors no matter who they are,

2: Love for the healing of the world.



Creative Expression

Skit

Characters: Kids 1-4

Kid 1: Well, we've really done it this time.

Kid 2: I don't think we're ever going to be done being grounded.

Kid 3: Mom did warn us, you know. About what would happen if we kept acting up.

Kid 4: Yeah, but I didn't think she'd really follow through, did you?

Kid 1: Nope. I mean, we've always gotten away with stuff before.

Kid 2: Speak for yourself. I swear you're the worst one of us and she never seems to catch you in the act.

Kid 1: I'm ninja like that.

Kid 3: But this time... I mean it isn't even just this time. I think she just got sick of us not listening to her.

Kid 4: Why don't we try to make it up to her?

Kid 1: Yeah! That's a good idea! If we butter her up, maybe flatter her a little, she might change her mind about us missing the party.

Kid 2: I don't know. I think Mom is smarter than that.

Kid 3: How about we give back our allowance for the last couple of months?

Kid 4: Or the stuff we bought with it. Mine's gone.

Kid 1: Or we could buy her a big present. Maybe a dozen roses or something.

Kid 2: But, you guys... I really don't think it's that complicated.

Kid 3: This isn't complicated. We were awful. We got punished. We're going to give her a bunch of stuff to prove we love her.

Kid 2: But that's not how we're going to prove we love her!

Kid 4: Okay, then. What do you suggest?

Kid 2: It's really simple. She's told us what she wants.

Kid 1: She has?

Kid 2: Only a million times. Geez. Don't you ever listen?

Kid 3: Pretend we don't. What did she say she wanted? We'll do anything to go to that party!

Kid 2: First of all, give up on the party. We deserve to be grounded and you know it.

Kid 4: Yeah. You're probably right.

Kid 2: Then just do what she asks, which is that we stop fighting with each other, help out however she wants, and spend time with her.

Kid 1: Wait. That's it?

Kid 2: Well obviously it's not that easy or we wouldn't keep blowing it.

Kid 3: Still, I'm smelling what you're stepping in. We don't have to make some extravagant gesture. We just need to listen to her.

Kid 4: And that will show her we love her.

Kid 2: Exactly. And we can start by cleaning our rooms, which she's only asked us to do like four thousand times.

Kid 1: On it!

(All exit)



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

God wants simple things from us.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin

Background

At the time of Micah, the kingdom of Israel was under serious threat from the Assyrian Empire. Micah had lots of words of condemnation for the people, how they had failed to keep their side of the covenant with God, and therefore had brought this threat upon themselves. Micah also had words of hope, including the promise of a king, born in Bethlehem, who would bring peace.

Through Micah's words, God reminded the people that God did not desire burnt offerings or sacrifices. Instead, God desired the people to live with justice, kindness, and humility.

Set the Scene

Define "prophet" for the kids as "someone who speaks God's words to the people." Over the years God sent many, many prophets to remind God's people of God's promises to them and their promises to God. God's people broke their promises all the time and the prophets would warn them about bad things to come and try to get the people to do what they were supposed to again. Micah was one of those prophets.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Ask the kids to imagine that they have hurt another person's feelings by their choices. Give them an example from your own life to get them thinking. Then give them a choice: They can either send the person a present, or they can go to the person directly and, face to face, admit they were wrong and ask for forgiveness. Which one is harder to do? Which shows the other person that you're actually sorry? (*Buying a present doesn't necessarily do this. It's the easier way out*)

Talk about how God's people, the Israelites, were giving God gifts, called sacrifices, but that they really weren't living in love for God. They were still doing mean things to each other and acting like God wasn't really there. They thought if they just gave God more and more gifts, God would be fooled.

But that's not what God wants. God doesn't want sacrifices. All God wants is for us to show love for God and our neighbors. But which is easier? Giving gifts to God or actually living the way God wants? (*Living the way God wants*) But when we do this, our lives are much, much better.

Close with a prayer asking God to help us remember what God really wants from us.

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Picture of a sword
- Picture of a plowshare
- Picture of a spear
- Picture of a pruning hook



Planning Worksheet

Preaching Themes

Kids' Storytime Ideas

Skit or Creative Ideas

Worship Setting

Props for Kids' Storytime or Skit

Hymns

Special Events (Baptism, New Members)

Choral Music/Special Music

Guest Speakers/Announcements



Scripture Readings

Text: Isaiah 36:1-3, 13-20; 37:1-7; then 2:1-4

36 In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, King Sennacherib of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of ¹Judah and captured them. ²The king of Assyria sent the Rabshakeh from Lachish to King Hezekiah at Jerusalem, with a great army. He stood by the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the Fuller's Field. ³And there came out to him Eliakim son of Hilkiah, who was in charge of the palace, and Shebna the secretary, and Joah son of Asaph, the recorder.

¹³Then the Rabshakeh stood and called out in a loud voice in the language of Judah, "Hear the words of the great king, the king of Assyria! ¹⁴Thus says the king: 'Do not let Hezekiah deceive you, for he will not be able to deliver you. ¹⁵Do not let Hezekiah make you rely on the Lord by saying, 'The Lord will surely deliver us; this city will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.' ¹⁶Do not listen to Hezekiah; for thus says the king of Assyria: 'Make your peace with me and come out to me; then everyone of you will eat from your own vine and your own fig tree and drink water from your own cistern, ¹⁷until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of grain and wine, a land of bread and vineyards. ¹⁸Do not let Hezekiah mislead you by saying, 'The Lord will save us. Has any of the gods of the nations saved their land out of the hand of the king of Assyria? ¹⁹Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim? Have they delivered Samaria out of my hand? ²⁰Who among all the gods of these countries have saved their countries out of my hand, that the Lord should save Jerusalem out of my hand?'"

37 When King Hezekiah heard it, he tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the Lord. ²And he sent Eliakim, who was in charge of the palace, and Shebna

the secretary, and the senior priests, covered with sackcloth, to the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz. ³They said to him, "Thus says Hezekiah, This day is a day of distress, of rebuke, and of disgrace; children have come to the birth, and there is no strength to bring them forth. ⁴It may be that the Lord your God heard the words of the Rabshakeh, whom his master the king of Assyria has sent to mock the living God, and will rebuke the words that the Lord your God has heard; therefore lift up your prayer for the remnant that is left." ⁵When the servants of King Hezekiah came to Isaiah, ⁶Isaiah said to them, "Say to your master, 'Thus says the Lord: Do not be afraid because of the words that you have heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria have reviled me. ⁷I myself will put a spirit in him, so that he shall hear a rumor, and return to his own land; I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land.'"

2 The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. ²In days to come the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it. ³Many peoples shall come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. ⁴He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

Secondary Text: Matthew 5:14

¹⁴"You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid."



Scripture Readings

Pronunciation Guide

Hezekiah: heh-zeh-KAI-uh

Sennacherib: seh-NAK-er-ihb

Assyria: a-SIHR-ee-uh

Rabshakeh: RAB-shah-kuh

Lachish: lah-KEESH

Eliakim: ee-LAI-uh-kihm

Hilkiah: hihl-KAI-uh

Shebna: SHEEB-nah

Joah: JOH-uh

Asaph: AY-saf

Hamath: HAY-mehth

Arpad: AR-pahd

Sepharvaim: SEF-ahr-vyhm

Amoz: AY-muhz



Scripture Readings

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator, Rabshakeh, King, Eliakim, Isaiah, People

Narrator: In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, King Sennacherib of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and captured them. The king of Assyria sent the Rabshakeh from Lachish to King Hezekiah at Jerusalem, with a great army. He stood by the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the Fuller's Field. And there came out to him Eliakim son of Hilkiyah, who was in charge of the palace, and Shebna the secretary, and Joah son of Asaph, the recorder. Then the Rabshakeh stood and called out in a loud voice in the language of Judah,

Rabshakeh: Hear the words of the great king, the king of Assyria! Thus says the king:

King: Do not let Hezekiah deceive you, for he will not be able to deliver you. Do not let Hezekiah make you rely on the Lord by saying, The Lord will surely deliver us; this city will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.

Rabshakeh: Do not listen to Hezekiah; for thus says the king of Assyria:

King: Make your peace with me and come out to me; then everyone of you will eat from your own vine and your own fig tree and drink water from your own cistern, until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of grain and wine, a land of bread and vineyards. Do not let Hezekiah mislead you by saying, The Lord will save us. Has any of the gods of the nations saved their land out of the hand of the king of Assyria? Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim? Have they delivered Samaria out of my hand? Who among all the gods of these countries have saved their countries out of my hand, that the Lord should save Jerusalem out of my hand?

Narrator: When King Hezekiah heard it, he tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the Lord. And he sent Eliakim, who was in charge of the palace, and Shebna the secretary, and the senior priests, covered with sackcloth, to the prophet Isaiah son of Amoz. They said to him,

Eliakim: Thus says Hezekiah, This day is a day of distress, of rebuke, and of disgrace; children have come to the birth, and there is no strength to bring them forth. It may be that the Lord your God heard the words of the Rabshakeh, whom his master the king of Assyria has sent to mock the living God, and will rebuke the words that the Lord your God has heard; therefore lift up your prayer for the remnant that is left.

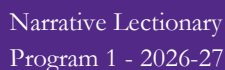
Narrator: When the servants of King Hezekiah came to Isaiah, Isaiah said to them,

Isaiah: Say to your master, 'Thus says the Lord: Do not be afraid because of the words that you have heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria have reviled me. I myself will put a spirit in him, so that he shall hear a rumor, and return to his own land; I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land.'

Narrator: The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. In days to come the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it. Many peoples shall come and say,

People: Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths."

Narrator: For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.



Reign of Christ: Swords Into Plowshares, Isaiah 36:1-3, 13-20; 37:1-7; then 2:1-4

[illegible]



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: In a world that is ravaged with war and conflict in the name of God, your community can live loud and bold as purveyors of peace.

Hezekiah's situation was dire. He was about to be overrun by Assyrian armies. Other lands had fallen despite unheard pleas to their gods. Hezekiah feared even God couldn't save him from defeat. Isaiah knew better. What could God do to save them? Would they meet a violent end? Not this time.

God said that God would whisper in the king's ear a faraway trouble that would draw him away from Hezekiah and back home, where he would meet his fate. God's plan for saving Hezekiah was peaceful and passive. God's whisper would save lives.

The prophets proclaimed that God's ways are often peaceful. In the midst of turmoil and war, God promised a time when they could turn "swords into plowshares." God promised to turn weapons of death into tools to nurture life. That is what God's kingdom is: life. God's reign is not a reign of terror or violence. God's reign is peaceful and strong.

War is raging around the world right now. If God's word is to be believed, then this is not how God

desires our world to be. God's goal for humanity is peace. Yet humanity seems to struggle to maintain peace for very long.

Unfortunately, instigators of many wars claim that theirs is a "holy war." Even people claiming to be Christians are quick to label their own violent actions as ordained by God. They claim that the purpose of their warmongering is to force humanity closer to God's will. It's completely contradictory to say that the way to peace is through war. The way to peace is through peace, conversation, community, understanding, patience, and intention. Explore with your congregation what it means to be a Christian of peace. Consider how your community can live out its identity as Christ's own in a world where non-Christians and even other Christians are hostile to your flavor of Christianity.

—Dr. Kimberly Leetch

Scripture Summary

King Hezekiah was desperate to escape the invading army of Assyria. Isaiah told him to have faith. God would deliver them peacefully.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

L: You are the light of the world.

C: A city on a hill cannot be hidden.

L: You are the light of the world.

C: Let us shine God's light of love to all creation.

Confession and Forgiveness

P: We confess our sins before God and one another.

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: Loving God,

C: We have rebelled against your life-giving reign and raised up worldly kings for ourselves—people, possessions, fame. You have sent us prophets to declare to us the error of our ways and we have despised them, choosing instead to follow false prophets who tell us what we want to hear. We have failed to heed your persistent call to lives of simplicity, love, self-sacrificial service, and commitment to the flourishing of all creation. Forgive us our short-sightedness and self-focus. Draw us back to you, that we might center our lives on our relationship with you, and turn outwards in love for all that you have made.

P: Our God still reigns over all that is, and cherishes each and every one of us as beloved children. Know that your sins are forgiven, and go forth in that knowledge to serve and do justice in all the earth. In Jesus' holy name we pray. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

L: God of peace,

C: Teach us to reject the weapons of war, turn from the rhetoric of hatred, and practice the way of nonviolence, that we might lead the world into a time when your eternal reign of love and justice breaks into our world here and now. In the name of Jesus, our holy savior, friend, and ruler. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

Holy God, we offer now these gifts out of the abundance you have first given us. Receive them for the sake of all creation. Bless and use them for the work of turning swords into plowshares, that all of your beloved creation might have peace. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: Trusting in God's benevolent rule over creation, we pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

A brief silence.

L: Holy God, relieve us of the fear of others that leads us to believe warfare is inevitable and necessary. Make all of humanity eager to dismantle the weapons of war and turn their efforts and attention to laboring for the peace that is your perfect justice. God of mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: Guide all whose work involves the plow; give them wisdom to care for and restore soil and to practice farming methods that enrich rather than degrade the earth. God of mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: Guide all whose work involves international relations; give them wisdom to work for peace among all nations. God of mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: Guide all whose work involves the provision of medical care to those we know and to those we don't know; give them wisdom to bring hope and healing to the suffering, (*especially...*) God of mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: Guide all of us each day in whatever work is ours to do, that we might live out your call to love and serve. Give us wisdom to know that even the smallest acts of kindness make a difference in your universe. God of mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: Guide us to see the ways in which your saints have worked to bring peace to our world, and to follow in their example each day. God of mercy,

C: You hear our prayer.

L: Sovereign God, we lift these prayers to you, and have faith that all things are in your hands. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

Christ who reigns over all of creation now invites you to this feast of victory and redemption. Come with your siblings in Christ, beloved children of God, to where Jesus meets you in bread and wine, and strengthens you to bear his light to the world. All is prepared.

Litany

1: The world tells us not to believe in you, O God.

2: The world tells us you cannot save us.

1: The world proclaims a message of division,

2: A message of suspicion,

1: A message of everyone-for-themselves,

2: A message of what's-in-it-for-me.

1: And the world says this is "the way it is" and there's nothing we—or you, O God—can do about it.

2: But it's a lie.

1: You can, you will, you do save us, O God.

2: You raise up leaders who sacrifice for others.

1: You inspire us to speak up for our neighbors.

2: You call us to follow in your way of love.

1: Make us bold to proclaim your saving power,

2: In all that we do.



Creative Expression

Skit

Characters: Kids 1-4, Kid 5

Kid 1: We are in big trouble now.

Kid 2: I guess we should have seen it coming.

Kid 3: They warned us if we didn't do what they wanted, we'd regret it.

Kid 4: We just want to have our gaming club.
Simple. Honest. Why do we have to deal with the bullies in the Aggressive Gamers club?

Kid 1: That's just how it works around here. The bigger, more popular kids get to push us kids around.

Kid 2: What are we supposed to do? They said if we tried to meet, they would beat us up?

Kid 3: In a last-ditch effort, I did ask [Kid 5] to come help us out.

Kid 4: Oh, I like them. They seem to be able to get along with everyone.

Kid 5: (*entering*) Here you are. I was wondering where you were hiding out.

Kid 1: Oh thank goodness, [Kid 5]. You know what's going on, right?

Kid 5: Yeah, I have a general idea.

Kid 2: What should we do? Should we just cave and give them what they want?

Kid 5: No. Don't do that. Where's your trust in Ms. Yamamoto?

Kid 3: The new principal? What can she do?

Kid 5: You mean what is she already doing.

Kid 4: Say more about that.

Kid 5: She already knew what was going on when I talked to her. She's dealt with the Aggressive Gamers club before.

Kid 1: And she's going to expel them?

Kid 5: Nothing so dramatic. She's just worked with their advisor to give them a project that's going to take up all their time and attention for the foreseeable future.

Kid 2: You mean... they're just going to get distracted and leave us alone?

Kid 5: Basically.

Kid 3: That sounds like a long shot.

Kid 4: I don't know. It could work.

Kid 5: Things are changing around here ever since Ms. Yamamoto got promoted to Principal. She's really working to change the culture.

Kid 1: I don't even know what that means.

Kid 2: Wait. I do. Remember when she gave that talk to the whole school last week?

Kid 3: You paid attention to that?

Kid 2: Yeah. She said she was going to put an end to inter-club rivalry and fighting, and we were all going to work together to make the whole school a better place for everyone.

Kid 4: Is that even possible?

Kid 5: Trust me. With Ms. Yamamoto it is. One day this whole place is going to be peaceful.

Kid 1: I hope it's soon. I'm tired of being scared of bullies.

Kid 5: It will happen, [Kid 1]. But we're all going to have to help it happen.

Kid 2: I'm in. Meanwhile, can we just game, please?

(*All exit*)



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

God teaches us to make peace.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Picture of a sword
- Picture of a plowshare
- Picture of a spear
- Picture of a pruning hook

Background

First Isaiah was written for Judah (the Southern Kingdom), whose borders were being threatened by Assyria, the same country that had already conquered Samaria and defeated Israel a few hundred years before. The Rabshakeh (the chief steward and messenger of the king of Assyria) threatened Judah and invited the people to surrender, promising they would be taken care of. King Hezekiah of Judah remained faithful to God, asking Isaiah to plead to God on behalf of Judah. God heard King Hezekiah's plea and saved Judah from the Assyrian king. Once again, God's promise of deliverance was kept.

The last part of today's reading comes from earlier in Isaiah and is among its most famous passages. It tells of a time when all nations will go to the mountain of God, be instructed in God's ways, exchange their weapons for farm equipment, and make war no more.

Set the Scene

Remind the kids what a prophet is (someone who speaks God's words) and tell them that today they're going to hear from the prophet Isaiah.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Show the kids the picture of the sword. Ask them to identify it and tell you what it's for (*killing people*). Do the same with the picture of the spear. Can the kids name other weapons used to fight wars and kill people? Ask what these weapons are generally made of (*metal*).

Talk about how in the story, Isaiah talks about a time when God's people will turn their weapons into other things. Can the kids remember what? (*tools for farming*) Show the kids the picture of the plowshare. Do they have any idea what it is? Describe its' use for them. Do the same with the pruning hook. Talk about how these items are for growing food, feeding and taking care of people.

Isaiah says that God will teach us God's ways. Are those ways about fighting with each other and using weapons to hurt each other? (*Nope*) God wants us to spend our time growing food and caring for each other. Ask the kids if they can think of some ways to make peace. Affirm their ideas and offer some of your own if the kids aren't coming up with many.

Close with a prayer asking God to help us make peace in our world.

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Lightweight dumbbells



Planning Worksheet

Preaching Themes

Kids' Storytime Ideas

Skit or Creative Ideas

Worship Setting

Props for Kids' Storytime or Skit

Hymns

Special Events (Baptism, New Members)

Choral Music/Special Music

Guest Speakers/Announcements



Scripture Readings

Text: Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:1-4; 3:[3b-6], 17-19

1 The oracle that the prophet Habakkuk saw. ²O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen? Or cry to you “Violence!” and you will not save? ³Why do you make me see wrong-doing and look at trouble? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. ⁴So the law becomes slack and justice never prevails. The wicked surround the righteous— therefore judgment comes forth perverted.

2 I will stand at my watchpost, and station myself on the rampart; I will keep watch to see what he will say to me, and what he will answer concerning my complaint. ²Then the Lord answered me and said: Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it. ³For there is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of the end, and does not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay. ⁴Look at the proud! Their spirit is not right in them, but the righteous live by their faith.

[^{3b}God came from Teman, the Holy One from Mount Paran. Selah

His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise. ⁴The brightness was like the sun; rays came forth from his hand, where his power lay hidden. ⁵Before him went pestilence, and plague followed close behind. ⁶He stopped and shook the earth; he looked and made the nations tremble. The eternal mountains were shattered; along his ancient pathways the everlasting hills sank low.]

¹⁷Though the fig tree does not blossom, and no fruit is on the vines; though the produce of the olive fails and the fields yield no food; though the flock is cut off from the fold and there is no herd in the stalls, ¹⁸yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will exult in the God of my salvation. ¹⁹God, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, and makes me tread upon the heights. To the choirmaster: with stringed instruments.

Pronunciation Guide

Habakkuk: huh-BAK-uhk

Teman: TEE-muh-n

Paran: PAY-ruhn

Zebedee: ZEB-uh-dee

Secondary Text: Matthew 26:36-38

³⁶Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” ³⁷He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated. ³⁸Then he said to them, “I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me.”



Scripture Readings

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator, Habakkuk, God

Narrator: The oracle that the prophet Habakkuk saw.

Habakkuk: O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen? Or cry to you “Violence!” and you will not save? Why do you make me see wrongdoing and look at trouble? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. So the law becomes slack and justice never prevails. The wicked surround the righteous— therefore judgment comes forth perverted. I will stand at my watchpost, and station myself on the rampart; I will keep watch to see what he will say to me, and what he will answer concerning my complaint. Then the Lord answered me and said:

God: Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it. For there is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of the end, and does not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay. Look at the proud! Their spirit is not right in them, but the righteous live by their faith.

[**Narrator:** God came from Teman, the Holy One from Mount Paran. His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise. The brightness was like the sun; rays came forth from his hand, where his power lay hidden. Before him went pestilence, and plague followed close behind. He stopped and shook the earth; he looked and made the nations tremble. The eternal mountains were shattered; along his ancient pathways the everlasting hills sank low.]

Habakkuk: Though the fig tree does not blossom, and no fruit is on the vines; though the produce of the olive fails and the fields yield no food; though the flock is cut off from the fold and there is no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will exult in the God of my salvation. God, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, and makes me tread upon the heights. To the choirmaster: with stringed instruments.



Advent I: Faith as a Way of Life, Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:1-4; 3:[3b-6], 17-19

[illegible]



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: In Advent, we can take our brokenness and difficult questions to God.

At its core, Advent is a fierce, eschatological season. We tend to forget that amid all the cheerful holiday movies and jolly, red-suited gift givers in our modern world, but the early and medieval church were particularly aware of it. They understood Advent as a time when believers don't just look back and rejoice at the Savior's first coming but look forward in anticipation to the Savior's second coming that will fix the brokenness we see now. Perhaps it's only right then to begin Advent with the prophet Habakkuk.

Frustrated and overwhelmed by the brokenness of the world around him, in chapter 1:2-4 Habakkuk demands to know how God can tolerate so much violence and injustice. Habakkuk digs in his heels and says he will stand at his watch-post (2:1) until God answers. Then, in the second chapter, God does. God encourages Habakkuk that the day of the Lord will come and to hold fast in the ugliness that is. The wicked may seem to triumph for a time, but "the righteous live by their faithfulness." And the amazing thing is that Habakkuk does. As broken as

Habakkuk's world is, the final chapter looks forward with hopeful anticipation to that time when the earth shakes with God's glory and praises while the book ends with Habakkuk's faithful affirmation that "God, the Lord, is my strength." (3:19).

Perhaps that is how we too should approach this season of Advent. Christmas isn't just a time when we can rejoice and be merry, but when we can take all the brokenness and difficult questions of our present world to God. Because, as Habakkuk reminds us, faith is a way of life that trusts that tomorrow belongs to God. Somehow the Lord will come again, and the earth will shake in the most miraculous way as all its brokenness is set right. And until then, we will live by our fierce Advent faith.

—Pr. Mattheis Lorimor

Scripture Summary

The prophet demands to know where God is in the midst of the world's violence and suffering. In the end, he declares his trust in God no matter what is going on around him.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

- L: How long must we wait?
- C: How long must we see such hatred and injustice?**
- L: We will stand on the watch post and wait for God's answer.
- C: We will have faith that God will bring peace.**

Confession and Forgiveness

- P: We confess our sins before God and one another.
Pause for silence and reflection.
- P: Merciful God,
- C: We come before you with contrite hearts, aware of all the ways we have failed to do what you would have us do, and the ways we have insisted on doing what we know does not contribute to our flourishing or that of the world. As we anticipate and celebrate your selfless act of becoming one of us in Jesus Christ, re-center us on your call to empty ourselves as you did, so that we might serve you and all of creation with open, loving hearts, and work diligently for the peace and justice you desire for all that you have made.**
- P: The One who was and is and is to come hears your confession and declares to you that you are forgiven. Free of the burden of your sin, go forth in gratitude and joy to love and serve. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

- L: Holy God,
- C: As we begin our season of waiting for your humble birth in a manger, open our ears to listen eagerly for what you would have us hear and understand on this day. Strengthen and deepen our faith in your good promises of peace in all creation. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.**

Offertory Prayer

Holy God, you call us into a life of faith and trust, and you satisfy all our needs. In gratitude for your unfailing love and provision, we return these, our gifts, for use in the work of proclaiming that love to all the earth through ministries of peace, justice, and care for neighbor. Bless what we offer now, for the sake of Jesus Christ our savior and friend. Amen.

Prayers of the Church

- L: With humble anticipation of God's promises fulfilled in Jesus Christ, we pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

A brief silence.

- L: Holy God, with Habakkuk we cry out for your justice in the face of the violence that pervades our societies from top to bottom. Make us to proclaim your truth to those who would try to convince us of the lie that violence is necessary. Make us agents of your healing love. God of promise,

- C: We lift our prayers to you.**

(continued)



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church, continued

L: Give us faith in your promise of restoration, and stir up in us a passionate love of your astonishing creation, that we might join you in the work of bringing healing and wholeness to all the earth. God of promise,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Make us to raise up and support leaders who proclaim your way of peace and restoration throughout the earth. Guide all who lead in their efforts to bring flourishing to your beloved children everywhere. God of promise,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Help us show your love in concrete ways to those who are dealing with health challenges of any kind, (*especially...*) Hold all who suffer in your loving arms; comfort and strengthen them on their journeys. God of promise,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: As we begin the season of Advent, which so often comes with a flurry of overwhelming preparations in the midst of capitalist demands that we spend beyond our means, keep us firmly rooted in our faith, that we might open our eyes and hearts to the wonder and anticipation of Jesus' coming. God of promise,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: With all your saints, living and long departed, we commit to faith in you as a way of life. Walk with us, as you did with those who came before, that we might live with confidence in your good promises. God of promise,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Loving God, we place into your loving arms all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy and grace for all of creation. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

God our strength, in whom we delight, now invites us to the table where Jesus Christ meets us in bread and wine. Come to the feast of life and be strengthened in faith, that you might tread upon the heights with feet like the deer, rejoicing in God's promises fulfilled.

Litany (Habakkuk 3:17-19a)

1: Though the fig tree does not blossom,

2: And no fruit is on the vines;

1: Though the produce of the olive fails,

2: And the fields yield no food;

1: Though the flock is cut off from the fold,

2: And there is no herd in the stalls,

1: Yet I will rejoice in the Lord,

2: I will exult in the God of my salvation.

1: God is my strength, and makes my feet like the deer,

2: God makes me tread upon the heights.

All: Thanks be to God!



Creative Expression

Skit

Characters: Kids 1-3 (junior high or high school)

Props: Shopping bags

Scene: Kid 1 is onstage looking glum. Kid 2 enters with bags, singing some cheesy holiday tune.

Kid 1: Ugh! What are you singing that for?

Kid 2: Advent starts today. It's time to celebrate!

Kid 1: Advent is about preparing and waiting. Not about shopping and singing stupid songs.

Kid 2: Whoa! Who spit in your eggnog?

Kid 1: How can you be thinking about Christmas when the world is such an unbelievable mess?

Kid 2: Um... I guess I haven't thought about it.

Kid 1: Exactly. No one thinks about it. They just want to rush to the little baby Jesus in the manger and "stockings all hung by the chimney with care" and they ignore just how much everyone around them is suffering.

Kid 2: Wow. You're really upset about this.

Kid 1: Yeah. So why aren't you?

Kid 2: The world has always been a mess. Does that mean we should give up on celebrating?

Kid 1: It's just that we hear all the time how Jesus comes and fixes everything but the world does not seem fixed. Not one bit.

Kid 3: (*entering, looking a little sad*) Oh. Hey, guys.

Kid 2: You, too? This is supposed to be a cheerful season! What's got you upset?

Kid 3: I just found out my family is moving to Arizona right after Christmas.

Kid 1: That stinks. Weren't you going to be team captain next fall after Abdullahi graduates?

Kid 3: That was the plan.

Kid 1: Just one more stupid reason to hate this stupid season.

Kid 3: That's not really true. I mean, I know the world is a complete mess. Compared with that, this isn't anything.

Kid 2: Right. But, I mean, it's a big deal to you personally.

Kid 3: But I still have hope.

Kid 2: What, that you'll get to be team captain wherever you're moving to?

Kid 3: No. That the world will get better.

Kid 1: Based on what?

Kid 3: I don't know. History? There have been terrible times and then things get better.

Kid 1: And then get terrible again.

Kid 2: Maybe so. But I agree with [Kid 3]. We definitely have work to do to help the people around us. But we can't do it from a place of despair.

Kid 3: I want to celebrate the good things about what is right now, and trust that even if the worst happens, ultimately it will be alright.

Kid 1: Sounds a bit naïve and selfish to me.

Kid 2: Sounds like you just want to wallow.

Kid 3: All I know is that I'm not giving up on the world changing for the better. And I'll do whatever I can to help it. But in the mean time, I won't forget to enjoy the amazing things about life.

Kid 1: Yeah, yeah. I guess. But I'm not singing stupid Christmas music in November.

Kid 2: That's fair.



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

God can strengthen our faith.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Lightweight dumbbells

Background

Habakkuk was a prophet who spoke to Jerusalem when it was just about to fall to Babylonian exile. The people had not believed they could be conquered, and yet exile was at their doorstep. Their faith in God wavered, and they questioned where God was.

God responded to Habakkuk's plea, "How long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen?" God's response promised that those who live by faith can endure great suffering. God suggested faith as a way of life. Faith is stronger than despair.

Set the Scene

Ask the kids what it means to be strong. Flex your muscles. Are there other ways to be strong? Have them wonder about that while you read the story.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Pick up the dumbbells and do some exercises. Ask the kids what will happen to your body if you lift the dumbbells every day. (*your body will get stronger*) Ask if the kids thought of any other way to be strong. Explore the idea of having a strong faith, which means trusting that God will take care of you no matter what. Do the kids have that kind of faith?

Discuss how when our faith (trust in God) is weak we can get very scared. Give an example from your own life. Ask the kids to share an example if they can think of one. Talk about how Habakkuk was afraid. He wondered where God was, why things weren't going well for God's people.

Remind the kids that if you lift weights, your body gets strong. Then ask them how they can make their faith stronger? Point out in the story how Habakkuk said he would sing praises to God even when things were bad. So praising God makes faith stronger. What are some other ways? (*pray, come to church, read the Bible, talk to others about God, practice generosity, kindness, patience, care, etc.*) Ask kids to imagine that their faith is lifting dumbbells every time they do one of these things.

Close with a prayer thanking God for helping us make our faith stronger so we can trust God more.

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Pictures of Malala Yousafzai, Greta Thunberg, Thandiwe Abdullah, and Bana Alabed, or any other kid activists/heroes you know about.



Planning Worksheet

Preaching Themes

Kids' Storytime Ideas

Skit or Creative Ideas

Worship Setting

Props for Kids' Storytime or Skit

Hymns

Special Events (Baptism, New Members)

Choral Music/Special Music

Guest Speakers/Announcements



Scripture Readings

Text: Esther 4:1-17

⁴When Mordecai learned all that had been done, Mordecai tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went through the city, wailing with a loud and bitter cry; ²he went up to the entrance of the king's gate, for no one might enter the king's gate clothed with sackcloth. ³In every province, wherever the king's command and his decree came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting and weeping and lamenting, and most of them lay in sackcloth and ashes. ⁴When Esther's maids and her eunuchs came and told her, the queen was deeply distressed; she sent garments to clothe Mordecai, so that he might take off his sackcloth; but he would not accept them.

⁵Then Esther called for Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs, who had been appointed to attend her, and ordered him to go to Mordecai to learn what was happening and why. ⁶Hathach went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king's gate, ⁷and Mordecai told him all that had happened to him, and the exact sum of money that Haman had promised to pay into the king's treasuries for the destruction of the Jews. ⁸Mordecai also gave him a copy of the written decree issued in Susa for their destruction, that he might show it to Esther, explain it to her, and charge her to go to the king to make supplication to him and entreat him for her people. ⁹Hathach went and told Esther what Mordecai had said. ¹⁰Then Esther spoke to Hathach and gave him a message for Mordecai, saying, ¹¹"All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that if any man or woman goes to the king inside the inner court without being called, there is but one law—all alike are to be put to death. Only if the king holds out the golden scepter to someone, may that

person live. I myself have not been called to come in to the king for thirty days." ¹²When they told Mordecai what Esther had said, ¹³Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, "Do not think that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. ¹⁴For if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter, but you and your father's family will perish. Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this." ¹⁵Then Esther said in reply to Mordecai, ¹⁶"Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will also fast as you do. After that I will go to the king, though it is against the law; and if I perish, I perish." ¹⁷Mordecai then went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him.

Pronunciation Guide

Mordecai: MOR-duh-ki

Hathach: HAY-thuck

Haman: HAY-man

Secondary Text: Matthew 5:13-16

¹³"You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled underfoot. ¹⁴You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. ¹⁵No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."



Scripture Readings

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator 1, Narrator 2, Esther, Mordecai

Narrator 1: When Mordecai learned all that had been done, Mordecai tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went through the city, wailing with a loud and bitter cry; he went up to the entrance of the king's gate, for no one might enter the king's gate clothed with sackcloth. In every province, wherever the king's command and his decree came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting and weeping and lamenting, and most of them lay in sackcloth and ashes.

Narrator 2: When Esther's maids and her eunuchs came and told her, the queen was deeply distressed; she sent garments to clothe Mordecai, so that he might take off his sackcloth; but he would not accept them.

Narrator 1: Then Esther called for Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs, who had been appointed to attend her, and ordered him to go to Mordecai to learn what was happening and why. Hathach went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king's gate, and Mordecai told him all that had happened to him, and the exact sum of money that Haman had promised to pay into the king's treasuries for the destruction of the Jews. Mordecai also gave him a copy of the written decree issued in Susa for their destruction, that he might show it to Esther, explain it to her, and charge her to go to the king to make supplication to him and entreat him for her people.

Narrator 2: Hathach went and told Esther what Mordecai had said. Then Esther spoke to Hathach and gave him a message for Mordecai, saying,

Esther: "All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that if any man or woman goes to the king inside the inner court without being called, there is but one law—all alike are to be put to death. Only if the king holds out the golden scepter to someone, may that person live. I myself have not been called to come in to the king for thirty days."

Narrator 1: When they told Mordecai what Esther had said, Mordecai told them to reply to Esther,

Mordecai: "Do not think that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. For if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter, but you and your father's family will perish. Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this."

Narrator 2: Then Esther said in reply to Mordecai,

Esther: "Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will also fast as you do. After that I will go to the king, though it is against the law; and if I perish, I perish."

Narrator 1: Mordecai then went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him.



Advent II: Esther, Esther 4:1-17



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: God is present in our stories even if we can't explicitly see it. We are never alone.

Have you ever noticed that God never appears in the book of Esther? Seriously, at no time is the Lord God directly mentioned in any way, shape, or form in the entire work. The only characters who appear, act, and drive the story forward are humans. It's Mordecai who reveals Haman's plot and creates the plan to stop it, Hathach the messenger who informs Esther of it, and Esther who willingly agrees to the plan, though she may die. However, the fact that God is never explicitly seen in Esther's story does not mean that's God's presence is never felt in the story.

In that way, Esther's story is a bit like Luke's account of Jesus' birth in Luke 2:1-7. Mary and Joseph go to Bethlehem not by God's command, but because a human emperor orders it (Lk. 2:1). Jesus is born there not by explicit divine determination, but because Mary had simply reached that "time" in her pregnancy (Lk. 2:6). And Jesus ends up in a manger not because of angelic proclamation, but because the manager at the local "Bethlehem Inn" told his parents they were full to capacity (Lk. 2:7). As surprising as it seems, the actual moment of Jesus' birth unfolds with no explicit

divine appearances or interventions whatsoever. The angels and heavenly host are out in the fields with the shepherds and the magi won't turn up for some time. But does that mean God wasn't there for Mary and Joseph?

Perhaps the lesson Esther and the Advent story teach us is that the question isn't whether God is there—thankfully the answer to that is an unequivocal 'yes.' The real question is if we can see God in the story with us even if God isn't explicit; even if God chooses to subtly prompt rather than command or quietly guide rather than dictate. That God is present somehow behind and beneath the story is a given. That we, like Esther, will be willing to say "yes" to God's unfolding plan for our lives, is where the real drama unfolds.

—Pr. Mattheis Lorimor

Scripture Summary

A young Israelite woman is placed in a position to risk her life to save her entire people. Will she accept that perhaps she has been placed in this position "for just such a time as this" and act?



Liturgy

Call to Worship

- L: Let your light shine!
- C: We will shine with God's light of love.**
- L: Let all the world see your light!
- C: We will shine through good works of compassion and justice.**
- L: Let your light shine!
- C: We will proclaim God's glory in all we do and say.**

Confession and Forgiveness

P: We confess our sins before God and one another.

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: Merciful God,

C: We come before you with contrite hearts, aware of all the ways we have failed to do what you would have us do, and the ways we have insisted on doing what we know does not contribute to our flourishing or that of the world. As we anticipate and celebrate your selfless act of becoming one of us in Jesus Christ, re-center us on your call to empty ourselves as you did, so that we might serve you and all of creation with open, loving hearts, and work diligently for the peace and justice you desire for all that you have made.

P: The One who was and is and is to come hears your confession and declares to you that you are forgiven. Free of the burden of your sin, go forth in gratitude and joy to love and serve. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

- L: Holy God,
- C: You placed Queen Esther in a position—however dangerous and challenging—to bring about justice for her people. Inspire us by her example to speak the truth on behalf of those who are marginalized in our society, even if it is risky, trusting that you have put us here for just such a time as this, and will never leave us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.**

Offertory Prayer

Holy God, you have placed us in the position to be able to demonstrate your love and care for all of creation. Receive these gifts we bring to you, that they might support the work we and others do in your name, for the flourishing of all creation. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Prayers of the Church

L: With humble anticipation of God's promises fulfilled in Jesus Christ, we pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

A brief silence.

L: Holy God, we can never know when we might be in a position to make a profound difference in the life of others. Wake us up to those moments of opportunity, that we might advocate for justice on behalf of your beloved children. God of promise,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

(continued)



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church, continued

L: You have created a world filled with beauty and life, and charged us with its care. Inspire us to show up on behalf of the environment and work to change our exploitive use of the resources that might support generations to come. God of promise,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Help us to see the powerful example of those among us who are willing to risk everything for the sake of justice, just as Jesus did. Move us to follow in their way, trusting that you are with us in our efforts, no matter the outcomes. God of promise,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: We thank you for all those who have dedicated their lives to the healing and wholeness of us and our neighbors—medical professionals of every kind. Guide their work with all who suffer in any way, (*especially...*) God of promise,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Even now nations make war on other nations or on their own people, convinced that the “other” is evil and worthy of annihilation. Cry out your truth that every single human being is your beloved child! Make us to cry out with you and then spur us to action to put an end to violence in any way we can. God of promise,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: You have raised up saints throughout the history of your church who have shown us what it is to live out your call to do justice. Stir up in us the same conviction and strengthen us to act on behalf of others. God of promise,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Loving God, we place into your loving arms all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy and grace for all of creation. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

Christ who delivers us from sin and death invites you now to his feast of life, where he meets us in the bread and the wine, forgives all our shortcomings, and renews us for the work of justice and peace in all of creation. Come, eat, and drink. All is prepared for you.

Litany

1: Like Esther, we see injustice happening before our eyes.

2: Like Esther, we know that if we do not act, there will be great suffering.

1: Like Esther, we are stronger than we know.

2: Like Esther, we are braver than we think.

1: Perhaps, like Esther, God has placed us where we are,

2: For just such a time as this.

1: O God, make us, like Esther, speak truth to power,

2: For the sake of those whose lives are shattered by injustice.



Creative Expression

Skit

Characters: Kids 1-4

Kid 1: Did you hear what Brit said in Afterschool yesterday?

Kid 2: No. I've been too busy working on my social studies project.

Kid 3: They said they were going to beat up whoever ratted on them about cheating on the English test last week.

Kid 2: That's not good.

Kid 1: (*to Kid 2*) Aren't you friends with Brit?

Kid 2: Friends is a bit of a stretch. But ever since I helped them pass Math first quarter they've been really nice to me.

Kid 3: That's saying something. Normally they hate the smart kids.

Kid 2: I really don't think they're as bad as everyone says. They have a lot going on in their life.

Kid 1: Well then I have a favor to ask.

Kid 2: What's that?

Kid 1: Um... I'm the one who ratted on them.

Kid 3: Are you nuts? Why did you do that?

Kid 1: Because Mr. Hassan asked me if I knew anything. And I wasn't going to lie to him.

Kid 3: Wait a minute. If you're the one who ratted on Brit and they don't know who did it, what if they start beating up anyone who might have ratted on them?

Kid 2: What do you mean?

Kid 3: I mean there were four of us at the table and we all saw that Brit cheated. Any one of us could have ratted on them. What if, when Brit

can't figure out who did it, they come after all of us?

Kid 1: [Kid 2], you've got to talk to Brit for us. Talk them out of their plan to beat people up.

Kid 3: Yeah! Especially because [Kid 1]'s stupid decision put me, Cielo, and Arnav in danger, too!

Kid 2: You know if I speak up for you guys, Brit might just turn around and beat me up for getting in the way.

Kid 1: I don't think so. I really think Brit respects you.

Kid 3: And anyway, maybe it's just our good luck that they sort of like you right now—this could be the reason!

Kid 2: (*skeptical*) Yeah, I don't think things work that way. (*thinks for a few seconds*) Okay, I'll do it.

Kid 1: You are amazing, do you know that?

Kid 2: Maybe. I guess I'm just in the right place at the right time. And I need to use that to help other people.

Kid 3: Thanks, [Kid 2]. We'll make it up to you. Promise!

Kid 2: You can start by being nicer to Brit. They deserve it.

Kid 1: Whoa. I never thought of that.

Kid 3: We'll do it. I mean, unless this whole thing fails and we all end up getting beat up.

Kid 2: Even then.

Kid 1: Fine. Well, good luck!

Kid 3: You're gonna need it!



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

With God's help, ordinary kids can do God's work of justice and peace.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Pictures of Malala Yousafzai, Greta Thunberg, Thandiwe Abdullah, and Bana Alabed, or any other kid activists/heroes you know about.

Background

The book of Esther is actually a comedy, and probably one that was performed as a play with lots of audience participation. It uses humor to draw out themes of human foibles, danger, "relief and deliverance" (4:14) and how an ordinary girl, an orphan, could become a great hero. Today's passage from the story focuses on how Esther needs to act—even at the risk of her own life—and act now, before time runs out for her people. She makes the decision to do just that and asks her relative, Mordecai, to drum up a bunch of people to fast and pray for her, so that she might have the courage to do what was right.

Set the Scene

Introduce the story by telling the kids that the main character, Esther, was just an ordinary girl. She was an orphan (had no mom or dad) who was raised by her cousin, Mordecai. God used Esther—an ordinary girl—to save her whole people, the Jews, when the King of Persia planned to have them all killed.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Reinforce the brave thing Esther did—going to the king uninvited, which gave him the right to kill her. But she had courage and did it anyway. Ask if the kids have ever had to do anything really brave before. Be open to examples.

Show the kids the pictures of the kid activists/heroes you brought and briefly tell their stories. Make it a point to say that they were just ordinary kids who knew they had to stand up for what was right, even if it wasn't necessarily safe for them. Tell them there are lots and lots of kids out there doing amazing things to make the world a better place. Let the kids know that with God's help, they can be brave and make a difference, too.

Close with a prayer asking God to give us courage to do God's work in the world.

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Candle in a holder
- Candle lighter
- Candle snuffer



Planning Worksheet

Preaching Themes

Kids' Storytime Ideas

Skit or Creative Ideas

Worship Setting

Props for Kids' Storytime or Skit

Hymns

Special Events (Baptism, New Members)

Choral Music/Special Music

Guest Speakers/Announcements



Scripture Readings

Text: Isaiah 42:1-9

42 Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. ²He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; ³a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. ⁴He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his teaching.

⁵Thus says God, the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it: ⁶I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations,⁷ to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. ⁸I am the Lord, that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to idols. ⁹See, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth, I tell you of them.

Secondary Text: Matthew 12:15-21

¹⁵When Jesus became aware of this, he departed. Many crowds followed him, and he cured all of them, ¹⁶and he ordered them not to make him known. ¹⁷This was to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah: ¹⁸“Here is my servant, whom I have chosen, my beloved, with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will

proclaim justice to the Gentiles. ¹⁹He will not wrangle or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets. ²⁰He will not break a bruised reed or quench a smoldering wick until he brings justice to victory. ²¹And in his name the Gentiles will hope.”

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator 1, Narrator 2

Narrator 1: Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his teaching.

Narrator 2: Thus says God, the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it: I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. I am the Lord, that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to idols. See, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth, I tell you of them.



Advent III: Light to the Nations, Isaiah 42:1-9

[illegible]



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: Prophecies function on many levels.

How might Isaiah's prophecy be about us?

Written at the time of the Babylonian exile, Isaiah 42 is a passage that's meant to give God's people a sense of hope and to present the nation of Israel with God's new "servant"—the "chosen" one on whom the Lord's spirit dwells, who shall "bring forth justice," and be "a light to the nations." (42:1,6). But the question is: who exactly is this servant?

At the time, around 539 BC, Isaiah was trying to encourage his reader's to look and think beyond just their nation of Israel to see the new nation of Persia as a friend and the Persian king Cyrus as God's agent. Incredibly, Isaiah even calls Cyrus God's "messiah" (aka "anointed") (Is. 45:1). Perhaps, then, Cyrus is the "servant" in chapter 42. At the same time, Isaiah could be speaking of *the* Messiah to come, Christ Jesus. This is perhaps the most obvious candidate and the one we most often hear this passage applied to every Christmas. Yet still a third candidate is that the servant could be the entire nation of Israel as a whole. This was another of Isaiah's goals, to help God's

people embrace their collective calling to be God's light and witness to all nations. So, who is the servant in Isaiah 42?

Remarkably, there's no need to choose. Prophecies, like scripture itself, do not function at just one level but many. Isaiah may be speaking about Cyrus, Christ Jesus, and the people of God all at the same time. God calls many to serve and many to be a light in this dark world. Consequently, perhaps the more interesting question behind Isaiah 42 is if *we* (God's people today) are the servant too. How does God call us to be the Lord's servants today? How might we bring some measure of justice to the nations now? How will we follow in Christ's footsteps and shine a little light into this dark world?

—Pr. Mattheis Lorimor

Scripture Summary

The prophet writes of one who will be a light to the nations: one to bring hope to all people everywhere.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

L: Jesus is coming into the world!

C: A servant of God, a servant to all humanity.

L: New things God now declares to us.

C: Before they spring forth, we hear of them.

L: Jesus is coming into the world!

C: A servant of God, a servant to all humanity.

Confession and Forgiveness

P: We confess our sins before God and one another.

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: Merciful God,

C: We come before you with contrite hearts, aware of all the ways we have failed to do what you would have us do, and the ways we have insisted on doing what we know does not contribute to our flourishing or that of the world. As we anticipate and celebrate your selfless act of becoming one of us in Jesus Christ, re-center us on your call to empty ourselves as you did, so that we might serve you and all of creation with open, loving hearts, and work diligently for the peace and justice you desire for all that you have made.

P: The One who was and is and is to come hears your confession and declares to you that you are forgiven. Free of the burden of your sin, go forth in gratitude and joy to love and serve. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

L: God of peace,

C: The prophet Isaiah proclaims the coming of your servant, who will be humble, gentle, and unfailing. This is Jesus, who will not be crushed until he has established justice in all the earth. Open our hearts and minds to see him in the faces of our neighbors near and far, that we, like Jesus, might be servants to all. In his holy name we pray. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

Holy God, we offer these gifts out of the abundance you have first given us. Use them according to your will to bear your light to all the world, for the sake of the one who was a light to all nations, Jesus' Christ our savior. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: With humble anticipation of God's promises fulfilled in Jesus Christ, we pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

A brief silence.

L: Holy God, as we await the coming of Jesus, let us also be lights to the nations, proclaiming your healing love, justice, and peace for all people, regardless of their ancestry, location, or religious beliefs. Give us compassion for those who disagree with us, and lead us all to live together in harmony. God of promise,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Let us be lights to your created world, working for justice and restoration of all that you have made, that the astonishing, life-giving beauty of this earth might sustain our grandchildren's children and the generations beyond. God of promise,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Let us be lights to our neighbors, our communities, and the world, that we might work tirelessly for peace, justice, and the flourishing of all people. God of promise,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Let us be lights to those who journey with illness of any kind—physical, emotional, or spiritual—that we might bring your strength, hope, and healing to them, (*especially...*) God of promise,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Let us be lights to all who feel lost, sad, or lonely during this festive season. Inspire us to reach out in love and companionship, and to listen without judgment to those in pain. God of promise,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: Your saints have been lights to us and the world in all times and places. With their light to guide us, lead us in their path, that we might continue the good work of caring for all that you have made. God of promise,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Loving God, we place into your loving arms all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy and grace for all of creation. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

Jesus, both humble servant and sovereign of all, invites you now to this table of life. Come and be fed on the bread and wine which is Jesus' own body and blood, that like him, you might be a light to the nations, proclaiming God's redemptive love to all the earth.

Litany

1: Our God calls us to be servants to one another.

2: Our God calls us to be gentle in our service.

1: Our God calls us to be faithful in our service.

2: Our God calls us to be tireless in our service.

1: Like Jesus, God will help us not to grow faint or be crushed.

2: Like Jesus, God will help us establish justice in all creation.

1: Let us answer God's call to serve one another,

2: Let us follow in the way of Jesus for the sake of the world.



Creative Expression

Skit

Characters: Persons 1-3, Persons 4-6

Props: A lantern

Scene: Persons 1-3 are together peering from the front porch of a cabin in the woods.

Person 1: Do you see them yet?

Person 2: No. They should have been here by now.

Person 3: This was supposed to be a fun trip to the cabin. Now I'm all worried.

Person 1: I hate that it gets dark so early this time of year.

Person 2: What if they don't make it back before we lose the light?

Person 3: It could be dangerous. The wind chills are supposed to be below zero tonight.

Person 1: At least the bears are hibernating.

Person 2: But we've been hearing those coyotes almost every night. Aren't they dangerous?

Person 3: No. Not like the terrain. There's ice out there. And a few places where they could go off cliffs.

Person 1: What a mess. I had such hopes for this weekend.

Person 2: It's not your fault. They're the ones who decided to wander off.

Person 3: You did warn them to be back before dark.

Person 1: I guess. I wish they would have just listened.

Person 2: Wait! I have an idea!

Person 3: What is it?

Person 2: Remember I brought up that high-powered lantern?

Person 1: Oh yeah! Since we don't have electricity, that was going to be our light until bedtime.

Person 2: I'm going to light it now. They'll definitely be able to see it from wherever they are unless they're too far away.

Person 3: Great idea!

(Person 2 goes "inside" and brings out the lit lantern. Persons 1 and 3 act as though it's painfully bright.)

Person 1: Whoa! That could light up a whole stadium.

Person 3: How long till the batteries run out?

Person 2: I have a hand-crank charging station for it, so we can shine it as long as we have the energy to keep it lit. *(holds up the lantern)*

Person 4: *(from offstage)* Hey! Do you see that?

Person 5: Oh thank goodness! That must be the cabin!

Person 6: I was starting to get really worried!
(Persons 4-6 enter)

Person 1: There they are! Woohoo!

Person 4: Thanks for shining that light. We were so lost! We didn't think we were going to make it.

Person 3: We're so glad you did! Let's all go in and warm up.

Person 5: And bask in that glorious light!

Person 6: Anyone else want s'mores?

Person 2: Always!

(all exit)



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

God's light burns in us all.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Candle in a holder
- Candle lighter
- Candle snuffer

Background

The book of Isaiah was written for three distinct time periods. Chapters 1-39 were written about the period when the Northern Kingdom of Israel fell to Assyria. Its message was a warning of exile. Chapters 40-55 were written during the time of exile in Babylon. It was a dark time for Israel and the message was one of waiting and hope. Chapters 56-66 were written after the people had returned from exile, and praised God for God's goodness and faithfulness to God's people.

Isaiah 42 is one of four "servant songs." In these servant songs God promises that an unknown servant (likely the nation of Israel) would come and administer justice to the nations. This is a message of hope for an exiled people, not only that they would be saved, but that they would be exalted to a position to bless all the nations with justice.

Set the Scene

Set the candle in its holder on a stable, flat surface in the midst of the kids. Ask them to listen for the part of the story that talks about light.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Ask the kids what God said about light. (*God wants us to be a light shining in the world.*) Ask one of the older kids to light the candle or light it yourself.

Tell the kids that many of God's people had been taken far from their home, and others had been scattered. They were afraid that their people were going to die out like a candle flame. Ask one of the older kids to extinguish the candle with the snuffer or do it yourself.

Assure the kids that God had other plans. That not only did God want God's people to continue to burn bright, but that their light would bring healing and justice to the world. Ask one of the older kids to re-light the candle or light it yourself.

Ask the kids how they might shine God's light of love and healing into the world. (*being kind, loving, generous, sharing God's love with others, etc.*) Let them know that God's light shines brightly through them just for being who they are.

Close with a prayer asking God for help shining God's light into the world.

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- A lamp, plugged in but off



Planning Worksheet

Preaching Themes

Kids' Storytime Ideas

Skit or Creative Ideas

Worship Setting

Props for Kids' Storytime or Skit

Hymns

Special Events (Baptism, New Members)

Choral Music/Special Music

Guest Speakers/Announcements



Scripture Readings

Text: Matthew 1:18-25

¹⁸Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. ²⁰But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” ²²All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ²³“Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means, “God is with us.” ²⁴When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, ²⁵but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

Secondary Text: Psalm 23:1-4

¹The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.
²He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters;
³he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name’s sake.
⁴Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff— they comfort me.

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator, Angel, Prophet

Narrator: Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said,

Angel: Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.

Narrator: All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

Prophet: Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,

Narrator: ...which means,

Narrator and Angel and Prophet: God is with us.

Narrator: When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her



Advent IV: Jesus as Immanuel, Matthew 1:18-25

A word cloud of biblical terms related to the birth of Jesus. The most prominent words are 'SON OF MARY' and 'GOD'. Other large words include 'Jesus', 'Now', 'Name', 'Before', 'Wife', 'Lord', 'Husband', 'Public', 'Spirit', 'Place', 'Birth', 'Man', 'People', 'Sins', 'Virgin', 'Mother', 'Son', 'Borne', 'Means', 'Through', 'Engaged', 'Disgrace', 'Unwilling', 'Conceive', 'Take', 'Together', 'Planned', 'Found', 'Messiah', 'Angel', 'Dismiss', 'Lived', 'Emmanuel', 'Prophet', 'Conceive', 'Sleep', 'Unwilling', 'Righteous', 'Awoke', 'Man', 'Way', 'David', 'Child', 'Holy', 'Fulfill', 'Righteous', 'Bear', 'Now', 'Public', 'Disgrace', 'Prophet', 'Save', 'Look', 'Name', 'Husband', 'Engaged', 'Child', 'Resolved', 'Place', 'Before', 'Expose', 'Lord', 'Husband', 'Sins', 'Place', 'Sins', 'Place', 'Righteous', 'Unwilling', 'Mary', 'Joseph', 'Dismiss', 'Expose', 'Engaged', 'Sleep', 'Take', 'Planned', 'Found', 'Jesus', 'Together'. The words are arranged in a dense, overlapping manner, with some words appearing multiple times in different sizes and orientations.



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: Whether or not we realize it at any given moment, God is with us. Advent is a time to look for the ways this is true.

It's important to appreciate that verses 22-23 are not part of the angel's speech to Joseph. Instead, the narrative breaks off at verse 22 so the Gospel writer can insert his own interpretation of the significance of the angel's news. In other words, the realization that this child's birth fulfills the ancient prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 (cited in verse 23) and that in Jesus "God is with us" is how Matthew, the Gospel writer, understands this moment in hindsight. Consequently, the narrative break at verses 22 may lead one to wonder: did Joseph himself see this new child's birth as a sign that God was with him?

Presumably the experience of going through with a marriage to a pregnant fiancé was not particularly pleasant in the first century Near East. Likely, Joseph and Mary's first years together were marked by social shaming, shunning, and isolation. Not to mention all the challenges connected with the delivery, the desperate flight to Egypt, and the arrival of strange Persian astrologers later. Did Joseph really feel as if God was "with us" as the two of them battled through all those endless struggles?

Regardless of whether Joseph realized it or not the miracle of the story is that, yes, in that new child named Jesus, God was with him. The Gospel writer's realization that in Jesus God had become Isaiah's promised Immanuel, "God with us," was true for Joseph even if it took some time for someone to connect the dots and voice that truth. And perhaps this is what gives us hope as well. There are all kinds of difficult circumstances and challenging problems we may find ourselves struggling through this Christmas season. And as we fight through those battles we may not always feel our God with us. But the miracle that the narrative break at verse 22 reminds us of is that whether we realize it or not, yes, our God is with us. Sometimes it just takes a little time to see it.

—Pr. Mattheis Lorimor

Scripture Summary

Despite the social shaming, shunning, and isolation that must follow, Joseph trusts God's call to take an out-of-wedlock pregnant woman as his wife.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

- L: We walk in darkness,
C: Our world so often feels like the valley of the shadow of death.
L: But our God is with us.
C: We will take comfort in our Shepherd's care.

Confession and Forgiveness

P: We confess our sins before God and one another.

Pause for silence and reflection.

- P: Merciful God,
C: We come before you with contrite hearts, aware of all the ways we have failed to do what you would have us do, and the ways we have insisted on doing what we know does not contribute to our flourishing or that of the world. As we anticipate and celebrate your selfless act of becoming one of us in Jesus Christ, re-center us on your call to empty ourselves as you did, so that we might serve you and all of creation with open, loving hearts, and work diligently for the peace and justice you desire for all that you have made.
P: The One who was and is and is to come hears your confession and declares to you that you are forgiven. Free of the burden of your sin, go forth in gratitude and joy to love and serve. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

- L: God of all,
C: It is not always easy to follow in your way. As you called Joseph to risk taking Mary as his wife, so you call us to risk pushing back against social norms that diminish the flourishing of our neighbors. Give us good courage to speak your love into an often hostile world, for the sake of all creation. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

Holy God, you call us to give more than we think we can, and then strengthen us to do what you have asked of us. With faith in your unfailing provision, we return to you these gifts, that they might bring life-transforming love to this community and our neighbors in need. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Prayers of the Church

- L: With humble anticipation of God's promises fulfilled in Jesus Christ, we pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

A brief silence.

- L: Holy God, in Jesus you are "God with us." Help us to see and know you in the faces and lives of every single person on earth—for they, too, bear your presence. Help us to trust that each of us has value, purpose, and a direct call from you into the work of your reign of love and peace. God of promise,

- C: We lift our prayers to you.**

(continued)



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: God, you are with us—Immanuel—in all that you have made. Help us to treat our fragile earth and all its natural resources with the same love with which we would treat you. God of promise,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: God, you are with us—Immanuel—in our neighbors, regardless of their origins, abilities, immigration status, gender identity, or beliefs. Help us to be examples of your universal love and justice in all that we do and say. God of promise,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: God, you are with us—Immanuel—in our struggles with physical, emotional, and spiritual illness, injury, or pain. Hold us in our challenges, and bring healing and hope to all those we name out loud and in our hearts (*especially...*) God of promise,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: God, you are with us—Immanuel—in our joyful anticipation of Christmas. Help us wait patiently for the gift to come, rather than rushing to fulfillment, that we might fully experience the wonder of this Advent season. God of promise,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: God, you are with us—Immanuel—in the lives of all the saints who have come before us. Keep us ever grateful for all that they accomplished in your name, known and unknown, for the sake of the world. God of promise,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Loving God, we place into your loving arms all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy and grace for all of creation. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

The one who is coming into the world, our savior Jesus Christ, welcomes you with open arms to this table, where bread and wine become life abundant. Come and dine, for all is ready.

Litany

1: What must Joseph have thought?

2: What would we think?

1: What if God called us to some task that made absolutely no sense to us?

2: What if God called us to go against every societal convention for the sake of a greater good?

1: Would we trust God to protect us if we risked following God's call?

2: Or would we shrink back in self-protective fear?

1: O God, make us like Joseph, that we would trust your call.

2: O God, walk with us as we work for your justice and peace.



Creative Expression

Skit

Characters: Person 1, Person 2

Props: Laptop

Scene: Person 2 is onstage working at a laptop.

Person 1: (*entering rapidly, excitedly*) I have a job for you.

Person 2: (*startled*) Whoa! Where did you come from?

Person 1: Sorry I scared you. But I have a really important job for you.

Person 2: Who are you again?

Person 1: [Person 1], from Human Resources.

Person 2: Oh. Hey there. So what's the job?

Person 1: I want you to promote Diante to be your personal assistant.

Person 2: Um... what?

Person 1: Did I stutter? It's really a simple request. Hire Diante as your personal assistant.

Person 2: Ok. But...

Person 1: But?

Person 2: Look. Diante is totally qualified. Maybe overqualified. Maybe more qualified than I am. And that's great. I would love to work with them. But there's the matter of that little controversy.

Person 1: Oh that? We took care of that already. The allegations were fake. Diante was cleared of any suspicion of wrongdoing. They were singled out because their teammates were jealous of their abilities.

Person 2: Right. But if I promote them over their teammates, that could turn out pretty badly for me.

Person 1: How so?

Person 2: I have a reputation around here. When I'm in charge of things, they get done, and done well.

Person 1: Duh. That's why I chose you to do this.

Person 2: Yeah, but if the rest of the team thinks I'm promoting Diante in some kind of retaliation for their mistreatment of them, they might refuse to work for me. It could affect my success rate. Make me look bad. Even cost me my job.

Person 1: Don't you trust the boss?

Person 2: What? Why would you even say that? Of course it do!

Person 1: Well, it was their idea.

Person 2: Oh. Um... that puts a different spin on things, doesn't it.

Person 1: So you'll do it?

Person 2: There really isn't another way?

Person 1: Nope. The boss has big plans for Diante. Bigger than you can possibly imagine. But you have a role to play.

Person 2: It's a risk.

Person 1: But?

Person 2: But I trust the boss. I'll do it. Do me a favor and send Diante into my office on your way out.

Person 1: Done. Thanks [Person 2]. You will not regret this. What the boss has in mind is going to fundamentally change the nature of this company for the better.

Person 2: Like I said. I trust them. So let's get this thing started.



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

Jesus is God with us.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- A lamp, plugged in but not on

Background

When Matthew was written the early Christians were still working out whether they would behave more like Jews or more like Gentiles. Matthew speaks to both perspectives, pointing out that what's important is not so much how people behave, but how God acts in the world.

God sent God's son, Jesus, into the world to be God in the world. Jesus bridged the gap between God and humanity so that nothing could separate us from the presence of God.

Set the Scene

Set the lamp in the middle of the kids and make sure it is plugged in but turned off. Tell them you'll explain the lamp after you read the story.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Ask the kids what they think it means that Jesus was "God with us." Be open to their ideas (kids are amazing theologians).

Ask the kids if they can see electricity (*no*). But is there electricity all around us? You bet. Not even just in wires. It's in the air. It's everywhere. But we can't see it.

Turn the light on. Now can we see the electricity? Yep. It's taken a form that we can see and experience. (This isn't strictly true from a physics perspective, and you could get way off base theologically. If you have lots of science-minded folks in your congregation, assure them that you know this fact, but you're just trying to give the kids a concrete image.)

God is like electricity—everywhere all the time, even if we can't see God. In Jesus, God was right there for all to see: God was "embodied"—actually a human being. Not just God inside a human being, but God *as* a human being. Assure the kids it's a tough concept (even for adults) but that maybe the lamp analogy will help them remember that Jesus is God with us.

Close with a prayer thanking God for coming to be with us in Jesus.

Christmas Eve's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Pictures of kings and queens and their opulent lifestyles (optional)

Christmas Day's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Your family tree (keep it simple)



Planning Worksheet

Preaching Themes

Kids' Storytime Ideas

Skit or Creative Ideas

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Props for Kids' Storytime or Skit

Hymns

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Guest Speakers/Announcements



Scripture Readings

Text: Luke 2:1-14, [15-20]

2In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. ²This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. ⁵He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. ⁶While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

⁸In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹²This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” ¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, ¹⁴“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

[¹⁵When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” ¹⁶So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. ¹⁷When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; ¹⁸and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.]

Pronunciation Guide

Quirinius: kwi-RIN-ee-uhs

Secondary Text: Psalm 96:10-13

¹⁰Say among the nations, “The Lord is king! The world is firmly established; it shall never be moved. He will judge the peoples with equity.”

¹¹Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it;

¹²let the field exult, and everything in it. Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy

¹³before the Lord; for he is coming, for he is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with his truth.



Scripture Readings

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator, Angel, Angel Choir (multiple voices), Shepherd

Narrator: In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them,

Angel: Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.

Narrator: And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

Angel Choir: Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!

[**Narrator:** When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another,

Shepherd: Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.

Narrator: So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.]



Christmas Eve: The Birth of Jesus, Luke 2:1-14, [15-20]

[illegible]



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: Jesus' birth spawned spontaneous community. We too can work to build community, even in a world that fights to keep us apart.

To consolidate and count his people, Emperor Augustus forced all his subjects to leave their current homes to return to the places they'd come from. It was a clumsy way to make his people gather and was simply a way to collect more taxes. In doing so, he displaced many who had moved on and formed communities elsewhere. Joseph and his new wife, Mary, were among those that were far from home when time came for Mary to deliver her son. Even on the eve of delivery, they found no place to call home, as the local hospitality industry was maxed out due to the census.

But an interesting thing happened once the baby king was born. Slowly, quietly, the community began to wake up to the miraculous event, and new community spontaneously formed. Angels appeared in the fields. Shepherds flocked to see the baby. A little drummer boy played for him while the ox and lamb kept time (j/k). Community started to form around this new family brought together not by the government or some other artificial mechanism. Community gathered around the desire to be together to support this little man and his family. It's likely Jesus and his family were comfortably integrated into the town at

Bethlehem, as they stayed two years, presumably sheltered, fed, and working.

Community seems harder than ever to form these days. While social media originally promised to bring us together, in many ways it has isolated us even more. (No hate to social media; many meaningful and important connections have been made because of it.) Texting has replaced talking on the phone, which itself replaced talking face-to-face. The exalting of the nuclear family has greatly reduced multigenerational cohabitation, disconnecting younger people from their wiser elders.

Indeed, we can point fingers in multiple directions trying to dig up the reason meaningful community is scarce. It might be more helpful to look forward. Explore with your congregation how people can find a new way of being together. Consider what community will look like in 5 years, 10 years, even 50 years. Remember, community will look like what we build it to be.

—Dr. Kimberly Leetch

Scripture Summary

In a lowly stable apart from the community, baby Jesus was born. His arrival brought together people from all around; even the heavens opened to gather for the celebration of the new king's birth.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

L: Rejoice and be glad!
C: The savior is born!
L: Rejoice and be glad!
C: The savior is born!
L: Rejoice and be glad!
C: The savior is born!

Confession and Forgiveness

P: We confess our sins before God and one another.

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: Merciful God,

C: We come before you with contrite hearts, aware of all the ways we have failed to do what you would have us do, and the ways we have insisted on doing what we know does not contribute to our flourishing or that of the world. As we anticipate and celebrate your selfless act of becoming one of us in Jesus Christ, re-center us on your call to empty ourselves as you did, so that we might serve you and all of creation with open, loving hearts, and work diligently for the peace and justice you desire for all that you have made.

P: The One who was and is and is to come hears your confession and declares to you that you are forgiven. Free of the burden of your sin, go forth in gratitude and joy to love and serve. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

L: Mother God,
C: With joy we receive your greatest gift, our savior, Jesus Christ, whose life and death utterly transformed creation. With the angels we sing praises to you and to him. May our joy spill over into all the world, tonight and always. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

Holy God, you have withheld nothing from us, not even your only son, Jesus Christ, born to us this day. In joy we offer these gifts and tithes to your continuing redemptive work in creation. Bless and use them according to your loving will. In the name of the one who came to us as a helpless child, Jesus' Christ our savior. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: With humble anticipation of God's promises fulfilled in Jesus Christ, we pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

A brief silence.

L: Loving God, on this holy night, move us deep within our spirits at the knowledge of all you gave up to live among us in the person of Jesus. Make us as trusting as newborns, filled with the potential for love and compassion for all that you have made. God of promise,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: On this holy night, all of creation sings for joy—mountains and valleys, rivers and oceans, plants and trees, fish and birds, and all animals. Join our voice to their chorus that we might always see them as our siblings in you. God of promise,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: On this holy night, we pause to take in your promise to redeem all of creation through Jesus. Help us to see that we—all the world's people—are your beloved children, redeemed without exception, today and always. God of promise,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: On this holy night, we remember those for whom the holidays are a source of pain, those who are journeying with illness or injury that prevents them from celebrating with us, and all who need your hope and healing, (*especially...*) God of promise,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: On this holy night, we remember your humble birth. Help us to see the dignity of every single child on earth, and know that they are—we are—loved by you. God of promise,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: On this holy night, we join our voices with the saints of every time and place from the beginning of time until now. Make our songs of joy ring out into this often sad and broken world, that all might be comforted by the beauty of your heavenly music. God of promise,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Loving God, we place into your loving arms all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy and grace for all of creation. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

Our loving, mothering God invites you to the table of her beloved son, Jesus Christ, who defeated sin and death and redeemed all of creation. As we celebrate his incarnation among us, let us feast on the bread and wine which is his presence with us still. Come, for all is prepared.

Litany

1: Shout out loud to the whole world:

2: Our God reigns!

1: Creation is holy!

2: God's justice is sure!

1: God will judge with equity!

2: Shout out loud to the whole world:

1: The earth is rejoicing!

2: The sea is roaring!

1: The fields are exulting!

2: The trees are singing for joy!

1: Shout out loud to the whole world:

2: Our God reigns!



Creative Expression

Skit

Characters: Kids 1-6, additional kids (non-speaking)

Props: Small space heater, basket of food, a full Christmas stocking, a small pre-lit Christmas tree, a wrapped present.

Scene: Kid 1 is onstage alone.

Kid 1: Ugh. This Christmas is the worst. We had to move across the whole country for my mom's job. I don't have any friends. I hate the weather here. And our rental house isn't even ready yet, so we have to stay in this crummy hotel with no heat in our room. On Christmas. Ugh.

(door knocks)

Kid 1: *(mimes opening the door)* Can I help you?

Kid 2: *(entering)* Hi! I'm [Kid 2]. My dad said you needed this space heater.

Kid 1: Who's your dad?

Kid 2: The hotel manager. Can I plug it in for you?

Kid 1: Uh, okay. Over there is fine I guess.

Kid 2: It's nice to meet you. I'm guessing we'll be in the same class once Christmas break is over.

Kid 1: Really? What can you tell me about the school?

(door knocks)

Kid 1: Hold that thought. *(answer the door)* Can I help you?

Kid 3: *(enters with a big basket full of food)* Hi! I'm [Kid 3]. My grandma said you might want some good holiday treats to eat.

Kid 1: Your... who are you?

Kid 3: We live on the fourth floor right now. My grandma isn't well enough to work and we got evicted from our apartment.

Kid 1: Oh, man. That's awful.

Kid 3: It's not so bad. We know it's only temporary. And it's kind of fun to live in a hotel.

Kid 1: Even on Christmas?

Kid 3: My grandma says Christmas happens wherever you are.

Kid 1: That's— *(door knocks)* Hold that thought. *(opens door)* Can I help you?

Kid 4: *(enters holding pre-lit Christmas tree)* Hey there! My name is [Kid 4]. My mom told me to bring this to you.

Kid 1: Who's your mom?

Kid 4: She's a teacher at our school. She heard you'd moved in and said you might want this.

Kid 1: Wow! That's... that's amazing. Um... put it over in that corner. *(door knocks)* Are you kidding? *(opens door)* Can I help you?

Kid 5: Are you [Kid 1]?

Kid 1: Yes.

Kid 5: Great! I'm [Kid 5]. My uncle said to bring this to you. *(hands Kid 1 and stocking full of stuff)*

Kid 1: How does... how do any of you people know who I am or that I'm even here?

Kid 5: Oh, word gets around in a small town. My uncle owns the variety store on Main Street and thought you should get a proper Christmas welcome. So here! *(hands present to Kid 1)*

(continued)



Creative Expression

Skit, continued

Kid 1: (*taking gift*) I... I don't know what to say.

Kid 2: Say "Let's have a party!"

Kid 1: I... what?

Kid 3: Yeah, we took the liberty of inviting a bunch of our friends over to meet you. (*door knocks*)
Oh! There they are now!

Kid 1: (*opening the door*) Can I help you?

Kid 6: (*holding a wrapped present*) We're here for the Christmas party!

Kid 1: Uh. Okay. Come on in, I guess.

(*Multiple kids enter with various baskets, gifts, objects, etc.*)

Kid 6: I heard you're a pretty awesome kid. So we all just wanted to come and make sure you felt welcome.

Kid 1: I do. I really, really do. This might be the best Christmas I've ever had.

Kid 6: Awesome! I can't wait to get to know you better and then tell the other kids about you!

Kid 3: Merry Christmas, everyone!

All: Merry Christmas!



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

Jesus came to us as a poor baby in a manger. Yet he was the ruler of all creation.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Pictures of kings and queens and their opulent lifestyles (optional)

Background

Jesus was born at a time when God's people were oppressed under the rule of Rome. Mary and Joseph were not wealthy, and when it came time for Mary to give birth, there was no place for them except the stable, which was probably a cave. Jesus' first bed was an animal's feeding trough. It seemed as though all worldly circumstances were against Jesus. Yet here he was, the Word made flesh, the ruler of all creation. From the very beginning, God made it clear that Jesus would turn everything on its head.

Set the Scene

Ask the kids who Jesus is. Some may remember last Sunday's Kids' Storytime when you explained that Jesus is God. Talk about how Jesus was God's promised ruler, like a king or a queen. Ask them to think about that while you read the story.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Talk about what a ruler—a king or a queen—is like. (*lots of money, power, people praising them, etc.*) Show images of rulers and their opulent lifestyles if you like. Ask the kids what they think the birth of a new baby ruler would be like. (*a beautiful crib, lots of presents, nice clothes, lots of people celebrating, etc.*)

Ask the kids if that's what Jesus' birth was like. (*No*) What was it like? (*born in a barn, a manger for a bed, no friends and family around, no presents, surrounded by animals*) Ask: But wasn't Jesus a ruler? Why do the kids think his birth was the way it was? Affirm their ideas.

Tell the kids that this was just the beginning of Jesus' story. That over and over again, the things Jesus did and said surprised everyone. Jesus' love changed everything. Jesus' poor birth said that Jesus would be a different kind of ruler. Not the kind that has money and power and wages wars and is a big deal. Jesus' reign would be about peace. It would be about taking care of people who were poor and sick, people who were treated badly by others, all the people who most folks believed didn't matter. Jesus is not what people expect.

Close with a prayer thanking God for the surprising birth of Jesus, the poor baby who was the ruler of all creation.

Christmas Day's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Your family tree (keep it simple)



Planning Worksheet

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Skit or Creative Ideas

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Guest Speakers/Announcements



Scripture Readings

Text: Luke 2:8-20

⁸In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹²This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” ¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, ¹⁴“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!” ¹⁵When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” ¹⁶So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. ¹⁷When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; ¹⁸and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Secondary Text: Psalm 95:6-7

⁶O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!
⁷For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. O that today you would listen to his voice!

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator, Angel, Angel Choir (multiple voices), Shepherd

Narrator: In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them,

Angel: Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.

Narrator: And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

Angel Choir: Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!

Narrator: When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another,

Shepherd: Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.

Narrator: So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.



Tag Cloud





Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: Everyone stopped what they were doing to visit with the baby king and his family. Jesus-focused mindfulness can be an incredible gift to give oneself.

If you have Christmas morning services, it's likely that worshipers on this day are exhausted from the months-long onslaught of Christmas preparations, and distracted by the dinner they still have to make, or the family they still must visit, or the gifts they haven't yet unwrapped, or the gifts they received but need to return. While the winter solstice is literally the shortest day of the year, encouraging us to slow down and rest, we just can't seem to stop running.

On the day Jesus was born, the angels were busy doing angel business. Shepherds were tending their flocks. The "all who heard it (v. 18)" were busy tending to the baby and his family. Everyone was busy. But then they all stopped what they were doing to exist in the moment and celebrate the miracle that he was. The angels came down from wherever angels hang to sing to the shepherds. The shepherds left their flocks to visit with the new baby. And the people with the family stopped to listen to the shepherds' story. Everyone was fully present, if only for a moment.

Our world has gotten so used to moving fast that we often forget to stop and exist in the moment. Anxiety,

which is on the rise, is literally exacerbated by regretting things past and worrying about things to come. It is extremely difficult to worry when we're fully present. Redirecting our attention to the present is peaceful and empowering.

Look into a few mindfulness practices you think your parishioners would respond to. Gratitude is an easy way to practice mindfulness. Worship itself is designed to offer a moment of mindfulness, where people can focus their attention solely on Jesus for one small hour a week. Consider putting a piece of artwork front and center for worshipers to muse over throughout the service. Better yet, put up a blank canvas and washable paint and invite worshipers to paint something they are grateful for. Afterwards, point out that they were mindful while they painted. Let this day offer a moment to stop what you're doing and just be.

—Dr. Kimberly Leetch

Scripture Summary

On the day Jesus was born, angels came to earth to proclaim the good news to the shepherds. The shepherds left their flocks to go see the baby. Everyone stopped what they were doing to celebrate the moment.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

- L: Come, let us worship our God!
- C: We are God's people and the sheep of God's pasture.**
- L: O that today you would listen to God's voice.
- C: We hear and rejoice! Praise God!**

Confession and Forgiveness

P: We confess our sins before God and one another.

Pause for silence and reflection.

- P: Merciful God,
- C: We come before you with contrite hearts, aware of all the ways we have failed to do what you would have us do, and the ways we have insisted on doing what we know does not contribute to our flourishing or that of the world. As we anticipate and celebrate your selfless act of becoming one of us in Jesus Christ, re-center us on your call to empty ourselves as you did, so that we might serve you and all of creation with open, loving hearts, and work diligently for the peace and justice you desire for all that you have made.**
- P: The One who was and is and is to come hears your confession and declares to you that you are forgiven. Free of the burden of your sin, go forth in gratitude and joy to love and serve. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

- L: God with us,
- C: In your birth the Word became flesh and lived among us, full of grace and truth. Let us never cease to see you still living among us in the faces of our neighbors, in the beauty of creation, in all that is good in the world. We lift our praise and thanksgiving to you for your promises fulfilled this day and always. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.**

Offertory Prayer

Holy God, with the shepherds we rejoice at your generous gift of Christ Jesus, and we rejoice in all the wondrous abundance you give us each day. We now bring to you these, our gifts, that you might multiply them for use in proclaiming your life-giving love through our ministries. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Prayers of the Church

- L: With humble anticipation of God's promises fulfilled in Jesus Christ, we pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

A brief silence.

- L: Holy God, with the shepherds we run to the manger in anticipation and joy. Gladden our hearts as we celebrate your greatest gift to us, Jesus Christ. God of promise,

- C: We lift our prayers to you.**

(continued)



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church, continued

L: Make us to care for your creation as a shepherd cares for her sheep. Help us protect and preserve our beautiful world for the sake of Jesus Christ. God of promise,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Make our leaders to care for those they serve as a shepherd cares for his sheep. Help us support our elected and appointed officials in their work of bringing flourishing to all people for the sake of Jesus Christ. God of promise,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Make our medical professionals to care for those who suffer in body, mind, or spirit as a shepherd cares for her sheep. Help us support all who labor in the field of healing, and provide love, service, compassion and hope to those who are facing challenges—known and unknown (*especially...*) God of promise,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Be with all those for whom the holidays bring sorrow, those who are alone or grieving, those for whom what should be a joyful time is, in fact, a painful time. Help us to know how to open a space for those who are struggling right now. God of promise,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: We have been lovingly shepherded by all the saints, living and departed, and brought into a loving relationship with you as we have followed their path. Help us, in turn, to shepherd others in your beloved community. God of promise,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Loving God, we place into your loving arms all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy and grace for all of creation. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

As the shepherds ran to the manger, proclaiming all they had heard and seen, you are invited to hasten to the feast of life at this holy table, where Jesus meets us as he did the shepherds, and where he offers his own body and blood for the transformation of creation. Come with your beloved siblings in Christ!

Litany

- 1: We are standing in the fields, so to speak,
- 2: **Going about our daily work, as one does,**
- 1: Trying not to think about the state of the world,
- 2: **Keeping our heads down, ourselves out of trouble.**
- 1: Then lo and behold: An angel!
- 2: **A strident call to rejoice and be glad!**
- 1: A command to “go and see” the new thing God is doing in the world.
- 2: **An awe-inspiring chorus of praise.**
- 1: Let us run to the manger together.
- 2: **Let us see this thing that God has done.**
- 1: Let us rejoice in God’s boundless love.
- 2: **Let us praise God for God’s unfathomable grace.**



Creative Expression

Reenactment

For today's worship service, invite members of the congregation to dress up as the different characters in the story. As the Gospel is read, have them act out what is going on in the story.

Congregational Art

Supplies needed:

- Mural paper
- Drawing paper, cut into the shape of presents.
- Markers or crayons
- Masking tape or other adhesive

Before worship

- Draw the manger scene on mural paper and mount it the worship space where it can be accessed.
- As people enter the worship space, offer them a gift-shaped piece of paper and coloring implements and encourage them to write or draw something they want to offer the world for the sake of Jesus.

During Creative Expression

- While singing a Christmas hymn, invite people to bring their gifts to the manger and tape them around the image.
- Offer a prayer for gratitude to God for the gift of Jesus, and for a willingness to carry out our offered acts of love for the world.



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

Jesus is for all of us!

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin

Background

The first people to receive the announcement of Jesus' birth were shepherds. Not rulers, not members of high society. Regular old hard-working shepherds, who were among the lowest in society. The surprising circumstances of Jesus' birth as a poor baby in a stable continue on as the most unlikely people were the first on the scene. And they heard about it from a choir of angels to boot!

No matter who we are or where we come from, the good news of Jesus' birth is for all of us. We can sing with the angels and run to the stable with the shepherds.

Set the Scene

Ask the kids if they got really good news, who would be the first person they would tell. Take a couple of suggestions. Have them think about that question while you read the story.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Ask the kids: What was the really good news in this story? (*Jesus is born!*) Who were the first people the angels told (*the shepherds*)? Why do they think the angels told the shepherds first? Were they the richest people? (*No*) Were they the most important people? (*No*) Did they have the power to make a big announcement to the whole world? (*No*) So why on earth would God want the shepherds to know about Jesus first?

Remind the kids (from the previous night's Kids' Storytime) that everything about Jesus was surprising. Jesus came as a poor baby even though he was a ruler, because he would be a ruler of peace and love for all the people. This is another example of how Jesus is so surprising. The first people to hear about Jesus' birth were also poor and unimportant. Why? Because Jesus is for everyone!

Tell the kids it's their turn to be the angels sharing the message that Jesus is born—a message for everyone! Ask them to go out into the congregation and choose someone they might not know and tell that person “Jesus is born for you!” Then ask the people who are told by the kids to turn and tell the person next to them, “Jesus is born for you!” until everyone receives the angel's message.

Close with a prayer thanking God for sending Jesus to each and every one of us.

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Your family tree (keep it simple)



Planning Worksheet

Preaching Themes

Kids' Storytime Ideas

Skit or Creative Ideas

Worship Setting

Props for Kids' Storytime or Skit

Hymns

Special Events (Baptism, New Members)

Choral Music/Special Music

Guest Speakers/Announcements



Scripture Readings

Text: Matthew 1:1-17

1 An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham. ²Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, ³and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Aram, ⁴and Aram the father of Aminadab, and Aminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, ⁵and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, ⁶and Jesse the father of King David. And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, ⁷and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph, ⁸and Asaph the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah, ⁹and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, ¹⁰and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos, and Amos the father of Josiah, ¹¹and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon. ¹²And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Salathiel, and Salathiel the father of Zerubbabel, ¹³and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, ¹⁴and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud, ¹⁵and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, ¹⁶and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah. ¹⁷So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David to the deportation to Babylon, fourteen generations; and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah, fourteen generations.

Pronunciation Guide

Perez: PEE-res
Zerah: ZAIR-uh
Tamar: TAY-mahr
Hezron: HEHZ-ruhn
Aram: AY-ruhm
Aminadab: uh-MIN-uh-dab
Nahshon: NAH-shon
Salmon: SAL-muhn
Boaz: BOH-az
Rahab: RAY-hab
Uriah: yoo-RI -uh
Rehoboam: ree'huh-BOH-uhm
Abijah: ah-BI-juh
Asaph: AY-saf
Jehoshaphat: juh-HOSH-uh-fat
Joram: JOH-ram
Uzziah: uhz-ZI -uh
Jothan: JOH-thun
Ahaz: AY-haz
Hezekiah: hez'uh-KI-uh
Manasseh: ma-NAS-uh
Jechoniah: jek-oh-NY-uh
Salathiel: sah-LA-thee-el
Zerubbabel: zee-RUB-uh-buhl
Abiud: uh-BI -huhd
Eliakim: ee-LI-uh-kim
Azor: AY-sahr
Zadok: ZAY-dok
Achim: AY-kim
Eliud: ee-LI-uhd
Eleazar: el'ee-AY-zuhr
Matthan: MATH-uhn



Scripture Readings

Secondary Text: Psalm 132:11-12

¹¹The Lord swore to David a sure oath from which he will not turn back: "One of the sons of your body I will set on your throne.

¹²If your sons keep my covenant and my decrees that I shall teach them, their sons also, forevermore, shall sit on your throne."

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator 1, Narrator 2

Narrator 1: An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

Narrator 2: Abraham was the father of Isaac,

Narrator 1: and Isaac the father of Jacob,

Narrator 2: and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,

Narrator 1: and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar,

Narrator 2: and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Aram, and Aram the father of Aminadab, and Aminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab,

Narrator 1: and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth,

Narrator 2: and Obed the father of Jesse,

Narrator 1: and Jesse the father of King David.

Narrator 2: And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah,

Narrator 1: and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph, and Asaph the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah, and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos, and Amos the father of Josiah, and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

Narrator 2: And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Salathiel, and Salathiel the father of Zerubbabel, and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud, and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob,

Narrator 1: and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah.

Narrator 2: So all the generations from Abraham to David are

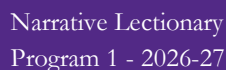
Narrator 1: fourteen generations;

Narrator 2: and from David to the deportation to Babylon,

Narrator 1: fourteen generations;

Narrator 2: and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah,

Narrator 1: fourteen generations.



The Genealogy of Jesus, Matthew 1:1-17

[illegible]



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: While what God did in Jesus was radical and new, it is yet one more chapter in God's consistent story of love for creation.

One of the earliest challenges faced by followers of Jesus was negotiating their relationship with established Jewish communities and their practices. Jesus himself was Jewish and regarded as a rabbi (teacher) by his followers, themselves all Jewish. The ministry of the apostles wrestled with both the rejection of Jesus as the Messiah by the vast majority of the practitioners of Judaism and the rapid conversion of non-Jews to the Jesus movement. We see these debates throughout scripture as Peter, Paul, and others discern whether practices like circumcision and dietary laws are a part of what it means to follow Jesus.

These challenges point us to the truth that our lives of faith are never lived in a vacuum. What God did for us in Jesus did break into history, yes, but as a chapter in a story God has been telling since the foundation of creation was laid. Jesus's genealogy is a stark

reminder that as much as the incarnation of God is radical and new, it is set within a family tree because he is also yet one more chapter in a story of God's consistent mercy and love for creation.

Christmas is a time in which we are confronted with both where we are currently in our story and hope for something new. Holiday celebrations can bring challenges with family, confrontations with loneliness or isolation, and a general pondering of life as we prepare to pass from one calendar year to the next. Here you have the opportunity to hold out the promise of what is new in the midst of what has been. Jesus shows us both who God has always been and yet how God is still able to surprise us.

—Rev. Dr. Miles Hopgood

Scripture Summary

Matthew provides a genealogy of Jesus, filled with noted notables and some less than reputable characters.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

L: The promise is sure.

C: Our God, in Christ Jesus, rules over us.

L: The reign of Christ is one of love and justice.

C: We will follow in the way of Jesus!

Confession and Forgiveness

P: We confess our sins before God and one another.

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: Merciful God,

C: We come before you with contrite hearts, aware of all the ways we have failed to do what you would have us do, and the ways we have insisted on doing what we know does not contribute to our flourishing or that of the world. As we anticipate and celebrate your selfless act of becoming one of us in Jesus Christ, re-center us on your call to empty ourselves as you did, so that we might serve you and all of creation with open, loving hearts, and work diligently for the peace and justice you desire for all that you have made.

P: The One who was and is and is to come hears your confession and declares to you that you are forgiven. Free of the burden of your sin, go forth in gratitude and joy to love and serve. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

L: Loving God,

C: We are all a part of your sacred family, no matter where we trace our earthly lineage to. We are all, without exception, your children, worthy of your grace and forgiveness, worthy of life abundantly. Help us to see all of creation as our treasured siblings and act in the kind of selfless love that is a reflection of your own towards us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

Holy God, we offer these gifts from what you have first given us, that they might be used for your good work of peace and justice for all of your beloved children—all people in all the world, and all of the beautiful and fragile creation that sustains us. Bless our gifts for the sake of our brother, Jesus Christ. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: With humble anticipation of God's promises fulfilled in Jesus Christ, we pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

A brief silence.

L: Holy God, Jesus was a living, breathing human being with ancestors both lofty and humble. Help us as living breathing human beings with various ancestry to follow in his way of peace and love, that we might see every single human being as your beloved child. God of promise,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: As St. Francis proclaimed, all of creation is our sibling—sun, moon, wind, air, water, fire, animals, plants, and the earth itself. Help us treat the natural world as we would our most beloved family member. God of promise,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: We are all members of Jesus' family, regardless of any barrier we might try to erect between ourselves and others. Help us to see our siblings around the world as our equals, and love them as you do. God of promise,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: So many of our siblings suffer illness of many kinds, or are recovering from injury, surgery, addiction, or loss (*especially...*) Enfold all your beloved children into a community of mutual care that all might be brought into well-being and wholeness. God of promise,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Remind us that our particular ancestry or family tree does not make us who we are in your eyes, O God. Help us to embrace those aspects of our genealogy that are life-giving, and to let go of any family systems that diminish our lives. God of promise,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: Our family tree includes a multitude of saints from all times and places, whose lives of faith and sacrifice have served as examples to us. May we celebrate them by following their example. God of promise,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Loving God, we place into your loving arms all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy and grace for all of creation. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

Jesus, our brother, invites you now to this holy table, where he meets you in love and joy, and offers his body and blood for the forgiveness of sin. All of God's beloved children, the whole human family and all of creation, are welcome into loving relationship with Jesus at this table and beyond. Come and remember who you are and whose you are, and be strengthened for the work ahead.



Liturgy and Creative Expression

Litany

- 1: Do we put too much stock in our pedigrees?
- 2: **Do we see our ancestry as making us superior?**
- 1: My friends, we are all equal in the eyes of God,
- 2: **Beloved children, no matter our heritage.**
- 1: And look! Jesus' own ancestry is full of flawed people,
- 2: **And those we might judge as inferior:**
- 1: A prostitute, women from other nations,
- 2: **An adulterer and murderer,**
- 1: Schemers and thieves,
- 2: **And the worshippers of other gods.**
- 1: If these are the forebears of Jesus,
- 2: **How can we judge anyone based on their backgrounds?**
- 1: Our God is the God of all people.
- 2: **We are all the image of God.**

Creative Expression

Skit

Characters: Persons 1-3

Props: A very complex and large family tree

Person 1: What do you have there, [Person 2]?

Person 2: A family tree. I started it years ago, but I keep adding to it.

Person 3: How far back does it go?

Person 2: Eleven generations. Back to family living all over the world.

Person 1: (*looking at the tree*) Some of your family came to the U.S. before the Revolutionary War!

Person 3: But look here (*points to another place*)! This woman didn't come here until 1944!

Person 2: Yep. One of my grandmas immigrated here when she was 20.

Person 1: This is so cool. It kind of tells a story.

Person 2: It does! And see (*points*) it's still going. My niece just had a baby two weeks ago.

Person 3: Looking at this really makes me think about how we're all part of one long story. I mean, think about it. Every single one of these names is a person!

Person 2: I know, right? Like, what was my grandma feeling when she left her home overseas and came to a brand new place to live?

Person 1: And what kind of story will that new baby have? Honestly... it all sort of makes me feel small.

Person 3: I get that. But also, isn't it amazing to think about how we're all connected? Everything we do continues a story that goes way way back—way before we can even find records.

Person 2: Yeah. It doesn't make me feel small. It makes me feel important. Part of something so much bigger than me.

Person 3: And it makes me think about how everyone we meet is part of this story whether they're on this actual family tree or not.

Person 1: That is true. I think I'm going to go make my own family tree and wonder about all the people who've made me who I am.

Person 3: Great idea! Me, too!



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

Jesus had a family just like we do.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Your family tree (keep it simple)

Background

Genealogy was very important to the Jewish people. Matthew includes the genealogy of Jesus not only to firmly establish Jesus' Jewishness, but also to show a clear line of descent from King David, from whom God's messiah was destined to come. Theologically, it's also worth noting that this genealogy established Jesus' humanness. He was God, yes, but also fully embodied as a particular human being in a particular place and time.

Set the Scene

Ask the kids if any of them has ever been told they look like one of their grandparents or someone else in their family. Have they ever seen pictures of great-grandparents or even people further back? What about the way they act? Has anyone ever told them they have a certain expression or mannerism or personality that is like one of their ancestors? Have them think about this while you read the story.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Talk about how for the Jewish people (Jesus was Jewish) it was very important to know their family tree. Have any of the kids ever made a family tree? Show them yours and point out some of the people on it. Tell them that knowing who you came from helps you understand who you are.

Ask if the kids have ever thought about Jesus having a family. Who were his parents? (*Mary and Joseph*) Did they know any of the other names in the story?

Have they ever wondered about what Jesus was like? Did he look like one or more of his ancestors? Maybe his eyes were like his great-grandmother and his nose was like his uncle. Did he raise his eyebrows in a funny way when he laughed? Did he get that from one of his grandparents? Isn't it interesting to think about Jesus as a person like them?

Invite the kids to talk to their parents or guardians about their extended families and to be curious about who they might take after in one way or another. Also let them know that some people might not know their family tree and might not be able to find out. It's important to remember that there's one family everyone is a part of no matter what: God's family.

Close with a prayer thanking God for all the people who have come before us in our families.

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Cell phone
- Kids' Bible



Planning Worksheet

Preaching Themes

Kids' Storytime Ideas

Skit or Creative Ideas

Worship Setting

Props for Kids' Storytime or Skit

Hymns

Special Events (Baptism, New Members)

Choral Music/Special Music

Guest Speakers/Announcements



Scripture Readings

Text: Matthew 2:1-23

2In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ²asking, “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.” ³When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: “And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.”” ⁷Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. ⁸Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.” ⁹When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹²And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road. ¹³Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.” ¹⁴Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and

went to Egypt, ¹⁵and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, “Out of Egypt I have called my son.”

¹⁶When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men. ¹⁷Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah: ¹⁸“A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more.”

¹⁹When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, ²⁰“Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child’s life are dead.” ²¹Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. ²²But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee. ²³There he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, “He will be called a Nazorean.”

Pronunciation Guide

Judea: joo-DEE-uh
homage: AH-midj
frankincense: FRANG-kin-sen(t)s
myrrh: MUHR
Archelaus: ahr-kuh-LAY-uhs
Judea: joo-DEE-uh
Nazorean: na-zoh-REE-uhn



Scripture Readings

Secondary Text: Psalm 96:10-13

¹⁰Say among the nations, “The Lord is king! The world is firmly established; it shall never be moved. He will judge the peoples with equity.”

¹¹Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it;

¹²let the field exult, and everything in it. Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy

¹³before the Lord; for he is coming, for he is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with his truth.

Optional Secondary Text: Psalm 11:1-3

¹In the Lord I take refuge; how can you say to me, “Flee like a bird to the mountains;

²for look, the wicked bend the bow, they have fitted their arrow to the string, to shoot in the dark at the upright in heart.

³If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?”



Scripture Readings

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator, Magi, Herod, Angel, Prophet

Narrator: In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking,

Magi: Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.

Narrator: When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him,

Magi: In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: 'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.'

Narrator: Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying,

Herod: Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.

Narrator: When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road. Now after

they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said,

Angel: Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.

Narrator: Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet,

Prophet: Out of Egypt I have called my son.

Narrator: When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:

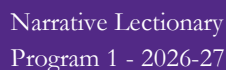
Prophet: A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more.

Narrator: When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said,

Angel: Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child's life are dead."

Narrator: Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee. There he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled,

Prophet: He will be called a Nazorean.



Flight to Egypt, Matthew 2:1-23

[illegible]



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: The birth of Jesus is a public event with political and cosmic significance.

Understanding this can help us follow in the way of Jesus with courage.

Of the many gifts of St. Francis' ministry to the church, one that sometimes flies under the radar, is the humble nativity scene. For many families and congregations, it is hard to imagine preparing for Christmas without setting up a manger on the mantle, lawn, or somewhere else in home or sanctuary. But prior to St. Francis, they simply did not exist. In the year 1223, desiring to depict the birth of Christ using something simple rather than an elaborate painting or gold-trimmed icon, he borrowed some animals and set up a living scene to present the birth of Christ.¹ From this humble origin came the stable scenes we think of every Christmas season.

It is a perfectly fitting thing to represent the intimacy of the birth of Christ with family and animals gathered around. However, as Christmas has become a less communal and more of a family-centered celebration in 20th and 21st century North America, it is important to be reminded that this is not a private event. It is also a moment with political and cosmic significance. The magi follow a celestial surprise to

find their way to the infant, and in so doing get caught up in the politics of Herod's court, which itself is the sight of drama between an occupied people and the empire that dominates them.

There is no reason to shame people for embracing the intimate, personal dimension of the birth of Christ.

After all, he came not just for everyone but *for you*.

But the personal needs to be paired with the cosmic and the political. Christ coming *for you* is a thing that shakes the heavens and causes tyrants to tremble, not only then but now. The message of Emmanuel—*God with us*—is of such a magnitude as this. Understanding the universal significance helps us find our courage to live out a witness to it that reverberates with that power *and* lets us understand how deep the love of God is for us. God was willing to shake all creation up *for you*.

—Rev. Dr. Miles Hopgood

Scripture Summary

The birth of Jesus is both a cosmic and political event that will upend nations and shake the foundations of creation with news that is both challenging and good.

¹ <https://www.franciscans.org/single-post/2017/12/20/Francis-and-the-Cr%C3%A8che>



Liturgy

Call to Worship

- L: Our God reigns!
- C: God's world is firmly established.**
- L: Let the heavens be glad,
- C: Let the earth rejoice,**
- L: For our God will judge the world.
- C: God will judge in truth and righteousness.**

Confession and Forgiveness

- P: We confess our sins before God and one another.

Pause for silence and reflection.

- P: Merciful God,
- C: We come before you with contrite hearts, aware of all the ways we have failed to do what you would have us do, and the ways we have insisted on doing what we know does not contribute to our flourishing or that of the world. As we anticipate and celebrate your selfless act of becoming one of us in Jesus Christ, re-center us on your call to empty ourselves as you did, so that we might serve you and all of creation with open, loving hearts, and work diligently for the peace and justice you desire for all that you have made.**
- P: The One who was and is and is to come hears your confession and declares to you that you are forgiven. Free of the burden of your sin, go forth in gratitude and joy to love and serve. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

- L: Loving God,
- C: The world is often frightening and dangerous. Nothing is certain. Bad things happen to good people. Remind us that you are always with us, sharing our place, feeling our pains and our joys. Help us to work for a just and peaceful world, in which all might feel safe and welcome. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.**

Offertory Prayer

Holy God, with the magi from the east we offer now our gifts as a proclamation of our faithfulness to you. Use them to transform lives and communities, as Jesus transformed all that is. In his holy name we pray. Amen.

Prayers of the Church

- L: With humble anticipation of God's promises fulfilled in Jesus Christ, we pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need.
- A brief silence.*
- L: Holy God, the powers of the world are in fear of your message of radical love and acceptance of all creation. Protect all who would stand up to injustice, corruption, greed, and violence for the sake of your beloved world and all its inhabitants. God of promise,
- C: We lift our prayers to you.**

(continued)



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church, continued

L: As you delivered Jesus from the hands of those who would do him harm, so help us to deliver the natural world by shaking us out of our compulsion to consume resources well beyond our true needs. Restore in us the awe-filled adoration of creation that would lead us to act toward it in love. God of promise,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: As you delivered Jesus from those who would do him harm, so help us deliver those who suffer for the sake of their work for your justice, peace, and equity throughout the world. Restore in us the compassion for every single human being that would lead us to act toward all people in love. God of promise,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: As you delivered Jesus from those who would do him harm, so help us deliver those who suffer illness or are recovering from surgery, injury, or loss (*especially...*) God of promise,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: As you delivered Jesus from those who would do him harm, so deliver us from the things we do or say that harm ourselves and those around us. Give us compassion for our mistakes, and guide us lovingly into new ways of being in the world that lead to our flourishing and that of our neighbors. God of promise,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: As you delivered Jesus from those who would do him harm, so you have held and protected the saints throughout history, even when they have

succumbed to their challenges. Remind us that you are fully present in life and in death, and give us comfort in the promise of the life with them to come. God of promise,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Loving God, we place into your loving arms all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy and grace for all of creation. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

God who delivered the infant Jesus out of the hands of King Herod now calls you to the feast in remembrance of the adult Jesus' ultimate sacrifice for our sins. Come and feast on the bread and wine that proclaims Jesus' love, forgiveness, and constant companionship to each of you. All is ready.

Litany

- 1: Let us never forget: Jesus is a threat.
- 2: **A threat to all those who love power.**
- 1: A threat to all those who hoard wealth.
- 2: **A threat to "just the way things are."**
- 1: Will we be the magi, who see the one who will reign in justice and peace, and rejoice at his birth?
- 2: **Or will we be Herod and fearfully seek to destroy Jesus' message of love, justice, mercy, and equity?**
- 1: Do not be complacent: Jesus' reign asks much of us.
- 2: **O God, commit us to following in Jesus' way of love.**



Creative Expression

Skit

Characters: Persons 1-5

Scene: Person 1 is alone onstage. Persons 2-4 enter.

Person 1: Can I help you?

Person 2: I'm [Person 2] from HR. We're your three o'clock appointment.

Person 1: Of course. Right. Come on in. I'm sorry I haven't met you before.

Person 3: That's okay. It's a big company, and as CEO you're dealing with high level stuff. I'm [Person 3], by the way.

Person 1: (*shakes Person 3's hand*) Welcome. So what can I do for you?

Person 4: (*Shaking Person 1's hand*) I'm [Person 4]. We just came to ask you about Cal Hendricks.

Person 1: Who?

Person 2: You don't know about Cal?

Person 1: I'm sorry. Like you said. Big company. I don't oversee much of the hiring.

Person 3: Of course. Cal has applied for the Director of Operations position. And, well...

Person 4: Frankly we're blown away by their qualifications.

Person 2: In fact, from everything we've seen and heard, their background, experience, and impressive list of references... Well, we get the feeling they're going to really revolutionize this company.

Person 3: We're ready to make an offer. We just wanted to talk it through with you because...

Person 1: Because?

Person 4: Well, to be frank [Person 1], the company's work environment under your leadership has been... less than stellar.

Person 1: Yes. I'm well aware of the complaints. I have to make hard decisions every single day. I can't help it if sometimes people get hurt in the process. We have shareholders to keep happy, you know.

Person 2: Right. So you're not open to bringing Cal into the leadership team when they're hired?

Person 1: When they're hired? Not if?

Person 3: I can show you their file. This is a slam dunk.

Person 1: No, that's fine. I'll leave it up to the COO and their department. But...

Person 4: But?

Person 1: I'd like to meet this Cal myself. Get a sense of them. See what makes them tick and ask them about their vision for the company. When they come in for their offer appointment, can you let me know?

Person 2: Sure! We can do that. In fact, that's what we were hoping for. We'll go pass the message along. Thanks for you time.

(*Persons 2-4 step out of Person 1's "office as Person 5 enters.*)

Person 5: I'm glad I found you. Did you already talk to [Person 1]?

Person 3: Yes. They want to meet Cal.

Person 5: That's a bad idea. I'm glad I caught you.

(*continued*)



Creative Expression

Skit, continued

Person 4: What are you talking about?

Person 5: HR is opening an investigation into [Person 1] regarding all those hostile work environment complaints.

Person 2: And?

Person 5: I'm pretty sure things are going to get ugly. And if Cal winds up in the middle of it, they're never going to take this job.

Person 3: Should we withhold the offer until the investigation is over?

Person 5: Unfortunately I think so. I have no doubts that Cal will be ready to come back when

this clears up. And at that time, I think we should offer them the CEO position.

Person 4: Okay. We'll go break the news to Cal that they need to lie low for a while. It's a shame, though. I really believe they're going to change this place for the better.

Person 5: Oh, they will. I have no doubt about that. The timing just isn't right. And we don't want them getting hurt—personally or professionally—in the process.

Person 2: Got it. Thanks for the heads up, [Person 5]. We might have made a huge mistake!

(All exit)



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

God speaks to us in many ways.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Cell phone
- Kids' Bible

Background

Sometime within the first two years of Jesus' birth, King Herod was alerted to the presence of a baby who was born destined to be king. To ensure the baby king would never rule, King Herod had all children under two killed.

But Herod would not touch Jesus. An angel of God warned Joseph in a dream to take Jesus and Mary to Egypt, where they would be safe from King Herod. They remained in Egypt until King Herod died. Again, an angel came to Joseph in a dream to announce it was safe to return to their homeland. Joseph, Mary, and Jesus settled in Nazareth.

God speaks to us in many ways. To Joseph, God spoke in a dream. Often God speaks to us through other people and events. Other times God speaks through stories, sermons, or Bible readings. Sometimes God speaks in the still, small voice inside of us that we hear through prayer and meditation.

Set the Scene

Ask the kids if they've ever gotten a phone call from God. Tell them the answer might not be as simple as they think. God speaks to us in lots of ways!

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Talk about how God spoke to Joseph by sending an angel to speak to Joseph in a dream. Have they ever felt like they got a message from God in a dream?

Show the kids the cell phone and ask if they've ever gotten good news or information about a choice they had to make. Does God literally call us on the phone? (*Nope*) But can God speak to us through the other person on the phone? (*You bet!*)

Show the kids the kids' Bible. Wonder about how God speaks to us through the Bible.

What might be some other ways God can speak to us? (*through people, places, and things, stories, sermons, prayer and meditation*)

How can we practice active listening for God? (*read the Bible, listen for hope and love in stories about the world, pray, meditate, music*)

Close with a prayer thanking God for speaking to us in lots of ways and asking God to open our minds and hearts to hear God's call this week.

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Baptismal font, filled with water
- White candles for each kid
- Paschal Candle, lit



Narrative Lectionary Worship Resources

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