**Worship Brainstorming Summary**

**“Come, Let Us Adore Him”**

Based on a series by

UM Discipleship Ministries

December 1, 2024 – January 5, 2025

(4 weeks of Advent, plus Blue Christmas, Christmas Eve, Christmas 1, and Epiphany)

Thurs., November 7, 2024

**Members present:** Karen Booth, Karen Post, Taryn Smith, Jim Post, Marie Kordecki, Diane Thompson, Pastor Mark Erbes, Pastor Mary Ivanov, Betty Kinney, Annette Erbes, Jean Kelly, Barb Gripton, Kathy Luckett, Ken Luckett, Ron Zuker, Vicki Zuker, David Booth

*“The worship we hope to develop will be rooted in Scripture, centered on Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit. It will be relevant to local and emerging culture, while addressing the needs of believers and unbelievers alike. Above all, it will intentionally engage people physically, emotionally, intellectually, and soulfully.”*

**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?

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**2025 Theme:**  Living in the Light of Jesus

**Inspiration:** [*Light of the World*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_cLhaZIBSpo) by Lauren Daigle

*The world waits for a miracle  
The heart longs for a little bit of hope  
Oh, come, oh, come  
Emmanuel*

*A child prays for peace on Earth  
Then she's calling out from a sea of hurt  
Oh, come, oh, come  
Emmanuel*

*And can you hear  
The angels singing?*

*Glory  
To the light of the world  
Glory  
The light of the world is here*

*The drought breaks with the tears of a mother  
The baby's cry is the sound of love  
Come down, come down  
Emmanuel*

*He is the song for the suffering  
He is Messiah, the Prince of Peace  
Has come, He has come  
Emmanuel*

*Glory  
To the light of the world  
Glory  
The light of the world is He*

*For all who hunger  
For all who've prayed  
For all who wonder*

*Behold your King  
Behold Messiah  
Emmanuel  
Emmanuel*

*Glory  
To the light of the world  
Glory  
To the light of the world*

*Glory  
To the light of the world  
Glory  
The light of the world is He*

**Related songs:** *God’s Highway* by Sandra McCracken

**Key verse:** *When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.’*

*– John 8: 12*

**Major spoken/unspoken needs:** Life is hard.

* Navigating an angry, divided world
* Pervasive lack of trust, respect, and civility
* Aging. Caregiving. Death.
* Violence. Insecurity – housing, food.
* Misunderstanding scripture

**Social justice issue for December 2024:** Immigration & Refugees – Ruth McPhail Ubaldo will speak. She has experience working with refuges at our border with Mexico.

**Social justice issue for January 2025:** TBD

**Synopsis:**Advent is a season of anticipation that comes in the midst of life in all its fullness and its messiness. We are wrapped up in so many things, getting so many things done, so many things right, that we can be surprised that the very thing we are planning for actually comes.

Tradition and remembering the songs and stories from our beginnings can be a powerful invitation to grow as disciples as we grow closer to Christ. Embrace the

Presence and Promise of the Christ who comes as we hear the prophets foretell and the Gospels proclaim the power of the Incarnation. And through it all, we will gather to worship. *So, come, let us adore him.*

**2025 theme connection:** The world still waits for the miracle that is Jesus, the Light of the World.

**Resources:** [Discipleship Ministries](https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/come-let-us-adore-him?fbclid=IwY2xjawFMQxZleHRuA2FlbQIxMQABHTJkoh8jQPS2gHRMUp771Kg_VHOcN2AL5eFQnITjDDduMSzOiJsu42xWrA_aem_6IbInsjVO0ruQ2x5sDQOhw) and [related podcast](https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/articles/worship-matters-episode-109-resources-for-advent-epiphany-ordinary-time?mc_cid=c8c0fa9289&mc_eid=b090e4f745) . *Comments from the podcast:* It is important to consider how to show light (candles, metals) in a season of deep blues, purples, and growing darkness. Consider introducing new music via emails; include the song’s background.

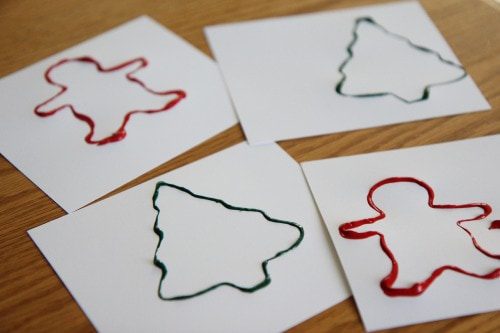
**Music:** *O Come, All Ye Faithful* (UMH 234); [Carol Improvisations for Christmas Worship](https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/articles/carol-improvisations-for-christmas-worship) – free mp3s

**Activity:**

* [*Mystery of the Christmas Star*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Veo8cK3S8s8&t=1s) at [MCC’s Carr-Fles Planetarium](https://www.muskegoncc.edu/facilities/carr-fles-planetarium/), Tuesday and Thursdays at 7:00 pm, November 5 – December 12 (closed on Thanksgiving)

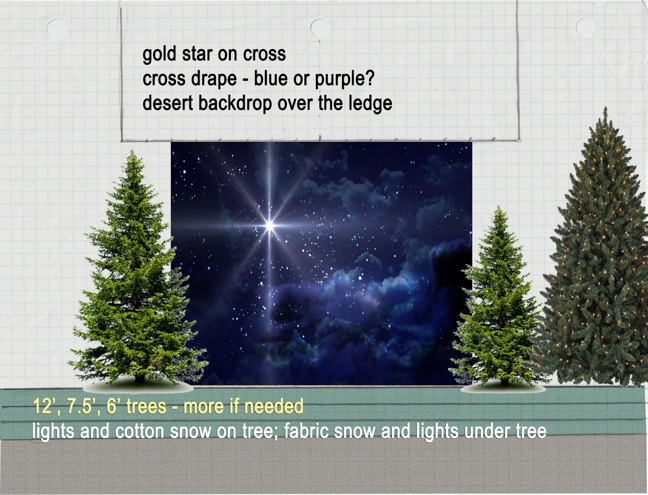
**NOTE: We have a group reservation for Mon., Dec. 9 at 6:00 p.m.** Note from Marie: This show might now be a challenge if lots of motion makes you dizzy.

* *Coffee hour:* Christmas cookies (to coordinate with Children’s Time) and cocoa

**Questions and notes for reflection:**

* What do we wait for?
* How do the prophets speak right now?
* How can the church and this series ground people right now? Our “typical” Advent/Christmas visuals with lots of trees, lights, and snow, create a warm, welcoming, peaceful space, i.e. a sanctuary.
* How can we remind people why we are in church? It should be for worship.Honor, worship, and adore aren’t words that are used outside of church typically.

**Visuals:**

* Advent wreath
* Cookie cutters for children’s time – tree, snowflake, heart, angel, small gingerbread man, large gingerbread man. Cookie cutter paint projects:
  + Wrapping paper
  + Invitations for Blue Christmas and the next session of GriefShare.
* [Baking soda and cornstarch “cookie” tree ornaments](https://www.sheepshopvt.com/blog/2019/12/10/baking-soda-and-cornstarch-christmas-ornaments)
* Church Stage Design Ideas
  + [Front porch](https://churchstagedesignideas.com/front-porch-christmas/)
  + [Christmas Connected](https://churchstagedesignideas.com/christmas-connected/) – like the fireplace
  + [Christmas Home](https://churchstagedesignideas.com/christmas-home/)
* [O Come, All Ye Faithful sheet music](https://www.etsy.com/listing/1575289658/christmas-hymn-backdrop-for-photography?click_key=19d4ad8aa4fa3b8dec276608fabaf14e281dabe0%3A1575289658&click_sum=eb9f5069&ref=market_strv-2&pro=1&frs=1) photo background
* We ordered the 12’ W x 10’ H starry night photo backdrop, right.

**Music:**

* **Doxology** sung to *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel* during Advent and *The First Noel* on Christmas and after
* Bells and choir will offer ministry of music each week

**Media:** [“Come and Adore: Christmas Invite.”](https://www.playbackmedia.com/mini-movies/100037/come-and-adore-christmas-invite) Length: 1:49. Cost: Free. Web license: Yes. **Comments:** We like the video, but not the “square dance” music. Replace the soundtrack or ask our own musics to play during the video.

**Ideas:**

* Post daily social media posts
* [Outreach resources](https://outreach.com/Products/list?ref=search&N=41&Nty=1&Ntx=mode%2Bmatchallpartial&Ntk=all&Ntt=O+Come+Adore) – The yard signs we have often gotten for free, are now $20 each.

**Christmas/Christmas Eve offering:** UMCOR Domestic Disaster Relief

**General discussion points:**

* Advent is a season of anticipation. The traditional Advent readings (lectionary, year C) are from Luke. Advent mean
  + the arrival of a notable person, thing, or event - "the advent of television"
  + the first season of the Christian church year, leading up to Christmas and including the four [preceding](https://www.google.com/search?sca_esv=fc2e42ae252a1d83&q=preceding&si=ACC90nxMSPeZfdJJjQgDsdZJuFuJ5gpDhcsR3F_vhfNd9Hp2hPPtMORCMiRmzEzQuuTbM0J50TjhWaBNNSr5jhIcw-KFWhf464WmDJni-RkFV2XsaBKpqtI%3D&expnd=1&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwiT3fPxhM2JAxU84skDHVmvDIgQyecJegQIOhAy) Sundays.
* The series title come from the song, “O Come, All Ye Faithful,” which we will probably sing each week. Pastor Mary may change each week’s titles.
* Candle lighters are needed each week.

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**December 1, 2024:** “Preparations”

1st Sunday of Advent

**Scripture:** Jeremiah 33: 14-16 (NIV)

14“‘The days are coming,’ declares the Lord, ‘when I will fulfill the good promise I made to the people of Israel and Judah.

15“‘In those days and at that time

I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David’s line;

he will do what is just and right in the land.

16In those days Judah will be saved

and Jerusalem will live in safety.

This is the name by which it will be called:

The Lord Our Righteous Savior.’

**Scripture:** Luke 21: 25-36 (NIV)

25“There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. 26People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. 27At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. 28When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

29He told them this parable: “Look at the fig tree and all the trees. 30When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. 31Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near.

32“Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. 33Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

34“Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap. 35For it will come on all those who live on the face of the whole earth. 36Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.”

**Synopsis:** We are people who live in anticipation, who live in hope. It is the essence of our being. So, at the beginning of Advent, we hear the call to **pay attention.** Our life is a life of fullness and joy, but it is also a preparation for even more fullness – sanctification. Riskier still, we say we are moving on to perfection.

**Felt need:** To see our daily lives as an opportunity to grow in knowledge and love of God

**Visuals:** Advent wreath - candle of HOPE. Sample graphic from Discipleship Ministries – night sky.

**Hands-on item:**

**Activity:** Holy Communion

**Media possibilities:**

**Music:** *Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus* (UMH 196), *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel* (UMH 211), *People, Look East* (UMH 202), *In the Bleak Midwinter* (UMH 221), *You Are Holy (Prince of Peace);* [Ukranian song “Peace Joy Love”](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pcJURx72wLU)

**Children’s Time:** Cookie cutter - TREE

**CANDLE LIGHTING LITURGY**

Reader: From deep in the past, Jeremiah calls to us, “The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah” (Jeremiah 33:14). Beloved, the days are surely coming when the yearning of the land; the longing of the sun, moon, and stars; the desperate need of the people of earth for flourishing and peace will receive their fulfillment.

**Congregation: While fear, anxiety, misinformation, and suspicion surround us on every side, we choose to watch and wait in hope, preparing our hearts to notice and cooperate with God’s grace already at work in our midst.**

Reader: We light this **candle of hope** as a sign of our commitment to pay attention and prepare for the days that are surely coming and are already here—the days when God’s Kingdom of love, justice, and mercy will reign.

*Light the first candle of the Advent wreath.*

**Discussion points:**

* *Scripture:* Both readings sound like the world is ending. First reactions: This sounds like now. Did I just read that? How will we know when Jesus is coming back?
* *Luke 21:* 36: Where is our focus while we are waiting for Christ’s coming? What does our preparation look like? Heart work.
* What do our December preparations often look like? Shopping, cooking, decorating, busyness. Do we do them as acts of love and comfort? Joyfully? We can find Christ is the “stuff.” Or do they make us anxious? Bring up hard memories?
* Where is the “Come, let us adore him?”
  + Prepare for Sunday worship. Stop and focus. Expect to encounter Christ. The Spirit is already there.
  + The Celebration team circles up before worship. Before the livestream begins, invite everyone to join in a common prayer each week during Advent. Publish the prayer in the Friday notes and on FaceBook.
  + We should be growing in faith every day.
* Charlie Brown: Commercialism has taken over.
* Attitude matters. When Ken is putting up lights in the bitter cold, he has to decide if he lets the cold get to him or will he remind himself of the joy the lights will bring to his neighbors.
* How does this season feel for people without the support of or connections to family and friends?
* How do we get people’s attention? The Christmas star (long ago). A phone call, written invitation or teacher’s bell (not so long ago). A text, prayer, song, dimming the lights, asking people to put away phones (now). **Go back to turning down the lights as worship begins.**

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**December 8, 2024:** “Passion”

2nd Sunday of Advent

**Scripture:** Malachi 3: 1-4 (NIV)

“I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,” says the Lord Almighty. 2But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner’s fire or a launderer’s soap. 3He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the Lord will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness, 4and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the Lord, as in days gone by, as in former years.

**Scripture:** Luke 3: 1-6 (NIV) **John the Baptist Prepares the Way**

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene— 2during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. 3He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 4As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet:

“A voice of one calling in the wilderness,

‘Prepare the way for the Lord,

God’s word is for everyone. Have several different people read.

make straight paths for him.

5Every valley shall be filled in,

every mountain and hill made low.

The crooked roads shall become straight,

the rough ways smooth.

6And all people will see God’s salvation.’”

**Synopsis:** We’re called to watch for and notice the ones who “prepare the way” for the coming Messiah, including those whose words convict us of our need for salvation. We may even notice in their words a call to us to be the ones who answer the call to prepare the way with passion.

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**Felt need:** To be open to voices that speak God’s word to us

**Visuals:** Advent wreath - candle of PEACE, water. Sample graphic from Discipleship Ministries – fire.

**Hands-on item:**

**Activity:**

**Media possibilities:**

**Music:** *Prepare Ye the Way of the Lord* (from Godspell), *Prepare the Way of the Lord* (UMH 207), *Beautiful Things*

**Children’s Time:** Cookie cutter – SNOWFLAKE

**CANDLE LIGHTING LITURGY**

Reader: The prophet Malachi calls us to watch for the messenger God will send us, a messenger who burns with a passion for God’s coming salvation. “For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap; he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the LORD in righteousness” (Malachi 3:2b-3).

**Congregation: In a world driven by a passion to maintain the status quo, we choose to live with a passion for God’s peace, to listen to those who call us to righteousness, and to submit ourselves to God’s grace, that we might be refined and purified until we reflect God’s love throughout the earth.**

Reader: We light this **candle of peace** as a sign of our commitment to passionately pursue the work of making peace in our hearts, our families, our communities, and throughout the earth until God’s Kingdom comes on earth as it is in heaven.

*Light the second candle of the Advent wreath.*

**Discussion points:**

* The word "passion" comes from the Greek word πάσχω, which means "to suffer, to be acted on.” Compassion means “suffer with.” Passionate about means “ready to suffer or act on.”
* *Malachi:* Refiner’s fire purifies metal and must be watched closely lest it ruin the metal. Launderer’s soap, aka Fuller’s soap, is a form of lye or potash, and is extremely strong. It removes impurities and bleaches clothing. The passage addressed Levites, the priestly class.
* *Luke:* The first two chapters have the only the full birth story of the four gospels. It has some stories about Jesus growing up. Chapter 3 is set in a particular time. Note that the word of God came to John who was not of the priestly class.
* John is passionate. He connects passion with peace. People sought him in the wilderness as he spoke to their longing for the Messiah. He was an intriguing prophet. Like most prophets, he was not in a position of power. He pointed to Christ, not himself. He was outside the institutional church.
* Who are the passionate voices for us? Pastor Mary (for the congregation). Claire Wheeler talking about Communion Sunday being her favorite (for Pastor Mary). Children (for many people). Diane’s Freddy – this is Jesus’ house. People whose words convict us.
* To whom do we listen? Music lyrics.
* How do we figure out who to listen to? Being part of a Christian community makes it easier. Being isolated contributes to having a negative feedback loop in our heads.
* How do we find truth? What is it? Who tells it? What about AI? Is there evidence? What truths can we find in the creative arts such as music, drama, and the visual arts?
* Passionate people – investment and engagement. They are “all in.” We see examples in sports, both the players and fans. In faith it is measured by depth. The relationship between parents/kids and grandparent/grandkids is another great example.
* Peace: What are we actually willing to do to see true peace? Let go of ego? Preconceptions? Actively engage with people who are not like us?

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**December 15, 2024:** “Presence”

3rd Sunday of Advent

**Scripture:** Isaiah 12: 2-6 (NIV)

2 Surely God is my salvation;

I will trust and not be afraid.

The Lord, the Lord himself, is my strength and my defense;

he has become my salvation.”

3With joy you will draw water

from the wells of salvation.

4In that day you will say:

“Give praise to the Lord, proclaim his name;

make known among the nations what he has done,

and proclaim that his name is exalted.

5Sing to the Lord, for he has done glorious things;

let this be known to all the world.

6Shout aloud and sing for joy, people of Zion,

for great is the Holy One of Israel among you.”

**Scripture:** Luke 3: 7-18 (NIV)

7John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? 8Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. 9The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.”

10“What should we do then?” the crowd asked.

11John answered, “Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same.”

12Even tax collectors came to be baptized. “Teacher,” they asked, “what should we do?”

13“Don’t collect any more than you are required to,” he told them.

14Then some soldiers asked him, “And what should we do?”

He replied, “Don’t extort money and don’t accuse people falsely—be content with your pay.”

15The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Messiah. 16John answered them all, “I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 17His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.” 18And with many other words John exhorted the people and proclaimed the good news to them.

**Synopsis:** John the Baptist’s words are tough to hear. Something is seriously out of sync. But the message of Advent is that there is hope. Our joy resides in the promise of redemption from our broken world, and John’s words call us to be present to and with each other now. Joy is here, not in the denial of the brokenness, but that brokenness is not the last word.

**Felt need:** To understand that joy doesn’t deny struggle, but finds its footing in the promises of God

**Visuals:** Advent wreath - candle of JOY. Sample graphic from Discipleship Ministries – friends around a fire.

**Hands-on item:**

**Activity:**

**Media possibilities:**

**Music:** *The First Song of Isaiah* (FWS 2030), *Hail to the Lord’s Anointed* (UMH 203), *Forever, King of My Heart*

**Children’s Time:** Cookie cutter – HEART (*I’ve got the joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart...*)

**CANDLE LIGHTING LITURGY**

Reader: No matter what troubles overwhelm us today, Isaiah reminds us that in all of our preparation and passionate pursuit of God’s coming Kingdom, we must not forget that God’s salvation has come and is coming. “With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation” (Isaiah 12:3). With joy you will remember that God’s salvation is already present among us.

**Congregation: Faced with the troubles and the suffering of the world, we choose to live in joyful presence to God and one another. We will not turn away from the pain and the hurt in our world, and we will not stop rejoicing in God, whose salvation fills us to overflowing that God’s love might flow through us and flood our troubled world with hope, peace, and joy.**

Reader: We light this **candle of joy** as a sign of our commitment to be present to ourselves, our friends, our families, and our neighbors that in sharing our vulnerable lives we might share in the glorious joy of God’s salvation together.

*Light the third (pink/rose) candle of the Advent wreath.*

**Discussion points:**

* *Luke 3:7:* What kind of greeting is this?
* *Joy* is not happiness. We can still find joy in all circumstances, even in ugly politics, deaths, and hard circumstances. It comes from know that we can be redeemed. John offers specific guidance – share food and clothing (Marie let someone know about the MAP box).
* Where do we feel most presense the most in this season? Hearing and singing Christmas carols. Circling up with candles on Christmas Eve.
* Current struggles:
  + Change – weather, time, politics
  + Aging. Care-giving.
  + Israel, God’s chosen people, being “mean” to the Palestinians. There is similar situation in Russan and Ukraine.
  + Companies down-sizing. Lost jobs. Car industry suffering.
  + Loneliness. Lack of friendships. Related news: There is a new app that helps connect people who want to eat together.
  + For the first time in a long time, children are not doing as well as their parents.

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**December 16, 2024:** “Peace”

Blue Christmas

**Scripture:** John 1: 1-5 **The Word Became Flesh**

1In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2He was in the beginning with God. 3All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being 4in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. 5The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

**Synopsis:** We seek true peace and comfort in this season when it’s promised in songs and decorations. Peace of God and comfort in God’s care is ours, even as we acknowledge the pain of death, strained relationships, changes in life circumstances, and other situations.

**Felt need:** To acknowledge the reality of death, loss, and grief and the need for peace and comfort through the promise of God with us and the presence of others who care

**Visuals:** Advent wreath candles

**Hands-on item:**

**Activity:** Lighting candles

**Media possibilities:** [“Peace on Earth: A Christmas Mini-Movie.”](https://www.worshiphousemedia.com/mini-movies/122635/peace-on-earth-a-christmas-minimovie) Length: 1:41. Cost: $15. Web license: Yes. The peace of Christ is not the absence of all conflict. It is, however, the presence of God in our lives. Christmas brought peace to earth and that peace is ours today! **Comments:** The message is good. Some found the visuals distracting. Its soundtrack is more upbeat than most Blue Christmas music, but maybe that is a good thing.

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

**Social media:** Create Facebook event – past posts have been effective. Also hand out invitations – kids’ cookie cutter prints.

**Discussion points:**

* Blue Christmas is pretty much the same from year to year. Pastor Mary held her first Blue Christmas service in Ravenna because of a man who lost his wife and was struggling in his first Christmas season alone. Pastor Mark’s church in Holt held the service in conjuction with a funeral home; the service was always packed.
* The peace of Christ: Christ brought peace. People haven’t been great at accepting his presence (Emmanuel – God with us) or peace –2000 years of conflict.

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**December 22, 2024:** “Promise”

4th Sunday of Advent

**Scripture:** Micah 5: 2-5a (NIV) **A Promised Ruler from Bethlehem**

2 “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:** Luke 1: 26-38, 39-55 (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!”

46And Mary said:

“My soul glorifies the Lord

47    and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

48for he has been mindful

of the humble state of his servant.

From now on all generations will call me blessed,

49  for the Mighty One has done great things for me—

holy is his name.

50His mercy extends to those who fear him,

from generation to generation.

51He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;

he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.

52He has brought down rulers from their thrones

but has lifted up the humble.

53He has filled the hungry with good things

but has sent the rich away empty.

54He has helped his servant Israel,

remembering to be merciful

55to Abraham and his descendants forever,

just as he promised our ancestors.”

**Synopsis:** Mary’s “yes” and Elizabeth’s faithfulness guide our path, showing that we too have a role to play in bearing God’s good news into the world. How will we respond to the invitation to participate in God’s promise? How will we share real hope – not simply a wish - but the promise of God fulfilled in Jesus?

**Felt need:** To hear God inviting us to participate in reflecting the presence of Emmanuel

**Visuals:** Advent wreath - candle of LOVE. Sample graphic from Discipleship Ministries – lantern shining in the darkness.

**Hands-on item:**

**Activity:**

**Media possibilities:**

**Music:** *O Little Town of Bethlehem* (UMH 230), *Emmanuel, Emmanuel* (UMH 204), *Star-Child* (FWS 2095), *Goodness of God*

**Children’s Time:** Cookie cutter – ANGEL

**CANDLE LIGHTING LITURGY**

Reader: When the people were looking for deliverance, the prophet Micah declared, “But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah…from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient day.” (Micah 5:2). But what if Micah is also talking to us, proclaiming, “But you, O Muskegon, O Lake Harbor, from you shall come forth for me…” What? What might God be calling forth from us?

**Congregation: God invites us to receive the promise of God’s salvation and the sustenance of God’s mercy and grace, enabling us to live the promise as God-bearers to the world. As Christ was born in Bethlehem, so too we answer God’s invitation to have Christ born among us today and every day.**

Reader: We light this **candle of love** as a sign of our commitment to live as people of God’s promise, a promise of salvation and flourishing for all people that springs forth from God’s love for all creation.

*Light the fourth candle of the Advent wreath.*

**Discussion points:**

* How do we participate in sharing God’s promise and real hope? Elizabeth supported Mary.
* What have others done for us to feel grounded in God’s love and promise?
* Invitations:
  + Something tangible (postcard) is helful.
  + Nover stop asking. Jen Cooper can attest to how oftern Gary asked her to church.
  + Social media plays a big role now.
  + Karen Booth had a chance to invite some trunk-or-treaters to church (and share the peaceful feeling) when they asked about touching the “snow” in her van.
* What did others do for us to make us feel welcome?
* Charitable giving picks up at Christmas time.
* “Jesus is loose in the neighborhood.”

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**December 24, 2023:** “Joy”

Christmas Eve

**Services at 7:00 p.m. & 10:00 p.m., Outside at 9:00 p.m.**

**Scripture:** Isaiah 9: 2-7

2 The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;

those who lived in a land of deep darkness on them light has shined.

3 You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy;

they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest,

as people exult when dividing plunder.

4 For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders,

the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian.

5 For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood

shall be burned as fuel for the fire.

6 For a child has been born for us, a son given to us;

authority rests upon his shoulders;

and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,

Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

7 His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom.

He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness

from this time onward and forevermore.

The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

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

1 In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2 This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3 All went to their own towns to be registered.

4 Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. 5 He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. 6 While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child.

7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

8 In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see--I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: 11 to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. 12 This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger."

13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

14 "Glory to God in the highest heaven,

and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"

15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us."

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

**Synopsis:** The first gift of Christmas, a proclamation from heaven itself, is joy. “I bring you great joy.” You aren’t required to feel a certain way about it. It’s yours, but not yours alone. Emmanuel, God with us, is the great joy for all people.

**Felt need:** To claim the joy of the Incarnation - the presence of Emmanuel, God with us, the Light of the World – to all the world – because we need it

**Visuals:** Advent wreath - Christ candle. Sample graphic from Discipleship Ministries – single lit candle.

**Hands-on item:**

**Activity:** Pick up pageant for kids at 7:00 p.m., lighting candles, Bells before 10:00 p.m.

**Media possibilities:**

* [“Receive the King.”](https://www.playbackmedia.com/mini-movies/88583/receive-the-king) Length: 1:42. Cost: Free with subscription. Web license: Yes. 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.
* [“The Promise of Advent: Joy.”](https://skitguys.com/videos/the-promise-of-advent-joy) Length: 1:13. Cost: $18. Web license: Yes. As bells ring from churches, sleighs, and even children during the holiday season, they declare and celebrate that the Savior has come, bringing joy to the world. This video encourages us to feel and spread the joy of Christmas, and all that the Christ child born in a manger represents. **Comments:**We like this best. Can we get sparklers?
  + [20” wedding sparklers](https://www.walmart.com/ip/Wedding-Sparklers-20-Inch/509460258), 48/$26.99 or 104/$27.23, Walmart online (2 min. burn time). No shipping fee.
  + [10” sparklers](https://www.superiorcelebrations.com/cart.html), 96/$10.99, Superior Celebrations online (50 second burn time). Shipping $10+

**Music:** *Silent Night* (UMH 239), [*Joy to the World*](https://hymnary.org/text/joy_to_the_world_the_lord_is_come) (UMH 246), *Emmanuel (Hallowed Manger Ground)*

**Children’s Time:** Cookie cutter – GINGERBREAD PEOPLE (small)

**Social media:** Create Facebook event

**CANDLE LIGHTING LITURGY**

Reader: Beloved, today we welcome the Christ Child, the fulfillment of our joy, as we proclaim with the prophet Isaiah, “For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6).

**Congregation: Christ our joy has come near. Emmanuel, God with us, has come to dwell with us as a tiny baby. “His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this” (Isaiah 9:7).**

Reader: We light this **candle as a sign of Christ coming** to dwell with us, to live in the neighborhood of vulnerable humanity as a vulnerable child. May the light of Christ warm our hearts and light our way as we share the joy of God’s salvation wherever we go.

*Light the center candle of the Advent wreath.*

**Discussion points:**

* *7:00 p.m. inside worship:* Family/kids, livestreamed, candlelighting (in a circle?)
* *9:00 p.m. outside worship:* Short. Readings. Carols. Candlelighting in a circle (non-flame candles). Maybe sparklers. Related needs: Lighter (culinary torch), buckets of sand, and fire extinguisher.
* *9:45 p.m. inside:* Bells
* *10:00 p.m. inside worship:* Not livestreamed, candlelighting in a circle.
* *“The Promise of Advent:* Joy” is part of a package by the Skit Guys. Cost: $39.99. Web license: Yes. [This Advent series contains five videos:](https://skitguys.com/videos/the-promise-of-advent) Hope, Peace, Joy, Love, and Christ. The beautiful imagery and moving words will help you guide your congregation into the Advent season and prepare hearts for the celebration of the birth of Jesus.

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**December 29, 2024:** “Home”

1st Sunday after Christmas Day

**One service at 10:00 a.m. (Pastor Mary on vacation)**

**NOTE: This could be a day of sharing about the power of the Incarnation.**

**Scripture:** 1 Samuel 2: 18-20, 26

18But Samuel was ministering before the Lord—a boy wearing a linen ephod. 19Each year his mother made him a little robe and took it to him when she went up with her husband to offer the annual sacrifice. 20Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife, saying, “Maythe Lord give you children by this woman to take the place of the one she prayed for and gave to the Lord.” Then they would go home.

26And the boy Samuel continued to grow in stature and in favor with the Lord and with people.

**Scripture:** Luke 2: 15-21 (NIV)

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.

21On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise the child, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived.

**Synopsis:** Christmas has come and gone and now it is time for everyone to go home – the shepherds, Mary and Joseph, and us too. We go home changed, transformed by the message of the Incarnation – that we are not alone, that we have connection and hope.

**Felt need:** To recognize that the coming of Christ transforms our lives

**Visuals:** Christ candle. Sample graphic from Discipleship Ministrieds – sitting in front of fireplace.

**Hands-on item:** 2025 theme. Could we print the Covenant Prayer on the flip side?

**Activity:**

**Media possibilities:** [“Oh Come All Ye Faithful: The Shepherds.”](https://skitguys.com/videos/songs-of-the-savior-oh-come-all-ye-faithful-the-shepherds) Length: 4:17. Cost: $18. Web license: Yes. Join a shepherd who has been forever changed by the message he’s been tasked to spread, as he attempts to revive the faith in his friends, reminding them of the miracle they witnessed. **Comments:** Needs an introduction. Very powerful video. Use it.

**Music:**

**Children’s Time:** Cookie cutter – GINGERBREAD PEOPLE (large)

**Discussion points:**

* Pastor Mary is looking for people who might be willing to share how Christ has transformed their lives.
* 1 Samuel is about growing in wisdom and stature.
* Luke is about going home. Have you ever wondered about the rest of the shepherds’ story?

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**January 5, 2025:** “Living in the Light of Jesus”

Epiphany

**One service at 10:00 a.m.**

**Scripture:** Isaiah 60: 1-6 (NIV) **The Glory of Zion**

“Arise, shine, for your light has come,

and the glory of the Lord rises upon you.

2See, darkness covers the earth

and thick darkness is over the peoples,

but the Lord rises upon you

and his glory appears over you.

3Nations will come to your light,

and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

4“Lift up your eyes and look about you:

All assemble and come to you;

your sons come from afar,

and your daughters are carried on the hip.

5Then you will look and be radiant,

your heart will throb and swell with joy;

the wealth on the seas will be brought to you,

to you the riches of the nations will come.

6Herds of camels will cover your land,

young camels of Midian and Ephah.

And all from Sheba will come,

bearing gold and incense

and proclaiming the praise of the Lord.

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

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from 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:** *Epiphany* is a word derived from the Greek for “manifestation” and is usually used as a reminder that Jesus is God’s revelation for the whole world. We worship as our witness that God is worthy of our praise – and we seek to follow God’s way – led by Jesus, the Light of the World.

**Felt need:** To offer our worship and allow Christ to lead us as we begin a new year

**Visuals:** Christ candle

**Hands-on item:** 2025 theme card?

**Activity:** Holy Communion

**Media possibilities:** [“First Christmas: Wise Man.”](https://skitguys.com/videos/first-christmas-wise-man) Length: 2:49. Cost: $18. Web license: Yes. Watch as the Wiseman recounts his journey and the surprise at the end of it all.

**Music:** *We Three Kings* (UMH 254), *I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light* (UMH 206), *Light of the World* (Lauren Daigle)

**Children’s Time:** Cookie cutter – STAR

**Discussion points:** The magi were models for worship. Christ came for the whole world.

**NOTE:** Wesley’s Covenant Prayer could be used as a part of worship.

**A Covenant Prayer in the Wesleyan Tradition**

*I am no longer my own, but thine.*

*Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt.*

*Put me to doing, put me to suffering.*

*Let me be employed by thee or laid aside by thee.*

*Exalted for thee or brought low for thee.*

*Let me be full, let me be empty.*

*Let me have all things, let me have nothing.*

*I freely and heartily yield all things to thy pleasure and disposal.*

*And now, O glorious and blessed God,*

*Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,*

*thou art mine, and I am thine.*

*So be it.*

*And the covenant which I have made on earth,*

*Let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.*

**A Covenant Prayer in the Wesleyan Tradition**

**(Contemporary Version)**

*I am no longer my own, but yours.*

*Put me to what you will, place me with whom you will.*

*Put me to doing, put me to suffering.*

*Let me be put to work for you or set aside for you,*

*Praised for you or criticized for you.*

*Let me be full, let me be empty.*

*Let me have all things, let me have nothing.*

*I freely and fully surrender all things to your glory and service.*

*And now, O wonderful and holy God,*

*Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer,*

*you are mine, and I am yours.*

*So be it.*

*And the covenant which I have made on earth,*

*Let it also be made in heaven.  Amen.*