

# 2017 Advent and Christmas Worship Brainstorming "Angels Among Us"

November 9, 2017

**Members present:** David Booth, Mary Travis, Michael Boersma, Larry Jorgenson, Barb Gripton, Diane Thompson, Carole Koch, Lynne, Karen Post, Jim Post, Mary Ivanov, Vicki Zuker, Deb Moon, Karen Booth; Ken Luckett via email after the gathering

## "Do not be afraid." - The Angels

The angels that appear in the story of Jesus' birth would have been very comfortable in our world of tweets and hashtags. Their messages were often short and to the point—their favorite line being #DoNotBeAfraid. As we look at the stories of these winged messengers to Zechariah, Mary, Joseph and the Shepherds and their reactions to them, we will contemplate what messages we can offer that will counteract a culture of fear and bring #morehope, #morepeace, #morejoy, #morecomfort, #moreworship, and #morelove to the world.



### Ideas for the series:

#### Images/visuals:

- Many angels/angel wings. Two pairs of homemade wings are pictured here. Instructions for making them: <http://craftybutt.blogspot.com/2010/11/pb-knock-off-angel-wings.html>.
- Additional inspiration images can be found in Dropbox: <https://www.dropbox.com/home/LHUMC/Advent%202017%20Angels%20Among%20Us>
- Family photo opportunity: Set up a place where family photos could be taken with the angel wings.

#### Stage sets:

- <http://redesigningworship.com/2010/12/the-christmas-story-stage-design/>
- <http://www.churchstagedesignideas.com/particles-of-christmas/>
- [www.churchstagedesignideas.com/glowing-angels-and-trees/](http://www.churchstagedesignideas.com/glowing-angels-and-trees/) and <https://www.dropbox.com/home/LHUMC/Advent%202017%20Angels%20Among%20Us?preview=glowing+angels+set.jpg> Note from Michael: The angels on the side are cool; I would do it without faces.

#### Music:

- "Angels Among Us" by Alabama ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y\\_4Xfi2LRSA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y_4Xfi2LRSA)),

especially the chorus which can be adapted each week by changing the underlined phrase. We will sing this each week after the Advent candles are lit:

Oh, I believe there are angels among us,  
Sent down to us from somewhere up above.  
They come to you and me in our darkest hours  
To show us how to live  
To teach us how to give  
To guide us with a light of love.

- Hymns that include angels: #196-254 in the UM Hymnal, #2090-2099 in TFWS, and WS #3052 God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen
- “My Lord Has Come” by Will Todd (b. 1970)  
Shepherds, called by angels, called by love and angels:  
No place for them but a stable. My Lord has come.  
Sages, searching for stars, searching for love in heaven;  
No place for them but a stable. My Lord has come.  
His love will hold me, his love will cherish me, love will cradle me.  
Lead me, lead me to see him, sages and shepherds and angels;  
No place for me but a stable. My Lord has come.

Listen to the song at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zpnD5qiVzJ0>

**Videos from Marcia McFee:** These links show how she develops a “threshold moment”.

- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jNVf\\_iHbpQ&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jNVf_iHbpQ&feature=youtu.be) (6:59)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a64q-p9Vgy8> (15:15)

**Related media:** “What Do You Armor Up With” with Dr. Brené Brown

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aakhpC-hhMI&feature=youtu.be>

**Series intro:**

- “The Voices of Advent.” Length: 0:45. Cost: Free. Video bumper for the 2014 Advent Sermon Series from the First UMC of Hot Spring. **Note from Karen:** This is more of an inspiration piece than something that fits with our series.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MplnfUwy5X8> **Comments:** Like the snowy blue background, but the music was jarring – like hearing bad voices.
- “This is a Season.” Length: 1:00. Cost: \$19.98. We were in darkness until God sent us a Light. Kickstart your services this December with this energetic opener.  
<http://www.sermonspice.com/product/29474/this-is-a-season> **Comments:** Good graphics. Bad music.
- “Angels.” Length: 1:28. Cost \$15.99. A brief look at the old advice about always helping a person in need... because you never know when you might be entertaining an angel unawares. Maybe one in a million people might be an angel... but they're all Jesus.  
<http://www.sermonspice.com/product/56847/angels> **Comments:** Powerful and true.
- “Angels: God’s Superbeings.” Length: 0:42. Cost: \$12.00. When we talk about beings that can fly or have super strength...many think of Superman or one of the X-men. However, the scriptures teach us that God has his own Superbeings that he sends to

earth called angels. **Appropriate for Children’s Time. We didn’t watch this together.**

<http://www.worshiphousemedia.com/mini-movies/5288/angels-gods-superbeings>

- “Angel Song Starter.” Length: 1:39. Cost: \$17.98. This mini movie starter pictures the angels as a star field of light and asks us to hear their words to the shepherds anew and praise the God who sent the Savior here. <http://www.worshiphousemedia.com/mini-movies/35420/angel-song-starter>

**Candle lighting liturgy inspiration:** <https://www.liturgylink.net/2014/11/11/advent-candles-hope-peace-joy-love/> and <https://www.liturgylink.net/2016/11/22/advent-wreath-liturgies/>. Have we ever thought of building the advent wreath in a manger?

**Hands-on items:**

- Small bell or jingle bell with a ribbon necklace – “Every time a bell rings an angel gets it wings.”
- Cardstock with signs of an angel, i.e. feather, butterfly, scents, coins, rainbow, sparkles of light, etc.

**Activity #1:** Ask people to write how they feel touched by an angel each week.

**Activity #2:** Devotionals written by church members as follows:

Angels continue to fascinate and intrigue us. We talk about “guardian angels.” Perhaps we have an experience of God sending the right person at the right time. Angels are “God’s agents.” In fact, the word “angel” comes from Greek for “messenger.” Put simply, angels are messengers. In Scripture, especially in the story of Jesus’ birth, angels are messengers who bring Good News of the birth of our Savior.

This year, as a part of our Advent journey, **we’re inviting you to help us create an Advent devotional book with reflections** from among our congregation. We’re asking that you write a reflection for one day during Advent based on our theme “angels among us.” You can reflect on one of the Scriptures below, a Christmas song, a piece of artwork, or something else that speaks to you. Please feel free to include a picture if it’s a part of your reflection.

I’m offering a template so that we have some consistency in our reflections, which is similar to many devotional books:

*Scripture verse, line from a hymn or song, etc.*

*Personal reflection (maximum of one page in length, at least 12-point font)*

*Short prayer*

**Deadline: November 9, 2017**

**Christmas Psalm** by Edward Hays (shared by Mary Travis)

O Blessed One:

It is said that Christmas is for children.

Indeed, I agree:

It’s only a fest for the young at heart,  
A feast for finding beneath the tree  
Gifts to surprise and delight the eternal  
child.

Peel back the scabs of cynicism from my eyes  
So that this calloused and aging child,

May see holiness blazing at the tip of every  
branch,

May see every tree as a Christmas tree.

Let me not be ashamed to dance with delight  
At hidden gifts wrapped in shimmering  
paper  
With bows of rainbow-colored ribbon.

But also grant me the youthful and wide-eyed  
wonder

To recognize, and even expect,  
Life-giving miracles on every street corner,  
Miracles of kindness and generosity and  
care.

Gift my all-too-calculating heart  
With the excitement of anticipation

To truly receive gifts of life,  
The capacity to feast and rejoice.  
Give birth within me to a spaciousness of heart  
That can celebrate this feast  
As the birth of Christ, the Child,  
as a child.

**General discussion points:** 1) Pastor Mary: What does scripture say about angels? What do we think about angels? They are probably not the same. The angel's message of "Do not be afraid" is always timely as is the need for love, hope, joy, and peace. 2) Jimmy (via Pastor Mary): He doesn't know what to say to people any more. He just heard of the third suicide this year in his group of high school friends. 3) Angel means messenger or agent of God, though their messages are not always welcome. 4) What comes to mind when we talk about angels?

- "Touched by an Angel" (TV)
- God's presence
- watching over us
- messengers
- wrestling
- Did angels ever have free will Guardian angels
- A child's prayer – There are four corners of my bed. Four angels round my bed: One at the foot, one at the head, one to stand watch and keep (?), and one to hold me while I sleep.
- the angel in "Hansel and Gretel"
- Gabriel with his horn
- "Charlie's Angels" (TV)
- "City of Angels" (movie)
- "Angels and Demons" (movie)
- bad tattoos
- "Michael" (movie with John Travolta) – angels of the parking spot, left turn, green light, etc.
- Seraphim and Cherubim
- Clarence in "It's a Wonderful Life"
- "Highway to Heaven" with Michael Landon (TV?)
- "Preacher's Wife" with Denzel Washington and Whitney Houston (movie)
- angel of death
- "I Have a Dream" by ABBA (lyrics: ...I believe in angels...)
- "Dogma" (movie – bad angels)
- flying, trumpets, harps, halos
- Hark! – pay attention (Hello!?)
- heavenly angels v. Hollywood angels
- Angels/Wings of Mercy – flights/nurses for medical emergencies
- Blue Angels (air force planes); "Littlest Angel" by Loretta Young
- Hallmark Christmas specials

4) Most of our ideas about angels are positive. 5) Why are we intrigued by angels? They are a conduit to heaven. They make us feel good and offer hope, comfort, peace, joy, and shelter. 6) Do we think of heroes as angels? The lyrics of Alabama's song, "Angels Among Us" would suggest that. 7) Pastor Mary's sister has referred to the people taking care of her in the hospital as angels. 8) Angels in the bible are genderless. The only two that are called by name are Michael and Gabriel. We have some other angels named, such as Lucifer, but they are literary figures. 9) Book: Angel Unaware by Dale Evans.

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**Make Ready a People: #morehope** **12/3/17**

**Scripture:** Luke 1: 5-25, 57-80 (New Revised Standard Version)

<sup>5</sup>In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly order of Abijah. His wife was a descendant of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth.

<sup>6</sup>Both of them were righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord. <sup>7</sup>But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were getting on in years.

<sup>8</sup>Once when he was serving as priest before God and his section was on duty, <sup>9</sup>he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and offer incense. <sup>10</sup>Now at the time of the incense offering, the whole assembly of the people was praying outside. <sup>11</sup>Then there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. <sup>12</sup>When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified; and fear overwhelmed him. <sup>13</sup>But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. <sup>14</sup>You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, <sup>15</sup>for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He must never drink wine or strong drink; even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. <sup>16</sup>He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. <sup>17</sup>With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” <sup>18</sup>Zechariah said to the angel, “How will I know that this is so? For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years.” <sup>19</sup>The angel replied, “I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. <sup>20</sup>But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur.”

<sup>21</sup>Meanwhile the people were waiting for Zechariah, and wondered at his delay in the sanctuary. <sup>22</sup>When he did come out, he could not speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He kept motioning to them and remained unable to speak. <sup>23</sup>When his time of service was ended, he went to his home.

<sup>24</sup>After those days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she remained in seclusion. She said, <sup>25</sup>“This is what the Lord has done for me when he looked favorably on me and took away the disgrace I have endured among my people.”

### **The Birth of John the Baptist**

<sup>57</sup>Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. <sup>58</sup>Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her.

<sup>59</sup>On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him Zechariah after his father. <sup>60</sup>But his mother said, “No; he is to be called John.” <sup>61</sup>They said to her, “None of your relatives has this name.” <sup>62</sup>Then they began motioning to his father to find out what name he wanted to give him. <sup>63</sup>He asked for a writing tablet and wrote, “His name is John.” And all of them were amazed. <sup>64</sup>Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue freed, and he began to speak, praising God. <sup>65</sup>Fear came over all their neighbors, and all these things were talked about throughout the entire hill country of Judea. <sup>66</sup>All who heard them pondered them and said, “What then will this child become?” For, indeed, the hand of the Lord was with him.

### **Zechariah’s Prophecy**

<sup>67</sup>Then his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke this prophecy:

<sup>68</sup>“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them. <sup>69</sup>He has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his servant David, <sup>70</sup>as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, <sup>71</sup>that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us. <sup>72</sup>Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors, and has remembered his holy covenant, <sup>73</sup>the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham, to grant us <sup>74</sup>that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear, <sup>75</sup>in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

<sup>76</sup>And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to

prepare his ways, <sup>77</sup>to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins. <sup>78</sup>By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, <sup>79</sup>to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

<sup>80</sup>The child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day he appeared publicly to Israel.

**Synopsis:** It was just another day at the temple for Zechariah. It was his priestly turn to make sure everything was done properly and in good order. But it turned into something quite different when an angel showed up at the altar. Have you ever had a moment in your life after which you knew nothing would ever be the same? In the midst of great change, hope is always a welcome thing. Advent can remind us that God makes us ready for whatever unknown may come our way and calls us to be messengers of *#morehope* in an ever-changing world.

**Visuals/images:**

**Media possibilities:**

- “Angels Among Us.” Length: 3:50. Cost: \$20.00. An inspiring and thought-provoking short film about belief... with a twist. A great illustration that allows the gaps to be filled by the pastor. <http://www.sermonspice.com/product/49962/angels-among-us>

**We did not view this as a group.**

- “Righteous Insanity – Do Not Be Afraid.” Length: 1:33. Cost: \$4.99. Ever wonder why angels always begin their visitations by saying “Do not be afraid?” Find out in this Muppet style angel training video!  
<http://www.sermonspice.com/product/34499/righteous-insanity-do-not-be-afraid>

**Comments:** Great! Use it, possible the week before the series begins.

- “The Call of Christmas: Zechariah.” Length: 4:18. Cost: \$15.00. A time of worship in the temple turns to a life-altering event for Zechariah. Watch what happens when the angel, Gabriel, pays him a visit and he’s called to prepare. It’s the beginning of a story that changes the lives of every person who hears it. <https://skitguys.com/videos/item/the-call-of-christmas-zechariah> **Comments:** Not our favorite Skit Guys video/series. Too long. The voices don’t seem right. It makes sense that Zechariah is terrified; it seems to be both powerful and punitive. “Betty scale”: 1/5.

**Activities #1 and 2:** Holy Communion. Advent wreath/candle lighting: End “Angels Among Us” with “To guide us with God’s hope and love.”

**Activity #3:** Could we share Zechariah’s words in a monologue? Ken’s suggestion: Have a person read Zechariah’s prophesy while piano music plays (Jim Brickman’s “Early Snowfall”). Lights down low. Person sitting on a stool in a spotlight.

**Music:**

**Discussion points:** 1) We will focus on the angel’s words to Zechariah, highlighted above, and how we listen to it. 2) Everything we know about Zechariah is in this passage from Luke. 3) The angel announces the hope John the Baptist will bring as he prepare the way for Jesus and speaks longer to Zechariah than anyone else. 4) The angel must say, “Do not be

afraid!" If it were a demon speaking, he/she would say something appealing and appear less scary. 5) What do angels sound like? Could we have many different people say, "Do not be afraid" or "Fear not!" or "Hark/Hello!?"? 6) What would an angel look like? Bright light? Large or small? White robe or Carharts? 7) Could we have different people dress as angels? Suggestion: Bailey Hilleary.

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Nothing is Impossible: #morepeace

12/10/17

**Scripture:** Luke 1: 26-56 (New Revised Standard Version)

**The Birth of Jesus Foretold**

<sup>26</sup>In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, <sup>27</sup>to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. <sup>28</sup>And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you."<sup>29</sup> But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. <sup>30</sup>The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup>And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. <sup>32</sup>He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. <sup>33</sup>He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." <sup>34</sup>Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" <sup>35</sup>The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. <sup>36</sup>And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren." <sup>37</sup>For nothing will be impossible with God."<sup>38</sup> Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

#### **Mary Visits Elizabeth**

<sup>39</sup>In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, <sup>40</sup>where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. <sup>41</sup>When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit <sup>42</sup>and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. <sup>43</sup>And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? <sup>44</sup>For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. <sup>45</sup>And blessed is she who believed that there would be<sup>ε</sup> a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

#### **Mary's Song of Praise**

<sup>46</sup>And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, <sup>47</sup>and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, <sup>48</sup>for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; <sup>49</sup>for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. <sup>50</sup>His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. <sup>51</sup>He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. <sup>52</sup>He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; <sup>53</sup>he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. <sup>54</sup>He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, <sup>55</sup>according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

<sup>56</sup>And Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.

**Synopsis:** Zechariah freaked out when the other-worldly creature appeared to him. But Mary was simply "perplexed." Why would such an incredible message come to a common girl just barely a woman? Then her reply to such a foretelling about her purpose in life was

also simple: “Let it be so.” Have you ever struggled with finding your purpose and being at peace with it? Or are you yearning for more peace in your life and relationships? *#morepeace* in the world happens when all of us feel *#morepeace* within ourselves and live out that message each day.

**Visuals/images:**

**Media possibilities:** We did not watch these as a group.

- “Advent.” Length: 2:07. Cost: \$17.94. Pregnancy is a wonderful illustration of the season of Advent. Waiting, hoping, and anticipating that special day in which we celebrate the birth of Jesus – the light of the world.  
<http://www.sermonspice.com/product/21211/advent>
- “Peace on Earth?” Length: 2:53. Cost: We own it. Last used: 12/11/11. Finding peace on earth while enduring the hardships of life can be a very difficult task. Several individuals share their story of surviving life. Is there peace on this earth? True peace is found in Christ. <http://www.sermonspice.com/product/14253/peace-on-earth>
- “Mary and the Angel” (Luke 1). Length: 1:45. Cost: \$12.00 A serious minded look at the angel from Luke 1 who visits Mary to give her the news of the birth of Christ.  
<http://www.worshiphousemedia.com/mini-movies/63266/mary-and-the-angel-luke-1>
  - “The Call of Christmas: Mary.” Length: 3:28. Cost: \$15.99. When Mary was visited by the angel she found herself in God’s favor and overcome with so many emotions. As she is called to provide, see how Mary responds to the words of the angel—words that changed everything. <https://skitguys.com/videos/item/the-call-of-christmas-mary> **Note from Lynne:** Mary is afraid when the angel appears.

**Activity:** Advent wreath/candle lighting. End “Angels Among Us” with “To guide us with God’s peace and love.”

**Music:** #215 “To a Maid Engaged to Joseph”; #218 “It Came Upon the Midnight Clear”

**Discussion points:** 1) Mary asks the same question as Zechariah, but is not struck mute. Does Zechariah’s silence make his news more believable? 2) Would greeters be willing to say “Hark”? 3) Where is the peace in this story? It must be in accepting God’s will. Mary would have known how difficult it would be to tell Joseph, a righteous man who doesn’t seem to get much credit. 4) Where do we find peace, especially at Christmas time?

- Vision of peace: snowfall, blue
- Real life: frenzied
- Sense of not being ready
- Self-imposed expectation of everything must be perfect, but no peace until after it is all over
- Carole: Deciding to have pizza instead of a fancier Christmas dinner helped
- Jim Post: “It will all work out.”
- Christmas music beginning November 1: Great for some (Diane, Karen Post, Ana). Not at all welcome for others (Karen Booth), especially commercial tunes like “Grandma Got Run Over by Reindeer”
- Have we lost the anticipation of Christmas in the midst of busyness?

5) Image/metaphor - Christmas tornado (Mary Travis) with all the stuff (shopping, family, gatherings, gifts, travel...) over a manger. In the end, only the light from the star in the manger matters. 6) Thanksgiving seems to be the road kill on the way to Christmas commercially. Do you ever see people decorate outside for Thanksgiving? No. We go right from Halloween to Christmas.

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## Do Not Be Afraid: #morejoy

12/17/17

**Scripture:** Matthew 1: 18-25 (New Revised Standard Version)      **The Birth of Jesus the Messiah**

<sup>18</sup>Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup>Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. <sup>20</sup>But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, **do not be afraid** to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup>She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” <sup>22</sup>All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: <sup>23</sup>“Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means, “God is with us.”

<sup>24</sup>When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, <sup>25</sup>but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

**Synopsis:** Every angel seems to use “do not be afraid” as an opening line. But perhaps no one needed to hear it more than Joseph. What was happening to him was the stuff that ruins lives. As a man, he had all the rights to abandon Mary and preserve his dignity. The stakes were high—who would believe this? **Keeping up “appearances” can rob us of our #morejoy.** Let us be messengers of encouragement and steadfast support, as Joseph was, for that which the Spirit is birthing in the world.

### Visuals/images:

**Media possibilities:** We did not view these as a group.

- “Joseph’s Dream.” Length: 2:00. Cost: \$25.00. Visual liturgy by the Lumo Project. <http://www.sermonspice.com/product/36623/josephs-dream>
- “The Call of Christmas: Joseph.” Length: 4:03. Cost: \$15.99. Who would’ve thought that a dream could be reality? Joseph discovers the role he will play in the story of Emmanuel when an angel visits him in a dream with a call to protect. <https://skitguys.com/videos/item/the-call-of-christmas-joseph>

**Activity:** Advent wreath/candle lighting. End “Angels Among Us” with “To guide us with God’ joy and love.”

**Music:** #215 “To a Maid Engaged to Joseph”; #246 “Joy to the World”

**Discussion points:** 1) Face Booth, Pinterest, and other social media have made us more anxious as we strive to make our lives appear perfect. It is just a show, much like Christmas letters of old that tell how wonderful the kids, job, life, vacation, etc. have

been. 2) The reality is we are a hot mess, like the Griswold family in “Christmas Vacation.” 3) For people without faith, every day is the same. It would be horrible to live without the anticipation of and belief in someone greater than ourselves. 4) “Gift of the Magi.” 5) This story if only found in the Gospel of Matthew. 5) The angel’s speech short: Take Mary as your wife. Jesus will save his people.

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**The Light Shines in the Darkness: #morecomfort** **12/18/17 at 7:00 pm**  
**Blue Christmas**

**Scripture:** John 1: 1-5 (Common English Bible)

<sup>1</sup>In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup>The Word was with God in the beginning. <sup>3</sup>All things were made by God, and without God nothing came to be. What came into being <sup>4</sup>through the Word was life, and the life was the light for all people. <sup>5</sup>The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness doesn’t extinguish the light.

**Synopsis:** For many, the “holiday season” is no holiday at all. It is filled with difficult times, humps to get over, gatherings to endure, varieties of pressures and a flood of memories that darken and dampen the short days and long nights. This season is not a joy for everyone, and yet God offers comfort in the promise of the Incarnation: we are not alone, and God is with us.

**Visuals/images:**

**Media possibilities:**

- “Nativity.” Length: 2:40. Cost: Free with our subscription. The word “nativity” comes from the Latin word meaning “to be born”, and truly the nativity is the birthplace of hope. With this beautifully fresh perspective that links the story of creation to the Christmas story, we are reminded that the good news began when God spoke and created, beginning the greatest love story of all time.  
<https://journeyboxmedia.com/product/nativity/>
- “A United Methodist Prayer: Turning to God in Days of Trouble.” Length: 1:27. Cost: Free. Life brings good days and bad. God is always there to comfort us.  
<http://www.umc.org/what-we-believe/a-united-methodist-prayer-turning-to-god-in-days-of-trouble>

**Activity:** Advent wreath/candle lighting, lighting candles to acknowledge struggles, losses, etc. If we sing “Angels Among Us,” end with “to comfort us with God’s perfect love.”

**Music:** #3052 “God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen”

**Discussion points:** 1) How do we help people through this time of year? Suggestions: Telling our stories. Inviting them to be a part of our lives. Giving them space to do less. 2) Larry: When all goes well, Bonnie couldn’t be happier. It is a gift for her to be able to make the holidays right for other people. 3) Diane: John and Diane took an extra turn hosting the Thompson Family Christmas after a brother died. Their sister-in-law was extremely grateful for their gift of hospitality. 4) Life is hard. This season is hard. The promise of the

incarnation, i.e. God becoming flesh in Jesus, means that we never go through hardship alone. “Do not be afraid” is always a timely admonition.

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## This Will Be a Sign: #morelove

12/24/17 at 10:00 am

**Scripture:** Luke 2: 1-20 (New Revised Standard Version)

**The Birth of Jesus**

<sup>1</sup>In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered.

<sup>2</sup>This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. <sup>3</sup>All went to their own towns to be registered. <sup>4</sup>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. <sup>5</sup>He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. <sup>6</sup>While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. <sup>7</sup>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.

### The Shepherds and the Angels

<sup>8</sup>In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup>Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. <sup>10</sup>But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: <sup>11</sup>to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. <sup>12</sup>This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” <sup>13</sup>And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, <sup>14</sup>“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

<sup>15</sup>When 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.” <sup>16</sup>So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. <sup>17</sup>When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; <sup>18</sup>and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. <sup>19</sup>But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. <sup>20</sup>The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

**Synopsis:** The sky was brighter than usual that night, making it easier to keep track of the sheep. And then it got *really* bright. You would have thought that all that “glory” shining would have been “the sign.” That’s what most of us look for—great big obvious clues about God’s presence. But instead, the angel says that a baby... a newborn helpless baby in a feeding trough was it—the sign. In a flash, the message was that #morelove is found where you least expect it and perhaps is already there residing in the ordinariness of your life.

**Visuals/images:**

**Media possibilities:**

- “The Angel’s Candle – Love.” Length: 1:28. Cost: \$20.00. The wonder of Christ’s birth is reflected through images of a young girl holding her newborn brother. As she presents him with a gift, we are reminded of the gifts presented to Christ by the three Magi. <http://www.sermonspice.com/product/35251/the-angels-candle-love>

**Comments:** Anything with a baby is cute, including this.

- “Hark the Herald Angels Sing.” Length: 2:03. Cost: \$17.95 Hark! The Herald Angels Sing is a Christmas classic and tells the story of Jesus Birth. This video is ideal for a Christmas or Christmas Eve service. It can be used as a sing along, stand alone element, introduction or other transitions. <http://www.worshiphousemedia.com/mini-movies/48661/hark-the-herald-angels-sing>
- “That Night” part 1. Length: 1:18. Cost: \$17.98. Only those who had heard and believed the message of the angels knew what was happening the night Jesus was born. <http://www.worshiphousemedia.com/mini-movies/48670/that-night-part-1> **Comments:** Mixed reaction.
- “The Call of Christmas: Shepherds.” Length: 3:28. Cost: \$15.99. Nobody would expect lowly shepherds to be some of the first to hear about the birth of the Messiah. But God’s angel comes to these men with good news, calling them to praise. <https://skitguys.com/videos/item/the-call-of-christmas-shepherds> **Comments:** We did not watch this as a group, but it is one of the funnier skits in this series as the shepherds argue about who should be left behind to take care of the sheep.

**Activity:** Advent wreath/candle lighting. End “Angels Among Us” with “to guide us with God’s perfect love.”

**Music:** #236 “While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks”; #239 “Silent Night”; #3059 “Love Has Come” (sung to the tune of “Bring a Torch”); #242 “Love Came Down at Christmas”

**Discussion points:** 1) It is likely that the kids will dress in costume in the morning to help tell the Christmas story. 2) Will we offer Communion at both the 10:00 am and 11:00 pm services? 3) We may add Isaiah 9: 2-11 at 11:00 pm.

## **We Have Come to Worship Him: #moreworship**

**12/31/17 at 10:00 am**

**Scripture:** Matthew 2: 1-12 (New Revised Standard Version)

<sup>1</sup>In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men<sup>f</sup> from the East came to Jerusalem,

<sup>2</sup>asking, “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.” <sup>3</sup>When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; <sup>4</sup>and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. <sup>5</sup>They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

<sup>6</sup>“And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.”

<sup>7</sup>Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. <sup>8</sup>Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.” <sup>9</sup>When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup>When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. <sup>11</sup>On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. <sup>12</sup>And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left

for their own country by another road.

**Synopsis:** Though there are no obvious angels among the magi (either en route to worshipping the newborn king or afterwards), they were warned in a dream not to return to Herod. How could they trust in God’s leading them away from Herod and “not be afraid” of the implications of going against the king? How does worship form our lives and transform our lives?

**Visuals/images:**

**Media possibilities:**

**Activity:** Advent wreath/candle lighting? If we sing “Angels Among Us,” end with “to guide us with God’s perfect love.” Wesley’s Covenant Prayer (for a new year).

**Music:** #220 “Angels from the Realms of Glory”; #254 “We Three Kings”; #245 “The First Noel”

**Discussion points:** 1) We will continue to tell the Christmas story chronologically and celebrate Epiphany today. 2) The magi were the first gentiles to worship Jesus, bowing down to him. 3) “Gift of the Magi.” 4) There aren’t any angels in this passage, but God also speaks through dreams. There is plenty for the magi to fear, especially Herod. Clearly they were transformed; they paid attention to their dream and defied Herod’s instructions to return to him. 5) Scripture is clear that there were three gifts, but it does not speak to the number of magi. 6) We are good at setting limits on who we believe God is for. This passage has major implications. God is for everyone. 7) The magi would have travelled a great distance (probably 1000 miles) to get to Bethlehem if they were from Persia. Note from Karen: The discussion moved on to many odd camel facts and “cheetahs never prosper.”

**Get up and Go: #morelife**

**1/7/18**

**Scripture:** Matthew 2: 13-23 (New Revised Standard Version)

**The Escape to Egypt**

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

**The Massacre of the Infants**

<sup>16</sup>When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men. <sup>17</sup>Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:

<sup>18</sup>“A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more.”

**The Return from Egypt**

<sup>19</sup>When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and

said, <sup>20</sup>“Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child’s life are dead.” <sup>21</sup>Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. <sup>22</sup>But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee. <sup>23</sup>There he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, “He will be called a Nazarene.”

**Synopsis:** By now Joseph was used to angels. And now he needed their timely warnings more than ever. **Jesus was barely a toddler and his trouble with the Roman Empire had begun.** Jesus, the Savior of Humankind becomes a refugee—forced from home by oppression and violence. We ask ourselves how we might usher in *#morelife* in the face of that which feels destructive. One last time in this series we hear the message *#DoNotBeAfraid* to get up and go—leaving those things that weigh us down and moving into the New Year with new life.

**Visuals/images:**

**Media possibilities:**

- “The Migrant.” Length: 1:20. Cost: Free. We remember the coming birth of the Christ child who himself was a migrant. [http://cdnfiles.umc.org/Website\\_Properties\\_UGC/audio-video/migration-sunday/global-migration-animation-1080p.mp4?mkt\\_tok=eyJpljoiT1dOa1ptSTVORGN5WVdVeilsInQiOiJsMW1pemdYSjcwMFwvU0hyVVhtUENBVlpqdkJFbW5sUURVcVJOQWtlaJsv1E5NFQ5dnRNQjJ3SWlZbGZBZnB4a0owMVwvTE5ld1FLekVHNI4YXFITFoOCtzYyVUpoakJWYlo5UUtWdmtRM0VMNnRzZDZiTURITHpadEFCc1sln0%3D](http://cdnfiles.umc.org/Website_Properties_UGC/audio-video/migration-sunday/global-migration-animation-1080p.mp4?mkt_tok=eyJpljoiT1dOa1ptSTVORGN5WVdVeilsInQiOiJsMW1pemdYSjcwMFwvU0hyVVhtUENBVlpqdkJFbW5sUURVcVJOQWtlaJsv1E5NFQ5dnRNQjJ3SWlZbGZBZnB4a0owMVwvTE5ld1FLekVHNI4YXFITFoOCtzYyVUpoakJWYlo5UUtWdmtRM0VMNnRzZDZiTURITHpadEFCc1sln0%3D)
- “Who Are Migrants?” Length: 5:19. Cost: Free. There are [65 million displaced people](#) in the world today. That’s more than at any other time since World War II. In response to the global migration crisis, The UMC has planned a day of prayer and a special offering to raise awareness and funds to aid migrants and refugees. <http://www.umc.org/how-we-serve/who-are-migrants-a-reflection-for-global-migration-sunday>

**Activity:** Holy Communion.

**Music:** #3066 “Still, Still, Still.” If we sing “Angels Among Us,” end with “to give us eternal life and love.”

**Discussion points:** 1) We don’t often pay attention to the flight to Egypt. It gets more “air time” in countries where people are persecuted regularly. It does speak to the many ways the Christmas story is messy and seems particularly appropriate after a bad year of news. 2) Carole: Some of the best times of her life have comes with lots of painful stuff, e.g. having babies, getting a new job in a new city, etc. 3) There is lots of artwork based on this passage. 3) The movie, “Nativity,” starts with the massacre of the infants (Matt. 2:16) then looks back the events leading up to it, quite appropriate since the Christmas story in not all joy-filled.

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