**December 2020/January 2021 Series:** ***Incarnation***

**Brainstorming Summary**

**Advent/Christmas/Epiphany**

Worship Brainstorming:

Monday, November 9, 2020 at 1:00 pm

**Members present:** Dave Booth, Barb Gripton, Karen Post, Jim Post, Carole Koch, Diane Thompson, Pastor Mary, Betty Kinney, Jimmy Epplett, Karen Booth; Lynne Richmond, Mary Swisher (via email submissions)

**2021 theme:** Still Blessed

**Still Blessed theme connection:** “Incarnation claims that God actually became flesh in Jesus.”

**Key word:** Relationship

**Goal of series:** We will focus on the meaning behind the names/titles of Jesus and the difference He makes in our lives. We will understand why Christmas (when we celebrate the Incarnation of God) is significant and life-changing.

*Why would God come to us in Jesus?*

*What was the purpose of the Incarnation?*

*How are we meant to respond to the Incarnation, to God’s coming to us in Jesus?*

**Overview of the series** (from Hamilton’s book)**:**

*His parents gave him the name Jesus. But the prophets, the shepherds, the wise men, and the angels addressed him by other names. They called him Lord, Messiah, Savior, Emmanuel, Light of the World, and Word Made Flesh. In* Incarnation: Rediscovering the Significance of Christmas, *best-selling author Adam Hamilton examines the names of Christ used by the gospel writers, exploring the historical and personal significance of his birth. This Advent season church families will come together to remember what’s important. In the face of uncertainty and conflict, Christians reclaim the Christ child who brings us together, heals our hearts, and calls us to bring light into the darkness. Now more than ever, we invite you to reflect upon the significance of the Christ child for our lives and world today!*

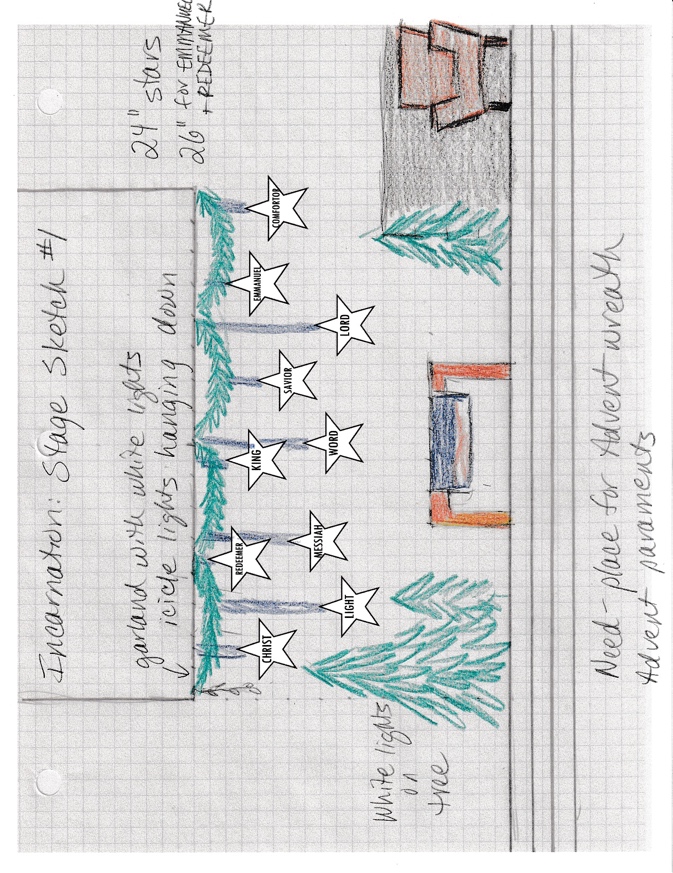
**Resources:**

* Incarnation: Rediscovering the Significance of Christmas by Adam Hamilton
  + Use prayers at the end of each chapter for worship
* Christmas music: *We Need a Little Christmas, All I Want for Christmas, I Need You Christmas. Where Are You, Christmas?*
* “God Can’t Be Kept Out” by Rachel Held Evans, Dec. 17, 2012 <https://rachelheldevans.com/blog/god-kept-out>

**Ideas for the series:**

* **STAR WORDS: MYSTERY**
* Small group learning opportunity - in-person or using Zoom?
* Advent devotional written by congregation - focusing on name/title for Jesus and relationship to Jesus. It is likely that it will be sent out on a daily basis rather than all at once. Potential volunteers: Rose Emmons (Emmanuel), Michael Boersma (Savior)
* Zoom coffee hour
* Introductory video: “Born This Day.” Length: 1:18. Cost: $19.99. Jesus changed everything. A world in desperate need of a Savior now had one. In this one little child was our King, our Redeemer, our Messiah, and our Lord. God in flesh, love personified…Born this day. <https://media.preachingtoday.com/mini-movies/72020/born-this-day>

**Visuals:**

* Advent candles/wreath: Not sure where to put this. Maybe on the altar?
* Lights – on the tree on the north side of church
* Stars (Marcia McFee’s Calm and Bright Pinterest board - <https://www.pinterest.com/worshipstudio/calm-and-bright/> and image collection - <https://unsplash.com/collections/2234360/calm-and-bright>)
* ~~Names of Christ using “music” letters~~
* ~~~~*Lynne:* 1) replace the brown fabric currently on the wall with a Christmas color (do we have material in a brighter color already??)   make a Christmas tree shape from the various names for Jesus... (see my pinterest board for "Jesus ornaments").....  there is also a pin with birch trees behind the Christmas tree of names.... since the names are of different styles and fonts, maybe we can use the overhead to enlarge the print....trace on cardboard... paint or cover with Christmas-colored fabric?? 2) the white star ornaments with names for Jesus (from your pins and mine) would look nice hanging on one of our trees with white ribbon.....  as would a pretty paper chain of names....there doesn't seem a need to use too many trees this year if we are considering streaming this series!!!
* *Likely plan:* Use the picture, right, as inspiration. Hang 24-26” white stars with the names of Jesus from the ledge just under swags of green garland. Incorporate white lights (regular and icicles). Hang the stars with a fancy ribbon. Frame this with 4’-7.5’ Christmas trees, maybe an even taller tree in front of the organ. Add lights to all trees.
* *Outside:* Hang the stars with names of Jesus and more lit green garland to the outside entrance; check with Trustees to see how (if) we can hang our stuff. Light the large pine tree to the north of the church.

**Music ideas:**

* *Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus* (UMH 196)
* *Love Came Down at Christmas* (UMH 242)
* Doxology sung to tune of *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel* (Advent) and *The First Noel* (Christmas)
* Song by Michael W. Smith

**Hands-on items:** To be distributed on December 6 with Communion. In addition to the following item, include a note explaining the significance of each thing.

* Names of Jesus printable star ornaments (<https://hymnsandversesprintables.s3.us-east-2.amazonaws.com/Names+of+Jesus+Printable+Star+Ornaments+Christmas+Countdown.pdf>) **Note:** This seems to be everyone’s favorite – white stars, black text, sparkly edges, nice ribbon. People who like to cut stuff out: Karen Post, Mary Swisher, Betty Kinney. Other options:
  + Names of Christ printable ornaments (chalkboard style) <https://www.ldslane.net/2014/12/names-of-christ-ornaments.html>
  + Name of God ornaments <http://kojo-designs.com/2011/12/advent-ornaments/>
* Candle for Christmas Eve. **Note:** We need to check our supplies now. Hobby Lobby has some with the papers ($19.99 for 96).
* Christmas Scripture Countdown (readings for December 1-25).
* “I Miss Your Smile” cards. See if Jenny Cross or Stephanie Sroka might have the Cricut supplies to make these.
* Photo card #1: Names of Jesus in the shape of a Christmas tree.
* Photo card #2: He was, and is, and always will be Emmanuel, God with us. Baby in the background. (Dec. 13)
* Wesley’s Covenant prayer (Jan. 3)
* “I am loved” stickers (Dec. 6)

**Media:** There are many videos about the names of Jesus, but few focus solely on the one or two names that we’ll examine in each specific week. We didn’t watch many, if any, as a group. We may still want to review these later. Key: red (Lynne), green (Mary Swisher).

* “Savior.” Length: 1:18. Cost: $19.99. Jesus changed everything. A world in desperate need of a Savior now had one. In this one little child was our King, our Redeemer, our Messiah, and our Lord. God in flesh, love personified…Born this day. <https://media.preachingtoday.com/mini-movies/72020/born-this-day> **Note from Karen:** May make a good series intro.  this would be a good series intro!!
* “Receive the King.” Length: 1:42. Cost: $19.98. The Savior is here! Joy to the World; the Lord has come? Let Earth receive the King! This mini-movie is a perfect call to worship for any Christmas or Christmas Eve service. <https://media.preachingtoday.com/mini-movies/88583/receive-the-king> i would skip this one...
* “Advent: Christ.” Length: 2:32. Cost: $10.00. As we prepare our hearts and souls for the arrival of the Christ child, we focus on the themes of Advent: hope, love, joy, peace, and Christ. <https://media.preachingtoday.com/mini-movies/62980/advent-christ> use on Christmas Eve??  after we light the candles..... can we do this outside??
* “This is Christ the Lord.” Length: 1:55. Cost: $19.99. We were lost in darkness, in desperate need of a Savior. Separated from God. But God loved us with an unstoppable love. A love which cost Him dearly. For God so loved the Word, He sent His only son. That night in Bethlehem, brace arrived and changed everything. This is Christ the Lord. <https://media.preachingtoday.com/mini-movies/88803/this-is-christ-the-lord> no on this one...too much for pastor mary to read!
* “Christ the Lord.” Length: 1:50. Cost: $19.99 The Word of God is filled with the story of Christmas. “Christ the Lord” is a powerful, scripture driven intro for any Christmas themes service or event. <https://media.preachingtoday.com/mini-movies/63276/christ-the-lord->

**General discussion points:** 1) The Incarnation and Resurrection are the basis of our faith and unique to Christianity. 2) The Education Team is looking at a program where kids can read the different parts and they will be pieced together as one final video. Many of us have notice how more people are already putting up their Christmas trees and lights. The secular songs like “We Need a Little Christmas” and “Where Are You Christmas?” are taking on more meaning this year. Are these signs that people need to feel more “normal” or at least better than they have for the past seven months? 3) Traditions seem to me more important than ever. How will we honor as many traditions as possible whether it is solely via livestream or some in person worship with masks, no singing, and physical distancing? Include:

* Lighting the Advent wreath.
* Lights (indoors and outside), stars
* Christmas Eve candles – even if we have to send them home

4) Our church leaders will continue to watch what other churches are doing during the season. We may want to borrow some of their ideas. 5) Music: Mary Scott and Michael Boersma are open to livestreaming a service of music during the season. Consider singing outside. Both Pastor Mary and Diane Thompson have some resources for this from Marcia McFee.

**Scripture ideas:** Focus on beginning of each Gospel. The birth stories appear in Matthew and Luke. John begins with “The Word Became Flesh,” a totally different approach.

**Matthew 1: 1, 16-25** (NIV) **The Genealogy of Jesus**

1This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham…

16and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah.

17Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Messiah.

### Joseph Accepts Jesus as His Son

18This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. 19Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

20But after he had considered 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 home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

22All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 23“The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).

24When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. 25But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

**Luke 1: 26-45, 2: 8-12** (NIV) **The Birth of Jesus Foretold**

26In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, 27to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. 28The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.”

29Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. 30But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. 31You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. 32He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, 33and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.”

34“How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?”

35The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. 36Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. 37For no word from God will ever fail.”

38“I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.” Then the angel left her.

### Mary Visits Elizabeth

39At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, 40where she entered Zechariah’s home and greeted Elizabeth. 41When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. 42In a loud voice she exclaimed: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! 43But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? 44As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. 45Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!”

8And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. 9An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. 11Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. 12This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

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There is a possibility that we will return to in-person worship (one service at 10:00 a.m.) in the sanctuary with safety protocols. We’ll continue to livestream worship as we have been doing.

**Sunday, November 29, 2020:** “CHRIST, MESSIAH, KING (royal titles)”

First Sunday of Advent

**Scripture:** Micah 5: 2-5a (NIV)

“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,

though you are small among the clans of Judah,  
out of you will come for me

one who will be ruler over Israel,  
whose origins are from of old,  
     from ancient times.”

3Therefore Israel will be abandoned  
     until the time when she who is in labor bears a son,  
and the rest of his brothers return  
     to join the Israelites.

4He will stand and shepherd his flock  
    in the strength of the Lord,  
     in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.  
And they will live securely, for then his greatness  
     will reach to the ends of the earth.

5And he will be our peace  
     when the Assyrians invade our land  
     and march through our fortresses.

**Scripture:** Matthew 1: 1, 16-25 (NIV) See page 2 of this document for the full reading

1This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham…

16and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah.

17Thus there were fourteen generations in all from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Messiah.

**Synopsis:** Jesus is called Christ (or Messiah) and King. What do those titles mean for us as we grapple with those in leadership and authority?

**Felt need:** To claim Jesus’ authority in our lives and find unity in him

**Visuals:**

**Media:**

* "That’s My King!” Length: 3:40. Cost: We own it. Last used: 8/24/08. The late S. M. Lockridge once presented an incredible message, describing God and who He is. Though God can't be described with just words, this is as close as you can get this side of heaven. <https://www.worshiphousemedia.com/mini-movies/28/thats-my-king> **Comments:** Use it. It broadens the description of who Jesus is. There isn’t much more to say. Lynne: i like the added video called "that's my king!!"
* “New King.” Length: 3:20. Cost: $20.00. A lone figure trudges through a beautiful, but unforgiving winter landscape searching for something, until he comes upon an opportunity to reflect on the real meaning of the Christmas season and worship the new king. <https://media.preachingtoday.com/mini-movies/35305/new-king> Lynne: liked the music! Mary Swisher: seems rather long.  I suppose the length is intended to be some kind of metaphor, but it seemed to drag on too long.  The scenery was lovely, though.
* “In Christ.” Length: 1:33. Cost: $20.00 This video gives a s glimpse of who believers are in Christ. <https://media.preachingtoday.com/mini-movies/43667/in-christ> Lynne: not exceptional
* **Related info:** No matter who is president, Jesus is King. *The Crown* series offers insight into Queen Elizabeth’s life.

**Activity:** Anointing with oil

**Music:** *Hail to the Lord’s Anointed* (UMH 203), *What Child Is This* (UMH 219), *There’s a Song in the Air* (UMH 249)

**Children’s Time:**

**Worship leader:** Dave Stamy

**Discussion points:** 1) Christ is a title, not a name. Christ = Messiah. 2) Although the New Testament is available alone, we don’t ever hand them out to anyone since you really need to the Old Testament to know where so many of the references come from, like the prophets. 3) Matthew makes the connection between David and Jesus. Jesus will be a different kind of king than David. 4) We usually associate the title “king” with wealth, power, military experience. Jesus lacked all of those things. He was in conflict with leaders and authority all of the time. 5) What does leadership and authority look like? 6) Post election: “No matter who is president, Jesus is king.” 7) The Netflix series, “The Crown,” gives a good look at the role of the monarchy and the queen’s role. 8) Most of us don’t associate a king as someone who is close to the people. Jesus turns this notion on its head. 8) Adam Hamilton entitled this chapter, “Presidents and Kings,” and looks at the difference between the recent political campaigns (especially in terms of money) and Jesus’ campaign for the Kingdom of God.

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**Sunday, December 6, 2020:** “SAVIOR”

Second Sunday of Advent

**Scripture:** Matthew 1: 20-21 (NIV)

20But after he had considered 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 home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

**Scripture:** Luke 1: 26-38, 2: 8-12 (NIV) **The Birth of Jesus Foretold**

6In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, 27to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. 28The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.”

29Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. 30But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. 31You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. 32He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, 33and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.”

34“How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?”

35The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. 36Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. 37For no word from God will ever fail.”

38“I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.” Then the angel left her.

**The Birth of Jesus**

8And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. 9An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. 11Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. 12This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

**Synopsis:** Jesus saves us - delivers, rescues, and helps us. His sacrifice saves us from sin, hopelessness, and death and frees us to live with hope, purpose, and love.

**Felt need:** To understand our need for a Savior and how Jesus saves us from sin and for love and new life.

**Visuals:**

**Media:**

**Related info/hands-on item:** Definitions of sanctification and atonement, story of Helzberg’s Jewelers - “I am loved” button/sticker

**Activity:** Holy Communion - adapt Communion prayer

**Music:** *Come, Ye Sinners, Poor and Needy; Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing* (UMH 400); *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God* (UMH 110); *Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates* (UMH 213); *Good Christian Friends, Rejoice* (UMH 224)

**Children’s Time:**

**Worship leader:**

**Discussion points:** 1) Adam Hamilton entitled this chapter, “The Savior and Our Need for Saving.” 2) Images/memes: Jesus saves. 3) “We Need a Little Christmas” probably wasn’t written with forgiveness in mind, but that is really what we need. 4) When have other people saved us? 5) Jesus saves us for a new life. We still have to face consequences for our decisions/behavior. 6) “Saved” isn’t a term we use much. It is a copout to say it happens once and then we are done; it is ongoing. We might even feel defensive when people ask us if we’ve been saved. Jimmy’s response: This morning (when I decided to follow Jesus once again). 7) “Wesley taught that God’s grace is with each of us throughout our lives. By grace God prepares us, justifies us, and then continues to grow us as followers of Jesus Christ…Prevenient grace prepares us….Justifying grace restores us… Sanctifying grace grows us.” <https://www.umc.org/en/content/our-wesleyan-heritage> It is a struggle to live it every day. 8) There is both personal and community salvation. 9) Baptism: We believe salvation is not dependent on baptism. Denominations (and individuals) have different beliefs regarding infant vs. believer baptism. 10) God’s grace is steady and contrary to what we have heard during the election season, is not tied solely to social issues. 11) Heavy Christmas vs. Merry Christmas.

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**Sunday, December 13, 2020:** “EMMANUEL”

Third Sunday of Advent

**Scripture:** Hebrews 1: 1-3 (NIV) **God’s Final Word: His Son**

1 In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, 2but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. 3The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

**Scripture:** Isaiah 7: 14-16 (NIV)

14Therefore the Lord himself will give youa sign: The virginwill conceive and give birth to a son, andwill call him Immanuel. 15He will be eating curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, 16for before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste.

**Scripture:** Matthew 1: 22-23 (NIV)

22All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 23“The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).

**Synopsis:** *God with us* is a powerful expression, especially in this year when we have faced a pandemic and so much more. In Jesus, God experiences our humanity, reveals himself to humanity, and is truly with us always. Emmanuel also gives us our mission - to “put flesh on” God’s love for each other.

**Felt need:** To celebrate “God with us” through the presence of one another

**Visuals:**

**Media:** “Emmanuel.” Length: 1:46. Cost: $19.99. The Son of God chose not to be born in a luxurious palace with the best the Earth had to offer. Instead, we find the creator of our universe humbly entering our world; being born in a manger amongst shepherds and animals. He shared in all of our humanity, and through his birth, we can see that he is familiar with the messy and imperfect parts of our lives. This mini-movie is a small reminder that he was, is, and always will be Emmanuel, God with us. <https://media.preachingtoday.com/mini-movies/72273/emmanuel> Lynne: yes on this one!  liked the last line of the video as a photo handout. HE WAS, AND IS, AND ALWAYS WILL BE EMMANUEL (with baby in manger GOD WITH US as a  background) **Comments:** We like the video and the handout idea.

**Related info:**

**Activity:**

**Music:** *Emmanuel, Emmanuel* (UMH 204), *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel* (UMH 211)

**Children’s Time:**

**Worship leader:**

**Discussion points:** 1) Carole: Incarnation – deep in our meat (carne is the Spanish word for meat). 2) Emmanuel is Pastor Mary’s favorite name for Jesus. 3) Adam Hamilton’s chapter is entitled, “Emmanuel in the Midst of a Pandemic.” 4) “Incarnation – The Words Made Flesh” recalls the story of the geese. <http://totustuusfamily.blogspot.com/2007/12/incarnation-word-made-flesh.html>. It reminded someone else of how a collie gathers up sheep (and sometimes small children). 5) Being present has always been important – and that is what Jesus did when he became human – but it seems even more so when we have had fewer opportunities to be physically together recently. 6) Prayer time for Vicki in the parking lot: She was so surprised and overwhelmed by the power of people surrounding her physically in prayer. 7) Many people noted how cards, texts, emails, and meals mean so much – a sign of love and caring. It shouldn’t just be for church friends either. We should be the bod of Christ for the unchurched too. 8) Page 110 from the book: When I visit someone in the hospital, I take the person’s hand and sometime before I leave, I say, “I came here to be a physical reminder that Jesus is with you. Feel my hand. I came to remind you that Jesus is with you here in this room all the time.”

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**Monday, December 14, 2020:** “Blue Christmas”

**Scripture:** Psalm 46 (NIV)

1God is our refuge and strength,  
an ever-present help in trouble.

2Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way  
and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,

3though its waters roar and foam  
and the mountains quake with their surging.

4There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,

the holy place where the Most High dwells.

5God is within her, she will not fall;  
God will help her at break of day.

6Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall;  
he lifts his voice, the earth melts.

7The Lord Almighty is with us;  
the God of Jacob is our fortress.

8Come and see what the Lord has done,  
the desolations he has brought on the earth.

9He makes wars cease  
to the ends of the earth.

He breaks the bow and shatters the spear;  
he burns the shieldswith fire.

10He says, “Be still, and know that I am God;  
I will be exalted among the nations,  
I will be exalted in the earth.”

11The Lord Almighty is with us;  
the God of Jacob is our fortress.

**Scripture:** Romans 8: 31-39 (NIV) **More Than Conquerors**

31What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? 33Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. 34Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. 35Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? 36As it is written:

“For your sake we face death all day long;  
    we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”

37No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

**Synopsis:** God offers comfort for those who mourn always, and especially when we struggle in what’s supposed to be “the most wonderful time of you the year.”

**Felt need:** To trust that God is with us and receives us with our personal and collective grief and sadness

**Visuals:** An empty chair. Candle ladder. Name of Jesus: COMFORTER. Blue lights on trees.

**Media:**

**Related info from GODSPACE:**

* 2017 Blue Christmas post <https://godspacelight.com/2017/12/21/blue-christmas-2017/>
* 2020 Acknowledging Our Pain <https://godspacelight.com/2018/12/10/acknowledging-our-pain-resources-for-a-blue-christmas-service/>
* Preparing for Blue Christmas 2020 <https://godspacelight.com/2020/10/24/preparing-for-blue-christmas/>
* “O Come All Ye Faithless” – sung to the tune of “O Come, All Ye Faithful” <https://godspacelight.com/2015/12/18/litany-for-a-blue-christmas/>

O come, all ye faithless, doubtful and disheartened  
Oh come ye O come ye just as you are  
Come and be honest, come in all your brokenness  
O come let us adore him Christ the Lord.

Sing, choirs of sinners, sing of your redemption!  
Sing, sing and testify of power from within  
Glory to God, glory in your presence  
O come let us adore him, Christ the Lord.

Yea, God we greet thee, come this longest evening  
Spirit to thee be all glory given  
Name of Creation, come in flesh appearing:  
O come let us adore him, Christ the Lord.

**Activity:** Lighting candles and offering healing prayer with anointing

**Hands-on items/activities from previous years:** blue blanket, write a prayer on an ornament, ornament to take home

**Music:** *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel* (UMH 211); “Worn” by Tenth Avenue North

**Discussion points:** 1) This service is needed more than ever this year. The tactile nature of the service will be hard to replicate this year, especially if we can’t gather in person. 2) The district is going to set up a virtual candle lighting. Can we be part of that? 3) Proposed schedule: 7:00-8:00 pm livestream, 8:00-10:30 pm allow people to come to the sanctuary for prayer, candle lighting, anointing with oil, or time to just “be” (like a prayer vigil). 4) Candle lighting: Offer people the chance to drop off a candle to honor a loved one. Read the first name as it is lit. Let people know we have candles for those who can’t drop one off. Alternate plan: Drop off a picture.

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**Sunday, December 20, 2020:** “WORD MADE FLESH, LIGHT OF THE WORLD”

Fourth Sunday of Advent

**Scripture:** John 1: 1-18 (NIV) **The Word Made Flesh**

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2He was with God in the beginning. 3Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. 4In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. 5The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcomeit.

6There was a man sent from God whose name was John. 7He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. 8He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

9The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. 10He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. 11He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. 12Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— 13children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.

14The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

15(John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, “This is the one I spoke about when I said, ‘He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’”) 16Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. 17For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 18No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God andis in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

**Scripture:** Matthew 5: 14-16 (NIV)

14“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. 15Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

**Synopsis:** Light is a powerful force that can illumine darkness. Jesus comes to shed light on darkness within us and around us by showing us who God is and how much God loves us. We are bearers of the Light of the World.

**Felt need:** To know God’s love deeply and claim our role as bearers of Christ’s light that transforms the world

**Visuals:**

**Media:** “A Great Light.” Length: 3:46. Cost: We own it. Last used 12/24/16. Three children in dire circumstances prepare for an honored guest. Set to the Text of Isaiah 9, this encourages us to wonder anew at the strange and beautiful arrival of our Savior. <https://skitguys.com/videos/a-great-light> Lynne: wonderful video of light. **Comments:** We like this. Use it.

**Related info:**

**Activity:**

**Hands-on item:** luminaries

**Music:** *I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light* (UMH 206)

**Children’s Time:**

**Worship leader:**

**Discussion points:** 1) This week we’ll look at the gospel of John. 2) Dualism: light/dark, good/bad – we’ll have to be careful how we discuss this. 3) Ask for picture of people’s Christmas lights. Loosely related note: Clark Griswold’s lights “Christmas Vacation” and Buddy the Elf’s winter wonderland using lite-brites. 4) In bible times, the only lights were the sun, moon, stars, and oil lamps. 5) Pastor Mary will talk with Ivan about lumens. 6) What phrases can you recall about light? Example from Karen: I’ve seen the light. 4) Adam Hamilton’s chapter is entitled, “Light of the World.”

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**Thursday, December 24, 2020**

CHRISTMAS EVE

**Scripture:** Isaiah 9: 2-7 (NIV)

2The people walking in darkness  
have seen a great light;

on those living in the land of deep darkness

a light has dawned.

3You have enlarged the nation  
and increased their joy;

they rejoice before you  
as people rejoice at the harvest,

as warriors rejoice  
when dividing the plunder.

4For as in the day of Midian’s defeat,  
you have shattered

the yoke that burdens them,  
the bar across their shoulders,  
the rod of their oppressor.

5Every warrior’s boot used in battle  
and every garment rolled in blood

will be destined for burning,  
will be fuel for the fire.

6For to us a child is born,  
to us a son is given,  
and the government will be on his shoulders.

And he will be called  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

7Of the greatness of his government and peace  
there will be no end.

He will reign on David’s throne  
and over his kingdom,

establishing and upholding it  
with justice and righteousness  
from that time on and forever.

The zeal of the Lord Almighty  
will accomplish this.

**Scripture:** Luke 2: 1-20 (NIV) **The Birth of Jesus**

2 In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. 2(This was the first census that took place whileQuirinius was governor of Syria.) 3And everyone went to their own town to register.

4So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. 5He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. 6While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, 7and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

8And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. 9An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. 11Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. 12This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

13Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

14“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

15When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

16So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. 17When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, 18and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. 19But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. 20The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

**Synopsis:** Isaiah’s prophecy offers powerful names for Jesus and calls us to allow his Kingdom to rule in our lives as a way of justice and righteousness. Will we accept?

**Felt need:** To know Jesus as the One who rules and reigns in our hearts and lives

**Visuals:**

**Hands-on item:** candle and paper candle holder (do we need to get more?)

**Media:**

**Related info:**

**Activity:** Holy Communion, Lighting candles

**Music:** *O Come, All Ye Faithful* (UMH 234), *Silent Night, Holy Night* (UMH 239)

**Children’s Time:** Education Team is working on plans for kids and youth

**Worship leader:**

**Discussion points:** 1) We’ll have at least two services if there is in person worship and will livestream at least one. There will be just one service if it is only livestreamed. 2) Could we serve communion and/or light candles outside? It would be cool to film the candle lighting with a drone. Ben Bos has one. 3) Service components: Advent wreath, scripture, message, music (Mary, Michael, bells, duet, strings…). 4) Sign “Silent Night.” Potential helpers: Carol Higginson, Mary Swisher, Cyndi Barefoot, or a kid’s video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KiMhk8VltYM&feature=emb_logo>).

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**Sunday, December 27, 2020:** “REDEEMER”

First Sunday after Christmas

This will be a laity-led service of Scripture, reflections, and music focused on the power of the Incarnation. Pastor Mary will invite members of our congregation (including worship leaders) to share. Some of the sharing may be pre-recorded.

**Scripture:** Psalm 148 (NIV)

1Praise the Lord.

Praise the Lord from the heavens;  
praise him in the heights above.

2Praise him, all his angels;  
praise him, all his heavenly hosts.

3Praise him, sun and moon;  
praise him, all you shining stars.

4Praise him, you highest heavens  
and you waters above the skies.

5Let them praise the name of the Lord,  
for at his command they were created,

6and he established them for ever and ever—  
he issued a decree that will never pass away.

7Praise the Lord from the earth,  
you great sea creatures and all ocean depths,

8lightning and hail, snow and clouds,  
stormy winds that do his bidding,

9you mountains and all hills,  
fruit trees and all cedars,

10wild animals and all cattle,  
small creatures and flying birds,

11kings of the earth and all nations,  
you princes and all rulers on earth,

12young men and women,  
old men and children.

13Let them praise the name of the Lord,  
for his name alone is exalted;  
his splendor is above the earth and the heavens.

14And he has raised up for his people a horn,   
the praise of all his faithful servants,  
of Israel, the people close to his heart.

Praise the Lord.

**Scripture:** Luke 2: 22-40 (NIV) **Jesus Presented in the Temple**

22When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord 23(as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord”), 24and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: “a pair of doves or two young pigeons.”

25Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. 26It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. 27Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, 28Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

29“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,  
you may now dismissyour servant in peace.

30For my eyes have seen your salvation,

31which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:  
32a light for revelation to the Gentiles,  
     and the glory of your people Israel.”

33The child’s father and mother marveled at what was said about him. 34Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, 35so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

36There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, 37and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. 38Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

39When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. 40And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.

**Synopsis:** Simeon and Anna remind us that the birth of Jesus is the beginning of the story. Jesus’ life, ministry, death, and resurrection are the rest of his story -- and the place where we start our journey of faith.

**Felt need:** To share the joy of the Incarnation

**Visuals:**

**Media:** “Redeemed.” Length: 3:23. Cost: $19.99. We've all got ghosts from our past. Whether they're self-inflicted wounds or pain imposed by others, we've all been there. Watch and listen as the Cross of Christ frees us to sing along with Big Daddy Weave that "I am Redeemed." <https://www.sermonspice.com/sermon-illustrations/37647/redeemed> Lynne: excellent video!! Mary S: Very poignant. **Comments:** Not exactly about Simeon and Anna, but a good example of what is means to be redeemed. Loosely related hands-on item: Mask with REDEEMED written across it.

**Related info:**

**Activity:**

**Music:** *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing* (UMH 240), *The First Noel* (UMH 245), *Go, Tell It on the Mountain* (UMH 251)

**Children’s Time:**

**Worship leader:**

**Discussion points:** Both Simeon and Anna were near the end of their earthly life when they saw Jesus.

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**Sunday, January 3, 2021:** “LORD”

Epiphany

**Scripture:** Luke 1: 39-45 (NIV) **Mary Visits Elizabeth**

39At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, 40where she entered Zechariah’s home and greeted Elizabeth. 41When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. 42In a loud voice she exclaimed: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! 43But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? 44As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. 45Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!”

**Scripture:** Matthew 2: 1-12 (NIV) **The Magi Visit the Messiah**

2 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magifrom the east came to Jerusalem 2and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

3When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. 4When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. 5“In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written:

6“‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,  
    are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;  
for out of you will come a ruler  
    who will shepherd my people Israel.’”

7Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. 8He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”

9After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. 10When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. 11On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. 12And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

**Synopsis:** Elizabeth is the first person to call Jesus “Lord,” and the magi (wise men) are the first Gentiles to worship Jesus as Lord. Though we may not use that title much in our everyday lives, how do we profess it and express it in our words and actions?

**Felt need:** To re-commit our lives to Jesus as Lord

**Visuals:**

**Media:**

* “Away in a Manger: Wise Man.” Length: 3:13. Cost: $16.99. A Wise Man recounts his quest for nobility, only to find a newborn baby in a manger. He remembers how they bowed down in worship to the King of Kings who lay before them. <https://skitguys.com/videos/away-in-a-manger-wise-man> Mary S: I liked it. Lynne: got mixed reviews at our house!
* “Worship the Savior.” Length: 0:54. Cost: $20.00 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” <https://media.preachingtoday.com/mini-movies/62364/worship-the-savior>

**Related info:**

**Activity:** Holy Communion, Covenant Prayer (make this into a hand-out)

**Music:** *Infant Holy, Infant Lowly* (UMH 229), *Joy to the World* (UMH 246), *We Three Kings* (UMH 254), *Carol of the Epiphany* (FWS 2094) – ***We touched God in a baby’s hand.***

**Children’s Time:**

**Worship leader:**

**Discussion points:**1) A Lord is expected to protect and provide for members of his kingdom and in return they were expected to trust and serve him. Who or what competes for our allegiance? 2) Adam Hamilton’s epilogue is entitled, “Epiphany…Falling to Our Knees.” 3) How do we tend to respond to authority?