



**Members present:** Pastor Phil Friedrich, Ron Zuker, Vicki Zuker, Lynne Richmond, Myke Bos, David Booth, Shaundra Fairfield, Karen Booth, Brad Dean, Michael Boersma, Jim Post, Glenn Chilson, Dena Chilson, Karen Post, Julie Fuller, Deb Moon, Betty Kinney, Barb Gripton, Marcia Woodworth, Fred Woodworth, Marie Kordecki, and Pastor Mary Ivanov

**“People and Places of Christmas”:** We’ll use Adam Hamilton’s *The Journey: Walking the Road to Bethlehem* as a resource for worship and study during Advent. Though we have focused on the story of Jesus’ birth, we don’t always look at the details, or we add our own details to the story. We’ll focus on how God uses unexpected people and how sometimes the journeys we travel are not what we planned. Looking at the seemingly insignificant people and places, the big question for the series is: **How do we embody Christmas by saying “yes” to God and giving sacrificially to serve and bless others?** We’ll use Adam Hamilton’s videos to show the places in the story in the small group settings.

**Felt needs:** What physical, emotional, intellectual, or spiritual need are we addressing in this service so that worship is engaging and a means of making disciples? What question needs to be posed/answered so that we are making disciples?

**Early Service:** Lighting of the Advent candles will be the call to worship. We’ll use the tune of “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” for the doxology. Our call to prayer will be “Emmanuel, Emmanuel” (UMH 204).

**Celebration Service:** We’ll include Lighting of the Advent candles every week.

Four possibilities for an all-church activity:

1. Journey to Bethlehem in Grand Haven (<http://www.journey2bethlehem.com/>). Pat Yonkers is planning a group outing on Friday, December 11 at 6:00 pm.
2. Showing “The Nativity Story” film at church. This is well acted and an accurate retelling of the story.
3. Create a pictorial family tree to show who we’re travelling with on our journey.
4. Christmas Walk at Trinity Lutheran Church in Roosevelt Park, December 18-20 (<http://www.tlcmuskegon.org/cw-work-dates>). It is little kid friendly.

**Visuals:** Use as many trees as possible (Christmas trees and bare branch trees). Can we incorporate the grasses and pallets from the Ruth series? Brown BLESSED banner or pallets with Emmanuel as a backdrop. Lights (light up a cloth cascading from the star to the manger). Silhouette Mary, Joseph, and Jesus in the manger.

**Media:** Many of the videos listed below are from the Skit Guys “First Christmas” series. We can (get the bundle of six videos (and their scripts), score music, background graphics, and sermon guides for \$89.99 (a good deal). See more at <https://skitguys.com/videos/item/first-christmas>. Is it best to be consistent, i.e. show the videos or do the skits, but not mix videos and skits?

**Hands-on activities:** 1) Advent coloring sheets. 2) Creative Advent Worship - strips of cloth given out first Sunday, then carried and prayed over by congregation. On last Sunday/Christmas Eve, strips were brought back, tied together by pew and placed into the manger to "soften" it.

(<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/528328600011872177/>)

**Hands-on items:** 1) Paper bag luminaries. 2) Skeleton key with a tag reminding us to "Let Him in" this season. (<http://annasdesigns.blogspot.com/2011/01/christmas-neighbor-gifts.html>) Relatively inexpensive keys (\$5.75 for 30 1.7-1.8" keys): [http://www.amazon.com/Skeleton-Antique-Silver-Different-Styles/dp/B00B2Q4RSW/ref=sr\\_1\\_8?ie=UTF8&qid=1446579160&sr=8-8&keywords=skeleton+keys+in+bulk](http://www.amazon.com/Skeleton-Antique-Silver-Different-Styles/dp/B00B2Q4RSW/ref=sr_1_8?ie=UTF8&qid=1446579160&sr=8-8&keywords=skeleton+keys+in+bulk).

**Music:** 1) How can we reconcile our desire to start singing Christmas carols at the beginning of Advent with Advent, which is meant to be a season of expectant waiting? Sing a few songs before worship begins each week? Include more after Christmas? 2) Can we recruit song leaders to help us sing out better? Unity Reformed Church has eight people that lead on a rotating basis.

**Additional ideas:** For musical Call to Worship ideas visit <http://creativeadvent.blogspot.com/>.

**November 29, 2015:** "Mary from Nazareth

1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Advent

**Synopsis:** Mary is usually depicted as a meek and humble girl from Nazareth, a fairly insignificant town, who went along with God's plan to redeem the world. But her call to bear the Son of God is a powerful example of saying "yes" to God. **How are we working to be like Mary – to say "yes" to God and share the joy of God's grace to redeem the world?**

**Candle lighting:** Based on Isaiah 11 (The Peaceful Kingdom)

**Metaphor/visuals:**

**Music suggestions:** #2155 "Blest Are They"

**Media possibilities:**

- A portion of "I Am for You." <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0cMxLCOmwMw>. **Comments:** We did not view this as a group. Pastor Mary's favorite lines are "welcoming in an angel of God; welcoming God's bold invitation."
- "Mary Did You Know." Length: 2:59. Cost: \$19.95. <http://www.worshiphousemedia.com/mini-movies/35485/mary-did-you-know>. **Comments:** We did not preview it as a group.
- "Mary Did You Know – Spoken Word." Length: 4:12. Cost: \$15.00. Have you ever wondered what went through Mary's mind before giving birth to our lord and King? <http://www.worshiphousemedia.com/mini-movies/28113/mary-did-you-know--spoken-word>. **Comments:** A very contemporary, earthy rap of the events leading up to Jesus' birth interspersed with the song, "Mary Did You Know." Either people really liked it or did not. Michael and Brad might like to do this live.
- "Mary Did You Know" (Go Fish). **Comments:** This is the version Myke suggested we look at.

**Drama possibility:** "Bigger Plans." Length: Under 5 minutes. A modern Mary tells of how her childhood dreams for an elaborate wedding all changed when an angel appeared. **Comments:** Laura Dean might be willing to play Mary, especially if someone else does the speaking. Could we rewrite the script a bit to fit with the Skit Guy scripts that follow?

**Discussion points:** 1) Nazareth was a very insignificant place. Note that in John, Nathaniel asked if anything good could come from Nazareth. 2) Mary had no power, but was chosen to be all powerful by bearing the Son of God. 3) Angel/messenger: Adam Hamilton says, "Now, the word *angel* is a Greek word that means "messenger." We imagine these as winged creatures, but more likely Gabriel appeared to Mary as an ordinary man. There is no indication in the Scripture that

she was terrified by his appearance, only by his message.” (p. 22) 4) How might we incorporate the messenger in the drama? Gabriel (Michael} riding in on a bicycle? 3) Hamilton also likens Jesus’ birthplace in Bethlehem to a parking garage, much like the Spoken Word video. 5) Jimmy Epplert has a bullhorn.

**Scripture:** Luke 1: 26-38 (The Message)

<sup>26</sup>In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to the Galilean village of Nazareth <sup>27</sup>to a virgin engaged to be married to a man descended from David. His name was Joseph, and the virgin’s name, Mary. <sup>28</sup>Upon entering, Gabriel greeted her:

Good morning! You’re beautiful with God’s beauty, beautiful inside and out! God be with you.

<sup>29</sup>She was thoroughly shaken, wondering what was behind a greeting like that. <sup>30</sup>But the angel assured her, “Mary, you have nothing to fear. God has a surprise for you: <sup>31</sup>You will become pregnant and give birth to a son and call his name Jesus. <sup>32</sup>He will be great, be called ‘Son of the Highest.’ The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David; <sup>33</sup>He will rule Jacob’s house forever—no end, ever, to his kingdom.”

<sup>34</sup>Mary said to the angel, “But how? I’ve never slept with a man.”

<sup>35</sup>The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, the power of the Highest hover over you; therefore, the child you bring to birth will be called Holy, Son of God.

<sup>36</sup>“And did you know that your cousin Elizabeth conceived a son, old as she is? Everyone called her barren, and here she is six months’ pregnant! <sup>37</sup>Nothing, you see, is impossible with God.”

<sup>38</sup>And Mary said, “Yes, I see it all now: I’m the Lord’s maid, ready to serve. Let it be with me just as you say.

Then the angel left her.

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**December 6, 2015: “Joseph from Bethlehem”**

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Advent

**Synopsis:** We never hear Joseph speak; all we know is that he is a righteous man who is from Bethlehem. **His role as Jesus’ earthly father is vital**, and like Mary, he eventually says “yes” to God.

**Candle lighting:** Based on Micah 5: 2-5a

**Holy Communion**

**Metaphor/visuals:**

**Karen’s music suggestions:** #2091 “The King of Glory Comes”; #2030 “The First Song of Isaiah”

**Media possibilities:**

- “Nativity Story: Honor.” Length: 1:23. Cost: \$5.00. Joseph is disgraced by what Mary has supposedly done, yet she remains firm in the belief that God’s will is being fulfilled, regardless of the consequences she may incur. <http://www.sermonspice.com/product/3864/nativity-story-honor>. **Comments:** We did not view this as a group.
- “The First Christmas: Joseph.” Length: 2:44. Cost: \$15.99. Watch as Joseph struggles to understand why God would choose him to be Christ’s earthly father. Also available as a script. <https://skitguys.com/videos/item/first-christmas-joseph>. **Comments:** There were mixed feelings about seeing Joseph in contemporary clothing. Did God choose Joseph? How would we see Joseph if someone like Dirk portrayed him? After all, Dirk is Gabe, Ethan, and Eli’s adoptive father. Who else might be Joseph? Ken Lockett?
- “Mary and Joe.” Length: 5:44. Cost: \$17.98. Sometimes we need to experience the same world-changing story, told in a different way. <http://www.worshiphousemedia.com/mini->

[movies/42074/mary-and-joe](#). **Comments:** Mixed reviews. It is quite long, very gritty, and tells the whole story from Mary's encounter with Elizabeth, telling Joseph her news, travel for the census, through the birth. It reminds us that Israel was occupied by the Romans; violence was probably a real threat. It was not an easy journey. For once, we even seen Mary seat the delivery. It is likely that many people would need to be "walked through" the story given its modern take.

- "Our Coming Savior: Mary and Joseph." Length: 2:33. Cost: \$19.99. Mary and Joseph both have their eyes to the future, but about very different things. Watch as Mary struggles to tell Joseph about the future God has in store for their family. <http://www.worshiphousemedia.com/mini-movies/54486/our-coming-saviormary-and-joseph>. **Comments:** We did not preview this as a group.

**Discussion:** 1) Joseph was Jesus' earthly father. We only know two things about him: he was a righteous man and that he chose to marry Mary even after he learned of her pregnancy. The rest of the "details" we think we know about Joseph don't come from scripture, i.e. his age, occupation, etc. although we can probably infer that Joseph had a profound impact on Jesus. 2) Bethlehem was the birthplace of King David. 3) Television show: "Jane the Virgin." A young Latina virgin becomes pregnant after being artificially inseminated by mistake. 4) Could "Mary and Joe" be used as a series intro?

**Scripture:** Matthew 1: 18-25 (New Living Translation)

<sup>18</sup>This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>19</sup>Joseph, her fiancé, was a good man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly.

<sup>20</sup>As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. "Joseph, son of David," the angel said, "do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup>And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

<sup>22</sup>All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord's message through his prophet:

<sup>23</sup>"Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means 'God is with us.'"

<sup>24</sup>When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife. <sup>25</sup>But he did not have sexual relations with her until her son was born. And Joseph named him Jesus.

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**December 13, 2015: "Elizabeth from Ein Karem (and Zechariah)"** 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Advent

**Synopsis:** Elizabeth lives near Jerusalem where Zechariah would spend a lot of time in the Temple as a priest. She is a mentor to Mary and helps her to move from fear to joy as Jesus' birth nears.

Who are the people who help us to trust in God with deep down joy even when the future is uncertain? How do we do the same for others?

**Candle lighting:** Based on Luke 1:46-56 (Mary's Song of Praise)

**Metaphor/visuals:**

**Music suggestions:** #2036 "Give Thanks"

**Media possibilities:**

- “First Christmas: Elizabeth.” Length: 2:59. Cost: \$15.99. Watch as Elizabeth discovers that God can create life out of a barren womb. <https://skitguys.com/videos/item/first-christmas-elizabeth>. Also available as a script. **Comments:** We like it. It wouldn’t be quite the same if Elizabeth had not been so emotional. The music contributes to the feel of the video too.
- “Mary and Elizabeth.” Length: 1:16. Cost: We own it. Last used 12/15/13. Visual liturgy. <http://www.worshiphousemedia.com/mini-movies/16034/mary-and-elizabeth>.

**Discussion:** 1) Elizabeth was probably very isolated, not just because of her location in Ein Karem, but because she had no children. 2) Ein Karem was pretty close to the temple. 3) Elizabeth mentored Mary. She confirmed Mary’s news and prepared the way for what was to come. 4) Elizabeth was the first to call Jesus Lord – something of a surprise as she was a woman. 5) The unusual circumstances of Mary and Elizabeth’s pregnancies connected them.

**Scripture:** Luke 1: 39-45 (The Message)

<sup>39</sup>Mary didn’t waste a minute. She got up and traveled to a town in Judah in the hill country, <sup>40</sup>straight to Zachariah’s house, and greeted Elizabeth. <sup>41</sup>When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby in her womb leaped. She was filled with the Holy Spirit, <sup>42</sup>and sang out exuberantly,

You’re so blessed among women, and the babe in your womb, also blessed! <sup>43</sup>And why am I so blessed that the mother of my Lord visits me? <sup>44</sup>The moment the sound of your greeting entered my ears, the babe in my womb skipped like a lamb for sheer joy. <sup>45</sup>Blessed woman, who believed what God said, believed every word would come true!

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**Th., Dec. 17, 2015 at 7:00 pm: “Blue Christmas – A Painful Journey”**      Blue Christmas

**Synopsis:** The journey to the birth of Jesus wasn’t easy for any of those who were part of it. Mary and Joseph both heard, “Do not be afraid” before they were told of what would happen in their lives – how God would call them to be a part of redeeming the world. As we come to this season just as we are, God offers us the same words – “**do not be afraid**” – for all of us as we face our fears, grief, and pain.

**Discussion:** 1) This is not the “most wonderful time of the year” for many people. Just providing a service is a welcome acknowledgement that pain is real and that people are not alone. 2) The focus will be on “do not be afraid.” 3) Make this an experiential service, i.e. prayer, anointing, candle lighting, etc. 4) Publicity: Invite other Grief Share groups, local churches, cards, posters, Facebook, sign. 5) Prayer: Beginning November 29, set out prayer request slips and box like we do for the Maundy Thursday/Good Friday Prayer Vigil. On the slip write, “What is holding you back from experiencing the joy of Christmas?” 6) Have prayer stations at the back of the sanctuary where the people can receive prayer (in person) or have their slips prayed over. 7) Other option: Prayer labyrinth in Fellowship Hall. 8) The videos show we have powerful emotions. Jesus had those same emotions. He understands us. 9) The Roots Community will join us.

**Ideas from** <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/blue-christmas-a-service-of-reflection-for-the-longest-night>:

- *Scripture:* Ecclesiastes 3: 1-11 (Everything has its time); Psalm 22 (Please for deliverance from suffering and hostility); Psalm 23 (The Divine Shepherd); Isaiah 40 (God’s people are comforted); Luke 2: 1-7 (The birth of Jesus); Psalm (Assurance of God’s protection)
- *Music:* #230 “O Little Town of Bethlehem”; #217 “Away in the Manger”; #239 “Silent Night”
- *Litany of remembrance:* Candle lighting using the Advent wreath

- *Memory stars:* As people enter, ushers give each person several paper stars with ornament hook and hanger. People are invited to write on each star their concerns for others or their own concerns. **Comments:** We like this idea.
- *Prayer*

Also see <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/blue-christmaslongest-night-worship-with-those-who-mourn>.

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**December 20, 2015: “Going to Bethlehem”**

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Advent

**Synopsis:** The journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem was long and arduous, and Mary and Joseph were forced to go to register because of Joseph’s connection to Bethlehem. All the while, Mary and Joseph trusted in the promise of “Emmanuel” – God with us. **How do we trust in that promise even when there are detours, stalls, flat tires, and breakdowns on our journeys of life and faith?**

**Candle lighting:**

**Metaphor/visuals:**

**Music suggestions:** #230 “O Little Town of Bethlehem”; “Child of Love” sung by Sara Groves (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VWK9grKgYOY>)

**Media possibility:** “First Christmas: Mary.” Length: 3:37 Cost: \$15.99. Watch as Mary discovers that Christ really will change everything. <https://skitguys.com/videos/item/first-christmas-mary>. Also available as a script. **Comments:** Very moving. “I thought the angel came to the wrong house.” To be effective, the skits need to have all the lights dimmed, music in the background, and be well rehearsed. The videos do a good job of being intimate, no matter how many people are in the room watching them together. They remind of the message when Frank Leeds, a fill-in pastor from Florida, portrayed Peter.

**Discussion:** 1) The journey probably took nine days. There are a couple of different possible routes. 2) Mary and Joseph did what they had to do, not what they wanted to do. 3) Matthew and Luke have two different versions of story. Were Mary and Joseph married? Why would Mary have gone with Joseph if they were not? 4) Were women actually counted in the census? 5) Would Mary’s parent have disowned her? 6) Pastor Phil story: He had a very young girl read the King James Version of Luke on Christmas Eve (like in Peanuts). She said, “Mary was *exposed* to Joseph...”

**Scripture:** Luke 2:1-7 (New Living Translation)

<sup>1</sup>At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire.

<sup>2</sup>(This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.) <sup>3</sup>All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census. <sup>4</sup>And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David’s ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee. <sup>5</sup>He took with him Mary, his fiancé e, who was now obviously pregnant.

<sup>6</sup>And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. <sup>7</sup>She gave birth to her first child, a son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them.

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**December 24, 2015 at 11:00 pm: “The Angels and Shepherds at the Manger” Christmas Eve**

**Synopsis:** The appearance of the angels to the shepherds is a great contrast – heavenly beings coming to some of those who were considered the most humble and outcast in society. The message of

God's salvation is for all people. As we celebrate the birth of Jesus, **we remember what God saves us from and what God saves us for.**

**Candle lighting:** Based on Isaiah 9:2-7 (The people who have walked in darkness have seen a great light...)

**Communion**

**Metaphor/visuals:**

**Karen's music suggestions:** #2096 "Rise Up, Shepherd, and Follow"

**Media possibility:** "First Christmas: Shepherd." Length: 2:06. Cost: \$15.99. The night of Christ's birth, a shepherd realizes that this night is good news to ALL people.

<https://skitguys.com/videos/item/first-christmas-shepherd>. Also available as a script. **Comments:** Show this at both the 6:00 and 11:00 pm services. Pastor Mary pictured Brad Dean as a possible shepherd. Lines we really liked: "I you bring Good News.... That means it is for you too." "The angel said, 'Do not be afraid.' Too late!" (reminds Brad of *Scared Shrekless*).

**Comments:** 1) It is significant that the angels appeared to the shepherds first. 2) The three guys that kneeled in "Mary and Joe" had the contemporary role of shepherds. 3) How many people really believe they are chosen by God? 4) In many ways, sharing the news with the shepherds is the most powerful part of the Christmas story. 5) Myke Bos has a relative with two mini donkeys.

**Scripture:** Luke 2: 8-20 (Contemporary English Version)

<sup>8</sup>That night in the fields near Bethlehem some shepherds were guarding their sheep. <sup>9</sup>All at once an angel came down to them from the Lord, and the brightness of the Lord's glory flashed around them. The shepherds were frightened. <sup>10</sup>But the angel said, "Don't be afraid! I have good news for you, which will make everyone happy. <sup>11</sup>This very day in King David's hometown a Savior was born for you. He is Christ the Lord. <sup>12</sup>You will know who he is, because you will find him dressed in baby clothes and lying on a bed of hay."

<sup>13</sup>Suddenly many other angels came down from heaven and joined in praising God. They said: <sup>14</sup>"Praise God in heaven! Peace on earth to everyone who pleases God."

<sup>15</sup>After the angels had left and gone back to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see what the Lord has told us about." <sup>16</sup>They hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and they saw the baby lying on a bed of hay.

<sup>17</sup>When the shepherds saw Jesus, they told his parents what the angel had said about him.

<sup>18</sup>Everyone listened and was surprised. <sup>19</sup>But Mary kept thinking about all this and wondering what it meant.

<sup>20</sup>As the shepherds returned to their sheep, they were praising God and saying wonderful things about him. Everything they had seen and heard was just as the angel had said.

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**Dec. 27, 2015 at 10:00 am:** "Simeon and Anna at the Temple" 1<sup>st</sup> Sun. after Christmas Day

**Pastor Mary is taking the day off.**

**Synopsis:** Simeon and Anna encounter Jesus for the first time when Mary and Joseph take him to the temple for dedication. **How do their responses to Jesus and their words of prophecy shape our understanding of what it means to seek Jesus?**

**Candle lighting:** Lighting of the Christ candle.

**Activities:** Reaffirmation of Baptism? Covenant Prayer Service?

**Drama possibilities:**

- “Simeon’s Prayer.” Length: Under 5 minutes. Cost: Free. Simeon has just blessed the baby Messiah and is praising God's promised hope. <http://www.dramaministry.com/store/simeons-prayer-497>. **Comments:** We like this.
- “Anna.” Length: Under 10 minutes. Cost: Free (must give credit to the author and notify her). This is a dramatic and, in parts, humorous talk by Anna, the prophetess who saw Jesus as a baby. <http://www.dramatix.org/archive/Biblestories/anna.html>. **Comments:** We like this too. Betty will think about it. Karen will contact the author to get the music.
- “Anna and the King of I AM.” Length: 2-3 minutes. Cost: \$9.99. She waited for what seemed like an eternity for God’s promise to be fulfilled. But Hope finally came in the form of a baby and changed the world forever. <https://skitguys.com/scripts/item/anna-and-the-king-of-i-am>.

**Metaphor/visuals:** Water (connection to baptism)

**Music suggestions:** #228 “He Is Born”; #249 “There’s a Song in the Air”; #665 “Go Now in Peace”

**Media possibilities:** “Scars & Straw Narration Eight: The Messiah.” Length: 2:52. Cost: \$10.00. Isaiah explains that Mary and Joseph would soon be, “Running for their lives...”

<http://www.sermonspice.com/product/3864/nativity-story-honor>. **Comments:** We did not view this as a group.

**Discussion:** 1) Simeon and Anna have been waiting all their lives for Jesus. They confirm for Mary and Joseph, who Jesus is. 2) We don’t hear from many female prophets, but Anna is one. 3) Not sure how these fit, but they were mentioned: a) Seinfeld episode where they are in the car going to the hospital after a circumcision. b) “Robin Hood: Men in Tights.” 4) Alternative service format: Mostly Christmas carols.

**Scripture:** Luke 2: 22-40 (New Living Translation)

<sup>22</sup>Then it was time for their purification offering, as required by the Law of Moses after the birth of a child; so his parents took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord.

<sup>23</sup>The law of the Lord says, “If a woman’s first child is a boy, he must be dedicated to the LORD.” <sup>24</sup>So they offered the sacrifice required in the law of the Lord—“either a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.”

### The Prophecy of Simeon

<sup>25</sup>At that time there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon. He was righteous and devout and was eagerly waiting for the Messiah to come and rescue Israel. The Holy Spirit was upon him <sup>26</sup>and had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. <sup>27</sup>That day the Spirit led him to the Temple. So when Mary and Joseph came to present the baby Jesus to the Lord as the law required, <sup>28</sup>Simeon was there. He took the child in his arms and praised God, saying,

<sup>29</sup>“Sovereign Lord, now let your servant die in peace, as you have promised. <sup>30</sup>I have seen your salvation, <sup>31</sup>which you have prepared for all people. <sup>32</sup>He is a light to reveal God to the nations, and he is the glory of your people Israel!”

<sup>33</sup>Jesus’ parents were amazed at what was being said about him. <sup>34</sup>Then Simeon blessed them, and he said to Mary, the baby’s mother, “This child is destined to cause many in Israel to fall, but he will be a joy to many others. He has been sent as a sign from God, but many will oppose him. <sup>35</sup>As a result, the deepest thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your very soul.”

### The Prophecy of Anna

<sup>36</sup>Anna, a prophet, was also there in the Temple. She was the daughter of Phanuel from the tribe of Asher, and she was very old. Her husband died when they had been married only seven years. <sup>37</sup>Then she lived as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the Temple but stayed there day and night, worshiping God with fasting and prayer. <sup>38</sup>She came along just as Simeon was

talking with Mary and Joseph, and she began praising God. She talked about the child to everyone who had been waiting expectantly for God to rescue Jerusalem.

<sup>39</sup>When Jesus' parents had fulfilled all the requirements of the law of the Lord, they returned home to Nazareth in Galilee. <sup>40</sup>There the child grew up healthy and strong. He was filled with wisdom, and God's favor was on him.

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## January 3, 2016: "The Wise Men from the East"

Epiphany

**Synopsis:** The wise men were people who came from far away seeking truth. In contrast to the shepherds who were poor and humble, the wise men had resources. Again, we see that the message of God's salvation is for all people. It is likely that their journey to Jesus lasted two years by the time they arrived and worshipped him. What do we do when the journey seems to take a long time – even longer than we expected? **How do we persevere and keep the promise of the end in mind?**

**Candle lighting:** Lighting of the Christ candle

**Metaphor/visuals:** Stars

**Communion**

**Music suggestions:** #254 "We Three Kings"; #2095 "Star-Child"

**Media possibility:** "First Christmas: Wise Men." Length: 2:47. Cost: \$15.99. Watch as the Wiseman recounts his journey and the surprise at the end of it all. <https://skitguys.com/videos/item/first-christmas-wise-man>. This is also available as a script. **Comments:** 1) Notable takeaways – A wise man's job is to listen and watch for signs (like the star). 2) This wise man reminds Pastor Mary of Ken Lockett.

**Scripture:** Matthew 2:1-12 (Contemporary English Version)

<sup>1</sup>When Jesus was born in the village of Bethlehem in Judea, Herod was king. During this time some wise men from the east came to Jerusalem <sup>2</sup>and said, "Where is the child born to be king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him."

<sup>3</sup>When King Herod heard about this, he was worried, and so was everyone else in Jerusalem.

<sup>4</sup>Herod brought together the chief priests and the teachers of the Law of Moses and asked them, "Where will the Messiah be born?"

<sup>5</sup>They told him, "He will be born in Bethlehem, just as the prophet wrote, <sup>6</sup> 'Bethlehem in the land of Judea, you are very important among the towns of Judea. From your town will come a leader, who will be like a shepherd for my people Israel.'"

<sup>7</sup>Herod secretly called in the wise men and asked them when they had first seen the star. <sup>8</sup>He told them, "Go to Bethlehem and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, let me know. I want to go and worship him too."

<sup>9</sup>The wise men listened to what the king said and then left. And the star they had seen in the east went on ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup>They were thrilled and excited to see the star.

<sup>11</sup>When the men went into the house and saw the child with Mary, his mother, they knelt down and worshiped him. They took out their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh and gave them to him. <sup>12</sup>Later they were warned in a dream not to return to Herod, and they went back home by another road.