**Worship Brainstorming Summary**

**“God Bless Us, Every One:**

The Redemption of Scrooge**”**

An Advent/Christmas series based on Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol*

and Matt Rawle’s book, *The Redemption of Scrooge*

Mon., November 7, 2022 at Le Fleur Shoppe

(4 weeks of Advent plus Blue Christmas, Christmas Eve,

Christmas Day, and New Year’s Day)

**Members present:** Linda Rousell, Pastor Mary Ivanov, Betty Kinney, Paul Powers, Kathy Luckett, Jim Post, Karen Post, Ken Luckett, Barb Gripton, Marie Kordecki, Carole Koch, David Booth, Deb Moon, Karen Booth; Jean Kelly via email

**2023 Theme:**  Jesus is Our Past, Present, and Future Hope

**2023 key Scripture verses:** 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. *Romans 8: 38-39 (NIV)*

**Major spoken/unspoken needs:**

* It is so easy to not attend church when I can watch it online. Worship is for God, not us. Convenience vs. sacrifice. Logistics vs. routine.
* Pastoral care, especially around losses: Grief. Family. Division. Addiction. Unrealized dreams. Financial woes. Abortion. Marriage and divorce.
* Relationships. Reconciliation.
* Fear and regret

**Series synopsis:** Ebenezer Scrooge is a man in dire need of a second chance. Is redemption possible for such a greedy, dark and sad character? Rawle shows us how the teachings of Jesus can be found in Dickens’ Christmas classic. From the ghosts of Christmas past, to the Life of the present, and the resurrection of Christmas future, this series will “bless us every one” and reinvigorate our spiritual journeys as we look at this familiar story through the lens of faith.

**2023 theme connection:** Hope comes from a higher power. God has been faithful in the past. We can rely on him today and in the future.

**Resources:**

* *A Christmas Carol. In Prose. Being a Ghost Story of Christmas.* by Charles Dickens.
	+ The book is available in its entirety online: <https://www.owleyes.org/text/christmas-carol/read/>
	+ Dave Lorenz made a summary with the help of his Under the Radar Michigan friend, Jim Edelman. Length: 5:23. It is tentatively posted at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RPOpRoQFh0w>. Pastor Mary will upload it to our YouTube channel soon. **Can we show this in church?**
	+ Animated book summary <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WGckMxRq6yE> *Length:* 5:51.
	+ Animated book summary <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HqMfGq3okZY> *Length:* 15:45
* [*God Bless Us Every One*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W-OBWNXBHqk&t=1s) by Marcia McFee. This Advent season we will ring out the truth of God’s economy – where “making change” has nothing to do with monetary success and everything to do with transformation. Could you use a transformation for your life? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W-OBWNXBHqk&t=95s>
* Intro videos for*The Redemption of Scrooge* by Matt Rawle:
	+ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tzy_lrIVABE>
	+ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=czA4lI3Bb7Q>
* Various articles:
	+ [https://www1.cbn.com/churchandministry/reclaiming-'a-christmas-carol'](https://www1.cbn.com/churchandministry/reclaiming-%27a-christmas-carol%27)
	+ <https://intellectualtakeout.org/2017/12/a-christmas-carol-teaches-key-lessons-in-the-christian-vocation/>
	+ <https://christianminimalism.com/2019/12/23/a-christmas-carol-a-christian-minimalism-story/>
	+ <https://thecollision.org/the-gospel-according-to-a-christmas-carol/>
	+ <https://www.detroitnews.com/story/opinion/2014/12/25/christmas-carol-secular/20887623/>
	+ Jim Post’s notes from *The Redemption of Scrooge* are on our [website](https://lakeharborumc.org/2022/11/november-7-2022-worship-brainstorming/).
* North Central Jurisdiction, Episcopal Address with Bishop Bard, Nov. 4, 2022 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K1SF9Q87rTg>

**Questions and notes for reflection:**

* Why has this story, written in 1843, stood the test of time?
	+ We can relate to the characters.
	+ We become invested in them and care about what happens to them.
	+ The story plays with our sense of time. Depending on our age, we might spend more time looking back than living in the present or looking towards the future – or the other way around.
	+ It was written in 1843, when the divide between rich and poor was very great. There was famine, the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution, and the Disruption of 1843 in which 450 evangelical ministers broke away from the Church of Scotland. Dickens had much to say about social justice issues, many of which are still relevant today. Loosely related note: Dickens was a friend of Mark Twain.
* How is Advent a time of preparation AND transformation?
	+ Transformation: If Scrooge can change, so can we.
	+ Preparation: It is easy to get wrapped up thinking about all we have to do, rather than just be. Advent is meant to be a time of reflection.
* What does it mean to truly celebrate Christmas?
	+ Let go of all the stuff that weighs us down, like stress, anxiety, and our stuff. Metaphor: Jacob Marley’s chains. Somehow there was a reference to Bob Marley at this point in the discussion.

**On the outside chance you find *A Christmas Carol* dark:** [“My Favorite Christmas Theme”](https://lakeharborumc.org/2022/11/november-7-2022-worship-brainstorming/) by Bri Johns from Preaching Today and watch the related video, a [2018 Christmas advertisement](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DShEAPKV0EU) featuring Elton John. **Comments:** Look at what a difference a gift can make. Receiving a piano as a young child was a life altering experience for Elton John. Scrooge received the “gift” of being visited by three ghosts, something he never wanted or asked for, but one that was life-changing. Are we altered by the gift of a Savior at Christmas?

**Visuals:** There are some images and sketches on our [website](https://lakeharborumc.org/2022/11/november-7-2022-worship-brainstorming/).

* Advent wreath – maybe Lynne’s glass candelabra or Ken’s black version
* Bells, candles (chamber candles), lanterns/luminaries (Posts, Booths), street lamp, chains or ribbons
* Tiny Tim’s crutch, table or serving cart set for a Christmas dinner, snow frosted windows, large clock, top hat, scale, wreaths, door, fireplace
* Heavy chain (Booth) for children’s time
* Backdrop for pictures – Christmas trees decorated in a variety of ways. Painted storefront with Scrooge, his office sign, and bench.
* Outdoor nativity
* [Lynne’s Pinterest page](https://www.pinterest.com/lynandlid/a-christmas-carol/)

**Music:**

* **Doxology** sung to *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel* during Advent and *The First Noel* on Christmas and after
* Ring a very low handbell for the large clock’s hourly chime
* *Ring Out* (in Worship Design Studio materials):

*Ring out your truth*

*Ring out your love*

*Reverberate in our lives*

*Come, Lord, come!*

* *God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen* (WS 3052)

**Ideas:**

* Living Advent Wreath - Countdown to Christmas - uses weekly focus (Hope, Peace, Joy, Love, Presence)
* Redemption in Action activities: Thinking of You gifts for homebound members and friends, gifts for MAP and Angel Tree, caroling
* *Change for Change* offering/Readers to Leaders’ fundraiser for Children’s Time
* Use memes *Keep Christ in Christmas* and *The Work of Christmas*

**Social Justice Issue for December 2022:** Refugees (including unaccompanied minors)

**Christmas/Christmas Eve offering:** First Place - Kids Belong initiative for young adults aging out of foster care

**NOTE:** We will use dramatic readings each week that connect with the theme. They may need to be adapted slightly. Each reading can use up to 6 people. Microphones could be shared. **Volunteers:** Ken Luckett, Dave Lorenz, Carole Koch

**General discussion points:** 1) Dickens was a man of faith. 2) There have been more than 120 versions of this story. Some of the ones we remembered most were with Reginald Own, George C. Scott, Scrooge Mc Duck, Kelsey Graham, Jim Carrey, and Alistair Cook. It is a pretty dark, scary story, not for young children. 3) We’ll use a mix of Advent and Christmas scriptures. 4) From Ken Luckett after the brainstorming:

I wanted to share a Christmastime moment. Have seen the movie Scrooged with Bill Murray? One of my favorite endings to a Christmas movie. Also, one of my all-time favorite songs during the ending scene and continuing thru the credits. I always turn up the volume during this time

* <https://youtu.be/YVvkj7jL-RM> Ending Scene
* <https://youtu.be/9VWQsbIn6cg> (song)
* <https://youtu.be/KcGTwbKbcOI> (Song Extended Version)

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**November 27, 2022:** “Bah! Humbug! Making Change”

1st Sunday of Advent

**Scripture:** Isaiah 9: 6-7 (CEB)

For a child is born to us, a son is given to us, and authority will be on his shoulders. He will be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal One, Prince of Peace. There will be vast authority and endless peace for David’s throne and for his kingdom, establishing and sustaining it with justice and righteousness now and forever.

**Scripture:** Luke 1: 46-55 (CEB) Mary’s Song This is one of Pastor Mary’s favorite passages.

46Mary said,

“With all my heart I glorify the Lord!
47    In the depths of who I am I rejoice in God my savior.
48He has looked with favor on the low status of his servant.
    Look! From now on, everyone will consider me highly favored
49        because the mighty one has done great things for me.
Holy is his name.
50    He shows mercy to everyone,
        from one generation to the next,
        who honors him as God.
51He has shown strength with his arm.
    He has scattered those with arrogant thoughts and proud inclinations.
52    He has pulled the powerful down from their thrones
        and lifted up the lowly.
53He has filled the hungry with good things
    and sent the rich away empty-handed.
54He has come to the aid of his servant Israel,
        remembering his mercy,
55    just as he promised to our ancestors,
        to Abraham and to Abraham’s descendants forever.”

**Synopsis:** For Ebenezer Scrooge, the only redeeming value in life was in getting more money. He lives in resentment, fear and the ice-cold frozen state of watching out only for himself. God’s economy, on the other hand, says that there is enough for all, and all are worthy of the abundance of life and joy, freedom and sustenance. Will we “make change” and move toward the richness of peace for all, or will we continue to be chained by the poverty of exclusion?

**Felt need:** To seek peace with justice as we follow the Prince of Peace

**Visuals:** Advent wreath - candle of PEACE. Chains.

**Hands-on item:**

**Activity:**

**Media possibilities:**

**Music:** *Amazing Grace (My Chains Are Gone); O Come, O Come, Emmanuel* (UMH 211) include v. 7: *O come, Desire of nations, bind*

*all peoples in one heart and mind;*

*bid envy, strife, and discord cease;*

*fill the whole world with heaven’s peace.*

**Children’s Time:** *Sleep in heavenly peace…* **Note:** Each week, Pastor Mary will look at one Christmas carol during Children’s Time. A carol is like a big Christmas card.

**Social media:**

**Discussion points:** 1) He begins the story in an odd way, “Marley was dead.” Why? Scrooge had no connections to anyone other than Marley. His employee, Bob Cratchit, and nephew are the only ones who try including him. 2) This week’s candle is Peace. What does peace look like now? Responses: No more political ads or calls. Less tension between people, groups, and countries. Getting along with each other. A time of healing. Marie finds it sad when families split over their differences. On a related note: Pastor Mary’s coach noted that many of today’s issues have always existed, but their importance is amplified now. More awareness has not proven helpful. 3) The church should be a place where peace, hope, joy, and love are present. That isn’t always the case. 4) Advent is a time to be intentional about focusing on our relationships with Christ. 5) Who is Jesus? Isaiah tells us: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal One, Prince of Peace. People are seeking peace, which is found in the presence of God, not the absence of conflict. 6) On feeling “Bah! Humbug!”:

* When relatives suggest a secret Santa gift exchange Thanksgiving weekend (Pastor Mary)
* Christmas decorations going up and songs being played the day after Halloween. Why do we skip over Thanksgiving? (Karen Booth)
* Betty’s daughters’ friends would call up and ask to speak to Mr. Kinney, then sing Christmas carols to him in early November.
* Not me. Thanksgiving and Christmas go together like peas and carrots. (Ken Luckett)
* Overwhelmed by shopping (too many people to list)

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**December 4, 2022:** “Remembrance of Christmas Past: Hope from Heartbreak”

2nd Sunday of Advent

**Scripture:** Isaiah 9: 2, 6a (CEB)

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light. On those living in a pitch-dark land, light has dawned. For a child is born to us, a son is given to us, and authority will be on his shoulders.

**Scripture:** Luke 2: 8-14 (CEB)

Nearby shepherds were living in the fields, guarding their sheep at night. The Lord’s angel stood before them, the Lord’s glory shone around them, and they were terrified.

The angel said, “Don’t be afraid! Look! I bring good news to you — wonderful, joyous news for all people. Your savior is born today in David’s city. He is Christ the Lord. This is a sign for you: you will find a newborn baby wrapped snugly and lying in a manger.” Suddenly a great assembly of the heavenly forces was with the angels praising God. They said, “Glory to God in heaven, and on earth peace among those whom God favors.”

**Synopsis:** Looking back into our past is sometimes a painful experience, and it requires courage and hope. When the Ghost of Christmas Past makes a visit, Scrooge is immediately afraid of the light that emanates from it. As he begins the terrifying journey, he sheds a tear for the disappointment of his own past and compassion slowly begins to grow in his life. How will we be inspired to share hope in the midst of the world’s heartbreak?

**Felt need:** To recognize that hope is a powerful motivator and can change us and the world

**Visuals:** Advent wreath - candle of HOPE

**Hands-on item:**

**Activity:** Holy Communion

**Media possibilities:**

**Music:** *God Almighty, We Are Waiting* (WS 3047) - **could be a choir anthem**, *O Little Town of Bethlehem* (UMH 230), *Hark the Herald Angels Sing* (UMH 240)

**Children’s Time:** *O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie…*

**Social media:**

**Discussion points:** 1) This part of the story is sad. It shows how Scrooge became so alone. 2) Description of the ghost: Child’s proportions, white hair, smooth skin, long arms, white tunic tied with a belt, fresh holly in one hand, summer flowers on tunic, jet of light from its head. Related Pinterest Christmas tree: White tree with white lights, covered with a gauzy fabric, and topped with a wreath and white hair to mimic the ghost or whispy fairy. 3) Ken wondered if we can compare the ghost with the Holy Spirit. 4) Like Scrooge, we don’t necessarily want to someone or something to illuminate our past. Some memories, like being alone at school at Christmas, are things we would rather forget. Scrooge cries out that he can’t watch this anymore.

 5) Can we let go of our chains? We don’t have to be defined by our past since we have hope in Christ. We have all known someone who uses the past as an excuse for not living in the present. 6) This season is difficult for many people. Memories of sad events that happened during the holidays. Little daylight/seasonal affective disorder. Placing too many expectations on ourselves (time and money).

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**December 11, 2022:** “Life of Christmas Present: Look upon Me!”

3rd Sunday of Advent

**Scripture:** Deuteronomy 15: 7-11 (CEB)

7 Now if there are some poor persons among you, say one of your fellow Israelites in one of your cities in the land that the Lord your God is giving you, don’t be hard-hearted or tightfisted toward your poor fellow Israelites. 8 To the contrary! Open your hand wide to them. You must generously lend them whatever they need. 9 But watch yourself! Make sure no wicked thought crosses your mind, such as, The seventh year is coming—the year of debt cancellation—so that you resent your poor fellow Israelites and don’t give them anything. If you do that, they will cry out to the Lord against you, and you will be guilty of sin. 10 No, give generously to needy persons. Don’t resent giving to them because it is this very thing that will lead to the Lord your God’s blessing you in all you do and work at. 11 Poor persons will never disappear from the earth. That’s why I’m giving you this command: you must open your hand generously to your fellow Israelites, to the needy among you, and to the poor who live with you in your land.

**Scripture:** Matthew 2: 1-18 (CEB)

2 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in the territory of Judea during the rule of King Herod, magi came from the east to Jerusalem. 2They asked, “Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We’ve seen his star in the east, and we’ve come to honor him.”

3 When King Herod heard this, he was troubled, and everyone in Jerusalem was troubled with him. 4 He gathered all the chief priests and the legal experts and asked them where the Christ was to be born. 5 They said, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for this is what the prophet wrote:

6 You, Bethlehem, land of Judah,

by no means are you least among the rulers of Judah,

because from you will come one who governs,

who will shepherd my people Israel.”

7 Then Herod secretly called for the magi and found out from them the time when the star had first appeared. 8 He sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search carefully for the child. When you’ve found him, report to me so that I too may go and honor him.” 9 When they heard the king, they went; and look, the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stood over the place where the child was. 10 When they saw the star, they were filled with joy. 11 They entered the house and saw the child with Mary his mother. Falling to their knees, they honored him. Then they opened their treasure chests and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. 12Because they were warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they went back to their own country by another route.

Escape to Egypt

13 When the magi had departed, an angel from the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Get up. Take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod will soon search for the child in order to kill him.” 14 Joseph got up and, during the night, took the child and his mother to Egypt. 15 He stayed there until Herod died. This fulfilled what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: I have called my son out of Egypt.

Murder of the Bethlehem children

16 When Herod knew the magi had fooled him, he grew very angry. He sent soldiers to kill all the children in Bethlehem and in all the surrounding territory who were two years old and younger, according to the time that he had learned from the magi. 17 This fulfilled the word spoken through Jeremiah the prophet:

18A voice was heard in Ramah,

weeping and much grieving.

Rachel weeping for her children,

and she did not want to be comforted,

because they were no more.

**Synopsis:** At the beginning of the story, Scrooge has a prescription for humanity – the poor have only themselves to blame and would be better off dead. So, when he is visited by the spirit of the present, he is admonished to “look!” because he must really see the truth of a suffering world and his hand in it. Love is the center of the message this week. What if, in this season, our lives reflected the truth that God has already blessed everyone, and we are called to make visible and tangible those blessings?

**Felt need:** To respond to the needs of the world and share God’s gifts with others

**Visuals:** Advent wreath - candle of LOVE

**Hands-on item:**

**Activity:**

**Media possibilities:**

**Music:** *Love Came Down at Christmas* (UMH 242), *In the Bleak Midwinter* (UMH 221), *Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates* (UMH 213)

**Children’s Time:** *The little Lord Jesus, asleep on the hay…*

**Social media:**

**Discussion points:** 1) The story of the magi as told in Matthew 2, is a story of contrasts. Jesus and his parents are poor. The birthplace, site, and parents are unexpected. What did the magi expect to find? On a related note: Carole remembers a Christmas play in which Jesus was actually played by a two-year-old boy, just like it says in the story. They did not show up when Jesus was a baby. 3) Children’s book: *The Fourth Magi.*  4) Description of the ghost: Jolly giant like a giant Santa, green robe with white fur trim, laugh, glowing torch, wreath with icicles, rusty antique scabbard. 5) Scrooge overhears the talk about him when he visits Cratchit’s house and his nephew’s house. Little good is said of him. 6) At the end of the chapter, the ghost reveals a boy and girl, hidden in the folds of his robe. When Scrooge asks who they are, the ghost responds that they are Ignorance and Want. “They are doomed.” Scrooge asks if there is refuge or resource for them. He hears his own words repeated: Are there no workhouses or prisons? 7) How is love made tangible, especially to people in need? 8) Henry Winkler played Scrooge in *An American Christmas Carol.* The movie shows him foreclosing on poor families and widows and not giving it a second thought. 9) How often do we make assumptions about the poor? Jean Kelly sent this observation along via email:

There is one synopsis in particular that I thought I would comment on.  It is December 11 regarding Scrooge’s thought that the poor have only themselves to blame and would be better off dead.  I had had the preconceived notion that most of the homeless and very poor who lived around the missions on South Division in GR suffered from addictions, mental illness, or were involved in human trafficking.  One Christmas Eve prior to the building of Van Andel Arena and redevelopment of area buildings, I went with a group from FUMC to serve breakfast to the people living in this area.  What I found was that while there were some affected with addictions and mental illness, many of the people who attended the event were not. Some people were affected by physical disabilities and special needs and lacked the financial and/or family support resources to meet their needs.  Some were Veterans who hadn’t completed their education before serving and not able to find meaningful work after leaving the service.  I met a couple of ladies of my mother’s generation who had raised families as stay at home moms and then went through divorces late in life leaving them with greatly reduced resources for retirement years.  I saw people doing the best they could under the circumstances, life had just taken a bad turn for them and they had no safety net.  This was contrary to what I had expected to see.  This experience has caused me to be more generous with time and resources and less judgmental/critical.  How can we care for these people with a hand up and not just a hand out?

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**December 12, 2022:** “God, Our Comfort Keeper”

Blue Christmas

**Scripture:** Isaiah 40: 1-5 (CEB) - possible ref. to Psalm 22 and 23

Comfort for God’s people

40 Comfort, comfort my people!
    says your God.
2Speak compassionately to Jerusalem,
        and proclaim to her that her compulsory service has ended,
    that her penalty has been paid,
    that she has received from the Lord’s hand double for all her sins!

3A voice is crying out:
“Clear the Lord’s way in the desert!
    Make a level highway in the wilderness for our God!
4Every valley will be raised up,
    and every mountain and hill will be flattened.
    Uneven ground will become level,
    and rough terrain a valley plain.
5The Lord’s glory will appear,
    and all humanity will see it together;
    the Lord’s mouth has commanded it.”

**Scripture:** Luke 2: 1-7 (CEB) Jesus’ birth

2 In those days Caesar Augustus declared that everyone throughout the empire should be enrolled in the tax lists. 2 This first enrollment occurred when Quirinius governed Syria. 3 Everyone went to their own cities to be enrolled. 4 Since Joseph belonged to David’s house and family line, he went up from the city of Nazareth in Galilee to David’s city, called Bethlehem, in Judea. 5 He went to be enrolled together with Mary, who was promised to him in marriage and who was pregnant. 6 While they were there, the time came for Mary to have her baby. 7 She gave birth to her firstborn child, a son, wrapped him snugly, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the guestroom.

**Synopsis:** *A Christmas Carol* begins with the reality of death and continues with memories and snapshots of life - grief, loneliness, joy, and community. It is the real stuff of life, which is much like the story surrounding Jesus’ birth. It is a hard story filled with the unexpected and sometimes painful circumstances we face.

**Felt need:** To acknowledge the reality of death, loss, and grief - and to trust that God cares about our pain, helps us to carry it, and works for good in all things

**Visuals:** Advent wreath - candle of COMFORT

**Hands-on item:** Candle

**Activity:** Lighting candles. Could we print out the silhouette of Scrooge as shown on the book cover? Let people write their burden(s) on it and hang it a tree at church.

**Media possibilities:**

**Music:** *Worn, Held, May You Find a Light*

**Social media:**

**Discussion points:** *A Christmas Carol* is a story of grief and loneliness, which is exactly what Blue Christmas is about. The birth story found in Luke is also a messy story. God cares about our struggles, knows our pain, and is there for us in our times of uncertainty.

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**December 18, 2022:** “**The Hope of Christmas Future: Death-Defying Acts**”

4th Sunday of Advent

**Scripture:** Romans 8: 4b-17 (CEB)

Now the way we live is based on the Spirit, not based on selfishness. 5 People whose lives are based on selfishness think about selfish things, but people whose lives are based on the Spirit think about things that are related to the Spirit. 6 The attitude that comes from selfishness leads to death, but the attitude that comes from the Spirit leads to life and peace. 7 So the attitude that comes from selfishness is hostile to God. It doesn’t submit to God’s Law, because it can’t. 8People who are self-centered aren’t able to please God.

9 But you aren’t self-centered. Instead you are in the Spirit, if in fact God’s Spirit lives in you. If anyone doesn’t have the Spirit of Christ, they don’t belong to him. 10 If Christ is in you, the Spirit is your life because of God’s righteousness, but the body is dead because of sin. 11 If the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your human bodies also, through his Spirit that lives in you.

12So then, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation, but it isn’t an obligation to ourselves to live our lives on the basis of selfishness. 13 If you live on the basis of selfishness, you are going to die. But if by the Spirit you put to death the actions of the body, you will live. 14 All who are led by God’s Spirit are God’s sons and daughters. 15 You didn’t receive a spirit of slavery to lead you back again into fear, but you received a Spirit that shows you are adopted as his children. With this Spirit, we cry, “Abba, Father.” 16 The same Spirit agrees with our spirit, that we are God’s children. 17 But if we are children, we are also heirs. We are God’s heirs and fellow heirs with Christ, if we really suffer with him so that we can also be glorified with him.

**Scripture:** Luke 4: 18-19 (CEB)

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me. He has sent me to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to liberate the oppressed, and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.

**Ref.** Revelation 1: 4 (CEB)

Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come.

**Synopsis:** We all have fear of the future to varying degrees, and it affects our behavior, our relationships, our generosity and our ability to truly know the joy of life. The journey of Scrooge with the Ghost of Christmas yet to Come is harrowing. He tries to hide and run from it, but to no avail. It is only when he realizes that he has the power to change the destructive course his is on that his fear is transformed to joy. Like Scrooge, we can experience true transformation from death-like attitudes to a reawakening to life. No matter how far off course we might have gone, “we haven’t missed it!”

**Felt need:** To understand that our faith in Jesus is not about avoiding the struggles, but shining God’s light (keeping joyful faith) in the midst of them

**Visuals:** Advent wreath – candle of JOY

**Hands-on item:**

**Activity:**

**Media possibilities:**

**Music:** *Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus* (UMH 196), *Joy to the World* (UMH 246)

**Children’s Time:** *Joy to the world, the Lord is come…*

**Social media:**

**Discussion points:** 1) Description of the ghost: Black, concealed except one hand, silent. Reminds us of the Grim Reaper or a Dementor from *Harry Potter*. 2) Scrooge was more prepared for this ghost. He saw his own tombstone and Tiny Tim’s crutch by the fire. When confronted with the truth, he was willing to change. A “come to Jesus” moment. There is joy in knowing that transformation can happen because of Jesus. 3) Stories of transformation: Butterflies. Having children/grandchildren. 4) Paul shared this kids’ photo, right. 5) What do you have to do to really celebrate Christmas? Deal with truth. Hurry and worry less. Make it more like Thanksgiving – no presents, or at least a whole lot less. Resist the pressure to have a “perfect Christmas.” Quit trying to make everyone happy. 6) Related Saturday Night Live skit: [Dana Carvey singing](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Edvmc570FDA), “Leave me alone. Just go away. I’m doing fine. Just stay away.” to the tune of “Carol of the Bells.” 7) Loosely related song lyrics: “Santa brought me Prozac this year.” 8) What is your best Christmas memory? Why?

* My own two-wheeled bike: Betty – didn’t have to share with siblings. Marie – as an adult it was unexpected, useful, and a thoughtful gift.
* Tonka truck: Dave. As the youngest in the family of four boys, it was nice to have something special that was not handed down to him.
* BB gun: Paul. His older brother wanted one, but he got it (and shared).
* Fancy doll: Carole’s mother. She had admired this grown-up, elegant doll at Etterman’s for some time. Carole’s dad bought it for her.

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**December 24, 2022:** “Keeping Christmas Well”

Christmas Eve

Indoor service at 7:00 p.m. with candle lighting (livestreamed)

Outside at 10:00 p.m. with candle lighting and a few carols (maybe 15 min. long? Bring your own candle.)

**Scripture:** Isaiah 9: 2-7, Matthew 1: 18-25, Luke 1: 26-45, 2: 1-20

We may not need all of these read in entirety.

**Synopsis:** “Keeping Christmas well” is not about signs of our own prosperity, but signs of our own redemption – getting our true selves back so that we might give of ourselves with joy. In this story, Scrooge’s journey is not complete until he reconciles with his family. “Scrooge knocked at the door and asked to be welcomed, and with joy, he was. If Scrooge can be redeemed, then so can we!”

**Felt need:** To celebrate the Incarnation - God coming to be with us - and offering ourselves to God’s work in the world

**Visuals:** Advent wreath - candle of AWE

**Hands-on item:** Keeping Christmas Well ornament

**Activity:** Pick up pageant for kids? No communion.

**Media possibilities:**

**Music:** *Silent Night* (UMH 239), *It Came upon the Midnight Clear* (UMH 218)

**Children’s Time:** *The world in solemn stillness lay to hear the angels’ sing…*

**Social media:**

**Discussion points:** 1) Like Scrooge, Christmas can change our focus from our own prosperity, to the possibility of redemption. 2) Scrooge has moved from isolation to community. He reconciles with Bob Cratchit and nephew, Fred. He gives Crachit a much-needed raise and becomes like a father to Tiny Tim.

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**December 25, 2022:** “God Bless Us Every One!

Christmas Day

One service at 10:00 a.m.

**Scripture:** John 1: 1-14 (CEB)

1 In the beginning was the Word

 and the Word was with God

 and the Word was God.

2  The Word was with God in the beginning.

3  Everything came into being through the Word

  and without the Word

 nothing came into being.

 What came into being

4      through the Word was life,

 and the life was the light for all people.

5 The light shines in the darkness,

  and the darkness doesn’t extinguish the light.

6 A man named John was sent from God. 7 He came as a witness to testify concerning the light, so that through him everyone would believe in the light. 8He himself wasn’t the light, but his mission was to testify concerning the light.

9 The true light that shines on all people

  was coming into the world.

10  The light was in the world,

 and the world came into being through the light,

 but the world didn’t recognize the light.

11  The light came to his own people,

 and his own people didn’t welcome him.

12  But those who did welcome him,

 those who believed in his name,

  he authorized to become God’s children,

13  born not from blood

 nor from human desire or passion,

 but born from God.

14  The Word became flesh

  and made his home among us.

 We have seen his glory,

 glory like that of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.

**Synopsis:** The Christ Child is born and we, the Body of Christ, are reborn with him. We’re called to embody peace, hope, love and joy, so how will we live this out? Scrooge could not contain his exuberance at being given the gift of living – truly living – another day. On this day of gift-giving, how will our lives continue to be a gift and a blessing for the sake of “everyone?”

**Felt need:** To claim our role as those who believe in and participate in incarnational Ministry – reflecting the presence of Christ in the world

**Visuals:** Christ candle of PRESENCE

**Hands-on item:**

**Activity:**

**Media possibilities:**

**Music:**

**Children’s Time:** *Noel, Noel, Noel, Noel, Born is the king of Israel…*

**Social media:**

**Discussion points:** This will primarily be a service of scripture and carols.

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**January 1, 2023:** “Turning the Page”

New Year’s Day

One service at 10:00 a.m.

**Scripture:** Psalm 148 (CEB)

Praise the Lord!

Praise the Lord from heaven!
    Praise God on the heights!
2 Praise God, all of you who are his messengers!
    Praise God, all of you who comprise his heavenly forces!
3 Sun and moon, praise God!
    All of you bright stars, praise God!
4 You highest heaven, praise God!
    Do the same, you waters that are above the sky!
5 Let all of these praise the Lord’s name
    because God gave the command and they were created!
6 God set them in place always and forever.
    God made a law that will not be broken.

7 Praise the Lord from the earth,
    you sea monsters and all you ocean depths!
8 Do the same, fire and hail, snow and smoke,
    stormy wind that does what God says!
9 Do the same, you mountains, every single hill,
    fruit trees, and every single cedar!
10Do the same, you animals—wild or tame—
    you creatures that creep along and you birds that fly!
11 Do the same, you kings of the earth and every single person,
    you princes and every single ruler on earth!
12 Do the same, you young men—young women too!—
    you who are old together with you who are young!

13 Let all of these praise the Lord’s name
    because only God’s name is high over all.
    Only God’s majesty is over earth and heaven.
14 God raised the strength[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalm+148&version=CEB#fen-CEB-16386a)] of his people,
    the praise of all his faithful ones—
        that’s the Israelites,
        the people who are close to him.

Praise the Lord!

**Scripture:** Matthew 2: 13-15, 19-23 (CEB) Escape to Egypt

13 When the magi had departed, an angel from the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Get up. Take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod will soon search for the child in order to kill him.” 14 Joseph got up and, during the night, took the child and his mother to Egypt. 15He stayed there until Herod died. This fulfilled what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: I have called my son out of Egypt.

Return from Egypt

19 After King Herod died, an angel from the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt. 20“Get up,” the angel said, “and take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel. Those who were trying to kill the child are dead.” 21 Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. 22But when he heard that Archelaus ruled over Judea in place of his father Herod, Joseph was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he went to the area of Galilee. 23 He settled in a city called Nazareth so that what was spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled: He will be called a Nazarene.

**Synopsis:** Christmas is a powerful moment, but the power of it can quickly fade away. Jesus’ early life includes careful attention from his parents - listening to God’s direction. How can we use this moment - a new day and a new year - to listen for God’s direction and renew our commitment to following Jesus as disciples?

**Felt need:** To keep the spirit of transformation in our hearts as we begin a new year and recommit ourselves to Jesus

**Visuals:** Christ candle

**Hands-on item:** 2023 theme and key Scripture verses from Romans 8

**Activity:** Holy Communion, Covenant Renewal/Reaffirmation of Baptism

**Media possibilities:**

**Music:**

**Children’s Time:** *Go tell it on the mountain that Jesus Christ is born…*

**Social media:**

**Discussion points:** To keep Christmas well, we need to pay attention to God’s leading. How can we do that? Making resolutions doesn’t typically work; we typically fail early and say we are going to try again next year. Resolving to take small steps might work better. In order to read the bible in a year, Karen Booth decide to read *The Story*, which is the NIV bible written as one continuous story. She finished it by the end of March.