

Narrative Lectionary Worship Resources



Program 1, 2025-26 (Fall through Christmas)

Narrative Lectionary Worship Resources

September 7, 2025—January 4, 2026

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Choral Music/Special Music

Guest Speakers/Announcements



Scripture Readings

Text: Genesis 1:1—2:4a

1 In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, ²the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.

³Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. ⁴And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

⁶And God said, “Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” ⁷So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. ⁸God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

⁹And God said, “Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so. ¹⁰God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. ¹¹Then God said, “Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.” And it was so.

¹²The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. ¹³And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

¹⁴And God said, “Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, ¹⁵and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth.” And it was so. ¹⁶God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the

stars. ¹⁷God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, ¹⁸to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. ¹⁹And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

²⁰And God said, “Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky.” ²¹So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. ²²God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.” ²³And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

²⁴And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind.” And it was so. ²⁵God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.

²⁶Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” ²⁷So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. ²⁸God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”

(continued)



Scripture Readings

Text, cont'd

²⁹God said, “See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. ³⁰And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so.

³¹God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

2 Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. ²And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done.

³So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.

⁴These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

Secondary Text: John 1:1-5

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator, God

Narrator: In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said,

God: Let there be light;

Narrator: And there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

Narrator: And God said,

God: Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.

Narrator: So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

And God said,

God: Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.

Narrator: And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. Then God said,

God: Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.

(continued)



Scripture Readings

Dramatic Reading of the Text, cont'd

Narrator: And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the third day. And God said,

God: Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth.

Narrator: And it was so. God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day. And God said,

God: Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky.

Narrator: So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. God blessed them, saying,

God: Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.

Narrator: And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day. And God said,

God: Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind.

Narrator: And it was so. God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good. Then God said,

God: Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.

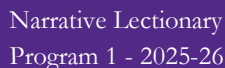
Narrator: So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them,

God: Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.

Narrator: God said,

God: See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.

Narrator: And it was so. God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation. These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created.



Creation by the Word, Genesis 1:1—2:4a

[illegible]



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: In a world that seems increasingly chaotic, God’s logical peace and orderly grace is still there.

It’s too easy to look at the world around us as a callous, chaotic, and utterly indifferent mess. Just turn on the news or scroll through social media for ten minutes. Every day we are bombarded with news of unspeakable wars, infuriating politicians, anxiety-inducing economic reports, and stories about how “those people” who aren’t like us are making the world worse. Perhaps in today’s world, Genesis 1 has become one of the most counter-cultural scriptures in the bible.

In the first account of creation, God creates through a meticulous, careful, and logical process. It’s clean, as God simply speaks things into existence. It’s simple, as each new element builds on the last. Most important, it’s orderly, as things unfold step-by-step and day-by-day. It all speaks to the ancient Greek idea that creation is ordered by a universal, underlying sense of reason known as the *logos*; “the Word.” It’s this logical Word that God uses to create as God speaks and it’s this same Word we see again in John 1 that was “with God,” “was God,” and that takes on flesh and steps into creation. And in a society driven

by shocking news headlines and talk of culture wars, perhaps the good news these two creation stories remind us of is that the Word of God’s divine reason is still there.

It may not always be easy to see behind all the challenges and drama, but there are still moments in our daily lives when we can catch a glimpse of creation working as God always intended it to. In the ordinary kindness of the co-worker who asks if we need a hand, in the routine peace we feel in a much-needed moment of rest, in the simple joy of watching our children and grandchildren play without a care in the world, and in all the little God-given moments we take for granted each day, there are still so many ways God continues to speak orderly beauty and logical peace into creation. The trick is to listen for the Word.

—Pr. Mattheis Lorimor

Scripture Summary

God is hard at work crafting each aspect of the universe, sparing no detail. But even the Almighty Creator takes time to rest.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

L: God said, “Let there be light!”

C: And it was good.

L: God said, “Let us make human beings in our image.”

C: And it was good.

L: God calls us now into God’s holy presence.

C: And it is very good!

Confession and Forgiveness

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

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: Holy God,

C: You have created us in your image, protected and nourished us, and called us into your work of justice. Yet while we profess these truths, we forget who we are and whose we are. We put our trust in ourselves, in material goods, and in worldly powers instead of trusting you. We prioritize our comfort over our neighbor’s needs. Call us back to you, God. Forgive us our failings, and direct us back onto the path you would have us tread.

P: Hear the good news, siblings in Christ. You have been created in wholeness, claimed in love, and forgiven according to God’s boundless grace. Nothing—even the worst we do or fail to do—can separate us from the love of our God. Receive this forgiveness with joy, in the name of Jesus, our savior and friend. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

L: God who speaks,

C: Your Word brought all that is into existence. Speak again into our present time your creating power, and continue to make us new with each passing day. Make us co-creators with you, that we might speak your words of love and compassion into a world in need, so that all might know your justice and peace. In Jesus’ holy name we pray. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

You have spoken into being all that is—all we have and all we are. Accept now our gifts and our tithes out of the abundance of what you have given to us, that they might be put to use in the care and nurture of all you have created. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: Confident that our God hears and answers our cries, we pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

L: Everything in heaven and on earth bears your signature. May we ever rejoice that you have made us, and that you have made us your own. God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: Light and dark, oceans and land, fish and creeping creatures—all owe their existence to you. May we never forget that we also were brought forth by your creative hand, as we carry out our duty to care for all that lives. God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: You have created us to be in relationship with one another, individually and as communities. Guide all those who lead our various levels of societal organization that they might be attentive to and work for the needs of each and every one of us. God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: Just as your spirit first brought our clay to life, so now breathe your healing into all who crave wholeness, (*especially...*) God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: Reach out to those who have been disenfranchised, robbed of what was rightfully theirs. Give them courage to stand for justice and reparation, and to also find a peace in you that no other could possibly give—or take away. God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: All creation sings your praise, O Lord: that which has gone before and that which has yet to be. Join us eternally with our sisters and brothers living in your light perpetual, that we may one day join hands again as your heavenly family. God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: We lift all these prayers, and those of our hearts, to your loving care, O God. Receive them and restore our hope in your promises. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

The one who created the grain of the field and the fruit of the vineyard now invites you to the feast of bread and wine, where Jesus, the Word, meets us in love. Come with your siblings to be nourished with these fruits of God's creation and of Jesus' redeeming grace.



Liturgy & Creative Expression

Litany

- 1: On the first day, God created light.
- 2: **On the second day, sky.**
- 1: On the third day, land and sea, and plants of every kind.
- 2: **On the fourth day, the sun, moon, and stars.**
- 1: On the fifth day, the creatures of the sea and of the air.
- 2: **On the sixth day, the creatures of the land.**
- 1: And on that same day, the land creatures called human beings.
- 2: **Created by God in God's image,**
- 1: And charged with the care of all that God had made.
- 2: **Let us work tirelessly to do what God has called us to.**
- 1: But let us also remember to rest.
- 2: **For God rested on the seventh day.**
- 1: Then God looked at all that God had done and behold!
- 2: **It was very good.**

Congregational Art

Supplies needed:

- Mural paper
- Drawing paper
- Markers or crayons
- Scissors
- Masking tape or other adhesive

Before worship

- Draw the Garden of Eden on mural paper and mount it the worship space where it can be accessed.
- As people enter the worship space, offer them drawing paper and coloring implements and encourage them to draw something that God created during the service. (They can draw themselves!)
- If it works, give them scissors to cut their drawings out.

During Creative Expression

- Sing a creation-related hymn or song (maybe a kids' choir)
- Invite people to tape their drawn creations in the Garden of Eden
- Take a moment to take in the beauty of God's created world.



Creative Expression

Skit

Characters: Person 1, Person 2

Props: Canvas, easel, palette, and paint brush

Scene: Person 2 is painting a picture.

Person 1: *(entering and looking over Person 2's shoulder as they paint)* Wow. That is really coming along!

Person 2: Thanks! I don't think I've ever been this inspired in my whole life.

Person 1: You've been working on it for days and yet every time I see you, you're just as excited about it.

Person 2: The beginning was tough though.

Person 1: Oh yeah, I remember. You just stared at that blank canvas for hours.

Person 2: There was so much potential there, and I had so many ideas. My mind and my heart and my spirit all just circling around each other, wanting to create, but wanting it to be just...good, you know?

Person 1: But then something just clicked and you picked up that brush and BOOM!

Person 2: And it was good.

Person 1: I'm amazed every time I come back and see what you've done. You keep building on that first brush stroke, and it gets richer and more beautiful.

Person 2: It seems to want to build on itself. One thing leads to the next and even though I absolutely adore everything I've created, I'm excited to see what comes next.

Person 1: So what does come next?

Person 2: *(frowning)* Actually, I'm kind of stuck.

Person 1: Really? Well, maybe you're done.

Person 2: No. I know it's not finished. There's something missing. Something important.

Person 1: Let me look. *(Steps back from the easel and takes a long look)*

Person 2: Well? What do you see?

Person 1: I know what I don't see.

Person 2: What? What don't you see?

Person 1: I don't see you.

Person 2: What do you mean? I didn't think it was a self-portrait.

Person 1: Well, yes and no. It's definitely a reflection of you. I see parts of you in every element of the painting. Your intense joy, your love, your creativity, your desire to communicate. But I think what it needs is a clear image of you.

Person 2: Wow. I...I love that idea. And I think you're right. There needs to be some kind of manifestation of all parts of me—heart, mind, spirit. Then it'll be complete.

Person 1: And it will be *very* good!

Person 2: After that? I'm taking a good long nap. This level of inspired creativity is exhausting!

Person 1: And that will be very good, too.



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

God creates; we create.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Works of art to display
- Building block set
- Modeling clay (enough for each kid)

Background

This first account of creation is a poetic myth. This is not to say that it is untrue; instead it speaks to the literary form used to describe God's relationship with creation. An artist pours heart and soul into her creation, honors, and even loves what she has created. Likewise, God poured heart and soul into creation, loving everything created, including us.

Set the Scene

Ask the kids if they like to create things. What kinds of things do they like to create? Point out the art masterpieces and the building blocks as examples of ways to create. Is it easy or hard to make something really beautiful? How does it feel when you make something you're really, really happy with? Talk about how God is like an artist—God created absolutely everything!

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Ask the kids to name some of the things that God created, like stars, moon, sun, and planets; the earth, mountains, lakes, seas, prairies and deserts; animals, sea creatures, birds, reptiles and insects, etc. Come around to how God created people "in God's image." Part of that means that since God creates, we also create.

We might not create the whole world like God did, but every time we create something beautiful, we are acting out God's gift to us of being co-creators with God.

Give each kid a little piece of modeling clay and tell them they can use it to create whatever they like and God will absolutely know it's beautiful!

Close with a prayer thanking God for God's amazing creation and for inviting us to be creators, too.

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Cell phone, handheld game console, or other technology device



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 21:1-3; 22:1-14

21 The Lord dealt with Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did for Sarah as he had promised.

²Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the time of which God had spoken to him.

³Abraham gave the name Isaac to his son whom Sarah bore him.

22 After these things God tested Abraham. He said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” ²He said, “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you.”

³So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac; he cut the wood for the burnt offering, and set out and went to the place in the distance that God had shown him. ⁴On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place far away.

⁵Then Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey; the boy and I will go over there; we will worship, and then we will come back to you.”

⁶Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together.

⁷Isaac said to his father Abraham, “Father!” And he said, “Here I am, my son.” He said, “The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” ⁸Abraham said, “God himself will provide

the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.” So the two of them walked on together. ⁹When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. ¹⁰Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son.

¹¹But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” ¹²He said, “Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.” ¹³And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. ¹⁴So Abraham called that place “The Lord will provide”; as it is said to this day, “On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided.”

Secondary Text: John 1:29

²⁹The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”

Pronunciation Guide

Moriah: maw-RAI-uh



Scripture Readings

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator, God, Abraham, Isaac

Narrator: The Lord dealt with Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did for Sarah as he had promised. Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the time of which God had spoken to him. Abraham gave the name Isaac to his son whom Sarah bore him. After these things God tested Abraham. He said to him,

God: Abraham!

Narrator: And he said,

Abraham: Here I am.

Narrator: He said,

God: Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you.

Narrator: So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac; he cut the wood for the burnt offering, and set out and went to the place in the distance that God had shown him. On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place far away. Then Abraham said to his young men,

Abraham: Stay here with the donkey; the boy and I will go over there; we will worship, and then we will come back to you.

Narrator: Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together. Isaac said to his father Abraham,

Isaac: Father!

Narrator: And he said,

Abraham: Here I am, my son.

Narrator: He said,

Isaac: The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?

Narrator: Abraham said,

Abraham: God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.

Narrator: So the two of them walked on together. When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son. But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, and said,

God: Abraham, Abraham!

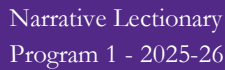
Narrator: And he said,

Abraham: Here I am.

Narrator: He said,

God: Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.

Narrator: And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called that place "The Lord will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided."



Binding of Isaac, Genesis 21:1-3; 22:1-14

[illegible]



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: Put back in its historical context, Abraham's near sacrifice proves to be miraculously surprising.

In contrast to the shock, horror, and baffling confusion it's read with today, God's command for Abraham to sacrifice his son probably wouldn't have come as much of a shock to the audience that first heard this story. Child sacrifice was fairly common in the Ancient Near East and practiced by several cultures. It's even attested to in the Hebrew scriptures, as when the King of Moab sacrifices his firstborn son to the Moabite god to reverse a losing battle in 2 Kings 3:26-27 (it works). Thus, Abraham may not have been all that surprised when his God told him to take his firstborn and offer him as a burnt offering (v.22). Firstborn children are what ancient gods typically expected of national leaders as a sign of loyalty. Instead, the real shock for Abraham and for this scripture's ancient audience, is that when the time comes, the God of Israel defies what's normal.

Just as the patriarch pulls his knife to perform the culturally accepted act of devotion, an angel appears declaring that the God Abraham has found does not

want his son, only his faith. Contrary to the horrifying story so many modern readers presume it to be, when placed back in its original historical context, the story of Abraham's near sacrifice of Isaac proves to be a miraculous story about how the God of Israel once defied every cultural norm to show God's new nation a new way. And as time passed, it became a story that reminded each generation of Israelites that their God was different from all the other gods. Their God didn't want their children, their grief, and their pain. Instead, our God is a God of unexpected grace, of expectation-defying mercy, and of faith that doesn't take life, but gives it.

—Pr. Mattheis Lorimor

Scripture Summary

Wood, fire, and knife. Father and son have all the elements required for their sacrifice to God. All but an animal to be offered, that is. Who could imagine the degree to which Abraham's faith is about to be tested?



Liturgy

Call to Worship

- L: All that we have belongs to God.
- C: Let us return our gifts to God with thanksgiving.**
- L: All that we are belongs to God.
- C: We give ourselves to God with joy.**

Confession and Forgiveness

- P: We confess our sins before God and one another.
Pause for silence and reflection.
- P: Holy God,
- C: You have created us in your image, protected and nourished us, and called us into your work of justice. Yet while we profess these truths, we forget who we are and whose we are. We put our trust in ourselves, in material goods, and in worldly powers instead of trusting you. We prioritize our comfort over our neighbor's needs. Call us back to you, God. Forgive us our failings, and direct us back onto the path you would have us tread.**
- P: Hear the good news, siblings in Christ. You have been created in wholeness, claimed in love, and forgiven according to God's boundless grace. Nothing—even the worst we do or fail to do—can separate us from the love of our God. Receive this forgiveness with joy, in the name of Jesus, our savior and friend. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

- L: Holy God,
- C: You did not withhold even your own Son, who willingly gave his life for the redemption of the world. Loosen our grasp on worldly things, that we might be freed from our fears of loss and inspired to risk for the good work of justice for all that you have made. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.**

Offertory Prayer

You do not ask of us more than we can give you, O God, but instead give us more than we can possibly need. We return now these gifts, a sacrifice for the well-being of the world, out of gratitude for all that has been sacrificed on our behalf. In Jesus' name. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: Confident that our God hears and answers our cries, we pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

L: You do not bestow gifts only to take them away again. Train our eyes and hearts upon your steadfastness, so that we also might be found faithful to your covenant. God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: You do not ask that we slaughter animals to appease you, but rather that we responsibly steward all the riches and resources of your creation. Forgive our missteps and help show us how we can be part of healing this beautiful but wounded planet. God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: Many in this world suffer from the threat of abuse and maltreatment by those more powerful than themselves. Make us to work for a society where such crime is neither persistent nor tolerated. God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: Lord, your presence is balm to those who suffer illness or long for wholeness. Feed them on your promises and surround them with your healing, (*especially...*) God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: For all your faithful children who have gone forward to pave the way, so that we might worship without fear of persecution, we give you thanks. Shine their light ever before us as we strive to continually follow you. God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: We lift all these prayers, and those of our hearts, to your loving care, O God. Receive them and restore our hope in your promises. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

The Lamb of God who gave himself on behalf of you and all creation now invites you to feast at this table in his honor. Come and receive bread and wine in the holy presence of Jesus Christ, our savior and friend. All is prepared for you!

Litany from Micah 6:6-8

1: What can we give to God to show our love,

2: To prove our faithfulness?

1: Would a burnt offering of cattle be enough?

2: Would God be happy with a thousand sheep?

1: With ten thousand rivers of olive oil?

2: With our own firstborn child?

1: Come, now. There's no mystery here.

2: God has been clear about what it is God truly wants from us.

1: It is just that we act with kindness toward one another and all creation,

2: That we work for justice and peace in all the earth,

1: And that we walk humbly with our God.

2: It is that simple. Let it be so.



Creative Expression

Congregational Art

Supplies needed:

- Drawing paper
- Markers or crayons
- Offering plate

Before worship

- As people enter the worship space, offer them drawing paper and coloring implements and encourage them to write down or draw a picture of their most important possession.

During Creative Expression

- Invite people to think about what they have written down or drawn and whether they could ever give it up.
- Invite people to come forward, if they wish, and place their drawing in the offering plate, and then perhaps remain at the altar to pray silently.

Skit

Characters: Person 1, Person 2, Person 3

Props: None

Scene: Person 1 and 2 are at work. Person 3 is offstage until the end.

Person 1: So, I finally heard back from the CEO...

Person 2: (*excited/nervous*) And?

Person 1: And she wants to offer you the position of Director of Development.

Person 2: (*reacting with intense joy*) Oh...oh wow...I have wanted this for so long!

Person 1: Years. I know. I've been working with you for almost two decades already.

Person 2: And all that time...well, she promised me I would go far in this company. She saw my potential and said if I was patient and trusted her, I could achieve my dream!

Person 1: Yep. It's been wonderful to watch the way your professional relationship has developed.

Person 2: She's been a mentor and a friend. I would do anything for her.

Person 1: (*a little awkward*) That's good to hear. Because there's one other thing.

Person 2: What do you mean? What other thing?

Person 1: Well...she's decided to move her headquarters to Auckland.

Person 2: Au...Auckland. As in...New Zealand?

Person 1: Yeah. She's always wanted to live there and feels like now is the time. And she really, really wants you there. The development opportunities there are enormous. And you're the one to make them happen.

Person 2: But...but my partner has a job they love here. And my kids are at that age where it would be really detrimental to move them. And my parents are getting older and since my siblings don't live in town, they're relying on me to take care of them. I mean...I'm really settled here. I can't...I can't just move to New Zealand.

Person 1: I had a feeling you would say that. So should I tell her you don't want the job?

(*continued*)



Creative Expression

Skit, continued

Person 2: This is awful. The promise...the dream...they've finally come true. After all these years and all the times and ways I've trusted her and been patient. And now I have to give it up? Why would she ask me to do that?

Person 1: I hear you. It's lousy.

Person 2: Well, I guess that's that. I'll have to sacrifice the dream. There's no way around it.

Person 1: Okay. I'll let her know.

Person 3: (*entering*) Let her know what?

Person 2: That I'm turning down the Director of Development job because I can't relocate to New Zealand.

Person 3: That's fine. Because she's not relocating either.

Person 1 and 2 together: What?!?

Person 3: She just told me. She had a feeling it wouldn't work for you and it would mean breaking her promise to you. And she never breaks a promise.

Person 1: So what is she doing?

Person 3: Come on. This is the digital age. She's opening an office in New Zealand and keeping the office here. She'll go back and forth and [Person 2] gets to run this office.

Person 2: Wait. Run this office? I thought...

Person 3: Congratulations. You've been doubly promoted. Director of Development and Assistant CEO.

Person 2: Holy buckets! I need to go thank her! (*runs offstage*)

Person 1: Well, [Person 3], impeccable timing as always. How come you always get to deliver the good news.

Person 3: (*grinning*) She promised me I could. And she always keeps her promises.



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

God changes old ideas into new ones.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Cell phone, handheld game console, or other technology device

Background

God's request for Abraham to sacrifice his son may be a difficult concept for children; it is a difficult concept for adults as well. But it was completely normal, culturally speaking, for Abraham's time. Still, it is appropriate to talk about how we may not always understand God's mind, but we can trust and obey anyway, knowing that God is always doing a new thing, and often the outcomes we least expect are the best for everyone.

Set the Scene

Be honest right out of the gate that this story makes a lot of people uncomfortable. In it, God asks Abraham to sacrifice his son, Isaac. Be clear about what that meant—Abraham would put his son on an altar, kill his son, and burn the body as an offering to God. Talk about how, while this sounds awful—and it IS awful!—in Abraham's time, this was something people just did. They sacrificed other people, including their children, to whatever god they worshipped hoping that their gods would repay them in some way.

But our God—the God we worship—is different than other gods. And this story—and it's just a story, by the way—points out that our God is always calling us into a new way of being in the world.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Ask the kids if there are things we do in our everyday lives that maybe aren't the greatest. Hold up the technology and ask the kids to be honest about how much time they spend on it. Be honest yourself. Invite the congregation to think about this. It's normal, right? Everyone does it. But does anyone ever think about whether it's actually good for them? Maybe... just maybe... God is calling us to sacrifice something—not a child! but an old way of doing things for a new way. What might be some things that could be done instead of spending so much time on technology?

Challenge the kids—and the congregation as a whole—to think critically about “the way things are” and how God is calling us into new ways of being.

Close with a prayer thanking God for always making things new.

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- A ladder



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 27:1-4, 15-23; 28:10-17

27 When Isaac was old and his eyes were dim so that he could not see, he called his elder son Esau and said to him, “My son”; and he answered, “Here I am.” ²He said, “See, I am old; I do not know the day of my death. ³Now then, take your weapons, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field, and hunt game for me. ⁴Then prepare for me savory food, such as I like, and bring it to me to eat, so that I may bless you before I die.”

¹⁵Then Rebekah took the best garments of her elder son Esau, which were with her in the house, and put them on her younger son Jacob; ¹⁶and she put the skins of the kids on his hands and on the smooth part of his neck. ¹⁷Then she handed the savory food, and the bread that she had prepared, to her son Jacob.

¹⁸So he went in to his father, and said, “My father”; and he said, “Here I am; who are you, my son?”

¹⁹Jacob said to his father, “I am Esau your firstborn. I have done as you told me; now sit up and eat of my game, so that you may bless me.” ²⁰But Isaac said to his son, “How is it that you have found it so quickly, my son?” He answered, “Because the Lord your God granted me success.” ²¹Then Isaac said to Jacob, “Come near, that I may feel you, my son, to know whether you are really my son Esau or not.” ²²So Jacob went up to his father Isaac, who felt him and said, “The voice is Jacob’s voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau.” ²³He did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau’s hands; so he blessed him.

¹⁰Jacob left Beer-sheba and went toward Haran. ¹¹He came to a certain place and stayed there for the night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of

the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place. ¹²And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. ¹³And the Lord stood beside him and said, “I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring; ¹⁴and your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring. ¹⁵Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.”

¹⁶Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, “Surely the Lord is in this place—and I did not know it!”

¹⁷And he was afraid, and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.”

Secondary Text: John 1:50-51

⁵⁰Jesus answered, “Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.” ⁵¹And he said to him, “Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”

Pronunciation Guide

Beer-sheba: BEE-er-SHEE-buh

Haran: HAY-ruhn



Scripture Readings

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator, Isaac, Esau, Jacob, Lord

Narrator: When Isaac was old and his eyes were dim so that he could not see, he called his elder son Esau and said to him,

Isaac: My son;

Narrator: And he answered,

Esau: Here I am.

Narrator: He said,

Isaac: See, I am old; I do not know the day of my death. Now then, take your weapons, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field, and hunt game for me. Then prepare for me savory food, such as I like, and bring it to me to eat, so that I may bless you before I die.

Narrator: Then Rebekah took the best garments of her elder son Esau, which were with her in the house, and put them on her younger son Jacob; and she put the skins of the kids on his hands and on the smooth part of his neck. Then she handed the savory food, and the bread that she had prepared, to her son Jacob. So he went in to his father, and said,

Jacob: My father;

Narrator: And he said,

Isaac: Here I am; who are you, my son?

Narrator: Jacob said to his father,

Jacob: I am Esau your firstborn. I have done as you told me; now sit up and eat of my game, so that you may bless me.

Narrator: But Isaac said to his son,

Isaac: How is it that you have found it so quickly, my son?

Narrator: He answered,

Jacob: Because the Lord your God granted me success.

Narrator: Then Isaac said to Jacob,

Isaac: Come near, that I may feel you, my son, to know whether you are really my son Esau or not.

Narrator: So Jacob went up to his father Isaac, who felt him and said,

Isaac: The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau.

Narrator: He did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau's hands; so he blessed him. Jacob left Beer-sheba and went toward Haran. He came to a certain place and stayed there for the night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place. And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And the Lord stood beside him and said,

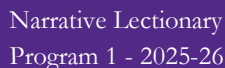
Lord: I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring; and your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring. Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.

Narrator: Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said,

Jacob: Surely the Lord is in this place—and I did not know it!

Narrator: And he was afraid, and said,

Jacob: How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.



Jacob's Dream, Genesis 27:1-4, 15-23; 28:10-17

[illegible]



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: God's blessing is unfair and unjust. And thank God for it!

This is an unfair scripture. Jacob is a liar and a cheat who has betrayed the ones he was meant to love to steal a blessing he does not deserve. Then, while running away from the consequences he does deserve, God chooses to give this cowardly, backstabbing, thief an even greater blessing. As Jacob prepares to enter a strange and hostile land alone, God promises to be his divine protector guarding him wherever he goes (v.15), to give him "the land on which you lie" (v.13), and to bless him with the same blessing given to none other than Abraham; "all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you" (v.14). To nearly any modern church audience, God choosing this unworthy trickster for such an indescribable blessing is bound to come off as horribly, even unbearably, unjust and unfair. However, instead of trying to use historical and textual details to try and explain away God's actions, perhaps the best way to approach this unfair passage is head on. Yes, God's blessing seems deeply unfair to us. But that is perhaps the greatest miracle in the story.

Throughout scripture, God's blessing is typically unfair and usually comes to those who haven't done

anything to deserve it, from Moses the murderer to Paul the persecutor. Maybe the greatest example is the modern church audience itself, to whom "God proves his love in that while [they] were still sinners Christ died for [them]" (Rom. 5:8). That's the miraculously unfair thing about grace. God doesn't bless us, protect us, and promise to go with us because we are such perfect, wonderful people. In our own ways we are all broken and have all hurt someone somehow. But God still blesses us because, no, God isn't fair. God is grace and redemption.

Jacob wasn't worthy of God's blessing, but the beautiful thing is, that the blessing came all the same and the blessing changes him. When Jacob meets Esau again years later, he meets him as a very different man than he once was. God's unfair blessing changes him in unimaginable ways.

—Pr. Mattheis Lorimor

Scripture Summary

Jacob is a liar and a cheat, and yet God blesses him. It seems unfair until you realize that the blessing changed Jacob and gave him new and awesome responsibility along with his new name.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

L: God is in this place.

C: We are in God's holy presence.

L: This is the house of God.

C: The gate of heaven is here!

Confession and Forgiveness

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

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: Holy God,

C: You have created us in your image, protected and nourished us, and called us into your work of justice. Yet while we profess these truths, we forget who we are and whose we are. We put our trust in ourselves, in material goods, and in worldly powers instead of trusting you. We prioritize our comfort over our neighbor's needs. Call us back to you, God. Forgive us our failings, and direct us back onto the path you would have us tread.

P: Hear the good news, siblings in Christ. You have been created in wholeness, claimed in love, and forgiven according to God's boundless grace. Nothing—even the worst we do or fail to do—can separate us from the love of our God. Receive this forgiveness with joy, in the name of Jesus, our savior and friend. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

L: God of heaven and earth,

C: In love and mercy you pour out your blessing upon us, that we might be a blessing to all the earth. Show us the way to you each day so that, following in it, we might reflect your beauty, power, and justice in all that we say and do. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

You have entrusted us with an abundance of good things, O God. In gratitude, we joyfully return to you our gifts and our tithes, that you might use them to bless creation with your goodness and mercy, for the sake of Jesus Christ. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: Confident that our God hears and answers our cries, we pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

L: Gracious God, you have offered us the richness of your blessings. Make us worthy to be the bearers of your life-giving word to the world. God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: All of creation is one family. Make us mindful of the needs of plants, animals, ecosystems, and the whole world, that all might flourish in your name. God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: We are like the dust of the earth, spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south. May your children truly be instruments of your peace, that all the families of the earth might be blessed because of our actions. God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: We are feeble at times, Lord. Our health fails. Our strength flags. We long for the blessing of your healing, and ask for all who are in need (*especially...*) God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: As the descendants of Abraham and Sarah, and with all your saints in glory, we rejoice in the mercy which you show to your family on earth and in heaven. Keep us faithful until that day when we are brought face to face with you. God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: We lift all these prayers, and those of our hearts, to your loving care, O God. Receive them and restore our hope in your promises. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

With the angels of heaven, let us climb the ladder to the holy mountain where the feast of life is spread before us. Jesus, who presides over this table, invites you now to share in his very presence, here in the bread and wine. Come and be fed!

Litany

1: Jacob lied, cheated, and stole what was not his,

2: Yet God chose him to be a blessing to the world.

1: We, too, do things we are not proud of to secure our advantages,

2: Yet God calls us to repentance, and sends us to do justice.

1: We are forgiven,

2: And we can do better.

1: God has richly blessed us in spite of ourselves.

2: Let us, in turn, be a blessing to the world.



Creative Expression

Skit

Characters: Person 1, Person 2, Kid 1, Kid 2 (Kids are older teens or young adults)

Person 1: It's time to turn over the family business.

Person 2: Oh, thank goodness. I'm so ready to retire to Hawaii.

Person 1: Now all that's left is to give my blessing to [Kid 1].

Person 2: [Kid 1]? We talked about this. You know I think it ought to go to [Kid 2].

Person 1: But you know that the responsibility for the family business has always gone to the oldest kid.

Person 2: So? You're in charge, aren't you? Change the tradition! You and I both know on a gut level that [Kid 2] is the right choice.

Person 1: Speak for yourself. [Kid 2] is a loose cannon, if you ask me. Not altogether on the up and up. You just want them in charge because they're your favorite.

Person 2: It's more than that and you know it. [Kid 1] doesn't even care about the business. He once gave [Kid 2] all the important accounts in exchange for a cheeseburger! You're just stuck in tradition for the sake of tradition. It's ridiculous.

Kid 1: (*entering*) What are you arguing about now?

Person 1: Ahh, [Kid 1], just the person I wanted to see. I'm ready to pass on the family business and I want to give you my blessing.

Kid 2: (*entering*) Wait a minute. How come they get the blessing? I mean, aren't we both part of the family business?

Person 1: It's tradition.

Person 2: It's ridiculous.

Person 1: Look, let's talk about this later. [Kid 1], go get me a tall skinny soy latte with an extra shot and two sugars and when you get back, I'll give you my blessing.

Kid 1: Sure thing. (*exits*)

(*Person 1 also exits*)

Person 2: Okay, quick. I'll whip up your [Parent]'s latte and you go douse yourself with [Kid 1]'s awful cologne. Then just hand [Parent] his latte from behind and he'll give you the blessing.

Kid 2: That doesn't sound particularly ethical.

Person 2: It's not. But it's what has to happen. The future of all that matters is at stake!

Kid 2: What's the big deal? It's just a blessing.

Person 1: "Just" a blessing? Do you have any idea how important this is?

Kid 2: Well, yeah. I mean, I think... I just get all the good stuff, right?

Person 2: It's a lot of responsibility. Complete and total commitment. You have to go out and pay it forward to the whole world!

Kid 2: Um. Yeah. Maybe [Kid 1] should have it.

Person 2: (*to Kid 2*) Nonsense. I have it on good authority that you're the one for the job and no one else. I've known since before you were born.

Kid 2: Complete an total commitment to paying it forward, huh? Sounds like a lot to take on.

Person 2: You won't be alone. Remember why we do what we do.

Kid 2: It is pretty important. And [Kid 1] is more interested in hunting and fishing than doing what needs to be done.

Person 2: Exactly. Now go put on that cologne and get back here asap. I have milk to froth.

Kid 2: If you say so.



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

God loves us even though we're not perfect

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- A ladder

Background

Jacob and Esau were bitter rivals since before birth. They struggled in the womb, tormenting their mother, Rebekah. Jacob tricked Esau out of his birthright and blessing, cementing a life-long rivalry between them. Jacob stole Esau's blessing by fooling their elderly father. He wrapped himself in animal skins so that it would seem that Isaac was blessing his hairy brother, Esau. While Jacob was escaping Esau's fury, God told him in a dream that God would fulfill the blessings for him, despite his trickery.

Set the Scene

The *KidStuff* bulletin focuses on the dream, so before reading it, recap for the kids that Jacob was far from perfect. He did dishonest things in order to get what he wanted. Ask if the kids think God would love someone like that. Invite them to listen to the story and see what happened next.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Point to the ladder and ask the kids to imagine that it went from the ground all the way up to heaven. How far do they think that would be? What would they think if they saw something like that with angels on it. Why do they think God would show something like that to Jacob even though he wasn't always the greatest guy?

Have the kids ever done anything they weren't proud of? Share your own story rather than putting kids on the spot. Assure the kids that no matter what we do, God always loves and forgives us, and promises us an amazing life with God forever.

Close with a prayer thanking God for loving us no matter what.

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Large-printed names of God
(see next week for details)



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 2:23-25; 3:10-15; 4:10-17

²³After a long time the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned under their slavery, and cried out. Out of the slavery their cry for help rose up to God. ²⁴God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. ²⁵God looked upon the Israelites, and God took notice of them.

3 Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ²There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. ³Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." ⁴When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." ⁵Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." ⁶He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

⁷Then the Lord said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, ⁸and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. ⁹The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. ¹⁰So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt."

¹¹But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" ¹²He said, "I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain." ¹³But Moses said to God, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" ¹⁴God said to Moses, "I am who I am." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I Am has sent me to you.'" ¹⁵God also said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you': This is my name forever, and this my title for all generations.

¹⁰But Moses said to the Lord, "O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." ¹¹Then the Lord said to him, "Who gives speech to mortals? Who makes them mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? ¹²Now go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to speak." ¹³But he said, "O my Lord, please send someone else." ¹⁴Then the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses and he said, "What of your brother Aaron, the Levite? I know that he can speak fluently; even now he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you his heart will be glad. ¹⁵You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth; and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and will teach you what you shall do. ¹⁶He indeed shall speak for you to the people; he shall serve as a mouth for you, and you shall serve as God for him. ¹⁷Take in your hand this staff, with which you shall perform the signs."



Scripture Readings

Secondary Text: John 8:58

⁵⁸Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am."

Pronunciation Guide

Levite: LEE-vait

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator, God, Moses

Narrator: After a long time the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned under their slavery, and cried out. Out of the slavery their cry for help rose up to God. God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God looked upon the Israelites, and God took notice of them. Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said,

Moses: I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.

Narrator: When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush,

God: Moses, Moses!

Narrator: And he said,

Moses: Here I am.

Narrator: Then he said,

God: Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.

Narrator: He said further,

God: I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.

Narrator: And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. Then the Lord said,

God: I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.

Narrator: But Moses said to God,

Moses: Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?

Narrator: He said,

God: I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain.

Narrator: But Moses said to God,

Moses: If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?

Narrator: God said to Moses,

God: I AM WHO I AM.

(continued)



Scripture Readings

Dramatic Reading of the Text, cont'd

Narrator: He said further,

God: Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'

Narrator: God also said to Moses,

God: Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you': This is my name forever, and this my title for all generations.

Narrator: But Moses said to the Lord,

Moses: O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.

Narrator: Then the Lord said to him,

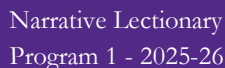
God: Who gives speech to mortals? Who makes them mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to speak.

Narrator: But he said,

Moses: O my Lord, please send someone else.

Narrator: Then the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses and he said,

God: What of your brother Aaron, the Levite? I know that he can speak fluently; even now he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you his heart will be glad. You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth; and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and will teach you what you shall do. He indeed shall speak for you to the people; he shall serve as a mouth for you, and you shall serve as God for him. Take in your hand this staff, with which you shall perform the signs.



God's Name Is Revealed, Exodus 2:23-25; 3:10-15; 4:10-17

[illegible]



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: Believers minister not because of who we are, but because God is with us.

Moses is the patron saint of every reluctant, nervous, and unqualified person who ever resisted a call to ministry. While it's typical for those whom God calls in scripture to protest at least once before they agree to serve, Moses' protests seem endless. Moses says he's too insignificant to speak to Pharaoh (3:10), that he doesn't know enough (3:12), that he's a terrible public speaker (4:10), and even after he runs through his list of reasons, Moses still just begs "please send someone else" (4:13). It's perhaps understandable why God would get a little frustrated with Moses (4:14). And while it will no doubt be a comfort for any anxious minister to know they are not the first person to feel under-qualified or under-equipped to answer God's call, perhaps what is most encouraging are the reassurances God gives.

To Moses' objection that he's an unqualified nobody, God reassures him that what matters most is that "I will be with you" and God will see it through (3:12). To the protest that he doesn't know God well enough, God gives Moses God's own name, "I AM,"

because God is the One who is there for Moses (3:14). Moses isn't eloquent enough, so God determines to teach Moses what to say (4:12). Moses still begs not to go, so God assures him he won't minister alone (4:14). For every potential problem, anxious short-coming, and logical reason Moses has not to answer God's call, God gives Moses the reassurance of knowing that he can, not because of who Moses is, but because of who God is. In the end, that is the hope and the confidence that every believer who hears God's call to serve, to feed, to teach, to heal, to minister can hold onto. We minister not because of who we are, but because of who God is and because God goes with us.

—Pr. Mattheis Lorimor

Scripture Summary

The God of enslaved Israel is about to make good on an ancient promise, and has a special job for his servant Moses. This would-be hero, however, is less than enthusiastic.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

L: Siblings in Christ, let us call upon our God.

C: Come, O Holy I AM.

L: Our God, who is and was and will be, is with us in this place.

C: We sing our thanks and praise to God!

Confession and Forgiveness

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

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: Holy God,

C: You have created us in your image, protected and nourished us, and called us into your work of justice. Yet while we profess these truths, we forget who we are and whose we are. We put our trust in ourselves, in material goods, and in worldly powers instead of trusting you. We prioritize our comfort over our neighbor's needs. Call us back to you, God. Forgive us our failings, and direct us back onto the path you would have us tread.

P: Hear the good news, siblings in Christ. You have been created in wholeness, claimed in love, and forgiven according to God's boundless grace. Nothing—even the worst we do or fail to do—can separate us from the love of our God. Receive this forgiveness with joy, in the name of Jesus, our savior and friend. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

L: God of promise,

C: You call us into your holy presence and entrust us with the work of caring for your beloved children—all of humanity and all of creation. Guide us, equip us, and inspire us to follow in your way, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

Generous God, you give us all we need to flourish, and we trust that there is enough for us and for all the world. Accept these gifts, given in gratitude, for the work of caring for all that you have made. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: Confident that our God hears and answers our cries, we pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

L: God, we are not always willing when you call. We make excuses, downplay our gifts, deflect and dodge the responsibility you ask of us. Equip and inspire us that we might move past our doubts and go boldly forth for the sake of your gospel. God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: The burning bush was not consumed, O God, yet wildfires often rage, bringing death and destruction. Teach us to manage the forests you created with love and attention, that they might be preserved for the good of all. God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: Call into leadership those who will put into action your work of justice and equity for all people. Engage each of us in supporting our leaders as they serve us. God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: You are who you are forever, and one word from you can bring about the healing of all. Visit us with your transformative spirit, and surround with your presence those whom we lift up before you (*especially...*) God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: We are as much enslaved now as we have ever been. Not by shackles, but by our shortsighted greed and callous disregard for the vulnerable and powerless. Bring us to reconciliation with each other and with all your creation. God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: We stand in a long line of servants who followed you without knowing exactly where you would lead them, but trusted nonetheless. Make us worthy to share their company, and bring us all at length to your eternal kingdom. God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: We lift all these prayers, and those of our hearts, to your loving care, O God. Receive them and restore our hope in your promises. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

Jesus, who was before the world came into being, and who still is, invites us in the here and now to into his holy presence, as Moses to the burning bush. Come to the table and be fed for the journey ahead.

Litany

1: We are standing on holy ground.

2: **We are in the presence of our awesome God.**

1: God calls us by name,

2: **And tells us God's name in return.**

1: God calls us to work that feels harder than we can possibly accomplish.

2: **And, like Moses, we want to say, "Send someone else."**

1: But our God knows we are up to the task.

2: **Our God will give us all we need.**

1: Let us go forth into the world with joy,

2: **Trusting that our God will lead the way.**



Creative Expression

Congregational Art

Supplies needed:

- Mural paper
- Markers or crayons

Before worship

- Draw the word “GOD” in open letters as large as possible to fill the mural paper, and mount it the worship space where it can be accessed.
- Place markers and crayons by the mural paper.

During Creative Expression

- Sing a hymn or kids’ song about the wonder of God or God’s holy name.
- Invite people write a name for God that they know from the Bible on the mural paper and/or come up with their own name for God. You can tell them about how Hagar named God “El-roi” or “God who sees”—the only person in the Bible to have given God a name (Gen 16:13)

Skit

Characters: Person 1, Voice on phone

Props: Cell phone

Person 1: *(answering phone)* Hello?

Voice: Hi, [Person 1]. How are you?

Person 1: New phone. Who dis?

Voice: You don’t remember me?

Person 1: You came up as “Unavailable” on my caller ID. I only answered because I had a feeling it was an important call.

Voice: The most important of your life!

Person 1: Is this Publisher’s Clearing House?

Voice: Listen. I have a job for you.

Person 1: Oh! You must be on the board at Eco-Tech. Did I get the job?

Voice: A more important job.

Person 1: Who is this again?

Voice: Look, can you just listen to me? I made a promise a long, long time ago and I need to keep it.

Person 1: A promise to who?

Voice: Whom. A promise to whom.

Person 1: Fine. To whom. What promise?

Voice: I promised my kids I would do something about it.

Person 1: About what?

Voice: The world. All of creation. It’s in crisis. Climate change is on an inexorable path to catastrophe. I want my kids to have a world to live in long into a future. A healthy, happy, beautiful world. I promised them they would have that, and I always keep my promises. So the time is now.

Person 1: What time is that?

Voice: Time for YOU to make that promise happen.

Person 1: Me? I didn’t make the promise.

(continued)



Creative Expression

Skit, cont'd

Voice: No, but you are the promise. Go out there and let the powers that be know that things have to change and change now. Drastically. With my help, you can free my kids from a bleak and uncertain future, and bring them into a beautiful new world!

Person 1: How am I going to do that?

Voice: I'll tell you exactly what to do. And you're going to start by marching down to the governor's office and telling her she needs to champion this cause.

Person 1: She's not in my political party. What makes you think she'll listen to me?

Voice: She probably won't at first. But trust me on this one.

Person 1: Why me? I'm not good at public speaking. I get all tongue-tied when I have to deal with confrontation.

Voice: I'll tell you exactly what to say. Just keep you Bluetooth on.

Person 1: Look, can't you just send someone else?

Voice: No.

Person 1: No? Come on. There must be thousands of other activists more qualified.

Voice: Of course there are. Almost all of them are more qualified.

Person 1: Hey!

Voice: But I know without a doubt that you are the right person for this job. You won't be alone. I just need you to step outside of your comfort zone and really push on this one. We're on a tight timeline.

Person 1: This sounds like it's going to be a serious challenge.

Voice: You'll be okay. You just have to trust me.

Person 1: But I still don't even know who this is.

Voice: Yes, you do.

Person 1: Wait...is this...is this who I think it is?

Voice: I AM.

Person 1: *(sighing)* Well. If anyone can make this happen, it's you. Okay, I'll do it. But stay on the phone, okay? I'm gonna need all the inspiration I can get.

Voice: You got it.



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

God's name tells us about who God is.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Large-printed names of God, one per piece of paper (big enough to be seen by congregation)

Adonai (my Lord)	Elohim (God)
Yahweh (Lord)	Jehovah (Lord)
Almighty	Alpha and Omega
Lord	Deliverer
Emmanuel	Comforter
Everlasting Father	Foundation
Friend	Holy One
I AM	Light of the World
Redeemer	Refuge
Rock	Way
Truth	Life

Background

Joseph, son of Jacob (named Israel by God), brought his family to Egypt to survive a famine. 400 years later, when the Israelites had become a nation great in numbers, the Pharaoh forgot what Joseph had done to save Egypt from the famine 400 years prior. Pharaoh enslaved the Israelites to keep them from uprising. God finally responded to their plea and sent Moses to proclaim their liberation. God told Moses to proclaim their freedom in God's name: I AM WHO I AM.

God's timing is clearly different from ours; it took generations for God to respond to the pleas of the Israelites. But when God did respond, it marked the beginning of a miraculous deliverance and eternal relationship with the Israelites, and eventually with us.

Set the Scene

Ask the kids if any of them know what their names means or if there's a story behind their name. Take one or two ideas. Talk about how in the Bible, names were very, very important. Lots of times, people's names were changed when there was a big change in their lives. Tell the kids that in today's story, they're going to hear a name so special it's unbelievable.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

What did God say God's name was? Kick around ideas about what that might mean. What does it tell us about God?

Tell the kids that God has a whole bunch of names in the Bible. Pass out the sheets and have the kids hold them up for everyone to see and read them, if they are readers. Choose one or two and ask what it tells the kids about who God is.

If the kids were to choose a name to call God, what would it be? Invite everyone to think of their own special, precious name for God and pray in that name this week.

Close with a prayer thanking God for helping us to understand who God is.

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Bread, enough to share.
(Be aware of food allergies)
- A cloth napkin to hide the bread under.



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 16:1-18

16 The whole congregation of the Israelites set out from Elim; and Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had departed from the land of Egypt. ²The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. ³The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.” ⁴Then the Lord said to Moses, “I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not. ⁵On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days.” ⁶So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, “In the evening you shall know that it was the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, ⁷and in the morning you shall see the glory of the Lord, because he has heard your complaining against the Lord. For what are we, that you complain against us?” ⁸And Moses said, “When the Lord gives you meat to eat in the evening and your fill of bread in the morning, because the Lord has heard the complaining that you utter against him—what are we? Your complaining is not against us but against the Lord.” ⁹Then Moses said to Aaron, “Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, ‘Draw near to the Lord, for he has heard your complaining.’” ¹⁰And as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the Israelites, they looked toward the wilderness, and the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud. ¹¹The Lord spoke to Moses

and said, ¹²“I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, ‘At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the Lord your God.’”

¹³In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. ¹⁴When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. ¹⁵When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, “It is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat. ¹⁶This is what the Lord has commanded: ‘Gather as much of it as each of you needs, an omer to a person according to the number of persons, all providing for those in their own tents.’” ¹⁷The Israelites did so, some gathering more, some less. ¹⁸But when they measured it with an omer, those who gathered much had nothing over, and those who gathered little had no shortage; they gathered as much as each of them needed.

Secondary Text: John 6:51

⁵¹“I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

Pronunciation Guide

Elim: EE-lihm

Sinai: SAI-nai

Omer: OH-mer



Scripture Readings

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator, Israelites, Lord

Narrator: The whole congregation of the Israelites set out from Elim; and Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had departed from the land of Egypt. The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The Israelites said to them,

Israelites: If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.

Narrator: Then the Lord said to Moses,

Lord: I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not. On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days.

Narrator: So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites,

Moses: In the evening you shall know that it was the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, and in the morning you shall see the glory of the Lord, because he has heard your complaining against the Lord. For what are we, that you complain against us?

Narrator: And Moses said,

Moses: When the Lord gives you meat to eat in the evening and your fill of bread in the morning, because the Lord has heard the complaining that you utter

against him—what are we? Your complaining is not against us but against the Lord.

Narrator: Then Moses said to Aaron,

Moses: Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, ‘Draw near to the Lord, for he has heard your complaining.’

Narrator: And as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the Israelites, they looked toward the wilderness, and the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud. The Lord spoke to Moses and said,

Lord: I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, ‘At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the Lord your God.’

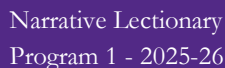
Narrator: In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another,

Israelites: What is it?

Narrator: For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them,

Moses: It is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat. This is what the Lord has commanded: ‘Gather as much of it as each of you needs, an omer to a person according to the number of persons, all providing for those in their own tents.’

Narrator: The Israelites did so, some gathering more, some less. But when they measured it with an omer, those who gathered much had nothing over, and those who gathered little had no shortage; they gathered as much as each of them needed.



God Provides Manna, Exodus 16:1-18

A word cloud visualization of words from the Bible, primarily Exodus 16-17. The most prominent words are "Lord", "Moses", "Sin", "Bread", "Shall", "Gather", "Against", "Eat", "Hear", "Congregation", "Wilderness", "Out", "Much", "Saw", "Came", "Set", "Israelites", "Whole", "Complain", "Up", "Layer", "Land", "Egypt", "Bring", "Twice", "Quails", "Frost", "Heaven", "Dew", "Sin", "Lifted", "Flaky", "Hungry", "Needs", "Sat", "Ate", "Omer", "Fifteenth", "Each", "Day", "Fifteenth", "Eaten", "Whether", "Land", "Month", "Commanded", "Egypt", "Evening", "Fill", "Substance", "Camp", "Israel", "Instruction", "Ground", "Departed", "Covered", "Second", "Test", "According", "People", "Omer", "Less", "Dew", "Fine", "Person", "Morning", "Congregation", "Deparated", "Evening", "Hunger", "Sin", "Lifted", "Hear", "Congregation", "Fill", "Sixth", "Utter", "Prepare", "Assembly", "Layer", "God", "Sinai", "Glory", "Day", "Enough", "More", "Rain", "Bread", "Gives", "Fleshpots", "Heaven", "Spoke", "Frost", "Quails", "Twice", "Month", "Month", "God".



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: Giving is an act of relationship. What we give to shows what we truly care for.

Much like the widow's mite, the Israelites' bread from heaven is a story that is probably most often heard during stewardship month. In that context, the preacher usually focuses on the Israelites' command to recognize what they "need" before exhorting us that if only we could all learn to live by what we need there would be enough for all. Yet, after the experience of having to continue to fund church ministries during a Covid shutdown, reading this passage today I tend to focus less on the Israelites and more on the reason why God gives to the people in the first place.

It's striking that although the people complain, God decides to give them what they need before Moses or Aaron (or anyone) actually asks God to give (16:4). And while it's true there is an element of a test behind the bread, God also sends a wave of quail for the people to eat meat with no strings attached. Why? Perhaps because, as so many of us learned during

Covid, we give to the things we care most for. Especially for humans with limited resources, what we do with our money—what we choose to spend it on, save for, give it to—shows in a clear way what things are truly a priority in our lives; our family, our entertainment, our retirement, our charities, or maybe just ourselves. Like God in the wilderness, we support the things and people we choose to care about. The miracle of the Israelites' bread from heaven is that it proves our God chooses to care for us, complaints and all. The only question is, what or who will we choose to care for?

—Pr. Mattheis Lorimor

Scripture Summary

God has looked after the Israelites as a loving parent would: first showing them the way out of slavery, then feeding and guiding them through the wilderness. And the people respond with all the gratitude of petulant children.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

- L: Come to the table of mercy.
- C: We come to be fed on the bread of life.**
- L: We do not live by bread alone,
- C: But by the Word of God.**
- L: Jesus is the Word of God and the Bread of Life.
- C: We come into Jesus' presence with thanksgiving.**

Confession and Forgiveness

- P: We confess our sins before God and one another.
Pause for silence and reflection.
- P: Holy God,
- C: You have created us in your image, protected and nourished us, and called us into your work of justice. Yet while we profess these truths, we forget who we are and whose we are. We put our trust in ourselves, in material goods, and in worldly powers instead of trusting you. We prioritize our comfort over our neighbor's needs. Call us back to you, God. Forgive us our failings, and direct us back onto the path you would have us tread.**
- P: Hear the good news, siblings in Christ. You have been created in wholeness, claimed in love, and forgiven according to God's boundless grace. Nothing—even the worst we do or fail to do—can separate us from the love of our God. Receive this forgiveness with joy, in the name of Jesus, our savior and friend. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

- L: God of grace,
- C: You open your hand and fill us with all good things. Relieve us from our fears of scarcity, that we might trust in your provision for us, and share generously out of what you have given, that all the world might flourish. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.**

Offertory Prayer

Merciful God, as you provided for your people in the desert, so you provide for all our needs. Accept now our gifts of money, time, and ability, returned to you out of what you have first given us. Use them and us to your good purposes according to your will. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: Confident that our God hears and answers our cries, we pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

L: Holy God, you have been generous beyond measure to your children. Open our hearts in gratitude for all that we have received, that we might give you the praise and honor befitting your goodness. God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: We reap the riches of the land and benefit from the treasures of the earth. Wake us up to the breadth of responsibility required to preserve this fertile planet, and don't let us lose sight of our interconnectedness with it and its fate. God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: Make us to work within our communities to ensure that all of our neighbors have enough to eat. Strengthen those who work toward just laws that provide what is needed to live for all people, so that all might flourish. God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: Your blessings rain upon us from the heavens, O God. Shower us with your healing and surround each person who suffers, drenching them with your presence and love, (*especially...*). God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: We follow the trail of your saints, stretching through miles of wilderness, over centuries of grace. Give us the faith which they showed, and patience when the way ahead seems unclear. God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: We lift all these prayers, and those of our hearts, to your loving care, O God. Receive them and restore our hope in your promises. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

As God provided bread to his people in the desert, Jesus invites you now to this table to feast on the Bread of Life which is his own body. Come with your siblings to be nourished in his holy presence, for all is prepared.

Litany

1: We do not see you at work in our lives, God.

2: Would it have been better not to follow you?

1: We were miserable, but it was at least familiar.

2: You call us out of our comfort zone.

1: You ask us to trust you, that all will be well.

2: You provide what we need to make it work:

1: A kind word from a stranger,

2: An opportunity for growth,

1: Exactly what we need when we need it.

2: Open our eyes to see the manna you provide.

1: Open our hearts to trust you to lead us.

2: Open our minds to the truth of your presence.



Creative Expression

Congregational Activity

Supplies needed:

- Different kinds of breads/baked goods
- Plates, napkins

Before worship

- Ask congregations members to make a batch of (preferably non-messy/sweet) baked goods.
- Set the bread out on a large table in the worship space where it can be seen.

During Creative Expression

- Remind the congregation how God provided food when God's people needed it, and invited them to take what they needed. Briefly reflect on the idea of "enough."
- Sing a hymn or kids' song about bread, food, eating together, communion, etc.
- During the singing, invite people to come up and "take only what they need" from the table, and enjoy it during or after worship.

Skit

Characters: Parent, Kid 1, Kid 2, Kid 3

Props: Map of a hiking trail

Scene: Family is hiking in the woods

Kid 1: I'm hungry.

Kid 2: I'm tired.

Kid 3: Are we there yet? I have to go to the bathroom.

Parent: Could the three of you just stop complaining? You wanted to go for a hike and now we're on a hike and you've don't nothing but complain since we left the car!

Kid 1: I didn't think it would be this hot.

Kid 2: Or climb-y.

Kid 3: It would've been better if we just stayed home.

Parent: Are you kidding? You were miserable at home! All I heard was how bored you were. How sick of school and your friends and all the rest of it. You begged me to get you out.

Kid 1: Well, yeah, I guess. But I'm hungry. I ran out of snacks an hour ago.

Kid 2: And my water bottle is almost empty.

Kid 3: And I really need to...you know.

Parent: Fine. (*looks at map*) The map says there's an apple orchard ahead if we take the left trail. We can pick a couple apples. There's a privy marked there, too.

Kid 3: Oh thank goodness.

Kid 1: I'm not in the mood for apples.

Kid 2: Isn't there a café?

Parent: For crying out loud. I have taken you kids away from your miserable lives just like you wanted, and I have found a solution for every issue along the way. Can't you just be grateful?

Kid 1: (*grudging*) I guess.

Kid 2: Yeah. Sorry.

Kid 3: Can we go? 'Cuz I gotta...go!

Parent: This way. Follow me and you'll be fine. You're lucky I love you guys so much.

Kid 2: We know. Thanks, [Parent].



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

God cares for us and we care for each other.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Bread, enough to share.
(Be aware of food allergies)
- A cloth napkin to hide the bread under.

Background

With God's help, Moses freed the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. When their food ran out, the people wanted to go back to Egypt, where at least they would be fed. But God had other plans. God sent manna (a bread-like substance) and quails daily for food, just enough for each person to be satisfied for the day.

Set the Scene

Ask the kids if they ever get "hangry" (hungry to the point that it makes them angry). What is that like? Take a story or share one of your own. Who helps them out when they're hangry? Maybe share a story of a time when a friend or family member reminded you to eat because you were crabby. Point out that we rely on each other to make sure we take care of our needs.

Give the kids a quick run-down of the Exodus—how Moses freed God's people from slavery but now they were in the desert wilderness and had to learn to take care of themselves and each other.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

What did God provide for the people to eat? (*Manna*) Tell them that "*manna*" literally just means, "What is it?" because the Israelites had no idea what it was!

God heard the Israelites complaining, and God knew they were hungry and scared and didn't know how to take care of themselves, and God loved them very much and wanted to make sure they had what they needed until they could take care of themselves.

Are any of the kids ready to go out and live on their own and take care of themselves completely? (*No*.) Who takes care of them until they're ready? (*parents, grandparents, guardians, neighbors, etc.*) God take care of us, too, just like God took care of the Israelites.

Ask the kids if any of them are hungry or even hangry. Hold up the bread still hidden under the napkin and ask, "What is it?" Then say, "Exactly! It's *manna*!" Take off the napkin and give each kid a piece to munch on.

Close with a prayer thanking God for caring for us, and of all the people in our lives who care for us.

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Stethoscope
- Microphone
- Hearing aid (maybe an old one someone isn't using)
- Bluetooth ear buds



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 Samuel 3:1-21

3 Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord under Eli. The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread. ²At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; ³the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was. ⁴Then the Lord called, "Samuel! Samuel!" and he said, "Here I am!" ⁵and ran to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call; lie down again." So he went and lay down. ⁶The Lord called again, "Samuel!" Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, my son; lie down again." ⁷Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. ⁸The Lord called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that the Lord was calling the boy. ⁹Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. ¹⁰Now the Lord came and stood there, calling as before, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening." ¹¹Then the Lord said to Samuel, "See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make both ears of anyone who hears of it tingle. ¹²On that day I will fulfill against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. ¹³For I have told him that I am about to punish his house forever, for the iniquity that he knew, because his sons were blaspheming God, and he did not restrain them.

¹⁴Therefore I swear to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be expiated by sacrifice or offering forever." ¹⁵Samuel lay there until morning; then he opened the doors of the house of the Lord. Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli. ¹⁶But Eli called Samuel and said, "Samuel, my son." He said, "Here I am." ¹⁷Eli said, "What was it that he told you? Do not hide it from me. May God do so to you and more also, if you hide anything from me of all that he told you." ¹⁸So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him. Then he said, "It is the Lord; let him do what seems good to him."

¹⁹As Samuel grew up, the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. ²⁰And all Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was a trustworthy prophet of the Lord. ²¹The Lord continued to appear at Shiloh, for the Lord revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the Lord.

Secondary Text: John 20:21-23

²¹Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." ²²When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

Pronunciation Guide

Beer-sheba: BEE-er-SHEE-buh
Shiloh: SHAI-lo



Scripture Readings

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator, Lord, Samuel, Eli

Narrator: Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord under Eli. The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread. At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was. Then the Lord called,

Lord: Samuel! Samuel!

Narrator: And he said,

Samuel: Here I am!

Narrator: And ran to Eli, and said,

Samuel: Here I am, for you called me.

Narrator: But he said,

Eli: I did not call; lie down again.

Narrator: So he went and lay down. The Lord called again,

Lord: Samuel!

Narrator: Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said,

Samuel: Here I am, for you called me.

Narrator: But he said,

Eli: I did not call, my son; lie down again.

Narrator: Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. The Lord called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said,

Samuel: Here I am, for you called me.

Narrator: Then Eli perceived that the Lord was calling the boy. Therefore Eli said to Samuel,

Eli: Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'

Narrator: So Samuel went and lay down in his place. Now the Lord came and stood there, calling as before,

Lord: Samuel! Samuel!

Narrator: And Samuel said,

Samuel: Speak, for your servant is listening.

Narrator: Then the Lord said to Samuel,

Lord: See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make both ears of anyone who hears of it tingle. On that day I will fulfill against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. For I have told him that I am about to punish his house forever, for the iniquity that he knew, because his sons were blaspheming God, and he did not restrain them. Therefore I swear to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be expiated by sacrifice or offering forever.

Narrator: Samuel lay there until morning; then he opened the doors of the house of the Lord. Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli. But Eli called Samuel and said,

Eli: Samuel, my son.

Narrator: He said,

Samuel: Here I am.

(continued)



Scripture Readings

Dramatic Reading of the Text, cont'd

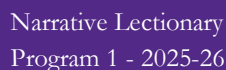
Narrator: Eli said,

Eli: What was it that he told you? Do not hide it from me. May God do so to you and more also, if you hide anything from me of all that he told you.

Narrator: So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him. Then he said,

Eli: It is the Lord; let him do what seems good to him.

Narrator: As Samuel grew up, the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was a trustworthy prophet of the Lord. The Lord continued to appear at Shiloh, for the Lord revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the Lord.



God Calls Samuel, 1 Samuel 3:1-21

[illegible]



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: In a world full of voices, we are called to listen for the voice of God.

Although Samuel and Eli's back-and-forth "You called me," "I didn't; go to bed!" may at first seem like a humorous skit from a sit-com, a very serious question lurks behind it. How do you recognize God's voice in a world full of voices? Just think about all the voices we hear on a daily basis; voices on the news describing all that's going wrong, the boss's voice ordering us to be more productive while adding more to our To-Do list, advertising voices telling us we'd be happier if we had this or that, the list goes on. The world is full of voices ready to give us all kinds of words for what to do, how to act, even who we are. Maybe we can sympathize with Samuel hearing the voice of God and running to Eli thinking it's just another worldly voice with worldly words.

Given all the voices and words in our world, it's significant the scripture says Samuel didn't recognize God's voice at first because he did not yet know it (3:7). Sometimes you have to learn how to listen for

the Word of God through all the clamor of the world. And while it initially brought a very difficult truth, over the course of his life it would be that single voice of God that Samuel would keep listening for in order to hear words of real truth, purpose, and grace that he needed in a world full of empty words. Perhaps if we are willing, with practice and patience, we might learn to hear that same divine voice that is still speaking somewhere beneath the bombardment of voices we face each day. And perhaps if we are attentive, with time and faith, we might learn to let that voice shape our own.

—Pr. Mattheis Lorimor

Scripture Summary

It takes several tries before young Samuel realizes that the one calling him in the night is God, rather than his master Eli. But delivering God's message will prove even trickier.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

L: People of God, your God is calling you.

C: Speak, holy God, for we are listening.

L: People of God, your God is calling you.

C: Speak, holy God, for we are listening.

L: People of God, your God is calling you.

C: Speak, holy God, for we are listening.

Confession and Forgiveness

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

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: Holy God,

C: You have created us in your image, protected and nourished us, and called us into your work of justice. Yet while we profess these truths, we forget who we are and whose we are. We put our trust in ourselves, in material goods, and in worldly powers instead of trusting you. We prioritize our comfort over our neighbor's needs. Call us back to you, God. Forgive us our failings, and direct us back onto the path you would have us tread.

P: Hear the good news, siblings in Christ. You have been created in wholeness, claimed in love, and forgiven according to God's boundless grace. Nothing—even the worst we do or fail to do—can separate us from the love of our God. Receive this forgiveness with joy, in the name of Jesus, our savior and friend. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

L: God who calls,

C: Open our ears to listen for your voice amid the clamor of our daily lives. Help us to discern your call from among the many distractions that confront us each day, that we might live each day according to your will. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

God of abundance, you shower your gifts upon us, providing more than we need. In gratitude, we offer these, our possessions, our time, and even our very selves to the work of your just and holy reign. Receive them for the sake of Jesus Christ our savior. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: Confident that our God hears and answers our cries, we pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

L: Your call comes often when we do not expect it. Incline our ears to hear what you are saying, and grant us courage to do what you ask. God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: Open our ears to the cries of the natural world, that we might remember your charge to care for all that you have made. Help us to love creation as you do, and bear out that love in action. God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: The world is slow to hear your message, even one of salvation. Use us in ways which reach the far corners of the earth with the good news of redemption and eternal life in you. God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: You are ever sensitive to our fears, weaknesses, and crises of health and wellness. Extend your healing hand to us all, (*especially...*) God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: Make us good mentors for the youth in our care. Help us to raise them in your community and support their growing faith that they may find the ways in which you are calling them to give their lives in service. God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: Join us with all who have heard your call in every age and followed you. Make of us one family of faith, undivided by time or space. God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: We lift all these prayers, and those of our hearts, to your loving care, O God. Receive them and restore our hope in your promises. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

As God called the boy Samuel in the temple, Jesus calls to you now, and says "Come and be nourished on my body and blood for the forgiveness of sins." Siblings in Christ, heed his call to the table, for all is prepared.

Litany

1: Jesus is here among us.

2: He breathes on us the Holy Spirit.

1: He calls us into the work of the Gospel.

2: Like Samuel, we don't always recognize his voice.

1: We can't imagine it would actually be God who is calling to us.

2: We might be afraid the work will be too hard.

1: But Jesus calls us by name, and gives us all we need.

2: Let us answer with joy and thanksgiving.



Creative Expression

Skit

Characters: Kid 1, Kid 2, Kid 3, Kid 4, (all Jr. High or High School) Parent 1, Parent 2

Props: Cell phone, offstage microphone

Scene: Kids 1 and 2 are together on stage. Everyone else is offstage and will just be heard as if on the phone.

Kid 1: I'm really feeling terrible.

Kid 2: Why?

Kid 1: Well, I told my friend Shanice I couldn't hang out with her tonight because I had to do my homework.

Kid 2: I thought you were going with me to [Kid 3]'s party tonight!

Kid 1: Exactly. I mean, Shanice and I have been friends since we were babies. But she's not... well...

Kid 2: Cool.

Kid 1: Yeah. And I didn't want [Kid 3] to think I'm a nerd because I hang out with Shanice.

Kid 2: Wow. That's not...well...

Kid 1: Cool. I know. I don't know what to do
(*cell phone rings. Kid 1 looks at the number.*)
Hmmm. It says "Unavailable." I'm not answering it. Anyway, I don't know what to do about Shanice.

Kid 2: I hate to sound like a...nerd...but did you pray about it?

Kid 1: A thousand times! I keep waiting for God to give me some sort of sign.

Kid 2: An epiphany.

Kid 1: Wait. Let me see if that was my [Parent 1] calling. I forgot I asked them for a ride to the party. (*dials the phone*) [Parent 1]? Did you just call me?

Parent 1: No, Honey. I'm in the middle of a meeting. I'll call you back in a little while.

Kid 1: Okay. (*ends the call*)

Kid 2: So you haven't had an epiphany.

Kid 1: Not yet.

Kid 2: Maybe you're just not listening. (*Kid 1's cell phone rings again.*)

Kid 1: It says "Unavailable." I'm not answering it. What do you mean, I'm not listening?

Kid 2: Well God's not just gonna up and speak out loud to you.

Kid 1: I suppose not. Oh, wait. Let me see if that was my brother calling. He said he'd do my chores tonight so I could go to the party. (*dials the phone*) [Kid 4] Did you just call me?

Kid 4: No! I'm in the middle of my driver's test! And I think I just failed it for answering the phone! THANKS, [Kid 1]."

Kid 1: Sorry! (*ends call quickly*) What were you saying?

Kid 2: That God doesn't just talk out loud to people.

Kid 1: He always did in the Bible, though. I wonder why that doesn't happen anymore. (*Kid 1's cell phone rings again*) It says "Unavailable." I'm not answering it.

(continued)



Creative Expression

Skit, continued

Kid 2: I think God speaks through other people, you know? Our parents and friends and [Pastor].

Kid 1: That makes sense. Wait—let me see if that was my [Parent 2] calling. They wanted me to pick up a couple things at the corner store on my way home. *(dials the phone)* [Parent 2]? Did you just call me?

Parent 2: No, Honey. And I'm trying to give the dog a bath so I can't talk now. I'll call you with that shopping list in a little bit.

Kid 1: Okay. Sorry to interrupt. *(ends the call)*

Kid 2: You know, [Kid 1], I just had a thought. Remember Samuel in the Bible? Where he keeps thinking his master, Eli, is calling him but it's really God?

Kid 1: Yeah...

(The phone rings. The kids stare at it with wide eyes for a few moments, then look at each other. Finally Kid 1 answers.)

Kid 1: Um... hello?

Kid 3: Oh, hi, [Kid 1]. It's [Kid 3]. I've been trying to call you all afternoon.

Kid 1: What's up?

Kid 3: Well, I ran into Shanice at the library this morning and invited her to my party. I told her I invited you, too, but she said you had to stay home tonight and do homework. Is that true?

Kid 1: No! I'm totally coming to you party!

Kid 3: Oh. Um...so did you lie to Shanice about your homework?

Kid 1: *(uncomfortable silence)* I...yeah, I guess I...sort of...did.

Kid 3: Why?

Kid 1: She asked me to hang out tonight and I didn't want her to feel bad that I was going to your party and she wasn't.

Kid 3: Why didn't you invite her along?

Kid 1: Because she's...she's not...

Kid 3: Cool?

Kid 1: Yeah. And I didn't want you to think I wasn't cool.

Kid 3: I'm starting to think that now!

Kid 1: You're right. Oh, I did this all wrong! What should I do?

Kid 3: I think you need to call Shanice and tell her the truth.

Kid 1: That would be awful! She'll be so hurt!

Kid 3: Think how much more hurt she'll be if she finds out you lied. Or you could just skip the party, since she'll be there, and stay home to do your homework like you said you were.

Kid 1: I guess that's an option.

Kid 3: But I can't be friends with someone who lies to their friends, [Kid 1]. So if you're not going to tell Shanice the truth, you should just stay home.

Kid 1: I get it, [Kid 3]. I'm so sorry. I'll call Shanice.

Kid 3: Great! See you tonight!!

(Kid 1 ends the call)

Kid 2: Who says God doesn't talk directly to people anymore. Maybe you should answer your phone more often.



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

We can listen for God's voice.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Stethoscope
- Microphone
- Hearing aid (maybe an old one someone isn't using)
- Bluetooth ear buds

Background

Samuel was born as a gift from God to Hannah, Samuel's mother. Hannah was barren and prayed to God for a child. God heard her prayer and gave her Samuel. In thanks, Hannah gave Samuel back to God by allowing him to live and grow up in the temple.

When God called Samuel, the boy didn't recognize the voice until Eli told him to be still and listen. Then God identified God's self to Samuel, and called him into God's work as a prophet. Talk to the kids about how to listen for God's voice in the world, when there are so many competing voices around us.

Set the Scene

Show the kids the stethoscope and talk about what it's for and how cool it is. Show them each of the remaining items and talk about how each helps us to hear things better or in a specific way. Tell the kids that in today's story, a young boy named Samuel heard a voice he'd never heard before. Can the kids guess who it was?

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Wonder with the kids about whether God still speaks to people today. How might people hear God's voice? Talk about how there are lots and lots of voices out there telling us what to do and how to act. Ask the kids for examples (*tv, internet, peers at school, parents, etc.*) Sometimes God speaks to us through the words of other people, but how can we recognize God's voice?

Ask the kids what Eli told Samuel to do. (*Say I'm listening.*) Wonder with the kids about the ways we listen for God's voice. (*reading the Bible, going to Sunday School, praying, asking trusted grown-ups to help us.*) Is it always easy to recognize God's voice?

Reiterate the point that God does speak to us if we are open to hearing God. Close with a prayer asking God to help us recognize God's voice calling us to love God, ourselves, and our neighbors.

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- A beautiful vase or jar you can't see through
- A beaten up tin can or other ugly container
- A heart-shaped gem or other small, beautiful object (place this in the can)



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 Samuel 16:1-13

16 The Lord said to Samuel, “How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons.”
²Samuel said, “How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me.” And the Lord said, “Take a heifer with you, and say, ‘I have come to sacrifice to the Lord.’”
³Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you.”
⁴Samuel did what the Lord commanded, and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling, and said, “Do you come peaceably?”
⁵He said, “Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord; sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice.” And he sanctified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.
⁶When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, “Surely the Lord’s anointed is now before the Lord.”
⁷But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.”
⁸Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, “Neither has the Lord chosen this one.”
⁹Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, “Neither has the Lord chosen this one.”
¹⁰Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, “The Lord has not chosen any of these.”
¹¹Samuel said to Jesse, “Are all your sons here?” And he said, “There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep.” And Samuel said to Jesse, “Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here.”
¹²He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome.

The Lord said, “Rise and anoint him; for this is the one.”
¹³Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah.

Text: Psalm 51:10-14

¹⁰Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.
¹¹Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me.
¹²Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.
¹³Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.
¹⁴Deliver me from bloodshed, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance.

Secondary Text: John 7:24

²⁴“Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.”

Pronunciation Guide

Bethlehemite: BEHTH-leh-hehm-ait
Eliab: ee-LAI-ab
Abinadab: uh-BIHN-uh-dab
Shammah: SHAM-uh
Ramah: RAY-muh



Scripture Readings

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator, Lord, Samuel, Elders, Jesse

Narrator: The Lord said to Samuel,

Lord: How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons.

Narrator: Samuel said,

Samuel: How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me.

Narrator: And the Lord said,

Lord: Take a heifer with you, and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the Lord.' Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you.

Narrator: Samuel did what the Lord commanded, and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling, and said,

Elders: Do you come peaceably?

Narrator: He said,

Samuel: Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord; sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice.

Narrator: And he sanctified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice. When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought,

Samuel: Surely the Lord's anointed is now before the Lord.

Narrator: But the Lord said to Samuel,

Lord: Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.

Narrator: Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said,

Samuel: Neither has the Lord chosen this one.

Narrator: Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said,

Samuel: Neither has the Lord chosen this one.

Narrator: Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse,

Samuel: The Lord has not chosen any of these.

Narrator: Samuel said to Jesse,

Samuel: Are all your sons here?

Narrator: And he said,

Jesse: There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep.

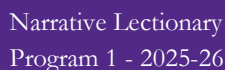
Narrator: And Samuel said to Jesse,

Samuel: Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here.

Narrator: He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The Lord said,

Lord: Rise and anoint him; for this is the one.

Narrator: Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah.



God Calls David, 1 Samuel 16:1-13; Psalm 51:10-14

[illegible]



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: God's activity in history does not conform to human judgment or expectation. But neither does God's judgment of us, which results in unearned love.

In her book, *Are You Alone Wise? The Search for Certainty in the Early Modern Era*, the historian Susan Schreiner examines points of connection between the theological currents of the Reformation and early modern literature. Her study shows how both theology and the arts were occupied with a concern over self-deception resulting from the disconnect between appearance and reality. While Martin Luther and other reformers struggled to establish a firm ground for Christian faith absent the magisterial authority of the Roman papacy, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* opines that "one may smile, and smile, and be a villain," and his witches open *Macbeth* chanting that "fair is foul and foul is fair," for example. Schreiner's work serves as a reminder that we are not the first to be troubled by disinformation and fake news, and that the quest for certainty is a timeless one, which manifests in each age.

Samuel's ministry as a prophet is defined by uncertainty about what God is doing. It may be helpful for your listeners to remind them how Samuel received his own calling, being woken by the voice of God in the night and confusing it with his master, Eli. He was instrumental to the rise of Saul as king, who was himself a surprising choice, coming from the least notable tribe of Benjamin. But what Samuel faces now is the most unnerving thing of all: God rejecting Saul as king, when it was God who first chose him! What's more, Samuel had called Saul to repentance, and Saul repented, and yet God did not relent in

regretting making Saul king. And now, God calls Samuel out of his grief over Saul to anoint a new, unexpected king. While the narrative lectionary wants us to focus on the unexpectedness of God selecting David as a king, setting this moment within the life and ministry of Samuel more broadly directs us to the larger question of certainty about God's activity which hangs over the reading and, of course, our lives as well.

Inviting your listeners into the uncertainty which surrounds Samuel's ministry will not lead to an easy answer. There is no version of "let go and let God" to be found here. This is because questions, doubts, worries—all these are a part of what it means to be in the presence of God at work. When we become comfortable with our own uncertainty, we can receive the comfort that it is not our certainty which saves us. As Paul says, "What if some were unfaithful? Will their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? By no means!" (Romans 3:3-4). Our uncertainty does not nullify the certainty with which God has named us and claimed us as our own. Allowing our doubts to become impediments to our life with God is an overestimation of our ability to define who God is for us. Embrace uncertainty when it comes, trusting that God has already overcome it and so much more in Christ.

—Rev. Dr. Miles Hopgood

Scripture Summary

Samuel grieves over God's rejection of Saul as king, but he is still called to rise and anoint a replacement, David.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

L: Create in us clean hearts, O God,

C: And put your new spirit within us.

L: Do not cast us away from your presence,

C: Nor take your Holy Spirit from us.

L: Restore to us the joy of your salvation,

C: And sustain in us a willing spirit.

Confession and Forgiveness

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

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: Holy God,

C: You have created us in your image, protected and nourished us, and called us into your work of justice. Yet while we profess these truths, we forget who we are and whose we are. We put our trust in ourselves, in material goods, and in worldly powers instead of trusting you. We prioritize our comfort over our neighbor's needs. Call us back to you, God. Forgive us our failings, and direct us back onto the path you would have us tread.

P: Hear the good news, siblings in Christ. You have been created in wholeness, claimed in love, and forgiven according to God's boundless grace. Nothing—even the worst we do or fail to do—can separate us from the love of our God. Receive this forgiveness with joy, in the name of Jesus, our savior and friend. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

L: Loving God,

C: You do not see as we see, but look on our hearts and know us deeply. Help us to see others as you do—with love, compassion, and boundless grace, that we might live in harmony with our siblings here and throughout creation. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

O God who lavishes all good things on us, we offer now these gifts of our skills, our time, our money, and our very presence with joy and gratitude. Accept them for the sake of Jesus Christ, who offered more than we ever could. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: Confident that our God hears and answers our cries, we pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

L: O God, you choose the least likely for your special purposes. Show us how you work in unexpected ways to carry out your will for the world that you have made. God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: As David shepherded his flock, make us to care for the world that you have made with loving attention. Show us how to protect and nurture the natural world, that we might share in the joys it brings for generations to come. God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: Open our eyes to see clearly the strengths of our potential leaders, that we might choose with wisdom and care those who will direct and inspire our communities toward your vision of justice for all people. God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: You have anointed us with your healing balm, and offered us the blessing of your wholeness. We pray that you would hold all who suffer in body, mind, or spirit, (*especially...*) God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: Your saints are a continual reminder that the victory does not always go to the strongest, most popular, or most outwardly beautiful. With your servants of every age, we are in good company, and share in your holy fellowship. God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: We lift all these prayers, and those of our hearts, to your loving care, O God. Receive them and restore our hope in your promises. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

Jesus, our one true king, invites you now to this royal banquet, to be nourished on his very presence in these elements of bread and wine. Come with your siblings in Christ, and feast with our savior and friend.

Litany

1: We are so often obsessed with appearance.

2: **We judge based on what we see.**

1: We see what is marketed to us.

2: **We judge ourselves against these slick and curated images, and so often fall short.**

1: Our God does not see as the world sees.

2: **Our God knows our hearts and loves us.**

1: May we let go of what others think of us,

2: **And trust the One who thinks the world of us.**



Creative Expression

Skit

Characters: Person 1, Person 2

Props: Table, chairs, stack of folders w/ papers.

Person 1: Well I'm completely flummoxed.

Person 2: Yeah. This has not been an easy task.

Person 1: You're not helping. Can't you just make a decision?

Person 2: None of the candidates are quite right.

Person 1: What are you talking about? They're all perfectly qualified. What's the hold up?

Person 2: I don't know. I just have a gut feeling we haven't seen the right person yet. I'll know when I know.

Person 1: Ugh. Why did the boss say you had to have the final word on this?

Person 2: The boss is trusting me. They said I'd know. To go with my gut.

Person 1: Fine. Is there more coffee? I could use some.

Person 2: I think we ran out half an hour ago.

Person 1: Of course we did. Let's go over this one more time and call it done. Please.

Person 2: Okay. (*picks up file*) Strong educational background. Great experience. I really like their work on that project out in Oregon. (*picks up second file*) Strong educational background. Great experience. Really good writer. That's a huge plus. (*picks up third file*) Strong educational background. Not a lot of direct experience, but those transferrable skills...

Person 1: Yeah, yeah. Keep going.

Person 2: (*picks up fourth file*) Oh, I really liked this one. All the qualifications and a real grasp of the company's mission.

Person 1: So that's the one?

Person 2: Ehh. Not really sure... (*picks up last file*) Wait. What's this one?

Person 1: What one?

Person 2: This one. I don't remember seeing this file.

Person 1: Oh, yeah. That was one the boss just wanted me to throw into the pile. Not as much experience as the others. Isn't quite done with the required degree program, but close.

Person 2: (*reading through file*) Wow. Did you read this?

Person 1: I glanced over it. Nothing extraordinary to my mind.

Person 2: No...that's where you're wrong. What this person wrote in their cover letter...I think I just got chills.

Person 1: It's a cover letter. How...?

Person 2: I don't know. I just get the sense that this is the right person for the job. In fact, I'm sure of it. All the pieces are there. It might not look exactly like the polished candidates we've been reviewing. But this person...I'm certain this is exactly the person the boss had in mind—you know they don't look at things the way everyone else does.

Person 1: True enough. They hired you, after all.

Person 2: (*sarcastic*) Nice. (*holds up the file again*) Anyway, with a little guidance and support, I think this person might just be the best hire we could ever make at this company.

Person 1: (*sighing*) Oh, thank goodness. I'll call them tomorrow to set up an interview. Now I'm going home to sleep.

Person 2: Thanks for all your help. Sleep well!



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

God sees our hearts.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- A beautiful vase or jar you can't see through
- A beaten up tin can or other ugly container
- A heart-shaped gem or other small, beautiful object (place this in the can)

Background

After years of following God with the guidance of judges and prophets, the people became eager to be ruled by a king. God warned them that they did not need a king if they were following God. But the people insisted.

The prophet, Samuel, was appointed by God to anoint a king over Israel. After the first king, Saul, failed to live up to expectations, Samuel followed God's command to find a king among the sons of Jesse. Samuel inspected all of Jesse's sons except David, the youngest and smallest. Although they were leaders by outward appearance, God was searching for a leader with a pure heart. God chose David to be the next king.

Set the Scene

Show the kids the beautiful vase and the beat-up tin can. Ask them "Which one would do you think would be a better gift?" Why? Make a big deal about how one is so beautiful and the other kinda awful. Talk about how in today's story, God makes a surprising choice about who should be king.

Reflect Together

Ask them which one—the vase or the can—was like all David's older brothers. (*the vase*) "It's beautiful on the outside. But let's look *inside* it." Tip it upside down and nothing comes out. "Hmm. Nothing? Well, then, I wonder what's in the can..." Tip it into your hand and show the kids the beautiful, sparkly gem.

Ask the kids to think about these objects as people. Are there sometimes people they think are better or worse based on how they look? Have they ever been told they weren't good enough because they were small or for some other reason? Assure them that, just like David, God sees what's inside us, and that it's what's inside us that matters.

How can we have beautiful hearts? (*take examples*) Point out, though, that ultimately, all of us are beautiful because God loves us. No matter what we look like or what we do, our hearts are beautiful to God.

Close with a prayer thanking God for seeing our hearts.

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 5:1-5; 8:1-13

5 Now King Hiram of Tyre sent his servants to Solomon, when he heard that they had anointed him king in place of his father; for Hiram had always been a friend to David. ²Solomon sent word to Hiram, saying, ³“You know that my father David could not build a house for the name of the Lord his God because of the warfare with which his enemies surrounded him, until the Lord put them under the soles of his feet. ⁴But now the Lord my God has given me rest on every side; there is neither adversary nor misfortune. ⁵So I intend to build a house for the name of the Lord my God, as the Lord said to my father David, ‘Your son, whom I will set on your throne in your place, shall build the house for my name.’”

8 Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes, the leaders of the ancestral houses of the Israelites, before King Solomon in Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of the city of David, which is Zion. ²All the people of Israel assembled to King Solomon at the festival in the month Ethanim, which is the seventh month. ³And all the elders of Israel came, and the priests carried the ark. ⁴So they brought up the ark of the Lord, the tent of meeting, and all the holy vessels that were in the tent; the priests and the Levites brought them up. ⁵King Solomon and all the congregation of Israel, who had assembled before him, were with him before the ark, sacrificing so many sheep and oxen that they could not be counted or numbered. ⁶Then the priests brought the ark of the covenant of the Lord to its place, in the inner sanctuary of the house, in the most holy place, underneath the wings of the cherubim. ⁷For the

cherubim spread out their wings over the place of the ark, so that the cherubim made a covering above the ark and its poles. ⁸The poles were so long that the ends of the poles were seen from the holy place in front of the inner sanctuary; but they could not be seen from outside; they are there to this day. ⁹There was nothing in the ark except the two tablets of stone that Moses had placed there at Horeb, where the Lord made a covenant with the Israelites, when they came out of the land of Egypt. ¹⁰And when the priests came out of the holy place, a cloud filled the house of the Lord, ¹¹so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord.

¹²Then Solomon said, “The Lord has said that he would dwell in thick darkness. ¹³I have built you an exalted house, a place for you to dwell in forever.”

Secondary Text: John 2:19-21

¹⁹Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” ²⁰The Jews then said, “This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?” ²¹But he was speaking of the temple of his body.

Pronunciation Guide

Hiram: HY-ram

Tyre: TAI-er

Ethanim: EH-thuh-nihm

Levites: LEE-vaits

Horeb: HAWR-ehb



Scripture Readings

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator 1, Narrator 2, Narrator 3, Solomon

Narrator 1: Now King Hiram of Tyre sent his servants to Solomon, when he heard that they had anointed him king in place of his father; for Hiram had always been a friend to David. Solomon sent word to Hiram, saying,

Solomon: You know that my father David could not build a house for the name of the Lord his God because of the warfare with which his enemies surrounded him, until the Lord put them under the soles of his feet. But now the Lord my God has given me rest on every side; there is neither adversary nor misfortune. So I intend to build a house for the name of the Lord my God, as the Lord said to my father David, 'Your son, whom I will set on your throne in your place, shall build the house for my name.'

Narrator 2: Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes, the leaders of the ancestral houses of the Israelites, before King Solomon in Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of the city of David, which is Zion.

Narrator 3: All the people of Israel assembled to King Solomon at the festival in the month Ethanim, which is the seventh month. And all the elders of Israel came, and the priests carried the ark. So they brought up the ark of the Lord, the tent of meeting,

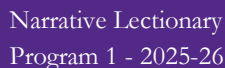
and all the holy vessels that were in the tent; the priests and the Levites brought them up.

Narrator 1: King Solomon and all the congregation of Israel, who had assembled before him, were with him before the ark, sacrificing so many sheep and oxen that they could not be counted or numbered. Then the priests brought the ark of the covenant of the Lord to its place, in the inner sanctuary of the house, in the most holy place, underneath the wings of the cherubim. For the cherubim spread out their wings over the place of the ark, so that the cherubim made a covering above the ark and its poles.

Narrator 2: The poles were so long that the ends of the poles were seen from the holy place in front of the inner sanctuary; but they could not be seen from outside; they are there to this day. There was nothing in the ark except the two tablets of stone that Moses had placed there at Horeb, where the Lord made a covenant with the Israelites, when they came out of the land of Egypt.

Narrator 3: And when the priests came out of the holy place, a cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord. Then Solomon said,

Solomon: The Lord has said that he would dwell in thick darkness. I have built you an exalted house, a place for you to dwell in forever.



Solomon's Temple, 1 Kings 5:1-5; 8:1-13

[illegible]



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: God's residence in the temple of Solomon is marked by what cannot be seen, whereas the temple God builds for us in Christ is marked by what can be seen.

The readings for today bid us to juxtapose two temples: that of Solomon and that of Christ. At first, the framing provided by the narrative lectionary appears to set them at odds. In 1 Kings, we have the building of the temple and God's glory filling it, whereas in John, we have Jesus prophesying the destruction of the temple. All but the most biblically literate listeners will need reminding that the temple of Jesus' day was the one built to replace the temple of Solomon after it was destroyed by the Babylonians nearly six-hundred years earlier. The destruction of the first temple was old news by the time of Jesus as evidenced by its recent renovation and expansion under Herod the Great, but the wound of its destruction still carried significant cultural weight. That Jesus' prophecy of the temple's destruction is contained in all four gospels testifies to the impact it would have had on his hearers.

While neither the first or second temple probably means much to the people in our pews today, there is a temple whose destruction they are likely witnessing and mourning: their local congregation. It is no secret that congregational life is undergoing a transformation in the United States which many are experiencing as destruction. Like the temple of Jesus' time, many of our members spent decades of their lives building something up which is now needing to undergo a radical change if it is going to meet the needs of our world as it is today. Regardless of what the preacher might want to preach on, the potential for these passages to evoke heavy sentiments cannot be overlooked.

With that in mind, what can these passages say together to your listeners? For those on the younger

or newer end, those members who have a sober hopefulness for what is ahead for the church, these passages bid us to attend to the loss among us. Our eagerness for the new thing that God is doing should not deafen us to the grief of those who, like Solomon, experienced the joy of building a place where they truly came to know God, come to an end. It is a mistake to chide those who are mourning the loss of something as somehow failing to trust in God doing a new thing, even as they might resist those changes as a form of denial that change is coming. For those who are experiencing these feelings of loss, these passages remind us that destruction and rebuilding are part of the essence of what it means for a temple to belong to God. God built a temple for Godself in Jesus for the express purpose that it would be torn down, all so God could raise it up again, and us with it.

We do not have to like destruction and change, nor are we necessarily called to be the agents of it. The idea that we are called to change the church by hastening its "destruction" is here, too, repudiated, as destruction always comes from without, not within. What we can find here is the call to be faithful in the midst of change. This is both a faithfulness to one another as we mourn change and faithfulness to a God who works salvation from destruction and does a new thing always and only for our benefit. What was given by God and what will be given have one thing in common: the heart of God's abiding love with and for us.

—Rev. Dr. Miles Hopgood

Scripture Summary

At last, Solomon builds the temple that will bear his name. Jesus stands before its replacement to promise us a new temple, that of his body.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

L: Our God does not live in a house built by human hands,

C: Yet our God is present here with us in this place.

L: Let us worship God in this holy house,

C: And carry this worship into the world.

Confession and Forgiveness

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

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: Holy God,

C: You have created us in your image, protected and nourished us, and called us into your work of justice. Yet while we profess these truths, we forget who we are and whose we are. We put our trust in ourselves, in material goods, and in worldly powers instead of trusting you. We prioritize our comfort over our neighbor's needs. Call us back to you, God. Forgive us our failings, and direct us back onto the path you would have us tread.

P: Hear the good news, siblings in Christ. You have been created in wholeness, claimed in love, and forgiven according to God's boundless grace. Nothing—even the worst we do or fail to do—can separate us from the love of our God. Receive this forgiveness with joy, in the name of Jesus, our savior and friend. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

L: Unbounded God,

C: All of creation is your temple and your dwelling place. Fill us with wonder and joy at your presence in all that you have made. Help us to treat the natural world and all that is in it with respect and care, that all might dwell here together in peace. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

Loving God, out of the bounty of your creation you have given us gift upon gift. Accept now these, our gifts in return—gifts of money, of ability, and of work, for the good of all that you have made. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: Confident that our God hears and answers our cries, we pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

L: Gracious God, we are your living house. Make of us a holy and sure dwelling place for your presence, to the honor of your glory and steadfast love. God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: No earthly temple can rival the awesome beauty of the natural world. Make us to hold your astonishing creation in the highest esteem and to care for it as befitting the place where you—and we—dwell together. God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: Churches stand in every place on earth as a testimony to your global presence and promises. Make us good neighbors to those of other faiths, strengthen our witness to your vast love, and send your protection to those worldwide who suffer true persecution simply for living out their faith. God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: As the incense of your presence fills the holy spaces, so descend upon us all with the balm of your healing for all who are in need (*especially...*). God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: Make us one with your faithful saints who join together in your heavenly home without walls, and inspire us by their example as we strive to follow where they have led. God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: We lift all these prayers, and those of our hearts, to your loving care, O God. Receive them and restore our hope in your promises. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

Jesus, who is God with us, present in this holy house, calls you now to this table, where all of creation shares in his body and blood for the redemption of the world. Come with your siblings in Christ to be fed.

Litany

1: How grand this holy house!

2: Surely God lives here in this place!

1: Yet were it to be a pile of rubble on the ground,

2: It would be no hindrance to God.

1: For God does not live in buildings made by human hands,

2: But in the cathedrals of creation,

1: And in the basilicas of human hearts.

2: May we adorn our hearts with love,

1: And fill our spirits with gratitude and joy,

2: A fitting habitation for our God!



Creative Expression

Congregational Art

Supplies needed:

- Mural paper
- Markers or crayons

Before worship

- Draw a simple outline of a church on the mural paper, and mount it in the worship space where it can be accessed.
- Place markers and crayons by the mural paper.

During Creative Expression

- Sing a hymn or kids' song about the church.
- Invite people to decorate the church as beautifully as they can.

Skit

Characters: Person 1 (an architect), Person 2, Person 3

Props: Blueprints, or big papers to suggest blueprints

Person 1: Here's the latest version with the set of changes you requested last time we met.

Person 2: Ooh, did you get the vaulted ceiling in the main bathroom?

Person 1: (*exasperated*) And the bay window. In the bathroom.

Person 2: What about the skylights in the workout room? The extra fifteen square feet in the second kitchen? The balcony off the second-floor hallway? The walk-in closets in the kitchen and living room?

Person 1: Everything. This has been the most exhausting build I've ever worked on. What on earth is all this for anyway?

Person 3: [Person 2] is building the house in memory of their parents. They want the fanciest house they can imagine so our whole extended family can have a place to gather together and so everyone will be incredibly impressed by it.

Person 1: Oh, they'll be impressed alright. The level of detail...

Person 2: Nothing but the best!

Person 3: Except I kind of wonder if you're not missing the point.

Person 2: What point is that?

Person 3: Well, if it's really about a place to gather with family in memory of your folks, and share love and laughter and be inspired by one another...does it need to be fancy for the sake of being fancy?

Person 1: I like the sound of that.

Person 2: Hey! My parents left me the money and I want to build a big place in their honor, so every time we get together, everyone remembers them.

Person 3: I get that. I really do. And there's nothing wrong with making the place big and beautiful and inviting. But remember that this is about the family, not about the house. About the relationship with your parents and each other. What about making that the focus. Wouldn't it change the design a bit?

Person 2: You know, I like that idea. Maybe I have gotten carried away. It's not like my parents will actually live in this house. I mean, they will live there. But not just there.

Person 1: Why don't you tell me about them? And about your family? We can create a space that's simple and beautiful and really lends itself to the meaningful relationships you've all had.

Person 2: Yeah, let's do that. Thanks.



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

Our church is a special place to be with God.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin

Background

King David, the second king of Israel, wanted to build a temple to God, a place for God to dwell. But God didn't want a temple from David. Instead, God allowed Solomon, David's son, to build a temple. The temple housed the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark of the Covenant was not a boat like Noah's ark, but was a box which held the stone tablets containing the Ten Commandments. The temple became the place all Israelites could come and worship God.

During this worship in which Solomon and the people celebrated the building of the temple, God's presence filled the entire place. Although God allowed Solomon to build a temple in which God could dwell, no building could hold the magnificence of God. God's presence extends far beyond the walls of any worship space.

Set the Scene

Ask the kids where God lives. Wonder together about it. Does God live in the church? (*yes*) Does God live in our homes? (*yes*) Does God live in nature? (*yes*) God lives everywhere! But in today's story, Israel's king Solomon wanted to build God a very special house.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Wonder with the kids about why, if God lives everywhere, God needed a special house. Who was the house really for? (*God's people*) Why did the people need such a special house? (*To gather and feel close to God, to worship and praise God.*) Talk about how the kids' church is also a special house that was built for us to come together and praise God and be with God. What are some of the things in the church that help us worship God? Look around the nave together and point out things like the musical instruments, any special windows, the vestments, the elements of communion, etc. What is each for?

Come back to the point that even though God is everywhere, we get to be with God in a very special and beautiful way when we are in church.

Close with a prayer thanking God for your worship space and for being with us everywhere we are.

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Megaphone



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 19:1-18

19 Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. ²Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, “So may the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life like the life of one of them by this time tomorrow.” ³Then he was afraid; he got up and fled for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which belongs to Judah; he left his servant there. ⁴But he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a solitary broom tree. He asked that he might die: “It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors.” ⁵Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him, “Get up and eat.” ⁶He looked, and there at his head was a cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. He ate and drank, and lay down again. ⁷The angel of the Lord came a second time, touched him, and said, “Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you.” ⁸He got up, and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God.

⁹At that place he came to a cave, and spent the night there. Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” ¹⁰He answered, “I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away.” ¹¹He said, “Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.” Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; ¹²and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not

in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. ¹³When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” ¹⁴He answered, “I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away.” ¹⁵Then the Lord said to him, “Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus; when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael as king over Aram. ¹⁶Also you shall anoint Jehu son of Nimshi as king over Israel; and you shall anoint Elisha son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah as prophet in your place. ¹⁷Whoever escapes from the sword of Hazael, Jehu shall kill; and whoever escapes from the sword of Jehu, Elisha shall kill. ¹⁸Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.”

Secondary Text: John 12:27-28

²⁷“Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say— ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. ²⁸Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.”

Pronunciation Guide

Ahab: AY-hab	Jehu: DZHEE-hyoo
Beer-sheba:	Nimshi: NIHM-shai
Horeb: HAWR-ehb	Elisha: ee-LAI-shuh
Damascus: duh-MAS-kuhs	Shaphat: SHAY-fat
Hazael: HAZ-ay-ehl	Baal: BAY-uhl
Aram: AY-ram	
Abel-meholah: AY-b’l-mee-HO-lah	



Scripture Readings

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator, Jezebel, Elijah, Angel, Lord

Narrator: Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying,

Jezebel: So may the gods do to me, and more also, if I do not make your life like the life of one of them by this time tomorrow.

Narrator: Then he was afraid; he got up and fled for his life, and came to Beer-sheba, which belongs to Judah; he left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a solitary broom tree. He asked that he might die:

Elijah: It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors.

Narrator: Then he lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep. Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him,

Angel: Get up and eat.

Narrator: He looked, and there at his head was a cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. He ate and drank, and lay down again. The angel of the Lord came a second time, touched him, and said,

Angel: Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you.

Narrator: He got up, and ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God. At that place he came to a cave, and spent the night there. Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying,

Angel: What are you doing here, Elijah?

Narrator: He answered,

Elijah: I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away.

Narrator: He said,

Angel: Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.

Narrator: Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said,

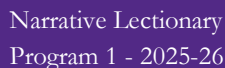
Lord: What are you doing here, Elijah?

Narrator: He answered,

Elijah: I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away.

Narrator: Then the Lord said to him,

Lord: Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus; when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael as king over Aram. Also you shall anoint Jehu son of Nimshi as king over Israel; and you shall anoint Elisha son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah as prophet in your place. Whoever escapes from the sword of Hazael, Jehu shall kill; and whoever escapes from the sword of Jehu, Elisha shall kill. Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.



God Speaks to Elijah, 1 Kings 19:1-18

Stones
Head
Came
Night
Jehu
Down
Away
Sword
Kill
Up
Go
Sat
Shall
Broom
Told
Left
Fire
Elijah
Here
Fell
Israelites
Jar
Done
Hot
Asked
Mount
Very
Himself
Food
Solitary
Leave
Face
Abel
Pass
Forsaken
Satan
Spent
Seeking
Time
Fire
Lay
Stand
Die
Fled
Wilderness
Sudden
Sound
Ate
Shall
Tree
Thousand
Second
Jezebel
Before
Altars
Beer
Up
Alone
Silence
Horeb
Better
Much
Lord
Go
Kill
Again
Enough
Servant
Earthquake
Tomorrow
Answered
Nimshi
Place
Go
Ancestors
Went
Mountain
Life
Down
Angel
Wind
Elijah
God
Breaking
Lay
Hosts
Strength
Altars
Seven
Covenant
Whoever
Judah
Baal
Went
Under
Broom
Baked
Place
Return
Tree
Angel
Aram
Stood
Hosts
Kissed
Forty
Touched
Israel
Now
Make
Prophet
Anoint
Shaphat
Night
Voice
Water
King
Doing
Rocks
Ahah
Eat
Pieces
Splitting
Out
Wilderness
Here
Wrapped
Now
Belongs
Hazeal
Mantle
Cave
Saying
Strong
Great
Entrance
Out
Arrive
Forsaken
Alone
Drank
Messenger
Prophet
Damasus
Eat
Quake
Journey
Son
Zealous
Day
Bowed
Forty
One
Heard
Saying
Seeking
Thrown
Over
Take
Elisha
Israelites
Wilderness
Mouth
Sheer
Cave
Wilderness
Sword
Doing
Under
Jar
Done
Hot
Asked
Mount
Very
Himself
Food
Solitary
Leave
Face
Abel
Pass
Forsaken
Satan
Spent
Seeking
Time
Fire
Lay
Stand
Die
Fled
Wilderness
Sudden
Sound
Ate
Shall
Tree
Thousand
Second
Jezebel
Before
Altars
Beer
Up
Alone
Silence
Horeb
Better
Much
Lord
Go
Kill
Again
Enough
Servant
Earthquake
Tomorrow
Answered
Nimshi
Place
Go
Ancestors
Went
Mountain
Life
Down
Angel
Wind
Elijah
God
Breaking
Lay
Hosts
Strength
Altars
Seven
Covenant
Whoever
Judah
Baal
Went
Under
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Return
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Alone
Drank
Messenger
Prophet
Damasus
Eat
Quake
Journey
Son
Zealous
Day
Bowed
Forty
One
Heard
Saying
Seeking
Thrown
Over
Take
Elisha
Israelites
Wilderness
Mouth
Sheer
Cave



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: The way God cares for Elijah speaks to our own moments of loss and grief, guiding us to how we can care for others in our midst.

If your congregation has the habit of commuting the commemoration of All Saints to a Sunday, you would not be blamed if you considered swapping this reading out for another. While the raising of Lazarus or Ezekiel in the valley of dry bones might seem more fitting, don't go running for them just yet. There is a great deal about this episode from Elijah's life which can speak to both the hope of resurrection and the promise of saintly living.

Grief is at the forefront of this moment in Elijah's ministry. He had just worked a great wonder, defeating the priests of Baal in a contest to see whose God would answer prayer and immolate a bull. This should have been the culmination of his mission to end the worship of Baal in Israel, and yet Ahab and Jezebel are undeterred. All his zeal has not changed the fundamental reality: he remains the only prophet of God, and a hunted one at that. He goes out into the wilderness to confront his own failure by way of death.

While few of us have experienced this degree of grief, the sense of life's futility and meaningless assails us in moments of death and makes us question the purpose of the struggle to live a life of costly discipleship. How God ministers to Elijah here echoes with how God ministers to us. Not as a distraction from the challenge or the journey but in service of it, God meets Elijah in food and drink, and in quiet whispers. Feels a little like a funeral, right? That is no accident.

As much as we love a grand gesture and big miracle, what sustains faith in trying times is humble, daily care and patient, quiet presence. God has already showed Elijah that he can do wondrous things; now God shows Elijah that God is also present and active in the simple acts of life.

These passages not only help attune us to God in our midst, but they also help us see what saintly living looks like. We are prone to think of saints as those who have lived heroic lives, knights of faith who suffered persecution, deprivation, or radical self-emptying in the name of God. All of the above is indeed saintly as a sign of God's grace and mercy, but so too are the lives of those saints, "unpraised and unknown," as the old hymn says, who through simple living "bear someone's cross or shoulder their own." It is not a particular life which makes one a saint, but the grace of God which has met us in the particulars of life, whatever they may be. Our efforts do not make us saints, for we remain in this life broken and lowly people in need of grace. As grace filled people, we find the courage to live in how God has lived for us, and in this, God's name is glorified.

—Rev. Dr. Miles Hopgood

Scripture Summary

Elijah feels defeated in his efforts to overcome the worship of Baal. God feeds him and speaks to him in whispers. Jesus rejects the idea that he should be spared from death and embraces the cross as his purpose.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

L: Our God speaks to us in the silence.

C: In silence, we prepare our hearts to listen.

(Observe silence for thirty seconds before continuing)

L: Our God speaks to us in the silence.

C: Speak, Holy God, for we are listening.

Confession and Forgiveness

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

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: Holy God,

C: You have created us in your image, protected and nourished us, and called us into your work of justice. Yet while we profess these truths, we forget who we are and whose we are. We put our trust in ourselves, in material goods, and in worldly powers instead of trusting you. We prioritize our comfort over our neighbor's needs. Call us back to you, God. Forgive us our failings, and direct us back onto the path you would have us tread.

P: Hear the good news, siblings in Christ. You have been created in wholeness, claimed in love, and forgiven according to God's boundless grace. Nothing—even the worst we do or fail to do—can separate us from the love of our God. Receive this forgiveness with joy, in the name of Jesus, our savior and friend. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

L: Sustaining God,

C: We often grow weary of trying to serve you, frustrated by our lack of success, dismayed by the continued turmoil that swirls around us in our lives and in the world. Reground us in your holy presence, renew our commitment, and send us back into the world with trust that all is in your hands. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

As you sustained Elijah in the wilderness, so you provide for all our needs. In gratitude, we joyfully return to you a portion of our worldly goods and our human capabilities, that you might use them for the good of all that you have made. Receive them for the sake of Jesus Christ. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: Confident that our God hears and answers our cries, we pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

L: God of the call, you have picked up your prophets and restored them to strength when they were ready to quit. Take us also and gently awaken us to the commitment we have made to serve you, knowing that you will never leave us on our own. God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: We seek you in the violent winds. We seek you in the earthquake. We seek you in the fire. We find you in all places of your good creation, especially in the spaces of silence. God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: There are thundering voices all around us, claiming to speak your will, O Lord. Help us distinguish fact from fiction, reason from rambling, and truth from trifle. Tune our ears to hear you in the silence. God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: When our strength has all but dried up, you offer us revival and refreshment. Cool our hot heads, and pour your blessing over those who most need it, (*especially...*) God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: For all the saints who precede us in life and in death, for those around us still living, and for our own renewed commitment, we pray, O Lord. Keep us one in hope and purpose. God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: We lift all these prayers, and those of our hearts, to your loving care, O God. Receive them and restore our hope in your promises. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

Jesus is not silent, but joyfully shouts out an invitation to feast at this holy table, where he is present in the bread and the wine. Come and be nourished on his body and blood for the good work of living the good news!

Litany

1: Silence is more than the absence of noise.

2: It is the gentle, intimate presence of God.

1: When our obligations clamor for attention,

2: Our God whispers peace.

1: When the powers of the world rage and roar,

2: Our God offers solace.

1: Let us quiet our hearts and our minds,

2: And listen for the still, small voice.

1: Like a child resting in their mother's arms,

2: We will quiet our souls.



Creative Expression

Skit

Characters: Parent, Kid (high school age)

Props: Technological device with headphones.

Parent: Hey there, [Kid]. What's up?

(Kid, wearing headphones, doesn't respond)

Parent: Hello? *(shouts)* HEY!

(Kid still doesn't respond)

Parent: *(claps loudly to try to get attention)* Hey [Kid] Hey!

(Kid still doesn't respond)

Kid: *(takes out cymbals and crashes them)* Earth to [Kid]!

Are you in there?!?

(Kid still doesn't respond)

Parent: *(shrugs)* For crying out loud. *(starts to walk away)*

Kid: *(taking off headphones)* Oh, hey [Parent]. Did you want something?

Parent: I've been trying to get your attention for ages. It's time for school.

Kid: Sorry. I was just moping to my favorite emo band. The song ended and it was completely silent and that's when I realized you were there.

Parent: Yeah, I've noticed the moping. That's why I came to talk to you. What's going on?

Kid: I'm not going to school today. School sucks.

Parent: Okay. Stating the obvious. But what, specifically.

Kid: Well, we always get told that if we do the right thing and follow the rules then everything will be better. And it's just not true.

Parent: Life lessons 101. Say more.

Kid: I stood up to a bully yesterday. She was picking on one of the Special Ed kids and I couldn't just stand by and say nothing. So I called her out—her and all her friends who were laughing. And Ms. Patel overheard and doubled down on them and I felt really good about it and everything...

Parent: I'm sensing a 'but' coming.

Kid: Yeah. The bully told everyone she was going to beat me up this morning. It's all over the school. And it doesn't feel like the teachers are doing anything about it. So I'm not going.

Parent: I am so sorry. That's awful.

Kid: So I don't have to go?

Parent: Oh, you have to go. Skipping school is not an option.

Kid: But she's gonna go after me!

Parent: Of course you need to take the threat seriously. I wouldn't ask you to just walk into that kind of situation. But you're forgetting something really important.

Kid: What?

Parent: You're not alone in this. Meet your friends at the bus. Go in a group and find Ms. Patel right away. Then go talk to the folks in the Special Ed department about what happened and maybe find out ways you and your friends can do even more.

Kid: I guess that's doable. I'll text a few people so we can work together. I know I have friends who have my back.

(continued)



Creative Expression

Skit, continued

Parent: Doing the right thing is the best option, but it's not easy. You're almost always going to come into conflict with people. But if you remember to ask for help and take care of yourself, you can make progress even if you're scared.

Kid: Yep. Scared is right. But I guess it's better to go deal with it than to just hide in my room for the rest of the school year.

Parent: Exactly. And if you need me for anything, I will be there in a heartbeat. Got it?

Kid: Thanks, [Parent].



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

Sometimes God speaks in whispers.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Megaphone

Background

When King Ahab of Israel married Queen Jezebel, he worshiped his new wife's god, Baal. God sent many prophets, including Elijah, to warn King Ahab of God's wrath. But King Ahab and Queen Jezebel remained faithful to Baal, killing God's prophets. Elijah made a show of God's power to the prophets of Baal and then killed them. An angry Jezebel swore to kill Elijah in retaliation.

Elijah fled and fell into despair. He complained to God, asking that God end his life. But God remained faithful. God sent Elijah to a cave on a mountain, where there was a great wind, an earthquake, and a fire. But it was in the following silence that Elijah experienced God. God promised Elijah protection and directed him to 7,000 faithful who continued to worship God, strengthening Elijah's resolve.

Set the Scene

Call the kids to the Kids Storytime with the megaphone. Ask the kids what it is and why it's used. It's very, very loud. Wonder with the kids what God's voice sounds like. Might it be like talking through a megaphone? Maybe sometimes. But in today's story... Well, let's have a listen.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Was God's voice in the great wind? (*No!*) Was God's voice in the earthquake? (*No!*) Was God's voice in the fierce fire? (*No!*) When did Elijah hear God's voice? (*In the silence*). So... did God use a megaphone? Nope. God whispered.

Remind the kids that a couple weeks back you talked about how to hear God's voice better, through reading the Bible, praying, learning about God, listening to trusting adults, etc. Are these big, loud things? (Sometimes fun camp songs can be loud, and that's okay!) So sometimes we need to make ourselves still and quiet if we want to hear God's voice.

God has a big job for us—to love God and ourselves and our neighbors. We need lots of help, so we need to listen extra hard for God's voice sometimes!

Close with a whispering prayer, so the kids have to be very, very quiet to hear it (but use a mic so the congregation can hear it and maybe do a repeat-after-you prayer in their own whispers). In it, thank God for helping us to be still and listen for God's voice.

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Pictures of a fancy party (*optional*)



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: Amos 1:1-2; 5:14-15, 21-24

1 The words of Amos, who was among the shepherds of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of King Uzziah of Judah and in the days of King Jeroboam son of Joash of Israel, two years before the earthquake. ²And he said: The Lord roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem; the pastures of the shepherds wither, and the top of Carmel dries up.

¹⁴Seek good and not evil, that you may live; and so the Lord, the God of hosts, will be with you, just as you have said. ¹⁵Hate evil and love good, and establish justice in the gate; it may be that the Lord, the God of hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.

²¹I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. ²²Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon. ²³Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. ²⁴But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream.

Secondary Text: John 7:37-38

³⁷On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, ³⁸and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.'"

Pronunciation Guide

Tekoa: te-KOH-uh

Uzziah: yoo-ZAI-uh

Jeroboam: dzhehr-o-BO-uhm

Joash: DZHO-ash

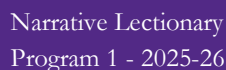
Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator, Amos, Lord

Narrator: The words of Amos, who was among the shepherds of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of King Uzziah of Judah and in the days of King Jeroboam son of Joash of Israel, two years before the earthquake. And he said:

Amos: The Lord roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem; the pastures of the shepherds wither, and the top of Carmel dries up. Seek good and not evil, that you may live; and so the Lord, the God of hosts, will be with you, just as you have said. Hate evil and love good, and establish justice in the gate; it may be that the Lord, the God of hosts, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.

Lord: I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream.



Amos: Justice Rolls Down, Amos 1:1-2; 5:14-15, 21-24

[illegible]



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: God is relentless in the call to justice, just as God never relents in showering us with grace and mercy when we fall short of this call.

One of the most frustrating moments for a parent is when your child throws a tantrum and the only thing that will do is not on hand. Whether it is for a particular brand of jelly or a pair of pants which are stuck in the wash, it can be maddening to try to negotiate with someone who will not compromise. Here, Amos presents us a God who is very much like a tantrum-throwing child, at least in terms of single-minded persistence. God demands that justice roll down like waters and will not settle for anything less than an everlasting flow of righteousness. “What about a nice Bach cantata?” we want to ask? “Or perhaps the praise band could play something to your liking?” “What if we gave more?” “Would you like us to be more solemn? Less?” “No, no, no, no,” God replies, doing a spot-on impression of Veruca Salt: “I want justice, and I want it now!”

How do we process these demands? The first thing we receive from these admonitions is clarity of focus. The establishment of justice in our communities, beginning with our own fellowship, should be a primary concern for our congregations. It is not an option for what a Christian fellowship could be concerned with, one possible ministry area among many. It is a necessary preoccupation for the whole Christian community. Where justice is not being established, our desire for God to be gracious is brought into question. Note carefully that Amos does not say that our work for justice occasions or earns the graciousness of God, only that where justice is not sought, the presence of grace of God are being actively rejected. To be precise, Amos’s complaint is not that the people are worshipping in a broken world as broken people. His complaint is that the people

have tried to use their religious life as a substitute for justice, making worship a way to excuse their abuse of their neighbors and world.

When worship becomes a work we perform to appease God, it ceases to be worship. That the people have tried to use worship as a substitute for right relationships with their neighbors is especially odious to God, but the right remedy is not to make the work of justice *into* worship. Neither knows anything of repentance or grace, praise and forgiveness, all hallmarks of Christian worship. Worship is God’s gift to us, not our gift to God. It is how God convicts us of our sin, calls us to repentance, showers us with grace, and strengthens us for the life we are called to live, knowing we’ll be back here again next week needing the same treatment all over again. When we are not out in the world, alive for the sake of our neighbor, the gifts God gives us in worship are being bottled up and do not flow as they ought.

Here the language of justice and righteousness flowing are instructive. They need a source, and that is what God has done for us in Christ, given freely as an unmerited gift. We receive the grace of God primarily (though not exclusively) through word and sacrament in worship, from which the whole of our lives flow. Here God is also persistent and unyielding in pursuing what God desires. For God’s desire for justice flows from the font of grace and mercy which is the heart of God’s love for us.

—Rev. Dr. Miles Hopgood

Scripture Summary

Amos lambasts the people for thinking that they could substitute worship for justice. Jesus invites us to come and drink, promising us ever flowing water from the heart.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

L: We are thirsty for your justice, O God.

C: Quench our thirst,

L: So that out of our hearts,

C: Shall flow rivers of living water.

Confession and Forgiveness

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

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: Holy God,

C: You have created us in your image, protected and nourished us, and called us into your work of justice. Yet while we profess these truths, we forget who we are and whose we are. We put our trust in ourselves, in material goods, and in worldly powers instead of trusting you. We prioritize our comfort over our neighbor's needs. Call us back to you, God. Forgive us our failings, and direct us back onto the path you would have us tread.

P: Hear the good news, siblings in Christ. You have been created in wholeness, claimed in love, and forgiven according to God's boundless grace. Nothing—even the worst we do or fail to do—can separate us from the love of our God. Receive this forgiveness with joy, in the name of Jesus, our savior and friend. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

L: Holy God,

C: Too often we are so dazzled by the images with which we are constantly bombarded that we do not see the simple truth of your call. Shake us out of our distraction and focus our attention on what matters: justice, equity, and flourishing for all your beloved creation. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

God, you satisfy our hunger, quench our thirst, and fill us with all good things. In gratitude, we return these, our gifts and our tithes, to your work of justice and peace for all the world, in and through Jesus' Christ our redeemer. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: Confident that our God hears and answers our cries, we pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

L: Holy God, your vision of justice for all is at the center of our faith. Clear our eyes to see it newly as something worth striving for, as messy and difficult as it may be. God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: Give us your hunger for your vision of justice for the natural world we share with all your people and all your creatures. Empower our witness and strengthen our voices. God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: We remember those who have laid themselves on the line, and in some cases given their lives in service to their country. Heal their wounds, grant them fair access to treatment and services, and comfort the families of those who did not survive, assuring them that you hold their loved ones close. God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: Lord, you invite all who thirst to come and drink of your living waters. Sustain the weary with your presence, and pour over them your healing, (*especially...*) God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: Bless the memory of all those who have turned from evil and fought for what is good, your saints of all times and places. Give us courage to follow their lead, and together share in the riches of your eternal kingdom. God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: We lift all these prayers, and those of our hearts, to your loving care, O God. Receive them and restore our hope in your promises. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

To all who hunger and thirst, Jesus calls, "Come to the table!" Jesus is fully present in this bread and this wine, and offers the gift of new life in his name. Come with your siblings to this sacred meal and receive this gift.

Litany

1: O God, you despise our selfishness and pride,

2: But delight when we put others first.

1: You despise our judgments of others, while refusing to look critically at ourselves,

2: But delight when we lift others, and work to change our ways.

1: You despise when we hoard wealth, and deny others the rights we enjoy,

2: But delight when practice radical welcome to the marginalized.

1: You despise hollow worship and empty rituals,

2: But delight in humble hearts singing praise, speaking truth, and working for justice.

1: Delight in us today, O God,

2: For we delight in you.



Creative Expression

Skit

Characters: Person 1, Person 2

Props: None

Person 1: I think this is the best company party we've ever had.

Person 2: Is it?

Person 1: Look around! Those centerpieces? Antique vases filled with exotic tropical flowers—it's amazing!

Person 2: They're beautiful alright.

Person 1: And the music! I can't believe Pasquale got the house band from Chez Trend to be here. They're usually booked out for years.

Person 2: They are a favorite of mine.

Person 1: Never mind the food. This caterer is incredible. Have you tried the crab cakes?

Person 2: Haven't yet. But they smell fantastic; I'm sure they're delicious.

Person 1: Everyone is having such a good time. The whole thing just strikes the perfect note between solemn recognition for you, our guest of honor, and upbeat celebration of your long career here.

Person 2: One might think this retirement party was perfect.

Person 1: (*frowning*) One might? But not you? It is your party after all. Aren't you enjoying it?

Person 2: No.

Person 1: What? Why not? We've done everything right. This party is exquisite.

Person 2: Sure. It looks, smells, and sounds fantastic. But you forgot something important.

Person 1: (*mortified*) Oh no! What did we forget?

Person 2: You forgot to listen to me about what I wanted.

Person 1: We...what?

Person 2: I never wanted a big party. This whole company is built on the principle of serving others. Of making sure everything we do moves us toward a more just society, a more open and supportive community.

Person 1: I don't see how this party goes against that...

Person 2: Those tropical flowers? I checked. They're from a critical habitat in Costa Rica and shouldn't have been cultivated. The band? Chez Trend is pretty well known for exploiting its artists, including their house band—I doubt they're being paid what they're worth tonight. The crab cakes? Made from irresponsibly-farmed crabs—this caterer is notorious for stuff like that.

Person 1: But...but I...We were just trying to show you how much we appreciate you...

Person 2: By disregarding everything I stand for. I'd say you missed the mark.

Person 1: Wow. I don't know what to say.

Person 2: Stick to the tenets of the company. And say that you'll never set aside justice for a good show again. Now I'm going home. Please see to it that the band gets an extremely large bonus before they go.

Person 1: Of course. I...Good night.

Person 2: Good night. (*exits*)



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

God doesn't need "stuff."

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Pictures of a fancy party (*optional*)

Background

God's kingdom split into the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah. The Northern Kingdom started worshiping away from the temple, and with influences from surrounding nations' worship practices. It also allowed the gap between rich and poor to grow, so that the poor were mistreated terribly.

God was angry with the abuses. Without justice and peace, the people's worship was empty. God refused to receive their worship as long as people were being mistreated. God desired true justice and peace over empty rituals.

Set the Scene

Ask the kids about the fanciest party they've ever been to. What was fancy about it? (use the picture if you need it.) Do we ever have fancy parties at church? When are some times we have big celebrations? What kinds of things do we do to show our celebration? (*decorations, special activities, etc.*) Is it fun to have big fancy parties at church? Affirm that these things are cool, but then ask, "Does God need us to do any of these things?" Let's hear the story.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Wonder together if God likes or doesn't like when we have big fancy parties in our church space. Is it the party that's the problem? What was the problem with the people in the story? (*They weren't taking care of each other, they weren't doing justice, acting in love, etc.*)

Wonder together what it means that God wants us to work for "justice." What is justice? How can we practice this? (*Be kind to each other, share everything equally, make sure everyone has enough of what they need.*)

So does God need "stuff"? Fancy parties, and the like? (*No*) What does God want from us? (*to care for each other*).

Consider having the kids repeat after you/memorize Micah 6:8b:

What does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?

Close with a prayer asking God to help us to remember what is really important and to do what God asks us.

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- A blanket big enough to cover the whole group
- A Bible
- A flashlight



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 9:1-7

⁹But there will be no gloom for those who were in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. ²The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness— on them light has shined. ³You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. ⁴For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. ⁵For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire. ⁶For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

Secondary Text: John 8:12

¹²Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.”

Pronunciation Guide

Zebulun: ZEH-byoo-luhn
Naphtali: NAF-tuh-lai
Midian: MIH-dih-uhn

Dramatic Reading of the Text

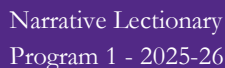
Readers: Narrator 1, Narrator 2

Narrator 1: But there will be no gloom for those who were in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

Narrator 2: The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness— on them light has shined. You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire.

Narrator 1: For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore.

Narrator 2: The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.



Isaiah: A Child Is Born, Isaiah 9:1-7

[illegible]



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: Hearing a “Christmas” passage outside of the season helps us see that God’s promise to enter our world and act is not relegated to the past or the future alone. God promises to come and act in our lives, here and now.

Each year, Christmas seems to come earlier and earlier. I used to be one of those curmudgeons who complained about anything Christmas related before December 24th; now, I am just relieved when I can make it through Halloween before I start hearing Mariah Carey’s “All I Want for Christmas.” Normally church is the one place where I as a pastor can halt the early arrival of Christmas, which is perhaps why I enjoy the Advent season so much. And yet today, the Narrative Lectionary seems to have brought Christmas Eve crashing in. Our passage from Isaiah this week is traditionally the Hebrew Bible reading on Christmas Eve, and we haven’t even begun to thaw our Thanksgiving turkeys yet.

Before I start hearing Marley’s chains, let me take off my Scrooge hat for a moment to note what a value there is in encountering these words from Isaiah outside the context of the Nativity of our Lord. For while we might feel tempted to let these words transport us to the Christmas season the way the smell of chestnuts or taste of fruitcake might, hearing these words in isolation from the birth of Christ helps give us better focus on what Isaiah is actually saying. I am not saying that these words can’t or shouldn’t be read as a prophecy of the birth of Christ. Rather, when we think about what it means to wait for the Lord, for God to come and act, it is too easy for that imagination to get swallowed up by the manger.

Hearing these words outside of Christmas allows us to hear what they have to say, not about the first coming of Christ but of the second.

For most, the mystery of faith where we confess that Christ will come again is one of the most challenging. It conjures up images of Revelation and, for those of us from a particular generation, the abysmal *Left Behind* series. The reason for the difficulty is that so much of what scripture has to say about what to expect from the second coming of Christ gets cordoned off as pertaining only to the first. These words from Isaiah are not merely about the birth of Christ—they are about what it means for God to break into our lives and world to act.

Just as God’s promise to act cannot be relegated to history, so too the promise of God to break into our world is not reserved for the second coming. It is also a promise to come into our lives today. We live in what St. Bernard of Clairvaux called the third or middle coming of Christ, the one in which the faithful experience the coming of Christ into our very own lives.¹ It is this middle coming that defines our lives as Christians, not only in the Advent season but in all times and places. Passages like today’s coming “out of time” (so to speak) draw us into the eternal now of God’s coming and activity.

—Rev. Dr. Miles Hopgood

Scripture Summary

Isaiah prophecies a light which will shine on those who have walked in darkness, the end of oppression, and newfound joy—all to come through the birth of a child. Jesus names himself the light of the world.

¹ Sermo 5, *In Adventu Domini*, 1-3: *Opera Omnia*, Edit. Cisterc. 4 (1966), 188-190.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

L: Come out of the darkness, O people of God.

C: We have come into the light of Jesus.

L: Whoever follows Jesus,

C: Will never walk in darkness.

Confession and Forgiveness

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

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: Holy God,

C: You have created us in your image, protected and nourished us, and called us into your work of justice. Yet while we profess these truths, we forget who we are and whose we are. We put our trust in ourselves, in material goods, and in worldly powers instead of trusting you. We prioritize our comfort over our neighbor's needs. Call us back to you, God. Forgive us our failings, and direct us back onto the path you would have us tread.

P: Hear the good news, siblings in Christ. You have been created in wholeness, claimed in love, and forgiven according to God's boundless grace. Nothing—even the worst we do or fail to do—can separate us from the love of our God. Receive this forgiveness with joy, in the name of Jesus, our savior and friend. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

L: Radiant God,

C: We live in a world plagued by the darkness of injustice and despair. By your holy light, scatter the darkness and fill us with the hope of your promised redemption. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

Holy God, we come to you with thankful hearts and set before you our gifts of time, money, and skill in gratitude for all that you have given us. Bless these offerings for the life of the world, that all might experience the light of hope. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: Confident that our God hears and answers our cries, we pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

L: Isaiah's vision still sounds as far away to us as it must have for his listeners. Forgive us when we despair, and plant within us renewed passion for the work of your Spirit. God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: Your light is the source of all life. Make us loving stewards of nature, which you feed with your life-giving light, and which, in turn, makes our lives possible. Keep us ever mindful of our sacred interdependence. God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: We give you thanks for all those who dedicate their lives in service to others, to the relief of suffering and the implementation of justice. Strengthen their witness, uphold them, and give them rest when needed. God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: Be with those who bear daily burdens, be it mental or physical illness, fear of homelessness or hunger, or other challenges which test their resilience. Surround them with your presence and guide them to the help they need, (*especially...*) God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: Whoever follows you, O Lord, will never walk in darkness. Shine your eternal light upon all your faithful servants, still living or alive in your resurrection, and surround them evermore with your blessing. God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: We lift all these prayers, and those of our hearts, to your loving care, O God. Receive them and restore our hope in your promises. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

Jesus, the light of the world, now invites you to the table where his presence shines forth in the bread and the wine. Come, receive nourishment, forgiveness, and new life in his name. All is prepared.

Litany

1: We are the people who walk in darkness.

2: We are the ones who wander, lost.

1: We are the suffering, the sick, the sorrowing.

2: We are the estranged, cut off from love.

1: We are the deceived who chase after false gods.

2: We are the despairing, unable to satisfy our own desires.

1: You alone satisfy. You alone heal.

2: You alone light the path of wholeness.

1: We are the people who walk in darkness.

2: Light the way, O God, back to you.



Creative Expression

Skit

Characters: Person 1, Person 2, Person 3

Props: Flashlight, random objects like a chair, potted plant, items that can be tripped on in the dark.

Scene: Make the area as dark as you can, otherwise, your actors can simply mime it. Person 1 and Person 2 enter while Person 3 remains offstage with the flashlight.

Person 1: I can't believe the power is out again. This is like the third time this month! *(trips on an object)* Nuts! Watch out for that [object].

Person 2: How can I watch out for it if I can't see it? Ugh. I just don't understand why the power company can't just fix the problem permanently. *(trips on an object)* Whoa! [Object] at three o'clock.

Person 1: I don't even know which way twelve o'clock would be. This wouldn't be such an issue if we didn't actually have to get things done around here.

Person 2: I know, right? It feels like everything is just in so much chaos all the time. How is anyone supposed to function in—OW!

Person 1: You okay?

Person 2: Lego. Seriously. A Lego.

Person 1: You're not wearing shoes?

Person 2: I can't find them!

Person 1: Valid.

Person 3: *(entering)* Let there be light! *(turns on flashlight)*

(Person 1 and Person 2 react by holding their hands up to block the light)

Person 2: Where have you been? We've been stumbling around in the dark for half an hour!

Person 3: I told you I was going to find the flashlight. I promised I'd be back. You could have waited.

Person 1: Whatever. You're here now and you are my hero! Can you lead the way to the backup generator?

Person 3: Sure thing. Just follow exactly where I walk. Keep your eyes on me, not the floor, not the gloom. I'll make sure you avoid the Legos.

Person 2: About that. Why are there Legos on the floor?

Person 3: My niece was over yesterday. And, you know, sometimes Legos happen.

Person 2: Well everything just seems to be an unfair mess. Power outages, random Legos, sometimes it's more than I can take.

Person 3: Like I said, keep your eyes on me and I'll lead you where you need to be. *(all exit)*



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

God promises to help us see God's love.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- A blanket big enough to cover the whole group
- A Bible
- A flashlight

Background

God's split kingdom (the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah), was in constant conflict over social and theological issues. Each held its own capital city and often worked to gain alliances with neighboring kingdoms to gain power.

First Isaiah (chapters 1-39) was written at a time when the Northern Kingdom, Israel, was being defeated by Assyria, bringing the kingdom to an end. The message of hope for a future would be received by a broken and suffering community.

Set the Scene

Do any of the kids ever feel like they need hope? If appropriate, you can share your concerns about the current state of the world, climate change, wars, and other things the kids may be hearing about that might be scary. Tell the kids that in today's story, God's people were very sad. They really needed a message of hope. A promise that things would get better.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Gather the kids as close to you as possible and have a volunteer throw the blanket over the whole group. Talk about how feeling sad and scared and alone is a little like being under a blanket. It's hard to see any hope. Tell the kids that God has an important promise for them. It's written in the Bible. Open the Bible and ask if anyone can read it (*no, it's too dark*). Well, how are we supposed to hear the message of hope?

Turn on the flashlight. Exclaim over how it destroys the darkness. Remind them of the verse "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light!" Who was the light they were talking about? Jesus!

Can the kids read the Bible now? Using the flashlight, have someone read Isaiah 9:7b: "there shall be endless peace." Talk about how wonderful it is to be able to see the promise clearly. Talk about Jesus is the light that can help us see God's promises in the world.

Close with a prayer thanking God for God's beautiful promises and for Jesus, who helps us to see them.

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: Jeremiah 29:1, 4-14

29These are the words of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the remaining elders among the exiles, and to the priests, the prophets, and all the people, whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon.

⁴Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: ⁵Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. ⁶Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. ⁷But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

⁸For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Do not let the prophets and the diviners who are among you deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams that they dream, ⁹for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name; I did not send them, says the Lord. ¹⁰For thus says the Lord: Only when Babylon's seventy years are completed will I visit you,

and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. ¹¹For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. ¹²Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. ¹³When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, ¹⁴I will let you find me, says the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.

Secondary Text: John 14:27

²⁷Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

Pronunciation Guide

Nebuchadnezzar: neh-byoo-kuhd-NEHZ-er



Scripture Readings

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator, Lord,

Narrator: These are the words of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the remaining elders among the exiles, and to the priests, the prophets, and all the people, whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon:

Lord: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

Narrator: For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel:

Lord: Do not let the prophets and the diviners who are among you deceive you, and do not listen to the

dreams that they dream, for it is a lie that they are prophesying to you in my name; I did not send them,

Narrator: Says the Lord. For thus says the Lord:

Lord: Only when Babylon's seventy years are completed will I visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. For surely I know the plans I have for you,

Narrator: Says the Lord,

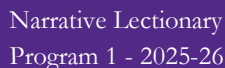
Lord: Plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me,

Narrator: Says the Lord,

Lord: And I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you,

Narrator: Says the Lord,

Lord: And I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.



Jeremiah's Letter to Exiles, Jeremiah 29:1, 4-14

[illegible]



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: In the face of hopelessness, God bids us to live joyfully. This is impossible to do on our own strength. Thanks be to God whose promise frees us for such a life.

A question worth pondering: where does trust come from? Do we work it in ourselves, or do others work trust in us? Even as I've framed the question, the answer may not be as intuitive as we would like it to be. At first blush, we want to say that trust is a decision we make. After all, I'm the one who puts my trust in someone, right? But we all know that choosing to trust someone doesn't make them trustworthy. There are friends you know you can ask to get you to the airport on time, and there are ones you know cannot be relied on. You can make the decision to ask an unreliable friend for a ride, but you also know you'll only have yourself to blame as you watch your flight take off from security. As it turns out, our trust in someone does not come from ourselves; rather, it is something that their actions work in us. We come to trust someone because of what they do. It is their history with us that works trust in us. And while we might be able to take a risk on something small, on the really big stuff, it's another matter.

Jeremiah is asking something big of the people today. They are in exile, their world is in complete disarray, and he is asking them to do the hardest thing one can do when all hope seems lost: to keep on living. Build community, plan for the future, strive for the welfare not only of those who suffer alongside us but those

who are the cause of our suffering—that is an impossible calling. Though it may seem mundane, persisting to choose to live a daily life in the face of hopelessness a revolutionary act. The will to continue to not only live but live joyfully testifies to a conviction that life is still worth living. Our faith in God's promise is not lived out by trying to fulfill the promise itself; it is to live the life which can only make sense in light of the promise. Confident that the one who promises us a future with hope is not only willing but capable of delivering, we are free to live the lives we will when that promise actualized, even as we wait.

Faith in the promise breaks down the barrier between present and future, enabling a type of living that is both now and not yet. Everything hinges on the one who makes the promise, however. We cannot summon the will to live this life for ourselves. Hope in the face of hopelessness only comes from somewhere outside ourselves. The good news is that God stands both outside and inside time, being at once both the creator of all that is, seen and unseen, and also the one who entered into creation and overcame death for our sake. God in Christ anchors us to live a life of daily, radical joy.

—Rev. Dr. Miles Hopgood

Scripture Summary

Jeremiah writes to those in exile, encouraging them to continue in daily, joyful living.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

L: I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord.

C: We will not let our hearts be troubled.

L: To give you a future with hope.

C: We will not let our hearts be troubled.

Confession and Forgiveness

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

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: Holy God,

C: You have created us in your image, protected and nourished us, and called us into your work of justice. Yet while we profess these truths, we forget who we are and whose we are. We put our trust in ourselves, in material goods, and in worldly powers instead of trusting you. We prioritize our comfort over our neighbor's needs. Call us back to you, God. Forgive us our failings, and direct us back onto the path you would have us tread.

P: Hear the good news, siblings in Christ. You have been created in wholeness, claimed in love, and forgiven according to God's boundless grace. Nothing—even the worst we do or fail to do—can separate us from the love of our God. Receive this forgiveness with joy, in the name of Jesus, our savior and friend. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

L: Consoling God,

C: Often we find ourselves dissatisfied with where we are in life, questioning our past and our future, unsure whether this is your plan for us. Grant us patience to accept the present, wisdom to discern your will, and courage to carry it out. In all things, help us to trust that you are our guide, and will lead us home. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

God, you lavish your lovingkindness upon us day after day. With joy and gratitude we bring before you these, our gifts and our tithes, signs of our love and commitment to you. Accept them for the sake of Jesus Christ, and use them according to your will. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: Confident that our God hears and answers our cries, we pray for the church, the world, and all in need.

A brief silence.

L: Merciful God, in the darkest of times, your promises remain. Give us hope when we are tempted to despair, and keep the reminders of your mercy ever before us. God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: As we gather in the harvest, remind us that you have made all things good for the nourishment of all creatures. Make us careful—and grateful—stewards of this small, blue, celestial island we call home. God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: We give you thanks for a time to pause in gratitude for all the blessings of our lives. We thank you for family, for food and shelter, for friends and neighbors and our church community. Bless all those who find themselves alone on holidays, whether by choice or otherwise, and make of us one great human family. God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: There is more suffering in the world than we can sometimes comprehend, and yet you hold us all in the palm of your hand. Pour out your healing spirit on all who cry to you, (*especially...*) God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: Like saints before us who waited on the fulfillment of your word, we find our peace in your faithfulness to all generations. Uphold us with your promises still, and assure us of our place among the heavenly throngs who adore you eternally. God of promise,

C: Hear our prayer.

L: We lift all these prayers, and those of our hearts, to your loving care, O God. Receive them and restore our hope in your promises. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

As God promised to call the Israelites back to their home, so God's son, Jesus Christ, calls you now to your place at the table. In his name, come, eat, and drink at this holy meal for the restoration of wholeness. The table is set for you.

Litany

1: Jesus said, "Do not let your hearts be troubled."

2: It is hard not to, when we see the world around us;

1: When we are dealing with grief, fear, illness, and more;

2: When we feel lost and abandoned.

1: Jesus does not give as the world gives.

2: Hope comes from unexpected places.

1: Trust in God, who holds you in all things.

2: We will hold fast to the promise of God's plan for a future with hope.



Creative Expression

Skit

Characters: Parent, Kid 1, Kid 2

Props: None

Kid 1: I miss home. I really hate it here.

Kid 2: I miss my friends. I bet they're all at the coffee shop right now. Without me.

Parent: Look, I know it's not ideal that we had to move here for my job. But it's what had to happen.

Kid 1: I get it. But I still hate it. I just want to go home.

Kid 2: Me too. How long do we have to be here again?

Parent: I'm not 100% sure. It could be a year. It could be five.

Kid 1: Five years? I'll be in college by then! Ugh.

Kid 2: My friends won't even remember me by then.

Parent: Here's the thing. I am going to make you a promise right here and now.

Kid 1: We're listening.

Parent: We will go back. As soon as it's possible. I will do everything I can to make that happen. But I need something from you in the mean time.

Kid 2: (*sullen*) What.

Parent: Get out of the house.

Kid 2: What?

Parent: I mean it. Go outside. Explore the neighborhood. Find a new coffee shop to

hang out in. Meet new people. Make new friends.

Kid 1: But my old friends...

Parent: They're still there. Back home. But you're here. You can't just hide out in the house for the next few years.

Kid 1: I guess. I did see a café a few blocks over. Maybe they have good lattes.

Kid 2: Coffee's gross. I want to see if they make root beer floats.

Kid 1: Eww.

Parent: I also noticed in your school welcome packet that there's a group of kids who volunteer down at the local humane society.

Kid 2: Oh! Like my friends back home! I am so gonna go take care of cats.

Parent: See? You can contribute to the local community right here.

Kid 1: Was there anything in there about cosplay?

Parent: I don't know. I just glanced at it. But I'm sure if you look, you'll find your people here, just like at home.

Kid 2: I guess I'm starting to feel a little better. But it helps knowing we won't be here forever.

Kid 1: Yeah. I'm going to hold you to your promise.

Parent: You do that. You know I always keep my promises.

Kid 1: I know.



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

We can find joy in waiting.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin

Background

Jeremiah preached to Israel at a time when its faith in God had been utterly shaken. In just ten short years, its captor, the Babylonian empire, destroyed three traditions that had cemented its faith. First, King Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the kingly succession promised to King David. Second, he destroyed the temple. Third, he destroyed the people's belief that Israel was indestructible.

Each of these led the people to wonder whether God was still with them. The prophet, Jeremiah, spoke to them during this crisis of faith and identity. He told them these events had been caused by God as punishment. It was their own lack of faith that had caused God's judgment to come upon them.

Even so, through the words of Jeremiah, the people had hope that God would restore them one day.

Set the Scene

Ask the kids if they've ever had to wait for something they wanted. Take a couple examples or share one of your own. Was it easy or hard to wait? How did they feel when they finally got what they were waiting for? Tell them that in today's story, God's people had to wait. But God said they could find joy in the waiting.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

What was it the people wanted more than anything? (*To go home*) When would that happen? (*They didn't know. It could be a long, long time.*) But what did Jeremiah say they could do? (*Find joy in the waiting*). Wonder together with the kids how people can find joy when they are waiting and waiting for something they want. Share an example from your own life, if you want.

Come up with a list of a few simple things kids can do that bring them joy. Maybe sing a favorite song or draw a picture or read a favorite story. Encourage them, if they feel impatient about something, to pause and do that activity and find joy. Wonder about what might happen if they do.

Then wonder about how it might feel when they finally receive whatever they're waiting for. Would it be even better after finding joy while waiting?

Tell the kids that God keeps God's promises, and the people did go home eventually. But they had lived good lives far from home in the mean time, and that was great, too!

Close with a prayer asking God to give us patience and to help us find joy while we are waiting.

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: Daniel 3:1, 8-30

3 King Nebuchadnezzar made a golden statue whose height was sixty cubits and whose width was six cubits; he set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon.

⁸Accordingly, at this time certain Chaldeans came forward and denounced the Jews. ⁹They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, “O king, live forever! ¹⁰You, O king, have made a decree, that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, drum, and entire musical ensemble, shall fall down and worship the golden statue, ¹¹and whoever does not fall down and worship shall be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire. ¹²There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These pay no heed to you, O King. They do not serve your gods and they do not worship the golden statue that you have set up.” ¹³Then Nebuchadnezzar in furious rage commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought in; so they brought those men before the king. ¹⁴Nebuchadnezzar said to them, “Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods and you do not worship the golden statue that I have set up? ¹⁵Now if you are ready when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, drum, and entire musical ensemble to fall down and worship the statue that I have made, well and good. But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire, and who is the god that will deliver you out of my hands?” ¹⁶Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to present a defense to you in this matter. ¹⁷If our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire and out of your hand, O king, let him deliver us. ¹⁸But if not, be it known to you, O

king, that we will not serve your gods and we will not worship the golden statue that you have set up.”

¹⁹Then Nebuchadnezzar was so filled with rage against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego that his face was distorted. He ordered the furnace heated up seven times more than was customary, ²⁰and ordered some of the strongest guards in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and to throw them into the furnace of blazing fire. ²¹So the men were bound, still wearing their tunics, their trousers, their hats, and their other garments, and they were thrown into the furnace of blazing fire. ²²Because the king’s command was urgent and the furnace was so overheated, the raging flames killed the men who lifted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. ²³But the three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell down, bound, into the furnace of blazing fire. ²⁴Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up quickly. He said to his counselors, “Was it not three men that we threw bound into the fire?” They answered the king, “True, O king.” ²⁵He replied, “But I see four men unbound, walking in the middle of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the fourth has the appearance of a god.” ²⁶Nebuchadnezzar then approached the door of the furnace of blazing fire and said, “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!” So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out from the fire. ²⁷And the satraps, the prefects, the governors, and the king’s counselors gathered together and saw that the fire had not had any power over the bodies of those men; the hair of their heads was not singed, their tunics were not harmed, and not even the smell of fire came from them.

(continued)



Scripture Readings

Text, cont'd

²⁸Nebuchadnezzar said, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants who trusted in him. They disobeyed the king's command and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God. ²⁹Therefore I make a decree: Any people, nation, or language that utters blasphemy against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb, and their houses laid in ruins; for there is no other god who is able to deliver in this way." ³⁰Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

Secondary Text: John 18:36-37

³⁶Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here." ³⁷Pilate asked him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice."

Pronunciation Guide

Nebuchadnezzar: neh-byoo-kuhd-NEHZ-er

Dura: DOO-ruh

Chaldeans: kal-DEE-uhnz

Lyre: LY-er

Trigon: TRY-guhn

Shadrach: SHAY-drak

Meshach: MEE-shak

Abednego: uh-BEHD-nee-go

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator, Chaldeans, Nebuchadnezzar, Three, Counselors

Narrator: King Nebuchadnezzar made a golden statue whose height was sixty cubits and whose width was six cubits; he set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. Accordingly, at this time certain Chaldeans came forward and denounced the Jews. They said to King Nebuchadnezzar,

Chaldeans: O king, live forever! You, O king, have made a decree, that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, drum, and entire musical ensemble, shall fall down and worship the golden statue, and whoever does not fall down and worship shall be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire. There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These pay no heed to you, O King. They do not serve your gods and they do not worship the golden statue that you have set up.

Narrator: Then Nebuchadnezzar in furious rage commanded that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be brought in; so they brought those men before the king. Nebuchadnezzar said to them,

Nebuchadnezzar: Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods and you do not worship the golden statue that I have set up? Now if you are ready when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, drum, and entire musical ensemble to fall down and worship the statue that I have made, well and good. But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire, and who is the god that will deliver you out of my hands?

(continued)



Scripture Readings

Dramatic Reading of the Text, cont'd

Narrator: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered the king,

Three: O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to present a defense to you in this matter. If our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire and out of your hand, O king, let him deliver us. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods and we will not worship the golden statue that you have set up.

Narrator: Then Nebuchadnezzar was so filled with rage against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego that his face was distorted. He ordered the furnace heated up seven times more than was customary, and ordered some of the strongest guards in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and to throw them into the furnace of blazing fire. So the men were bound, still wearing their tunics, their trousers, their hats, and their other garments, and they were thrown into the furnace of blazing fire. Because the king's command was urgent and the furnace was so overheated, the raging flames killed the men who lifted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. But the three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell down, bound, into the furnace of blazing fire. Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and rose up quickly. He said to his counselors,

Nebuchadnezzar: Was it not three men that we threw bound into the fire?

Narrator: They answered the king,

Counselors: True, O king.

Narrator: He replied,

Nebuchadnezzar: But I see four men unbound, walking in the middle of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the fourth has the appearance of a god.

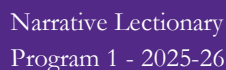
Narrator: Nebuchadnezzar then approached the door of the furnace of blazing fire and said,

Nebuchadnezzar: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!

Narrator: So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out from the fire. And the satraps, the prefects, the governors, and the king's counselors gathered together and saw that the fire had not had any power over the bodies of those men; the hair of their heads was not singed, their tunics were not harmed, and not even the smell of fire came from them. Nebuchadnezzar said,

Nebuchadnezzar: Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants who trusted in him. They disobeyed the king's command and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God. Therefore I make a decree: Any people, nation, or language that utters blasphemy against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego shall be torn limb from limb, and their houses laid in ruins; for there is no other god who is able to deliver in this way.

Narrator: Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon.



Daniel: The Fiery Furnace (First Sunday of Advent), Daniel 3:1, 8-30



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: Our God is a God who uses conviction—and even stubbornness—for good.

This passage is full of rigid imagery and characters. We open on King Nebuchadnezzar and the massive golden statues he has commissioned to represent his authority across Babylon. His expectation is just as massive as the statues themselves—not just that everyone under his rule will recognize his power, but that they will worship him because of it. He preemptively declares that anyone who doesn't fall on their faces in reverence of him will be thrown into "a furnace of blazing fire."

We learn very quickly that he wasn't kidding, or being hyperbolic. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, three men who were forcibly assimilated into Babylonian culture and who served at a court level, refused to play by Nebuchadnezzar's new rules. They still held their Jewish faith and wouldn't say otherwise, even if it meant death. They were thrown into a furnace, but nothing happened to them. They were unharmed and ultimately emerged from the flames free from burns or marks.

This story can certainly be understood as testimonial to what God was able to do through Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego—that is, delivering the

faithful. But what about what God was able to do through Nebuchadnezzar? What about transforming the defiant?

God showed up in a way that would resonate with Nebuchadnezzar. Direct, strong-willed and certain. Powerful and unbending. And Nebuchadnezzar responded! He rescinded the idea that his was the only authority in Babylon—that he was the only force worthy of worship—and he ended up spreading the word across the kingdom.

Our God speaks our language: our stubbornness, our misguidedness. Our God not only understands conviction, but cherishes it when it is used as a tool of love and justice. There is nothing we could do—no stand we could take—that God couldn't use to change our hearts for the better and bring us into deeper relationship with the people around us.

—Madison Johnston, MDiv

Scripture Summary

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego are thrown into a fiery furnace as punishment for declaring their belief in God. And just as God delivers them from the flames, God delivers the person who put them there.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

L: Come and hear the Word proclaimed!

C: We come with open hearts and minds.

L: God transforms us as we listen and learn.

C: We rejoice in God's liberating love!

Confession and Forgiveness

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

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: God who was and is and is to come,

C: Despite our best intentions, even our deepest desires, we find ourselves time and again turning away from you to follow after other gods—possessions, people, comforts—in an effort to fill the hole that only you can. In so doing we have harmed ourselves, others, and your holy creation by what we have said and done, and by the things we have neglected to do. Open our eyes to see that you alone are the source of our wholeness. Forgive us our wrongs and inspire us to the work of making them right, for the sake of your son, Jesus Christ.

P: Beloved of God, like the prodigal son, you are always received with great joy, and your sins are forgiven you. Go forth in newness of life. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

L: God of deliverance,

C: Make us strong in our faith, unafraid to hold fast to your word, inspired to act on behalf of those in need no matter what resistance we might face. Walk with us, protect us, and liberate us to speak your truth in word and deed. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

Gracious God, you enrich our lives in big and small ways, materially and spiritually. Inspired by your generosity, we return these gifts to the work of the church: to enlighten and inspire, to care for those in need, and to act for justice. Bless these gifts to your service. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: Trusting in the promise of Jesus' advent among us, we pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

A brief silence.

L: Saving God, as you walked in the fiery furnace with your faithful servants, protect and empower all who stand up to injustice, that their message might transform even those who condemn them. God who was, and is, and is to come,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Guide those who work on behalf of this beautiful world you have created, and all forms of life that inhabit it. Soften the hearts of those who insist on destroying the natural world for their own gain or comfort. God who was, and is, and is to come,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: You give us a peace which the world cannot, O God. Discourage us from seeking after temporary assurances or flimsy hopes. Instill generosity within us during a season that can often become a frantic scramble to take care of our own concerns. Open us to the unfolding mystery of your presence among us. God who was, and is, and is to come,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Equip all who provide care for the suffering, that those in need of help, hope, and healing experience your very real presence with them in their pain (*especially...*) God who was, and is, and is to come,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: So many of the saints who have come before us have dealt with persecution and other challenges to their faith, yet have remained steadfast. Make us bold to live as they did. God who was, and is, and is to come,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Steadfast and loving God, gather these prayers we have offered, both aloud and silent, into your loving arms, for we know that you are faithful and will never abandon us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

The God who saved Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from the flames offers even more powerful salvation through the body and blood of God's son, Jesus Christ, who now invites you to this table to feast in his name. Come and eat!

Advent Candle Litany

Throughout the Advent season, use this litany with one, two, or multiple readers, or a call and response with the congregation.

- 1: Daniel spoke of the one coming with the clouds at the end of all things.
- 2: Jesus, you are the one who is coming.
- 3: Your advent in our broken world is sure.
- 4: We light this candle in expectation of your coming among us.



Liturgy and Creative Expression

Litany

- 1: The kings of the world would have us bow down.
- 2: **The glittering bearers of money, power, and celebrity.**
- 1: Jesus' strident voice cuts through the clamor.
- 2: **"My kingdom is not of this world."**
- 1: Let us stand fast, as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego,
- 2: **And worship only what is worthy.**
- 1: And though the world might threaten to burn us with the fire of human judgment,
- 2: **We will know peace in what is true and everlasting—the love of God.**

Skit

Characters: Shades, Mick, and Ab, three freshmen, and Nebbi and Connie. All either male or female.

Props: Table, chairs, papers

Scene: the end of a Student Council meeting. A table is at one edge of the stage area, even slightly off, giving the idea that it's longer offstage. Nebbi is at the head of the table facing offstage. Shades, Mick, and Ab are seated facing the audience around the table.

Nebbi: If everyone is clear on their committee assignments, then this meeting is adjourned. See you all next Thursday.
(Looks through their papers as Shades, Mick, and Ab get up and approach)

Shades: Hey, Nebbi, can we talk to you about something?

Nebbi: Sure, Shades. What's up?

Shades: Well, Mick, Ab, and I are a little uncomfortable with our committee assignments.

Mick: It sort of seems like we're supposed to basically make all the ninth graders worship the ground you walk on.

Nebbi: Seriously? How do you get that?

Ab: We're not sure. It's kind of a gut thing. But we all felt it and we'd rather be off the communications committee.

Shades: We'd prefer to be on the games planning committee, actually. Get some role-playing going on.

Nebbi: Come on. Dani assured me you were the best people to work on the communications for student government.

Mick: We would be. But we're not sure we like what you're communicating.

Nebbi: *(angry)* You know what? Fine. But you know the rules, right?

Ab: Yep. If we don't do exactly what you tell us, we're off Student Government and you report to administration that we're a behavior issue.

Shades: And maybe we get suspended or expelled.

Nebbi: And you're willing to take the heat?

Mick: Look, Nebbi. All due respect. You're a decent guy. But you can't make us do something we're not comfortable with. We'll take the heat. *(Shades, Mick, and Ab exit)*

(continued)



Creative Expression

Skit, continued

Connie: What was that about? Were they serious about standing up to you?

Nebbi: Dead serious, it appears. But I think the problem is solved.

Connie: Well, I think we should go down to the principal's office, too, just to see what goes down.

(They walk to the other side of the stage and then stop and lean in as if listening.)

Connie: Good thing the principal's office has big windows. We can see everything from right here.

Nebbi: Wait. Why are there four people in there?

Connie: Oh, yeah. I think that's Ms. Brown, the guidance counselor.

Nebbi: What is she saying to the principal?

Connie: Dunno. Maybe she's weighing in on their punishment.

Nebbi: Then why are they all smiling???

Connie: They're coming out! Act naturally!

Shades: Oh, hey Nebbi.

Nebbi: Hi! Um... so what happened in there?

Mick: We told the principal the truth about everything.

Ab: And they were still going to suspend us. But then Ms. Brown walked in.

Shades: She said she normally doesn't intervene in these things, but she knows us pretty well, and knows that we get bullied a lot for being nerds.

Mick: Ms. Brown made it clear that she could override student council's decisions.

Ab: So we got through that completely unscathed.

Connie: Who actually says, 'unscathed?' You guys really are nerds.

Nebbi: No, Connie. You know what? They have integrity. AND someone looking out for them. I think maybe we ought to have them teach us a thing or two on council.

Connie: *(shrugs)* Suit yourself. You are the president, after all.

Nebbi: *(to Shades, Mick, and Ab)* Thanks for trying to help me see what a jerk I've been. Maybe at our next meeting you can help me completely re-do the communication plan.

Shades: We'd like that very much.

Nebbi: Dani was right about you three. For ninth graders, you're all pretty amazing.

Mick: Thanks, Neb. We'll see you next week at the meeting.

Nebbi: See you then!

(All exit)



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

God helps us make good choices.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin

Background

The stories of Daniel take place during the Babylonian Exile and cover several rulers during that time. Many of the Jewish people had been carried away from Jerusalem to live in Babylon. For many years they made their homes in Babylon and actually did quite well. Now Daniel and his friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are all in positions of leadership, but they refuse to let go of their old religious beliefs, which doesn't make Nebuchadnezzar particularly happy.

Set the Scene

Ask the kids if they know what it means to make good choices vs. bad choices. Take some examples. Offer some of your own. Discuss whether it's always easy to make good choices (*no*). Have the kids ever felt like someone they knew was trying to get them to make a bad choice? Share an example of your own. Say that in today's story, some people were asked to make a bad choice.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Discuss what bad choice Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were being asked to make. (*to worship King Nebuchadnezzar*) What does it mean to worship someone? (*To love them best and most of all, to pray to them, to see them as a god*) Did Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego make the bad choice? (*No, they made the right choice*) But what happened when they did the right thing? (*they got in BIG trouble!*)

Come back to the discussion of whether it's always easy to make good choices. In this case it was really hard! Usually for us it's not quite that hard (thank goodness!). But it can still hurt. Can the kids think of examples of when they got in trouble for a *good* choice? They may be too little to have had that experience, so it's okay if not. Share your own story of a time when making a good choice lost you a friend or had some other painful consequence. Talk about how God helped you through that hard time, just as God protected Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

Make the point that God always wants us to make good choices, even when it's hard, and that God will help us to do that.

Close with a prayer asking God to help us make good choices.

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Bones of some kind



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: Ezekiel 37:1-14

37The hand of the Lord came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. ²He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. ³He said to me, “Mortal, can these bones live?” I answered, “O Lord God, you know.” ⁴Then he said to me, “Prophesy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. ⁵Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. ⁶I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord.” ⁷So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. ⁸I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. ⁹Then he said to me, “Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.” ¹⁰I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on

their feet, a vast multitude. ¹¹Then he said to me, “Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.’ ¹²Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. ¹³And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. ¹⁴I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act,” says the Lord.

Secondary Text: John 11:25-26

²⁵Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, ²⁶and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

Pronunciation Guide

Prophesied: PRAH-feh-syd



Scripture Readings

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Ezekiel, Lord

Ezekiel: The hand of the Lord came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. He said to me,

Lord: Mortal, can these bones live?

Ezekiel: I answered, "O Lord God, you know."
Then he said to me,

Lord: Prophesy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord.

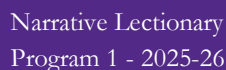
Ezekiel: So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me,

Lord: Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.

Ezekiel: I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude. Then he said to me,

Lord: Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.' Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act,

Ezekiel: Says the Lord.



Ezekiel: Valley of Dry Bones (Second Sunday of Advent), Ezekiel 37:1-14

[illegible]



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: Your witness to God's love is, quite literally, miraculous.

This is one of the most classic and beloved visionary accounts in all our canonized scripture. Read in tandem with the New Testament and understood as one part of a pre-Jesus to post-Jesus Biblical arc, it is the most explicit foreshadowing of Jesus's resurrection work in the world (which explains our accompanying passage from the Gospel of John). This is a *miracle* story.

But the miracle here isn't what we might think it is on the surface—that sinew is restored to once-dry bones. That new life ultimately conquers death.

The miracle in this story is that Ezekiel's faith transforms him into an agent of change. Ezekiel's willingness to entertain the *world as it should be* rather than just the *world as it is*, moves his reality much closer to the former.

Ezekiel tries to abdicate responsibility early in this text. He dodges a tough question and passes off the hard work of instigating change to God, making himself a bystander. But God won't accept that. God pushes Ezekiel past that. If we had to paraphrase God's words in this passage, we might recount them like this: "Lead this work, Ezekiel. You need to be the one to prophesy to these bones. Tell them everything you know about me. Tell them everything you know that I can do. It will mean something different coming from you. It will *do* something different coming from you."

God is asking Ezekiel to engage in community by speaking to the most baseline thing Ezekiel could ever speak to—what he is experiencing. The sinew

and flesh on *his* body. The animation in *his* spirit. And that is the same thing that God asks of each of us, today.

If God were to call on you this week, and to ask you, "Where are the places in your life that feel dry? Tired? Hopeless? Dead?" how would you respond? And if God followed up with a command—"Prophesy to these bones"—could you follow through? Are you willing to imagine the kind of love and vitality and thriving you want to see in those places? Unfiltered. Uninhibited. Are you willing to build a vision centered in divine love for yourself and for your community?

Are you willing to try entering your valleys of dry bones carrying that vision? Professing it? Explaining it? Fielding doubts about it? Modeling it? Even if it means feeling timid or skeptical or vulnerable or strange, will you listen to God when God says, "Do it. Prophesy to these bones."?

Our promise today is that you will not be alone in that work. God delights in guiding it. Sustaining it. Shaping it. Learning from it. God will have your back as this work evolves, forever and ever.

—Madison Johnston, MDiv

Scripture Summary

Yet another prophet promises God's deliverance for the exiled nation of Israel. How much longer can they take it? Ezekiel's vision must certainly be an illustration of a people desperate for life-giving breath.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

- L: We come to this house worn down by the world.
- C: Breathe new life into our hearts, O God.**
- L: Receive the Holy Spirit, here in this place.
- C: We receive it with joy and thanksgiving!**

Confession and Forgiveness

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

Pause for silence and reflection.

- P: God who was and is and is to come,

C: Despite our best intentions, even our deepest desires, we find ourselves time and again turning away from you to follow after other gods—possessions, people, comforts—in an effort to fill the hole that only you can. In so doing we have harmed ourselves, others, and your holy creation by what we have said and done, and by the things we have neglected to do. Open our eyes to see that you alone are the source of our wholeness. Forgive us our wrongs and inspire us to the work of making them right, for the sake of your son, Jesus Christ.

- P: Beloved of God, like the prodigal son, you are always received with great joy, and your sins are forgiven you. Go forth in newness of life. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

- L: Living God,
- C: All of creation is your beloved child. Hear the cries of all who are in pain, in grief, in fear. Give heed to the lost, the despairing, and the dying. Draw all into your loving embrace and breathe into all things your life-giving Spirit, that we might be renewed to be bearers of your light and love to one another. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.**

Offertory Prayer

Holy God, we bring to you our humble gifts, out of what you have first given us. As you gave new life to a pile of dried up bones, give life to these, our offerings, that they might become an overflowing blessing to renew a world in need. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: Trusting in the promise of Jesus' advent among us, we pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

A brief silence.

L: O God, Israel had so lost hope that it was as though they had died. Show us the places where we have given up—on ourselves, on others, on ever seeing peace and justice on earth. Reanimate our hope and motivate us to live into your promises. God who was, and is, and is to come,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Climate change has turned formerly fertile lands to deserts. Spur us to action, that we might change the tragic course we are on, so that these deserts might one day have new life. God who was, and is, and is to come,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: In war zones, droughts and famines, disaster areas, and places of mass persecution, breathe your spirit of life where hope has dried up. Use your people to minister to one another's needs and to restore a sense of what is possible. God who was, and is, and is to come,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Inspire the work of healers, caregivers, and all those who work tirelessly to find new treatments and cures for chronic diseases. Hold all with whom they work and all who suffer in your loving arms (*especially...*). God who was, and is, and is to come,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: They who once were dead are now alive in you. We have no fear of death because we belong to you. Join us with the saints in never-ending praise to our loving and redeeming Creator. God who was, and is, and is to come,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Steadfast and loving God, gather these prayers we have offered, both aloud and silent, into your loving arms, for we know that you are faithful and will never abandon us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

Jesus, who breathes new life into all things, invites you to this holy table, where he offers his own body and blood to give you life—and that abundantly! Come to the meal where our friend and sibling, Jesus Christ, is fully present, and be made new.

Advent Candle Litany

Throughout the Advent season, use this litany with one, two, or multiple readers, or a call and response with the congregation.

- 1: Ezekiel wrote of a people given new life.
- 2: Jesus, you are the source of this new life for us.
- 3: We cry to you to heal our brokenness, and revive our spirits.
- 4: We light the first candle in expectation of your coming.
- 5: We light the second candle in hope of new life in you.



Liturgy and Creative Expression

Litany

1: In her grief, Martha cried, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

2: **Jesus said, "Your brother, Lazarus, will rise again."**

1: Martha said, "I know he will rise in the resurrection on the last day."

2: **Jesus answered, "I am the resurrection and the life. Do you believe this?"**

1: In our grief, we cry, "God, where are you? Where is your promise now?"

2: **Jesus answers us, "I am the resurrection and the life. Do you believe this?"**

1: Holy Jesus, help us to believe.

2: **Holy Jesus, help us to believe.**

Skit

Characters: Person 1, Person 2

Props: None

Person 1: I give up.

Person 2: What? You can't give up. We're so close.

Person 1: No we're not. *(gestures around them in a circle)* Look around. All those sticky notes and charts on the walls, all those boxes of samples, all those crumpled papers and empty coffee cups...It's a lifeless mass of defeat.

Person 2: *(looking around)* Well, when you put it like that, it's kind of depressing.

Person 1: We've been waiting for so long. And working so hard. And it just seems like there's nothing left.

Person 2: Come on. You love this project. It's a part of you. That's why I knew you were the right person to work with me on it.

Person 1: I know. But I feel completely dried up. Right along with our funding.

Person 2: You can't lose sight of the purpose, [Person 1]. You believe in this. It could really make a difference for a lot of people. People who feel lifeless and dried up just like you.

Person 1: So what am I supposed to do about it? I don't see the possibilities anymore.

Person 2: I do. And I'm going to need your help breathing new life into this.

Person 1: How?

Person 2: Close your eyes. Just envision this with me.

Person 1: Seriously?

Person 2: Humor me.

Person 1: *(sighing)* Fine. *(closes eyes)*

Person 2: Remember Mae?

Person 1: Vaguely. Having a hard time picturing her.

Person 2: Seventy-five, widowed, arthritis, only son was killed in Afghanistan...

Person 1: Oh yeah. That smile of hers. Rare, but transformative. Great, now I can just see how sad she is.

(continued)



Creative Expression

Skit, continued

Person 2: But you see her, right? Complete? Not just as a sticky note or a file or an empty coffee cup?

Person 1: Clear as day.

Person 2: Remember Curtis?

Person 1: Starting to.

Person 2: Bring him together in your mind.

Person 1: Eighty-four, divorced, diabetic, no kids. Still manages to play guitar for folks in hospice. *(smiles)* What a character.

Person 2: Remember [Person 1]?

Person 1: *(sarcastically)* [Person 1]? [Person 1] who?

Person 2: Funny. Now really look at them. What do you see?

Person 1: Tired. Discouraged. Frustrated.

Person 2: Go back further. Before that.

Person 1: Passionate. Excited. Called.

Person 2: So tell Mae and Curtis and yourself that this is possible. That I'm going to help you make this happen, breathe new life into the project, bring it to fruition. And that's a promise.

Person 1: *(opening eyes)* That was cheesy.

Person 2: But could you see it?

Person 1: Oddly, yes. I'm sorry to be so out of sorts. I know this project is your baby and you love it fiercely. So I'll do my job and help make it happen. I still have a couple of possible funders to call.

Person 2: That's the spirit!

Person 1: The spirit. Yes. Yes it is. So, in the spirit of bringing new life to this thing, I don't suppose you could get rid of some old coffee cups?

Person 2: Done.



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

God breathes new life into us.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Bones of some kind

Background

The book of Ezekiel was written at a time when God's people were in exile. The first chapters are proclamations of judgment for Israel's unfaithfulness to God. Later chapters, like the ones read today, include promises of restoration.

Ezekiel's vision is a dramatic way for God to promise restoration. He tells Ezekiel to prophesy to a valley of dead bones, first renewing them with sinews and flesh, and finally bringing them to life with breath. This was an example of how God intended to bring Israel back to life, despite the despair they experienced at their exile.

Set the Scene

Ask the kids what it feels like when you've been waiting and waiting and waiting for something and it just doesn't happen. Wonder about how plants feel when there is a drought and they are waiting and waiting and waiting for rain. What happens? (*they dry out and die*). Show them the animal bones. Is there any life in them? Wonder together about what would be needed to make the bones back into a living animal? Tell them that in today's story, God's people were sad. They were tired of waiting. Their hopes were like these dried up, dead animal bones.

Reflect Together

Wonder together how Ezekiel experienced this vision. Did it actually happen in reality? (*No, it was a vision*) What happened to bring the bones back to life? What was the last thing that happened? (*God breathed life into the bodies*). God breathes life into us, too. That breath is the Holy Spirit. That breath of life can give us new hope when we are waiting and waiting and waiting. Or when we are sad or scared.

Wonder together why God would have shown Ezekiel the vision in this way instead of just telling him about it. Draw the connection between how Kids' Storytime and examples like the bones you brought can help us remember things more clearly.

Close with a prayer thanking God for breathing new life into us when we feel all dried up.

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Junk food
- Healthy food
- Two baskets
- Small box of raisins for each kid (*optional*)



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 55:1-13

55 Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. ²Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. ³Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live. I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. ⁴See, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples. ⁵See, you shall call nations that you do not know, and nations that do not know you shall run to you, because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you.

⁶Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; ⁷let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts; let them return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. ⁸For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. ⁹For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. ¹⁰For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return

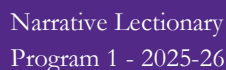
there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, ¹¹so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it. ¹²For you shall go out in joy, and be led back in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. ¹³Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle; and it shall be to the Lord for a memorial, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

Secondary Text: John 4:13-14

¹³Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Read today's passage as a monologue.



Word Accomplishes God's Purpose (Third Sunday of Advent), Isaiah 55:1-13

[illegible]



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: Being in relationship with God means being able to experience literally everything around us as a part of a cosmic vision of abundance.

Have you ever come across an old notebook, or even better, an old diary? Have you ever browsed through a grandparent's scrapbook? Or been confronted with a TimeHop post on your Facebook page, asking you to look at an image from who knows how many years ago?

Even when it's heartwarming—even when it merits a little laugh or a hit of nostalgia—our reaction to seeing things like this can so often be to cringe. To feel embarrassment! And a lot of the time, that's because so much growth has happened in the time between then and now.

In social media lingo, this type of lookback is now known as *blindness*. “Look at that 2016 eyebrow makeup! Why did no one tell me I was suffering from brow blindness?” “JNCO denim really had us in our bellbottom blindness.” “Frosted tips. Yikes! What were we, hair blind?”

In less superficial bouts of regret, the reflective questions—the blindness—can feel a little heavier. “Why did I stay in that place for so long?” “How was I ever friends with them?” “Man. Remember that apartment? That street? That town?”

If we're fortunate, willing and able to leave the things that don't ultimately serve us behind; if we can carry the good through multiple chapters of our lives, but limit some of what's harmful to the past; if we

practice building up resiliency, but pursue peace; we are able to engage our former bouts of blindness in a healthy, balanced way. We are able to use the reminders of our blindness as reminders to move on from it. To forgive ourselves. To forgive others. To make decisions differently. To seek something more life-giving than we used to.

This kind of posture is what God explains to and through the Prophet Isaiah in our text today. In knowing God; in deepening our connection with God and learning to look at the world as the canvas for God's kingdom-building work; even the things that appear as enlightened to us today will read as blindness later. It's like Jesus tells the Samaritan woman at the well: “Those who drink of the water I give them will never be thirsty again.”

God loves us steadfastly. Without end. Fiercely and substantively. And God's love does something to us. It shapes us and grows us and helps us to see more like God sees.

Our good news this morning is that God promises us peace as God promises to show us how to engage with, and uncover, the abundance all around us.

—Madison Johnston, MDiv

Scripture Summary

Isaiah's eloquent prophecy rolls off the tongue like poetry. But more than just beautiful words, it paints a vivid illustration of a world restored, and good that triumphs over evil.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

L: O Seek our God, beloved children.

C: We call upon our God in this place.

L: God's Word will be spoken and heard here.

C: We will let it take root in our hearts.

L: Let God's Word grow and flourish there.

C: God's Word will bear fruit in our lives.

Confession and Forgiveness

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

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: God who was and is and is to come,

C: Despite our best intentions, even our deepest desires, we find ourselves time and again turning away from you to follow after other gods—possessions, people, comforts—in an effort to fill the hole that only you can. In so doing we have harmed ourselves, others, and your holy creation by what we have said and done, and by the things we have neglected to do. Open our eyes to see that you alone are the source of our wholeness. Forgive us our wrongs and inspire us to the work of making them right, for the sake of your son, Jesus Christ.

P: Beloved of God, like the prodigal son, you are always received with great joy, and your sins are forgiven you. Go forth in newness of life. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

L: Holy God,

C: You send out your Word of life into the world that it would accomplish your purpose of redemption for all of creation. So transform us by this Word that we might deeply internalize it and live our lives according to its guidance. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

Just as your Word returns to you in fullness, so we return these gifts to you for the purpose of accomplishing your work for the flourishing of all creation. Accept these, our offerings, for the sake of the one who offered himself for us, Jesus Christ. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: Trusting in the promise of Jesus' advent among us, we pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

A brief silence.

L: Your ways are indeed not our ways, dear God, and yet we so often prefer our own. Turn our hearts to you again, and give us your own eyes to see the world which you have made. God who was, and is, and is to come,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: We await your coming, O Lord, not only in this season of Advent, but also your eventual return to restore your creation to yourself. Inspire us to proclaim your promises to all who need to hear them. God who was, and is, and is to come,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: As the rain and snow come down from heaven, so shall your word be unleashed throughout the earth, to accomplish all that you envision. May we neither avoid nor stand in the way of your powerful purposes, but rather be your agents of change and mouthpieces of proclamation of behalf of your gospel. God who was, and is, and is to come,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: The water that you give can quench thirst for eternity. Give us this life-giving refreshment when we thirst for healing, wholeness, and restoration. Offer your cup of living water to all who have particular needs (*especially...*) God who was, and is, and is to come,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: To the cries of all the saints who testified to your glory and who lived and died in you, we add our voices, trusting that you will empower us as you did them. God who was, and is, and is to come,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Steadfast and loving God, gather these prayers we have offered, both aloud and silent, into your loving arms, for we know that you are faithful and will never abandon us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

As Isaiah cried welcome to the bounty of God, so our savior and friend Jesus Christ cries welcome to this table of mercy. Come and be nourished on bread and wine in which Jesus himself meets us with joy and forgiveness. All is prepared for you.

Advent Candle Litany

Throughout the Advent season, use this litany with one, two, or multiple readers, or a call and response with the congregation.

- 1: Holy God, Isaiah wrote that your word does not return to you empty.
- 2: Jesus, you are the Word who fulfills the promise of this return.
- 3: We light the first candle in expectation of your coming.
- 4: We light the second candle in hope of new life in you.
- 5: We light the third candle in anticipation of your fulfillment of God's word.



Liturgy and Creative Expression

Litany

- 1: God's thoughts are not our thoughts,
- 2: **God's ways are not our ways.**
- 1: We are quick to judge and to condemn.
- 2: **God is quick to have mercy and pardon.**
- 1: We are quick to blame and to retaliate.
- 2: **God is quick to hold accountable and to transform.**
- 1: God, teach us your thoughts and your ways,
- 2: **That we might love our neighbor as ourselves.**

Skit

Characters: Kids 1-8

Scene: Kids 1-8 stand hand in hand in a long line across the front. They'll play a game of "telephone" except their lines will be spoken out loud and they'll pretend not to hear one another.

Kid 1: Let's play a game of "telephone." I'll whisper something in [Kid 2]'s ear, and they'll pass it on to the next person and so on down the line. Then when it gets it to [Kid 8], they'll come over to me and tell me what they think I said originally.

Kid 2: Sounds like fun! What's the message?

Kid 1: *(to Kid 2)* God loves you.

Kid 2: Got it. *(turns to Kid 3)* God loves you so much!

Kid 3: Got it. *(turns to Kid 4)* God loves you so much that you can't keep it to yourself!

Kid 4: Got it. *(turns to Kid 5)* You can't keep God's love to yourself, so go show it!

Kid 5: Got it. *(turns to Kid 6)* Go show God's love to the world by serving others!

Kid 6: Got it. *(turns to Kid 7)* Let's go show God's love to the world by serving others!

Kid 7: Okay! I think [Kid 8] could really use it right about now.

Kid 6: Really?

Kid 7: Yeah. They've been having a really hard time lately.

Kid 6: Let's go.

(Kids 6 and 7 drop hands and stand by Kid 8)

Kid 7: Hey. I just want you to know that I heard something amazing today.

Kid 8: *(sadly)* What's that?

Kid 7: God loves you so much and you can't keep that love for yourself. You've gotta go out and show it to the whole world!

Kid 6: Wait. Was that the message?

Kid 7: Close enough.

Kid 8: I don't know. I've been having such a hard time lately. It's hard to believe anyone loves me.

Kid 6: Well, we love you. And we know God loves you.

Kid 7: You know what might help you feel better?

Kid 8: What?

Kid 7: If you went out and showed God's love to other people. It will remind you just how much *you* are loved.

(continued)



Creative Expression

Skit, continued

Kid 6: Yeah! Why don't we go over to that retirement community and read to some folks. Or there are other things we can sign up for there to help out.

Kid 8: Actually, that sounds great. I'll meet you there. But I have something to do first.

Kid 7: Okay. See you there!

(Kids 6 and 7 exit, Kid 8 walks across the front to Kid 1)

Kid 1: Did you get the message I started?

Kid 8: Yep.

Kid 1: So what was it?

Kid 8: That God loves us so much we should go out and share that love with others, and when we do, we're reminded of just how much God loves us.

Kid 1: Wow. That's amazing.

Kid 8: What? Was it wrong?

Kid 1: Oh, no. It was better than right. My simple word went out and grew into something even more amazing than I had thought. It certainly didn't come back empty!

Kid 8: Cool. I'm gonna go show some of God's love to other people now. *(Turns to all the other kids)* Wanna come?

All: Yeah! Let's go!

(All exit)



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

God's word nourishes our spirits.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Junk food
- Healthy food
- Two baskets
- Small box of raisins for each kid (*optional*)

Background

The book of Isaiah was written at a time when God people, Israel, were in exile. Much of the New Testament quotes from Isaiah, since the people had once again been conquered, this time by Rome.

This passage begins with an invitation to a free and decadent banquet, given by the Lord. God's freedom cannot be bought with money, but is given freely as a gift. It goes on to promise deliverance to a people in exile. Deliverance comes with an upheaval of the system: the lowly will be brought up, and the lofty brought down. Finally, God's word will spread throughout the land. It will not go out and return empty, but will become richer as it is spread.

Set the Scene

Fill two baskets with food. In one basket, include things like Twinkies, Cheetos, cotton candy, and chocolate bars. In the other basket, include things like fruit, vegetables, granola bars, and water. Which of these baskets of food would you call "nourishing?" Some things are fun to eat—they taste good but they don't really give us strength or help our bodies grow

in the best way. Other foods help our bodies to work great and feel great. We can fill our minds with nourishing things, too. Ask the kids to listen carefully to the words of the story.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Wonder together what the different promises are in Isaiah's words. (*Plenty to eat and drink, life, love, forgiveness, joy, peace, nature celebrating*) How does it feel inside our bodies when we get good news or words of hope and promise like this? (*good!*) How does it feel in our minds and our hearts? (*good!*)

Point back to the two baskets. Remind the kids that it's the healthy food that helps our bodies work great and feel great. God's word is like healthy food for our minds and our hearts—our spirits.

Close with a prayer thanking God for God's healthy Word.

Optional: Send each kid back to their seat with a box of raisins to remind them of the healthy Word of God.

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- A cardboard box with a 1/4" hole in one side and a 1/2" hole in the top
- Markers
- A flashlight



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: John 1:1-18

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. ⁶There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. ⁸He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. ⁹The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. ¹²But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. ¹⁴And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have

seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

¹⁵(John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") ¹⁶From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

Secondary Text: Psalm 130:5-8

⁵I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope;

⁶my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning, more than those who watch for the morning.

⁷O Israel, hope in the Lord! For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is great power to redeem.

⁸It is he who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities.



Scripture Readings

Dramatic Reading of the Text

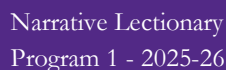
Readers: Narrator 1, Narrator 2,

Narrator 1: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

Narrator 2: There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

Narrator 1: (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'")

Narrator 2: From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.



Word Made Flesh (Fourth Sunday of Advent), John 1:1-18

[illegible]



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: In Jesus, who is the light, we are safe to engage. Safe to hope. And safe to rejoice.

The words of our Psalmist this morning sum up pretty well where we, as a church, are in this season of Advent: “I wait for the Lord; my soul waits, and in his word I hope. My soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for morning...”

More than those who watch for morning. It sounds like our Psalmist knows what it means to watch for the morning. Like she is clutching onto a tiny light in the middle of some very intense, very encompassing darkness (or maybe just the idea of a tiny light). It sounds like she is desperate. Anxious. Convicted, but suspended in her waiting and ready for something different.

On this, the fourth Sunday of Advent, we hear from the author of the Gospel of John the words that at this point are so familiar to us: “In the Beginning was the Word.” On this Sunday, we say again the words we’ve said countless times already, most likely in call-and-repeat form: “The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness does not overcome it.”

Let’s really root down into these words. Let’s not allow our familiarity to become complacency; our memorization to become a glossing over; our exposure to this text to manifest in a kind of unintentionally blasé Seinfeld response—“Yada, yada, yada.” Let’s write ourselves as the Psalmist and investigate what our hope really means. What our joy is really built on.

You’ll notice that the author of the Gospel of John didn’t say: “Once you know Jesus, the darkness will stop feeling like the most terrifying thing you could possibly experience.” He did not promise that, in a life with Christ, the light will get any bigger or closer or warmer to us.

Here’s what he did promise, though: that the darkness would not overcome the light. And that’s such a better promise. Because it means that light is what will do the overcoming. Of everything. It means that, despite its power, darkness will never, actually, truly win. Sure, darkness can toy with us. Darkness can drive us to places that hurt us. But darkness doesn’t have any substance. Darkness is working with optics.

If we can channel hope; channel joy; master the practice of waiting until the morning; we can’t fall victim to darkness. Let us leave our worship today reflecting on the power of Jesus’s light and singing some other words familiar to us. Words from the classic Gospel hymn: “We shall be alright/We shall live in peace/We are not afraid/Oh deep in my heart I do believe/We shall overcome someday.”

—*Madison Johnston, MDiv*

Scripture Summary

It all starts with a Word. Light. Promise. Savior. This is the one for whom we have waited. Our long-suffering hopes are about to be fulfilled.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

L: God's Word became flesh and lived among us.

C: The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness does not overcome it!

L: We have seen the glory of God, full of grace and truth.

C: The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness does not overcome it!

Confession and Forgiveness

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

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: God who was and is and is to come,

C: Despite our best intentions, even our deepest desires, we find ourselves time and again turning away from you to follow after other gods—possessions, people, comforts—in an effort to fill the hole that only you can. In so doing we have harmed ourselves, others, and your holy creation by what we have said and done, and by the things we have neglected to do. Open our eyes to see that you alone are the source of our wholeness. Forgive us our wrongs and inspire us to the work of making them right, for the sake of your son, Jesus Christ.

P: Beloved of God, like the prodigal son, you are always received with great joy, and your sins are forgiven you. Go forth in newness of life. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

P: God of light and life,

C: You sent us your Word so that we might know you fully and see your glory, full of grace and truth. Hold us close as we join all of creation in singing a new song to you, for you continue to do marvelous things. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

You create us new each day, God. You redeem us. You sustain us. Because of you, we come to worship ready to offer so much—our time, our energy, our ideas, our inspirations, and our resources. Bless all of these things as we strive to use them well, following your example of giving, embodied. In Jesus name. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: Trusting in the promise of Jesus' advent among us, we pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

A brief silence.

L: Loving God, you have given us the immeasurable gift of the Word made flesh. May his light abide within us as we strain with anticipation toward the fulfillment of your promise in this holy season. God who was, and is, and is to come,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Through the Word all things were created—land and sea, sun and moon, plant and animal, and humans among them. Keep us ever mindful of our dependence upon the natural world, that we might treat it as the loving sibling it is. God who was, and is, and is to come,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: It can be difficult, Lord, to pause from all our preparations and rest in your presence. Renew our spirits and prepare our hearts to receive the gift of your son. God who was, and is, and is to come,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: The darkness has not overcome your light, O Lord. Shine into the lives of those who struggle to see it, clouded by worries, challenges, or crises. Send healing and wholeness to all who suffer (*especially...*) God who was, and is, and is to come,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: With John and all who proclaimed your promised Messiah, we join the chorus of praise. Tune our

voices to glorify you always with the choir immortal. God who was, and is, and is to come,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Steadfast and loving God, gather these prayers we have offered, both aloud and silent, into your loving arms, for we know that you are faithful and will never abandon us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

The Word made flesh invites you now to share in the bread and wine that is his own body and blood. Come with your siblings and feast in his name, for all is prepared.

Advent Candle Litany

Throughout the Advent season, use this litany with one, two, or multiple readers, or a call and response with the congregation.

- 1: John wrote of the Word made flesh.
- 2: Jesus, you are that Word, who lived among us as a human being.
- 3: We light the first candle in expectation of your coming.
- 4: We light the second candle in hope of new life in you.
- 5: We light the third candle in anticipation of your fulfillment of God's word.
- 6: We light the fourth candle in wonder at your choice to become one of us.



Liturgy and Creative Expression

Litany

- 1: We wait for God. Our souls wait.
- 2: In our waiting, we hope in God's word.**
- 1: Our souls wait more than those who watch for the morning.
- 2: More than those who wonder if morning will ever come.**
- 1: O fellow beloved children, our hope is in God.
- 2: Our God will renew and redeem all things.**
- 1: Our waiting will not be in vain.
- 2: Our hope in our God will not be in vain.**

Skit

Characters: Person 1, Person 2, Person 3

Props: Flashlight

Scene: Total darkness (or at least the lights off)

Person 1: (*entering and tripping over something*) Ugh!
Who left that there?

Person 2: (*following*) You okay?

Person 1: Yeah. You think you know your way
around a place until all the lights go off.

Person 2: (*turning on the flashlight*) Does this help?

Person 1: Yes! Oh you are the best. You've fixed everything!

Person 2: Uh...no. It's still really hard to see.

Person 1: But it's much better. At least I won't trip on things anymore.

Person 2: Glad to help do what little I can, but this really isn't the solution to the problem. Someone else will be along who will really light things up.

Person 1: We'll be able to see everything? Not just this little beam of light?

Person 2: Yep. When they get there, all will be revealed, as they say.

Person 1: Now you're just getting melodramatic.

Person 2: Not even a little. Just you wait.

Person 3: (*entering*) Did somebody call for an electrician?

Person 2: They're here! Woo hoo!

Person 1: I guess this is cause for celebration.

Person 3: Uh...yeah. Just take me to the fuse box.

(*All exit*)



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

Jesus' light reveals God's love.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- A cardboard box with a 1/4" hole in one side and a 1/2" hole in the top
- Markers
- A flashlight

Background

The gospel of John differs from Matthew, Mark, and Luke in many ways. John focuses more on God's word and teachings than on the events of Jesus' life. It looks more at who Jesus was, than on what Jesus did, specifically on Jesus' relationship with God.

This first passage provides a lens through which we can view the rest of the book. It sets up images of light vs. darkness, belief, truth, and testimony. Jesus is the one who points toward God, emphasizing that God is the origin of all things and above all things.

Advance Prep

Inside the box opposite the 1/4" hole, use markers to write "God Loves You." Test to make sure that when you cover over the 1/2" hole on the top with your hand, it's too dark to read the words through the 1/4" hole in the side.

Set the Scene

Launch right into the story.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Cover the 1/2" hole in the top of the box with your hand. Ask a kid (or a few kids) to look through the 1/4" hole on the side and tell you what's in the box. (*it's too dark to see*) How do they feel when they can't see. Talk about how sometimes we say that things are "dark" when we feel sad and hopeless. Share a simple example from your own life. Hold up the flashlight and explain how the love of Jesus brings light to the world. When we feel sad or scared, we know because of Jesus how much God loves us. Shine the flashlight into the top hole in the box and ask the kids to look in again. Now what do they see?

Close with a prayer thanking God for the light of Jesus' love.

Christmas Eve Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Box full of Christmas-y trinkets: wrapping paper, decorations, maybe a tin of Christmas cookies, a holiday music CD, a Christmas movie DVD, etc.

Christmas Day Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin for Christmas Eve
- *KidStuff* bulletin for Christmas Day
- A nativity set

Next Sunday's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Mirror
- Flashlight



Planning Worksheet

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Skit or Creative Ideas

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Props for Kids' Storytime or Skit

Hymns

Special Events (Baptism, New Members)

Choral Music/Special Music

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.]

Secondary Text: Psalm 96:7-10

⁷Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.

⁸Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts.

⁹Worship the Lord in holy splendor; tremble before him, all the earth.

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.”

Pronunciation Guide

Augustus: uh-GUHS-tuhs

Quirinius: kwai-RIHN-ih-uhs



Scripture Readings

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator 1, Narrator 2, Angel,
[Narrator 3, Shepherds]

Narrator 1: 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.

Narrator 2: 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.

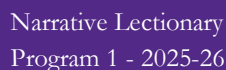
Narrator 2: And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

Angel: Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!

[**Narrator 3:** When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another,

Shepherds: Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.

Narrator 3: 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.]



The Birth of Jesus (Christmas Eve), Luke 2:1-14 [15-20]

[illegible]



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: Our calling as Christians is to be the sign our world and one another needs to see.

Imagine you are taking a hike in the woods. It is a beautiful day (since it is winter, you may include snow in your mental image if you wish). Caught up in the beauty of your surroundings, you come to a junction and suddenly realize you have no idea where to go.

Retracing your steps would be too long and difficult (again, feel free to imagine new-fallen snow has covered your tracks). You are going to have to figure out where to go, not knowing where you are.

Fortunately, as you approach the split in the trail, you see a sign. What luck! Drawing close enough to read it, you simply find a wooden plaque with the words, “YOU ARE HERE” imprinted in large letters. No accompanying map, no arrows, no mile markers. Just these words, “YOU ARE HERE.”

Pretty bad sign, right? Worse than bad, it is really no sign at all, because for a sign to be a sign, by its very nature it must point you to something other than itself. Like wearing a nametag which says only, “ME” or “NOT YOU,” or a watch which simply reads, “NOW,” it isn’t doing anyone any good. It is the distance between the sign and the thing signified, placed within the context of references, which allows gives the sign its proper function.

The life of Jesus is filled with signs, and his birth is no exception. He comes into this world surrounded by signs, a few of which we see tonight. Born in the city and from the line of David, wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger. We are given a mixture of the old and new, ancient prophecies concerning when the Messiah will be born and specifics about what it

will look like to be in his presence, here and now. Of the two, it is the latter which concerns us most this evening. We have been drawn here again tonight, by many and various paths, to look for what is new, the sign which is needed for this day and age to know that we still have a Messiah, the Lord. For Jesus to be Emmanuel, God with us, we look for a sign for this age. The signs of old have brought us this far, but we look again to reorient ourselves by what is new.

Here will be the hard part, preacher. The signs are looking at you, not knowing fully what they are. The gathered community, the body of Christ, is the sign God has given the world for our age. The faithful disciples, the Christmas-and-Easter contingent, those just looking for a way to be warm and no longer alone—it makes no difference. But they will not realize it. Like bands of cloth, they will be feel more fit for a tomb than new birth. Like a manger, they will think of themselves as purpose to hold feed for livestock rather than Christ in our midst. But our imperfection is no obstacle to God. Trying, failing, loving, stumbling, repenting, forgiving, alive as one body, pointing to the Christ who has enlivened us to live no longer to ourselves. It is the uniting of this proclamation and witness which testifies that to us a savior has been born this day.

—Rev. Dr. Miles Hopgood

Scripture Summary

Jesus is born in the city of David and the shepherd receive the good news from angelic messengers.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

L: Glory to God!

C: Tremble before God, all the earth!

L: Our God has done a new thing,

C: And Jesus reigns over all the earth!

Confession and Forgiveness

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

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: God who was and is and is to come,

C: Despite our best intentions, even our deepest desires, we find ourselves time and again turning away from you to follow after other gods—possessions, people, comforts—in an effort to fill the hole that only you can. In so doing we have harmed ourselves, others, and your holy creation by what we have said and done, and by the things we have neglected to do. Open our eyes to see that you alone are the source of our wholeness. Forgive us our wrongs and inspire us to the work of making them right, for the sake of your son, Jesus Christ.

P: Beloved of God, like the prodigal son, you are always received with great joy, and your sins are forgiven you. Go forth in newness of life. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

L: God of love,

C: On this holy night, when all of creation cries out with joy at the birth of Jesus, still there is suffering in the hearts of many. Still there is fear and grief nearby and far away. Breathe hope into the world, as small and humble as the tiny babe in the manger, and by this hope, transform reality, that all might know the eternal joy of your redeeming love. In the name of our newborn savior, Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

We cannot possibly match the gift you gave us in Jesus, O God. For his sake, accept these humble offerings and transform them by your power for your work of justice and reconciliation in all the earth. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: Trusting in the promise of Jesus' advent among us, we pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

A brief silence.

L: Your finest work came about on a quiet night in a small town. Instill in us the wonder of a Savior's birth: how something so ordinary is the most extraordinary of all. God who was, and is, and is to come,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: All of creation sings for joy at Jesus' birth! Make us to honor the earth and care for it, knowing that you came not only for our redemption, but for that of all you have made. God who was, and is, and is to come,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: All people await the fulfillment of your peace on earth—a true and lasting peace which binds up all who have had their hearts broken by war, suffering, and injustice. Break into our world with your uncommon grace. God who was, and is, and is to come,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: On this holy night, a mother comforted her newborn child. Comfort us as a parent would, when we cry out in pain, want, or grief. Heal your servants and hold them close, (*especially...*) God who was, and is, and is to come,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: Mary and Joseph, faithful caretakers, brought your son into the world. Add us to the long line of saints who heard your word and followed, risking the loss of safety, comfort, and reputation. God who was, and is, and is to come,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Steadfast and loving God, gather these prayers we have offered, both aloud and silent, into your loving arms, for we know that you are faithful and will never abandon us. In Jesus' name we pray.
Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

The God who came to us as one of us now invites you to the feast of Jesus Christ, God incarnate. Come to the table and share in the abundant goodness of creation.

Advent Candle Litany

Throughout the Advent season, use this litany with one, two, or multiple readers, or a call and response with the congregation.

- 1: On this holy night, a savior is born.
- 2: Jesus, you are that child, who redeems all of creation.
- 3: We lit the first candle in expectation of your coming.
- 4: We lit the second candle in hope of new life in you.
- 5: We lit the third candle in anticipation of your fulfillment of God's word.
- 6: We lit the fourth candle in wonder at your choice to become one of us.
- 7: Now we light this candle in joyful praise and celebration that you are in our midst at last, now and forever. Amen!



Liturgy and Creative Expression

Litany

1: O great mystery,

2: **O wonderful sacrament,**

1: 'That animals would see the newborn Jesus,

2: **Lying in a manger.**

1: O great mystery,

2: **O wonderful sacrament,**

1: 'That we might see the redeeming love of God,

2: **In this poor and humble human baby.**

Skit

Characters: People 1-6

Prop: Sheet of paper for Person 5

Scene: People 3- 6 stand separately across the performance area as if each in their own house. Kids 1 and 2 enter together. Person 1 mimes knocking on Person 3's "door."

Person 3: (*opening door*) Can I help you?

Person 1: I hope so. We're looking for a new church home. Can we be a part of this community?

Person 3: (*looking them up and down*) No. I don't think so.

Person 2: Um... why?

Person 3: You aren't dressed the way we expect you to dress here in this place. You'll have to find somewhere else.

Person 1: But... well, my friend here... they have incredible gifts to offer.

Person 3: Sorry. You just wouldn't fit in. (*closes door*)

Person 2: Well that was disheartening. Is my outfit really that bad?

Person 1: Don't worry about it. There are other places to try.

(*Person 1 and 2 walk to Person 4's door and knock.*)

Person 4: (*opening the door*) What can I do for you?

Person 2: Really the question is what can we do for you!

Person 4: What do you mean?

Person 1: Well, my friend and I are looking for a new church home. We have a lot to give.

Person 4: (*looking them up and down*) I'm sure not.

Person 2: Um... what?

Person 4: You don't look the way the rest of us look here. I'm sure that what you have to 'quote-offer-unquote' us will require us to change the way we do things. And we like the way we do things.

Person 1: But... but isn't this a church?

Person 4: Precisely. Merry Christmas. (*closes door*)

Person 2: Honestly, I think I'd rather just go worship at home.

(*Person 1 and 2 walk to Person 5's door and knock.*)

Person 5: (*opening the door*) Hi there! Welcome. How can I help?

Person 1: We want to join a new church. Can we worship here?

Person 5: That depends. Do you believe everything on this belief statement? (*hands them the sheet of paper*)

(*continued*)



Creative Expression

Skit, continued

Person 2: (*looking it over for a moment*) Um... well, mostly. I mean, I'm not really certain about some of these things.

Person 1: (*looking over Person 2's shoulder at it*) Yeah... I mean, I definitely still have doubts sometimes.

Person 5: Then I'm sorry, but you'd never be happy worshipping here. We find everyone is happier when we all agree on our theology. You should probably go somewhere else. (*closes door*)

Person 2: One more try and I'm just going home.

Person 1: Hang in there. Someone has to have a place for us.

(*Person 1 and 2 walk to Person 6's door and knock*)

Person 6: (*opening the door*) Hello there! I've never seen you before. Why don't you come on in?

Person 1: Thanks. We've been looking for a new worship community, but haven't been having much luck.

Person 6: That's too bad. Hopefully you can find what you need here.

Person 2: Well, I have a lot to offer. I want to get involved. (*looks around behind Person 6 as into a large room*) But...

Person 6: But?

Person 1: Well, looking around the room, I noticed that I don't really look like anyone else here. You might not like my ideas.

Person 2: And, um... well, sometimes we have doubts about God. But we really, really want to learn more and dig deeper.

Person 1: Also... well, we don't have money. I mean, you can probably tell that by my clothes?

Person 6: (*looking Person 1 up and down*) Um. Who cares?

Person 1: Really?

Person 6: Look, we're a pretty motley crew around here. Sometimes my mom asks me if we were all born in a barn.

Person 2: That doesn't bother me.

Person 1: And just you wait. I feel like [Person 2] is carrying something really special inside. And when it's 'born', so to speak, it's going to be really beautiful.

Person 6: Well I definitely want to be there when that happens. Come and meet the crew. I'm [Person 6], by the way.

Person 2: Thanks. I'm [Person 2] and this is [Person 1].

Person 6: Awesome. Worship starts in about ten minutes. I hope you find everything you need here.x

Person 1: I have a good feeling we will.

(*All exit*)



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

Jesus' birth was simple, but special.

the decorations and Christmas movies and Christmas songs and Christmas cookies (you could be packing away all the stuff now) it would still be Christmas.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Box full of Christmas-y trinkets: wrapping paper, decorations, maybe a tin of Christmas cookies, a holiday music CD, a Christmas movie DVD, etc.

Background

The gospel of Luke contains the most recognized account of Jesus's birth. The story places Jesus both in Galilee, which is in Nazareth, and in Bethlehem. This geographic placement fulfills prophecies of scripture.

Since Bethlehem was the hometown of Joseph, it was likely he had family there. Because of the census, the family accommodations may have been full with other travelers. The late arrival of Joseph and Mary may have caused the need to put them up in the living quarters shared with livestock.

These subpar accommodations, along with the angelic announcement to the shepherds, was a foreshadowing that Jesus came for all, not only for the privileged.

Set the Scene

When the kids come forward, go through the items in the box. Set them out and look at all the stuff. So much stuff! Talk about how we like to decorate the church and our houses for Christmas and ask what some of their favorite Christmas traditions are. All those things are fun and good. But if we put away all

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Wonder together about Jesus' being born in a stable. Was it fancy? Were there any of the things in the box? How do they think Mary and Joseph celebrated the birth of their baby? Did it matter that there wasn't a lot of "stuff" at Jesus' birth? Why? Come back to the point that Jesus was God's special gift to us. That Jesus *was* God with us. Jesus was perfectly wonderful and special all on its own!

Close with a prayer thanking God for Jesus.

Christmas Day Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin for Christmas Eve
- *KidStuff* bulletin for Christmas Day
- A nativity set

Sunday's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Mirror
- Flashlight



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: 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 123:1-2

¹To you I lift up my eyes, O you who are enthroned in the heavens!

²As the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the Lord our God, until he has mercy upon us.

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator, Angel, Shepherds

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.

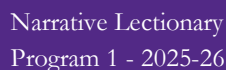
Narrator: And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

Angel: 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,

Shepherds: 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.



Shepherds Visit (Christmas Day), Luke 2:8-20

[illegible]



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: The birth of Christ draws us out of the ordinary into the extraordinary. Christmas Day offers us the chance to sample what it means to leave the old behind and find our calling in the new.

If you are reading this, congratulations! Or perhaps condolences. It appears that you have a congregation that worships on Christmas Day, and not just on those years when it falls on a Sunday. In the North American ministry context, worshipping on Christmas Day is one of the simpler counter-cultural things we can do as Christians. Against the dominant cultural narrative that views Christmas as a consumerist holiday centered on the family and culminating in the exchanging of gifts at home on Christmas morning, worshipping on Christmas Day testifies that this is a religious holiday centered on the community and culminating in the celebration of the gift of Emmanuel—God with us. What I am talking about here should not be confused with the so-called “war on Christmas,” a manufactured conflict which is all about ensuring that consumer practices are exclusively Christian in aesthetic. What it means to worship on Christmas Day is not an act of Christianizing the national life but an act of being called out of the capitalist consumer life and into the life of discipleship of Jesus Christ.

We see this movement in the story of the birth of Jesus as experienced by the shepherds. They are in the midst of business-as-usual when their routine is interrupted by angels declaring the good news of the Messiah’s birth. Their response is not to enact a branding campaign to fully saturate their sheep tending with Messiah-esque symbols or to start haranguing other shepherds for daring to wish them “Happy Holidays.” They leave what they are doing and go with haste to the stable to find Mary, Joseph,

and the infant Christ lying in a manger. The birth of Christ occasions a disruption of their daily living, and even as they return to it, they return changed by what they have encountered. They are still shepherds, yes, but something more: evangelists of the good news, glorifying God in what they say and do, amazing all who hear them.

Chances are, your pews this morning will have attracted the disrupted in your congregation and broader community in need of something amazing to break into their lives. In my experience, Christmas Day services provide a valuable space for those whose lives do not conform to what our society’s image of Christmas Day should look like. Those without family, or for whom family is no longer family, find in church a way not to be alone on Christmas. Those with nothing much to celebrate coming looking for something to be glad of. Most of those who join you in worship today will likely not be motivated by a conscious decision to rebel against society’s vision of Christmas; they will be those who need us to set aside the comfort of societal confirmation for their sake. Are we who have families and friends to surround ourselves with on Christmas willing to expand the celebration to include others? Can we exchange our consumerist gift giving for the self-giving that makes our fellowship the gift of abundant life to others? Consider how your worship today can be the beginning of a movement to be for others who God proves to be for us today in Christ.

—Rev. Dr. Miles Hopgood

Scripture Summary

The shepherds go to see Jesus and rejoice that they have found him, sharing the good news with all.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

L: We lift up our eyes to heaven,

C: We look to our merciful God.

L: The angels are proclaiming God's glory.

C: We are filled with wonder and joy.

Confession and Forgiveness

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

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: God who was and is and is to come,

C: Despite our best intentions, even our deepest desires, we find ourselves time and again turning away from you to follow after other gods—possessions, people, comforts—in an effort to fill the hole that only you can. In so doing we have harmed ourselves, others, and your holy creation by what we have said and done, and by the things we have neglected to do. Open our eyes to see that you alone are the source of our wholeness. Forgive us our wrongs and inspire us to the work of making them right, for the sake of your son, Jesus Christ.

P: Beloved of God, like the prodigal son, you are always received with great joy, and your sins are forgiven you. Go forth in newness of life. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

L: God of joy,

C: With the shepherds, we come running to your manger, bewildered by what this all means. As we look upon the poor and humble child, fill us with compassion, that we might carry the gift of Jesus' redeeming love to a world in deep need of healing and wholeness. In the name of our precious newborn savior, Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

We are not poor shepherds, but rich in the abundance you have given us day after day. Therefore, in gratitude, we give back to you a portion of these gifts for your life-giving work in the world. Receive and bless them according to your holy will. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: Trusting in the promise of Jesus' advent among us, we pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

A brief silence.

L: Loving God, the gift of your son is an interruption of the world's business as usual. Strike wonder in us once again as we behold your glory in the form of the newborn who gives us life. God who was, and is, and is to come,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: As a shepherd cares for her sheep, so make us to care for our beloved earthly home. Strengthen the work of all who strive to reverse the ravages of our negligence, that we might live in harmony with creation. God who was, and is, and is to come,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: You chose the lowly to receive the good news. Help us to raise up leaders in our communities who exhibit humility and a commitment to doing justice, loving kindness, and walking with you. God who was, and is, and is to come,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Bring your message of redemption to those who will spend this day in the hospital, at work, away from loved ones, or by themselves when they would prefer to be with others. To all for whom this day is marred by illness or grief, bring a word of peace through your presence, (*especially...*). God who was, and is, and is to come,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: Because of your great gift, saints of all ages have risked everything to proclaim your goodness to the entire world. Make us worthy of their company and give us that same zeal. God who was, and is, and is to come,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Steadfast and loving God, gather these prayers we have offered, both aloud and silent, into your loving arms, for we know that you are faithful and will never abandon us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

As the angels told the shepherds to go and find Jesus in a humble stable, so Jesus tells us to come and find him here in this humble meal of bread and wine. Heed the call of our loving savior and be nourished with your siblings in Christ in his name. All is ready for you.

Litany

1: I bring you good news of great joy!

2: But do we deserve to hear it?

1: Why wouldn't you?

2: Because we're nothing special.

1: Hah! That's where you're wrong. God loves you. And that makes you special. Full stop.

2: Okay. We're listening.

1: Jesus is born! Go and tell everyone!

2: This is amazing news! How can we keep from shouting it! Jesus is born!



Creative Expression

Skit

Characters: Kid 1, Kid 2, Kids (as many as you can get)

Props: Noisemakers for Kids (not Kid 1, Kid 2)

Scene: Kid 1 is sitting alone. All others are offstage.

Kid 1: (*singing*) Si-lent night... ho-ly night... I'm alone... That's alright...

Kid 2: (*entering*) Hey, [Kid 1]!

Kid 1: Who are you?

Kid 2: Doesn't matter. I have some big news. And I mean big!

Kid 1: (*looking around*) Um. For me?

Kid 2: Do you see anyone else around here?

Kid 1: No, actually. Okay, so I'm listening.

Kid 2: There's a big party happening tonight.

Kid 1: What does that have to do with me?

Kid 2: You need to go! You need to see what's happening there. And then you need to tell everyone else what's happening there!

Kid 1: (*looking around again*) You do know that I'm, like, the most unpopular person at my school, right?

Kid 2: Yep. And that's exactly why we picked you

Kid 1: I have no idea what you're saying right now.

Kid 2: Listen, this party isn't for the popular kids. It's for absolutely everyone who wants to be there no matter what. It's *especially* for the unpopular kids—the host wants to make it absolutely clear that you guys are amazing and wonderful and special and deserve a party!

Kid 1: So what am I supposed to do again?

Kid 2: Here's the deal. Tonight, something truly amazing is happening. Something that will change the whole world. You need to go to this party at Danae's house and check it out. You'll know you're in the right place because there's a manger scene out front of the house with the donkey in the manger.

Kid 1: Quirky. But I like it.

Kid 2: Go see the vibe, and you'll realize that it's something completely new and different, like you've never experienced before. It will literally change your life forever. And then I guarantee you'll realize you have to tell absolutely everyone you know about it.

Kid 1: If you say so.

Kid 2: Don't just take it from me. I brought friends.

(*Kids enter with noisemakers shouting, cheering, making noise, and then assemble around Kids 1 and 2.*)

Kids: (*all together*) God loves you! You're special! You deserve joy!

Kid 1: Okay! Okay! I believe you! I'm going to go to Danae's house and see this thing you're telling me about. It sounds amazing! (*runs off*)

Kid 2: (*to Kids*) Our work here is done. Let's go to the party, too!

(*All run offstage together, cheering and shouting*)



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

Jesus is born for us!

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin from Christmas Eve
- *KidStuff* bulletin for today (Christmas Day)
- A nativity set

Background

The gospel of Luke contains the most recognized account of Jesus's birth. The story places Jesus both in Galilee, which is in Nazareth, and in Bethlehem. This geographic placement fulfills prophecies of scripture.

Since Bethlehem was the hometown of Joseph, it was likely he had family there. Because of the census, the family accommodations may have been full with other travelers. The late arrival of Joseph and Mary may have caused the need to put them up in the living quarters shared with livestock.

These subpar accommodations, along with the angelic announcement to the shepherds, may be a foreshadowing that Jesus came for all, not only for the privileged.

Advance Prep

Hide the different pieces of the nativity scene around the front of the church.

Set the Scene

Invite the kids to the front and spend the first part of *Kids' Storytime* having them hunt for the different pieces: Mary, Joseph, shepherds, animals, baby Jesus, etc. When all the pieces have been found, ask the kids to help you tell the story with them.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using both the *KidStuff* bulletin from Christmas Eve and then the one from today, Christmas Day. As you tell the story, ask the kids to place each relevant piece in the manger scene at the right time.

Reflect Together

Wonder together why they think Jesus might have been born in a manger instead of a palace. Or why God chose to tell poor shepherds instead of kings and people with lots of money and power. Talk about how Jesus came for all people, especially the ones that other people thought weren't important.

So who else does that mean Jesus was born for? Point to each of the kids and to the whole congregation and shout, "You!"

Close with a prayer thanking God for sending Jesus as a gift to all of creation.

Sunday's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Mirror
- Flashlight



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: John 1:19-34

¹⁹This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” ²⁰He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, “I am not the Messiah.” ²¹And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the prophet?” He answered, “No.” ²²Then they said to him, “Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?” ²³He said, “I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’” as the prophet Isaiah said. ²⁴Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. ²⁵They asked him, “Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?” ²⁶John answered them, “I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, ²⁷the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.” ²⁸This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing.

²⁹The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away

the sin of the world! ³⁰This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.’ ³¹I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel.” ³²And John testified, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. ³³I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ ³⁴And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God.”

Secondary Text: Psalm 32:1-2

¹Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

²Happy are those to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.



Scripture Readings

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator, Levites, John

Narrator: This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him,

Levites: Who are you?

Narrator: He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed,

John: I am not the Messiah.

Narrator: And they asked him,

Levites: What then? Are you Elijah?

Narrator: He said,

John: I am not.

Levites: Are you the prophet?

Narrator: He answered,

John: No.

Narrator: Then they said to him,

Levites: Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?

Narrator: He said,

John: I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,'

Narrator: As the prophet Isaiah said. Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him,

Levites: Why then are you baptizing if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?

Narrator: John answered them,

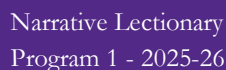
John: I baptize with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal.

Narrator: This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptizing. The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared,

John: Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.' I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel.

Narrator: And John testified,

John: I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God.



A Voice in the Wilderness, John 1:19-34

[illegible]



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: The Christmas season is the ultimate time for us to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ.

The act of proclamation—the practice of declaring what is true—has been a part of what the Christian church, universal, has understood as its differentiator from its inception. In a life of faith, proclaiming the good news doesn't mean what proclamation means in secular circles, in politics or drama or even generalized rhetoric. In a life of faith, proclaiming the good news means wielding a cosmic influence that isn't quite your own. In a life of faith, proclaiming the good news means speaking truth to power, and changing minds and hearts as your own mind—your own heart—also continues changing. Growing.

You'd think, then, that proclamation is a complex, nuanced thing. You'd think that proclamation requires some kind of specialized knowledge or training or tradition. But it's just the opposite. The things we are called to proclaim in Christ are simple. They're all the way broken down. They're baseline things that help both us and the people around us reorient. Refocus. Recharge. Proclamation is where the heavenly meets the earthly. Where we can make sense out of things that wouldn't ordinarily make sense. Where we can see and hear and feel the otherwise just-out-of-reach.

There is perhaps no more textbook proclamation than the testimony of John the Baptist. When Priests and Levites confront John the Baptist, quite obviously looking for the one they did not yet know (the one understood to be the Messiah), John did three confoundingly simple things in response.

- 1) He denied being who he wasn't, even though the Priests and Levites wanted him to be who he wasn't,
- 2) He told them who he was, citing prophetic traditions he knew they would recognize in an attempt to draw and foster connection,
- 3) He told them why he does the things he does—where his inspiration comes from.

And in these three things, John became incredibly powerful. John had people listening to him. John had people paying attention to him. And John had people making big decisions based on his account of his slice of the world.

As we transition out of the season of Advent and into the season of Christmas, let us ask the same question these Priests and Levites asked of John the Baptist: "What do you say about yourself?" Because your testimony—your proclamation—matters.

Who are you? Who are you not? What histories do you tie yourself to? And what futures are you trying to build up in Jesus?

—Madison Johnston, MDiv

Scripture Summary

Who is this Messiah, this long-awaited whom John is proclaiming to anyone who will listen? Who is this one who baptizes, not with water but with the Holy Spirit? Who is it? (Hint: it's not John.)



Liturgy

Call to Worship

L: God forgives us all our wrongdoing.

C: We come into God's presence with joy.

L: God forgives us our injustice and dishonesty.

C: We come into God's presence with joy.

Confession and Forgiveness

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

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: God who was and is and is to come,

C: Despite our best intentions, even our deepest desires, we find ourselves time and again turning away from you to follow after other gods—possessions, people, comforts—in an effort to fill the hole that only you can. In so doing we have harmed ourselves, others, and your holy creation by what we have said and done, and by the things we have neglected to do. Open our eyes to see that you alone are the source of our wholeness. Forgive us our wrongs and inspire us to the work of making them right, for the sake of your son, Jesus Christ.

P: Beloved of God, like the prodigal son, you are always received with great joy, and your sins are forgiven you. Go forth in newness of life. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

L: God of justice,

C: In the wilderness of our modern time, where so much is chaotic and confusing, open our ears to the voice crying out “prepare the way!” that we might always turn our hearts away from the clamors of the world and once again center our lives on Jesus, our source and redeemer. In his holy name we pray. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

Merciful God, in a reflection of your generosity to us, we offer here these gifts of ourselves, our abilities, and our financial resources. Bless them that they might be a testimony to the transforming love of Jesus Christ in a deeply hurting world. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: Trusting in the promise of Jesus' advent among us, we pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

A brief silence.

L: God With Us, your servant John cries out in witness to Christ. May our lives also point to and proclaim the one who has delivered us and claimed us as his own. God who was, and is, and is to come,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: The voice of the wilderness itself cries out in pain because of our wanton destruction and thoughtless exploitation. Make us to heed its cries and work for restoration and wholeness in creation. God who was, and is, and is to come,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: This world cannot help but be changed at the coming of your messiah. This is the one for whom we have been waiting. This is the one on whom all our hopes have rested. May this joyous news reach all corners of the earth, through your faithful servants in all places. God who was, and is, and is to come,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Heal your suffering people, longing for relief, and aching for your presence (*especially...*) Guide medical providers and grant respite and peace to caregivers. God who was, and is, and is to come,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: With John and all your trailblazing saints, we dare to proclaim one who comes to shake the very

foundations of the earth, and yet gladly gathers us together and calls us siblings. God who was, and is, and is to come,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Steadfast and loving God, gather these prayers we have offered, both aloud and silent, into your loving arms, for we know that you are faithful and will never abandon us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

The one for whom we have prepared the way in our hearts now meets us here at this table in the bread and the wine. Come and be nourished for the journey ahead, for all is prepared.

Litany

1: Siblings in Christ, who are you?

2: We are not messiahs.

1: Are you Elijah, come back from the dead?

2: We are not the prophet Elijah.

1: Then who are you that gather in this place?

2: We are the Body of Christ.

1: Who is the Body of Christ?

2: We are the ones crying out Jesus' message of sacrificial love to all the world.

1: In this way, then, you are prophets.

2: God help us to live your words of justice and love in all we do and say.



Creative Expression

Skit

Characters: Person 1, Person 2

Props: None

Person 1: I need to have a word with you in my office.

Person 2: Yes [Sir/Ma'am]. (*follows Person 1 across the front*) What is it?

Person 1: It's been brought to my attention that you've been openly criticizing our proposed company retirement plan.

Person 2: Yes, I have. I think it's a bad plan.

Person 1: Why?

Person 2: It places large amounts of employee money into funds that invest in businesses that openly damage the environment and undermine locally-owned businesses, especially those owned by people of color.

Person 1: How do you know this? And why should anyone take your word for it? Are you the plan administrator? Do you work for the investment company?

Person 2: No. I'm none of those things.

Person 1: So who do you think you are? Why should we change our plans just because you say so?

Person 2: I pay attention. It's important to me that my money goes into investments that benefit other people and the environment. So I did the research. And I asked an independent consultant to come in and talk to the board about it.

Person 1: You did what?

Person 2: Yep. Someone is coming who will make it all clear and set things straight.

Person 1: Rather presumptuous of you, wasn't it?

Person 2: Absolutely not. The board was open to hearing her.

Person 1: So what's in it for you? Do you get a finder's fee on the group investment?

Person 2: Nope. Not a cent. I just get a 401(k) I can believe in.

Person 1: You do realize that historically, socially responsible investments don't do as well as other funds.

Person 2: Actually, that's changing. But even if it's still the case, how does it benefit me to make a few extra dollars when my environment and community are being gutted by those dollars?

Person 1: You don't get a cut, you don't necessarily earn more return, you really, honestly believe this is right.

Person 2: Yep. And don't take my word for it. I'm just the messenger. You should sit in on the board meeting and listen to what the consultant has to say. She'll make the whole truth abundantly clear.

Person 1: Well, I'm still irritated with you. But I'll try to be open to all the options. And I'll go with what the board decides. You're really something else, [Person 2].

Person 2: I'll take that as a compliment.



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

We can reflect Jesus' light.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Mirror
- Flashlight

Background

John the Baptist lived in the wilderness before Jesus' ministry became public. He baptized and proclaimed the coming of one who would baptize with the Holy Spirit. His testimony unnerved many who were in power. When one comes to bring grace and peace, and to overthrow the bondage to the law, those in power become threatened. They sought out John to discover who he was and in whose name he spoke. John made it clear he was not the messiah himself. It was Jesus who came to save, and John had been sent to proclaim Jesus' arrival.

Set the Scene

Show the kids a mirror. What does a mirror do? A mirror reflects the image in front of it. It is not the actual image it reflects. Tell the kids you're going to read them a story about someone who reflects Jesus, but isn't Jesus.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

Unpack the story together. Who were the people waiting for? (*The messiah*) What's a messiah? It means "anointed one" and it was someone God promised who would save God's people and rule them in peace. Was John the messiah? (*nope*) Who did John say he was? (*the one God called to "prepare the way" for Jesus.*)

Just like the image in the mirror isn't the actual image, John wasn't the actual messiah. He was a reflection—he shined God's love in the promise of Jesus back at the people who were looking for Jesus.

Ask the kids to recall last week's activity with the flashlight and the shoebox. Jesus was represented by the light. What happens when you shine a light in a mirror? Demonstrate how the light bounces off the mirror and can be projected onto walls, ceiling, even into people's eyes—be nice though! Tell the kids that each and every one of us is a mirror just like John. We can reflect Jesus' light—Jesus' love and hope and joy—into the whole world. How might we do that?

Close with a prayer asking God to help us reflect God's light into a hurting world.

Next Week's Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- A card with the words "Come and See!" written inside.



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: John 1:35-51

³⁵The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, “Look, here is the Lamb of God!”

³⁷The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, “What are you looking for?” They said to him, “Rabbi” (which translated means Teacher), “where are you staying?” ³⁹He said to them, “Come and see.” They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o’clock in the afternoon. ⁴⁰One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. ⁴¹He first found his brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which is translated Anointed). ⁴²He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, “You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas” (which is translated Peter).

⁴³The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.” ⁴⁴Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.” ⁴⁶Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” ⁴⁷When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!” ⁴⁸Nathanael asked him,

“Where did you get to know me?” Jesus answered, “I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.”

⁴⁹Nathanael replied, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” ⁵⁰Jesus answered, “Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.”

⁵¹And he said to him, “Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”

Secondary Text: Psalm 66:1-5

¹Make a joyful noise to God, all the earth;

²sing the glory of his name; give to him glorious praise.

³Say to God, “How awesome are your deeds! Because of your great power, your enemies cringe before you.

⁴All the earth worships you; they sing praises to you, sing praises to your name.” *Selah*

⁵Come and see what God has done: he is awesome in his deeds among mortals.

Pronunciation Guide

Cephas: SEE-fuhs

Bethsaida: behth-SAY-ih-duh

Nathanael: nuh-THAN-ay-ehl

Selah: SEE-luh



Scripture Readings

Dramatic Reading of the Text

Readers: Narrator, Disciple, Jesus, Philip, Nathanael

Narrator: The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed,

Disciple: “Look, here is the Lamb of God!”

Narrator: The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them,

Jesus: “What are you looking for?”

Narrator: They said to him,

Disciple: “Rabbi,”

Narrator: (which translated means Teacher),

Disciple: “Where are you staying?”

Narrator: He said to them,

Jesus: “Come and see.”

Narrator: They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his brother Simon and said to him,

Disciple: “We have found the Messiah,”

Narrator: (which is translated Anointed). He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said,

Jesus: “You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas,”

Narrator: (which is translated Peter). The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him,

Jesus: “Follow me.”

Narrator: Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him,

Philip: “We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.”

Narrator: Nathanael said to him,

Nathanael: “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”

Narrator: Philip said to him,

Philip: “Come and see.”

Narrator: When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him,

Jesus: “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!”

Narrator: Nathanael asked him,

Nathanael: “Where did you get to know me?”

Narrator: Jesus answered,

Jesus: “I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.”

Narrator: Nathanael replied,

Nathanael: “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”

Narrator: Jesus answered,

Jesus: “Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.”

Narrator: And he said to him,

Jesus: “Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”



Jesus Says Come and See, John 1:35-51

[illegible]



Theme

Preaching Theme

Main Idea: Few acts of faith can change a life more than gently pointing someone to the Savior who invites all to “come and see.”

Few things are more unnerving for some modern Christians than the idea of witnessing to their faith. Perhaps it's because we live in a culture in which “witnessing” is associated with confrontational street-corner evangelists, smooth talking televangelists, and intrusive door-to-door recruiters whose “witness” comes with subtle judgments, demands, and expectations. However, as uncomfortable as many of us may be with it today, so far as the Gospel of John is concerned, few things are more essential to being a disciple of Jesus Christ than finding some gentle way to point someone toward Christ.

This is what John the Baptist masterfully models at the start of the Gospel when he points to Jesus and says “Look, there he is!” But witnessing is contagious and soon spreads. In the next few verses, we learn “the first thing Andrew did” after becoming a disciple is to share the news with his brother Simon. Then Philip rushes to tell his friend Nathanael, “we have found the one.” But it doesn't stop there. The Samaritan woman at the well who witnesses to her

village (Jn. 3), the healed blind man who witnesses before the Sanhedrin (Jn. 9), the list goes on until one realizes that witnessing is something all true followers of Christ do all throughout John's Gospel.

Yet, it doesn't happen as we so often assume today. In John's Gospel, witnessing isn't an abrasive, formulaic, cold-call attack. It's a personal, gentle invitation that points someone to the redeemer we've found while trusting that the redeemer can take it from there. And maybe that's the good news about witnessing that John's Gospel holds for us today. We may not always be the most comfortable with it, but when it's done with joy, driven by compassion, and comes from a friend, few things can change a life more than the simple willingness to point someone to the Messiah who invites us all to “come and see.”

—Pr. Mattheis Lorimor

Scripture Summary

John's proclamation begins to take hold as Jesus attracts his first followers. They are already impressed by what they see in their new leader, but they couldn't possibly be prepared for what is to come.



Liturgy

Call to Worship

L: John proclaims, “Look! Here is the Lamb of God!”

C: What does this mean? We want to know.

L: Come and see what Jesus is all about.

C: We open our minds and hearts to the Word.

Confession and Forgiveness

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

Pause for silence and reflection.

P: God of grace and mercy,

C: We who have seen the signs of Jesus’ presence in the world still fall into doubt and despair. We put our trust in ourselves and in the powers of the world, in material goods and in finite and fallible people. In our fear we act out against our neighbors, and hurt those most in need of our help. Restore our faith, O God. Forgive us for our failings and make us one with our beloved siblings throughout creation.

P: Your God hears and answers, beloved children, and with love and tenderness washes away all your sins. Know that you are always whole, always loved, and always held, even in your doubts and failings. Go forth with joy in this knowledge. Amen.

Prayer of the Day

L: Loving God,

C: You invite us each day into the Word, into our communities of faith, into the work or the wellbeing of the world. Help us to hear in this joyful invitation the call to know and love you more deeply, and to live more richly and authentically, in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

Holy God, we offer now these gifts, gathered together in gratitude for all that you have given us in our daily need. Bless what we offer here that it might be a blessing to this community and the world. Amen.



Liturgy

Prayers of the Church

L: Trusting in the promise of Jesus' advent among us, we pray for the church, the world, and all those in need.

A brief silence.

L: Holy God, you invite us to "come and see" Jesus, to witness with our own lives and hearts his presence in our hurting world. Make us to proclaim him among us in the here and now. God who was, and is, and is to come,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: All creation recognizes its creator, receiving its life, its vitality, and its fruitfulness from you. Make this joyful recognition so apparent in us as well, that we honor and respect our relationship with you, the world, and all created life. God who was, and is, and is to come,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Open the eyes of leaders at every level to see your face in the faces of those they serve. Make us to support them in their work, that all might flourish according to your will. God who was, and is, and is to come,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Your touch is life; your word is healing. Lead us back to you when we wander, when we doubt, and when we crave the wholeness that you impart. Bring your blessing of healing to all in need (*especially...*) God who was, and is, and is to come,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

L: It begins with a step and lasts forever, our journey with you. Draw us forth in the company of all your faithful saints, and the confidence of everlasting life with you. God who was, and is, and is to come,

C: We lift our prayers to you.

L: Steadfast and loving God, gather these prayers we have offered, both aloud and silent, into your loving arms, for we know that you are faithful and will never abandon us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Eucharistic Invitation

The one who told the first disciples, "Come and see," still invites us into his holy presence. Come and see Jesus here in this bread and wine, and be strengthened to carry the good news of Jesus' love into the world.

Litany

1: Come and see all that God has done.

2: Make a joyful noise, all the earth!

1: Come and see the Lamb of God, the promise fulfilled.

2: Sing the glory of God's name!

1: Come and see Jesus, who calls us to follow.

2: How awesome are God's actions in the world!

1: Come and see how we, too, can bring God's reign into the world.

2: God's actions, and our actions through God, are awesome in the lives of all people.



Creative Expression

Skit

Characters: Kids 1-4 (early teens)

Props: Two cell phones.

Kid 1: Look what I got! (*holds up phone*)

Kid 2: Wow! Is that the iPhone 27x? With all the extra features?

Kid 1: Yep. The latest and greatest.

Kid 3: It's so shiny. Can I touch it?

Kid 1: Sure. It's got the super-mega unbreakable screen protector and case on it.

Kid 2: I heard that thing can do everything except clean your room for you.

Kid 3: It's got way more features than my iPhone 26. I'm jealous.

Kid 2: I'm still using the 24. My parents are so mean.

Kid 4: (*walking over*) You got the new iPhone?

Kid 1: Oh, hey. You're the new kid, aren't you.

Kid 4: Yeah. Just moved into the neighborhood. Not from too far away, though.

Kid 3: How did you know [he/she] just got the new iPhone?

Kid 4: I could just tell from the excited conversation you were all having over here.

Kid 2: Wow. You're amazing.

Kid 3: Are you gonna get the new 27x?

Kid 4: Nah. I'm happy with my 8.

Kid 1: Um...did you say...eight?

Kid 4: Yep. It's got everything I need. All my friends' info, apps that help me do my volunteer work, a great camera. All that stuff.

Kid 2: But...don't you want a newer phone?

Kid 4: Nope. This one works fine. There are a lot more important things than the latest tech.

Kid 3: Name one.

Kid 4: Well, my mom and I volunteer in a sustainable community garden that gives food to homeless shelters.

(*Kids 1-3 stare blankly for a moment in stunned silence.*)

Kid 1: Okay. Well, you have a point.

Kid 4: Oh, and we're going to march in a Black Lives Matter protest at the capital building next weekend. I've got it on my calendar. (*holds up phone to show calendar*)

Kid 2: (*Pointing to phone*) Is that an appointment to talk to the mayor?

Kid 4: Yeah. A bunch of my friends and I are petitioning to get the city to fully fund the local humane society so it can be a no-kill shelter. You wanna come with us?

Kid 3: That would be amazing! I'm all for saving stray dogs and cats!

Kid 2: You're really cool. I'm so glad we met. I can't wait to hang out with you more.

Kid 1: (*looking down at phone*) Wow. I guess the latest shiny toy isn't the greatest thing after all.

Kid 4: There's nothing wrong with it, I guess. It's just that there are so many more important things out there. Amazing, and wonderful things you never see or do if you're just looking at your phone.

(*continued*)



Creative Expression

Skit, continued

Kid 1: Plus they'll just put out a new model next year, and it'll probably be able to do even more than this one. Maybe I'll just stick with this as long as it still runs.

Kid 4: Cool. Well, I'm looking forward to getting to know you guys better. Give me your names

and numbers and I'll text you about the meeting with the mayor.

Kid 3: Absolutely! I want to see and do lots of amazing things with you!

Kid 2: I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship.



Kids' Storytime

Main Message

Jesus invites us to be with him.

Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- A card with the words “Come and See!” written inside.

Background

The book of John begins with John’s testimony about Jesus. John was preaching repentance and baptizing in the wilderness when Jesus began his ministry. Some of John’s followers began following Jesus when John indicated that Jesus was the one he had been speaking about.

A key point in today’s reading came when new followers asked Jesus, “Where are you staying?” or “abiding”? In the reading, Jesus invited a number of disciples to follow and abide with him. The more time people spend together, the more they begin to emulate one another. By abiding with Jesus, the disciples were being invited to learn to emulate Jesus in a most intimate way. We too, can emulate Jesus in intimate ways when we abide with him.

Set the Scene

Ask if the kids have ever been invited to a party. Did they get an invitation in the mail? What did it say? Tell them today’s story is full of invitations, but of a different kind.

Tell the Story

Tell the story using the *KidStuff* bulletin.

Reflect Together

What was the invitation in the story? Give a kid the card you’ve brought and ask them to read what it says. “Come and See!” is the invitation Jesus gives Philip, and the invitation Philip gives Nathanael.

Wonder together how we get to know who Jesus is and how much Jesus loves us? (*by spending time with Jesus*). What does that look like? (*praying, singing, coming to church and Sunday School, going to church camps*) Are there other ways to see Jesus? (*we can see Jesus in other people, in kindness, in service*).

Tell the kids that each and every day, Jesus invites us to “Come and see!”—that means, to come and spend time with Jesus in all that we do.

Close with a prayer thanking Jesus for inviting us to be with him.

Next Week’s Props

- *KidStuff* bulletin
- Pitcher of water
- Instant drink mix
(be mindful of food allergies)
- Paper cups



Narrative Lectionary Worship Resources

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