

#505 Faith Formation in the Small Church with Everyone in the Circle

ADVENT – JOURNEY TO BETHLEHEM

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT -

JOURNEY WITH MARY

Scripture – “Let it Be”

Isaiah 40:1-5 and Luke 1:26-38

Mary’s Story – Julianna

Prayer Practice – Through the Eyes of Mary

Mary figure

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

JOURNEY WITH JOSEPH

Scripture – “The Impossible Dream”

Isaiah 11:1-3a and Matthew 1

Joseph’s Story – James

Prayer Practice – Joseph as Carpenter, Husband, Father

Joseph figure

ADVENT WORKSHOP – Advent Wreaths for the Journey
Mary, Joseph, Stable, Sheep, Star wooden pieces each week

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

JOURNEY WITH THE INNKEEPER

Scripture – “No Room”

Isaiah 9:2-3a, 6-7 and Luke 2:1-7

Innkeeper’s Story – Calvin

Prayer Practice – Crowded & Los Pasados

Stable piece

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

JOURNEY WITH THE SHEPHERD

Scripture – “To Us”

Luke 2:8-20 and Isaiah 52: 7-10

Shepherd’s Story – Cameron?

Prayer Practice – “Light of the World”

Sheep figures

EPIPHANY

JOURNEY WITH THE MAGI

Scripture – Isaiah 62: 1-3 and Matthew 2:1-12

Magi’s Story

Prayer Practice – “Quest of the Magi” Meditation

Star piece

REFLECTIONS – Prayer Practices or Prayer Stations

MEETING MARY ON THE JOURNEY:

Since Advent is the season of waiting and we have no choice, so we wait! The good news of Advent is that if we wait, while we wait, in the waiting, God comes. The waiting itself is the thing, the very place we can meet God all over again. So we encounter Mary on the Journey to Bethlehem.

Luke 1:26-38

How do you think Mary felt after the angel's visit?

Who do you think Mary told that God had chosen her to be the mother of Jesus?

What would you have done if God had chosen you?

REFLECTION – THROUGH THE EYES OF MARY

Take some quiet time to reflect on Mary by looking at the pictures, hold a stone and/or a rose petal, breathe in the scent, repeat a word or sentence from the scripture verse that stood out to you.

PRAYER: Holding a blue stone or rose petal in your hand, listen as we pray.

“God we are so grateful for your marvelous plan to bring your Son into the world so that we might experience your deep love.

Help us to find ourselves in Mary's story.

Help us to learn to say “yes” like Mary and to follow your will for us even when we are afraid.

You are wonderful, Lord. Come into our world and walk alongside us on this journey of waiting. Amen!”

MEETING JOSEPH ON THE JOURNEY:

Matthew 1:18-25

Which images best reflect who Joseph was as a father? Craftsman? Husband?

Who do you think Joseph told that God had chosen him to be the earthly father of Jesus?

What would you have done if God had chosen you?

REFLECTION TIME ON JOSEPH – CARPENTER, HUSBAND, FATHER

Take some quiet time to reflect on Joseph by looking at the pictures, touch & smell the wood shavings, hold a nail, breath in the scents, repeat a word or sentence from the scripture verse that stood out to you.

PRAYER: Holding a wood shaving and/or nail in your hand, listen as we pray.

“God we are so grateful for your marvelous plan to bring your Son into the world so that we might experience your deep love.

Help us to find ourselves in Joseph's story.

Help us to see Joseph with new eyes this season.

Help us to learn to say “yes” like Joseph, even if reluctantly and to follow your will for us even when we are doubtful.

You are wonderful, Lord. Come into our world and walk alongside us on this journey of waiting. Amen!”

ON THE JOURNEY TO BETHLEHEM:

REFLECTION – CROWDED STREETS/LAS POSADAS

During Advent we focus on preparing individually for the coming of Christ. The “Preparation of Advent” is best portrayed in one of the traditions of Mexico, Las Posadas. Las Posadas begins nine days before Christmas and symbolizes the time it took Mary and Joseph to travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem. For each of the nine days, the calling of Joseph and Mary at the inns of Bethlehem is reenacted.

The head of the household begins the ceremony by leading in prayer. Participants are divided into two groups, the pilgrims and the innkeepers. The pilgrims march through the neighborhood carrying lighted candles and singing a request for a room, a place to stay. At every door or “inn” they are refused. On Christmas Eve the pilgrims are welcomed at last. They enter, singing a joyful carol because they have found a place prepared for them.

Invite you to take a few minutes to imagine what it might have been like to enter the streets of Bethlehem like Mary and Joseph after traveling for several days from Nazareth. Relax and picture yourself traveling to Bethlehem to be registered.

How comfortable was that donkey really? Especially being 9 months pregnant.

How tiring and exhausting had this 2 ½ day journey really been? For both Mary and Joseph? Joseph worrying about their safety and worrying about Mary and the baby she was carrying every step of the way.

All that traveling to arrive in Bethlehem to noisy and crowded streets. Remember every adult male that had been born in David's City of Bethlehem had to travel there to be counted. I invite you to sit back and imagine what it would have been like entering the gates of the city with Mary and Joseph. The closer and closer we get to the gates of the city the more crowded the road is. It is like a parade through the streets as people and families are lined up traveling slowly into the city. One just plods along, the donkey moving as slow as ever, just one foot in front of the other. But that is about all the energy we have anyway, one foot in front of the other. The sun is getting ready to set. We must get settled before nightfall. We are hungry and tired.

Mary looks exhausted! I wonder how much time we really have before the baby comes. If only we could have waited until after the baby was born.

But we had no choice but to come from Nazareth to Bethlehem, Mary couldn't be left alone, even with her family.

We had to be counted, it was an order from the Roman government.

So many people.....everywhere you look there are people.

One foot in front of the other. And the noise. Talking, sometimes yelling.

People everywhere. Noisy people everywhere.

Why I can't even hear myself think.

What a noisy night. Nothing silent about this night.

Now to find a place to stay for the night.

Relatives no longer live in Bethlehem, they have mostly moved north.

Oh, what I would give for a cousin or even a distant aunt or uncle to live in Bethlehem still. But then again would we even find them and their home with all these people.

One foot in front of the other.

Maybe in all this chaos we can find an inn to stay in, even if just for tonight.

One night. We need one quiet night then once we are registered we can return home.

One night. One quiet night.

But there is no room.

Not an inn for miles has space.

Not even one bed. Just a bed for one, that's all we need.

One foot in front of the other.

One night.

One bed, that's all we need.

But there is no room.

There is no room in the Inn.

There is no room anywhere.

What are we to do?

PRAYER:

"God we are so grateful for your marvelous plan to bring your Son into the world so that we might experience your deep love. Help us to find ourselves in the crowded streets of Bethlehem and help us to push away the distractions that keep us from giving Christ the central place? During this Advent season, let us examine our hearts to find the places we have excluded Christ in our decisions, our work, our family life—and help us find room for His life to be lived through us. You are wonderful, Lord. Come into our world and walk alongside us on this journey of waiting. Amen!"

JOURNEY WITH THE SHEPHERDS

- Manger on the steps.

- Muslim strips in the Bulletins.
- Pencils in the pews to write prayers.

WHO ARE YOU WAITING FOR?

All through Advent we have been waiting, we have talked a lot about waiting. But what are we really waiting for? Just because we say we are waiting, doesn't make the waiting easy or simple.

As we wait for the baby Jesus to be born in the manger in the stable, what is it that we expect to find in that manger?

The shepherds like others at the time were waiting for the Messiah to come just as the prophets had predicted.

How do you think the shepherds felt when the angels appeared?

Do you think they realized their waiting was over?

Why do you think God chose the Shepherds to be the first to visit Jesus?

What does it mean for God to choose us as His beloved?

What did the shepherds offer to the newborn king when they arrived at the stable in Bethlehem?

Themselves!

How do we offer ourselves to the holy baby in the manger?

Invite you to take a few moments to ponder these questions in your heart, just as Mary pondered the visit of the shepherds in her heart. In that time I also encourage you to take a pencil and write a prayer or prayers that you are ready to offer to the Lord through His Son Jesus Christ. The waiting is almost over, write your prayers on the fabric then come forward and place those cloths in the manger. All of our prayers will be laid out ready to receive the Christ child.

PRAYER:

God of the shepherds, we remember that shepherds were considered the last and the least of your people. They were most unlikely recipients of the angelic message. And yet the announcement is made first to these men tending their sheep in the fields. Lord, no one is untouchable to you, there are no class distinctions, and you kick over all racial and ethnic barriers. The "good news of great joy" come to and for all. Help us to be as free in sharing Your love as You are in giving it, O God, that we may know the fullest benefits of Your greatest gift in Christ the babe in the manger. Amen.

SCRIPT FOR MARY

Everybody knows who I am. I'm Mary, the mother of Jesus. But do you really know who I am? I think you can come to know me best by looking into your own life, and recalling the times when you felt overwhelmed, confused, and afraid. At least that's where you have to begin, if you really want to know me.

I was only a teenager when my simple life was turned upside down by the visit from the angel Gabriel. In my young heart, I had felt a longing to serve God in any way he showed me. But I never expected that an actual angel would appear to me. And I never ever would have imagined that I would have been chosen to be the mother of such an important child!

But I can't describe the turmoil that churned up in me when Gabriel told me I was going to bear God's special child before I was even married. How could my desire to serve God and do what was right have led me into something that seemed so...bizarre?

Gabriel seemed to understand my confusion. "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, the baby will be holy. He will be called the Son of God." What I got from this angel talk was that God was going to do something that had never happened before, and that this child wouldn't be an ordinary human being. But what I couldn't understand was how people were going to believe that the baby was God's son, instead of believing that I was a sinful girl, I mean, I could scarcely believe that this was really happening myself.

Gabriel seemed to be waiting for my answer, but I felt no impatience or pressure from him. I had prayed to be shown God's will for my life. But what God was asking of me was going to be hard. Very hard. Why did God have to choose me?

And what about Joseph? I had dreamed of what it would be like, being his wife, and supporting him as he started his own carpentry shop. What would happen to those dreams now? Could Joseph ever believe me? Maybe I could politely decline this "honor", live a righteous life, and still pursue my own dreams. But could I ever be satisfied with my life knowing I had refused to do what God had asked of me?

I took a deep breath and told the angel, "I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be with me according to your word." With that, I let go of all my plans, my hopes, my dreams. I tried to look into the future, hoping Gabriel or God or someone would tell me what was in store for me now. But the angel was gone.

That night, I had a vivid dream that I was so close to God, I could feel Him filling every part of my body, mind, and spirit with powerful light and love. I can't find any words that can describe how glorious it was. When I woke up, I felt like I was glowing from the inside out with this heavenly power. I hummed and sang to myself as I set about my earthly duties of cleaning, cooking and fetching water. But I kept thinking about the new life I was sure I was carrying inside me now. What would happen when the baby started to grow, and I started to show? I knew it was God's baby, and somehow everything would be all right. I had to trust that. But I sure needed someone to talk to. I needed someone who I knew would stand by me no matter what. I needed to tell my mother.

When I tried to explain it all to her, worry seized her face. "Oh, my poor Mary!" She put her hand on my forehead, and stroked my hair like she did when I was sick with a fever. "What's happening to my poor child? I always knew you were too sensitive. Mary, everybody has strange dreams now and then. You can't believe everything that pops into your imagination. I think I've been making you work too hard. Please, just rest today, and tomorrow too. I'm sure you'll feel better soon."

"Yes, Mama," and I quickly walked outside and released a flood of lonely tears. I had to talk to Joseph. He needed to know what was happening. Maybe Gabriel had told him too.

I guess you would think our betrothal customs were very strange. Being betrothed to someone was as binding a commitment as being married. It could only be broken by death or divorce.

I was very happy our families had chosen Joseph and me for each other. He was a righteous man. He had a big heart and a warm smile for everyone, especially me! I could tell he was fond of me, like I was of him.

After I told him what had happened, the anguish on his face was too much for me to bear. I closed my eyes, my whole body trembling. “It happened just the way I told you, Joseph.”

What was I going to do? Then I remembered. The angel had told me that my elderly cousin Elizabeth was pregnant, after all these years of being barren. Maybe she could believe in a miracle. I went into my house and told my parents I needed to go see Elizabeth. It was a two-day journey to Zechariah and Elizabeth’s house. The determination I had felt leaving the house gave way to uncertainty as I wondered how to tell them my news.

I finally arrived at their house, bracing myself for whatever happened next. When I went to the door and called Elizabeth’s name I heard a most unusual cry of surprise and joy. “Mary! Mary!” Her eyes sparkled with wonder. “God has blessed you more than any other woman! And God has blessed the baby which you will give birth to! You are the mother of my Lord, and you have come to me! Why has something so good happened to me? When I heard your voice, the baby inside me jumped with joy. You are blessed because you believed what the Lord said to you would really happen.”

I fell into Elizabeth’s open arms, crying and laughing at the same time. Such relief and joy welled up, I couldn’t contain it. “My soul praises the Lord, and my spirit sings for joy because God is my Savior! I am not important, but God has shown His care for me, His servant girl.” God hadn’t left me alone! And God was using me to give birth to a wonderful new plan.

The three months I stayed with Elizabeth and Zechariah went all too quickly. When it was almost time for Elizabeth to deliver, I heard a familiar voice at the door. It was Joseph! He was so out of breath I wondered if he had run the whole way! “Mary! Mary! I had an unusual dream too! He panted. “I saw your angel, Mary! He told me that everything you told me about your baby is true!” I’m so sorry I didn’t believe you” Joseph said. “The angel told me I should take you home with me as my wife, and be the baby’s earthly father. Can we do that?”

“Let it be with me according to God’s word!” I said, and threw my arms around Joseph’s neck.

Well, I guess you know it wasn’t “happily ever after” from then on. Giving birth to God’s plan is seldom easy. When I was jostled on a donkey all the way from Nazareth to Bethlehem, about to deliver, I wondered why God would make us go to Bethlehem to have this baby. “Let it be according to your will,” I kept praying, not yet knowing that we were fulfilling what the prophet had foretold.

When we couldn’t even find a corner of a room at the inn, and had to rush to a stable as the labor pains came on hard. I wondered why God would allow His own Son to be born in a dirty place like that. “Let it be according to your will,” I prayed between pains, and with gasps and cries gave birth to the baby in a place even crude shepherds felt quite at home in. And you should have seen the wonder on those shepherds’ faces when it began sinking in that God was including the likes of them in His new plan!

Do you know me any better now? Maybe you know yourself a little better now too. Haven’t you struggled with hardships and trials you couldn’t understand? Maybe not everything we endure happens for a higher purpose. But I know that some things do.

If we can keep our hearts open, and trust that God is with us, no matter how hard the going, even ordinary people like you and like me can help give birth to God’s marvelous plan.

SCRIPT FOR JOSEPH

Do you believe in dreams? I mean, if you had a dream that flew in the face of all logic and all the evidence, how long would it take you to stop believing the dream and start believing your eyes and your brain?

I had a dream about an angel one night long, long ago that I wanted with all my heart to believe. If I could be sure that the dream was true, I knew that I could face all the trouble I was in without buckling under.

I guess you know the kind of trouble I was in, too. Mary and I were betrothed. You don't have anything quite like our betrothals here in your country. It was more than being engaged: it was a binding commitment that could only be ended by divorce. But when you were betrothed, you didn't live together. So there we were, just betrothed, but Mary was looking more and more pregnant every week and I hadn't done anything. I had never been so hurt, and embarrassed, and confused in all my life.

As a matter of fact, I have always taken great pains to never let myself get into a compromising situation. I have always been a righteous man.

I always believed that God is a just God. He smiles on those who obey Him with His blessings. And it seemed like God had been smiling on me. People respected my carpentry work and gave me enough business to buy the necessities of life. I had good friends. And God gave me Mary as my future wife. Mary had a heart of gold. And I knew that Mary loved and respected me. I just thanked God every night for giving me such a wonderful young woman to be my wife.

But then, for reasons I couldn't explain, it seemed like God's smile on me turned into a frown. Everything started to go wrong, very wrong. Mary was pregnant. She pleaded with me to believe her—that an angel had told her that God's Spirit had conceived this child, and he would be called the Son of God. Now what would you think if someone gave you an explanation like that of why she was pregnant? I have always been a man of reason. I don't let myself get carried away with strange ideas. Mary seemed so sincere as she begged me to believe her, and so desperate. I wanted to believe it, and to believe that I was the only one for her. But you can't base your decisions on wishes, and displays of emotion, and stories of angels.

The night Mary told me she was pregnant, God had never seemed so far away. My dreams, my heart, my faith, were all crushed into a thousand broken pieces that night. I thought I had been following God's law and His holy will. **Why is this happening to me?** I didn't know if the law was worth anything any more. But I had nothing else to go by, so I clung to it like an anchor in a storm. The law gave me two choices for how to handle an unfaithful woman. I could publicly take her to court, expose her as an adulteress, and watch her be sentenced to stoning. Oh, I could not do that to my Mary, no matter what she had done. Or I could give her papers of divorce in the presence of two witnesses. That's what I would do. I would find two people I could trust to keep things as quiet as possible.

It was while I was considering who would make the best witnesses that I had my strange dream. A being, glowing with brightness, stood over my bed and called: "Joseph, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, which means 'the Lord saves,' because he will save his people from their sins."

When I woke up, that dream was still very vivid in my mind. But did I dare to believe it? Was it really God talking to me, or was it my wishes taking control of my imagination?

Could God be with me, even when life had plunged me into darkness? Could I dare to believe in a sign that no one else could see, and I couldn't prove even to myself?

You probably never realized how hard it was for me to really believe what I wished so much might be true. I knew that if I believed that dream enough to act on it, I would face the ridicule of my people. And I was right. When I didn't divorce Mary, of course my reputation as an honest, law-abiding man was erased in one stroke. Business really dropped off. I could no longer say that God was making sure I got what I needed to live on.

I tried to explain my dream about the angel to a few trusted friends. "Dreams", they said to me. "Everyone has dreams, Joseph. If you had only divorced Mary like the law says, you could have started over and at least kept your reputation." Then they shook their heads, "But it's too late for that now."

My friends were no help. So I tried to explain everything to the rabbi, "Joseph," he said. "I have never known anyone in our time to receive a message from God in this way, though I have known some

who would like us to think they have. But Joseph, I know you are an honest man. If this is of God, He will show you that He is with you. You can be sure of that; He will show you.”

The rabbi’s words seemed wise and true. But those words churned up doubt and worry when I heard Caesar’s decree that I had to go to Bethlehem to enroll for the tax, just when Mary was almost ready to deliver. Mary and I had no one in the world now but each other and our dreams of angels. We just had to be together, surely God knew that. But now God seemed to be frowning on us again: we had to travel to Bethlehem. “If this is of God, He will show you that He is with you,” the rabbi had said. Was God with us?

Those words just caused frustration and anger as we made that long, hard journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem with Mary bone weary and hurting with every jostle, and the donkey stubborn and ornery, and night winds that blew through our garments like they were fish nets. “If this is of God, He will show you that He is with you.”

I was swept with a feeling of helpless loneliness as I desperately searched Bethlehem for a bed where Mary could deliver our homeless baby. “If this is of God, He will show you that he is with you.”

WAS GOD WITH US, when all I could find was a dung-splattered stable hollowed out of a cave, with skittish animals threatening to trample Mary and the helpless baby in the dark?

What had become of my dream, that this child was conceived by God’s Spirit and was God’s special child? How long would *you* hang onto a promise, a hope, your faith, when everything you saw and everything your mind told you flew in the face of it? How long?

When Mary set the baby into the manger, he began to cry. He knew this place was barely fit for an animal. I sat down beside Mary and grasped her trembling hand. What did all of this mean? Could this helpless baby, born into a dark and cold stable so far from home, born to a couple whose faith had been shaken to the core, born to a people who lived under the power of pagan Rome, could this tiny baby be God’s own Son, the Messiah, the Savior? Was God coming to us as a fragile human being, to be with us in our darkness and our suffering, and show us the way somehow to the light?

SCRIPT FOR INNKEEPER

What a lousy business I was in! I was the owner, bellhop, cook, and dishwasher of a small, run down inn in Bethlehem. You guessed it. I'm the innkeeper who turned away the mother and father of the Savior of the world, and put them in a cold, smelly stable. Little did I know that this one insignificant incident in the most busy time of my life would put me in the Bible, of all things! And believe me, folks, little did I know that this one little decision was going to force churches forever after to set up their nativity scenes to look like stables, with animals, feeding troughs, and straw.

I've often wondered what would have happened if I had found a room inside for that couple. Would you set up the scene of a cheap hotel room in your church? See, we're not talking about a Holiday Inn here, or even a Motel 6. Oh, I would have liked to have run a nice place, like some of the inns in Jerusalem. But that was the problem. Jerusalem was only five miles away from Bethlehem. Bethlehem was just a little town, with the wilderness at our back door. The rich merchants all stayed in Jerusalem. They came to Bethlehem to sell their goods, and take our money, but they never left any of it behind for us.

We couldn't keep going on this way. My children were looking thin, and their clothes were ragged. I hated the Romans! I hated poverty—my poverty and the poverty of my customers who always thought their three coins should get them better accommodations! Do you blame me for that? Do you blame me for being a little bitter, when my family was going hungry?

Well it so happened that I had an unexpected change in my luck. And it came from a most unexpected place. It came from the top Roman himself, Caesar Augustus, who sent out a decree that all the Roman world should be counted.

Everyone had to be counted in the town where the male head of household was born. I guess they wanted to keep track of all the families together, and make sure nobody was slipping through the cracks and evading the Roman tax. Not too many Jews were rejoicing at this news. But when we heard about, my family was dancing around our little room. There would be travelers coming to Bethlehem! There would be customers, plenty of customers! We could catch up at last, even get ahead of the game, and make a real profit for a change.

And it happened, just as we had hoped it would. People came from everywhere! I hadn't known so many people had moved out of Bethlehem, not that I could blame them. And by the looks of them, some of them had done pretty well for themselves. We would double, no, triple our prices for our rooms, and, if necessary squeeze more people in by putting mats on the floor. Why not? Now there were plenty of people who'd be willing to part with nine coins to sleep in any kind of room!

Do you blame me for what I did? Do you blame me for seizing this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to get ahead a little bit?

Well, our little inn was finally making some money. Of course people complained when they heard our room rates, but what could they do? Sleep in the street? We were working like dogs, day and night, trying our best to keep our customers satisfied. We were having one of those busy evenings when our most famous customers arrived---you know---the couple from Nazareth. Believe me, they sure didn't look famous when I saw them! Their clothes were plain and worn and dirty from a long journey. The woman, or young girl, was very pregnant, and her occasional gasping made me suspect she wouldn't be much longer. These were not the kind of customers we were looking for! I told them, "Sorry, friends, but there isn't any room." And in fact, I was right. All of the beds were taken. I said very firmly. "I just don't have any room for you in here."

Do you blame me for that? Do you blame me for not disrupting the whole inn and my family for this pair of strangers?

The couple just sort of stood there for a minute. I guess they didn't know where else to go. It was a shame what Caesar was putting people through, and I felt a little guilty for feeling so happy about this counting business. I started to close the door, but the look of worry and fear on the girl's face made me hesitate.

“Look,” I said. “See that stable over there? For just one coin, you can use that, and give your donkey some hay. If you come in for meals, that’s extra.” The man paid me, and I went back to the business of taking care of my more important guests.

Well, that’s how it happened. Was it my fault that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was born in a stable, and laid in a feeding trough? Caesar’s the one that should be blamed. Even so, I still feel kind of bad about the way it happened.

I’ve had lots of time to think about that strange night since then. I know now that God wasn’t so far away as I thought during those dark times. I know now that God wasn’t just letting this cruel world run its course. I know now that on that very night, God came to us, right there in the middle of all our suffering. God came to us, right there in the middle of our hatred and our greed too. They named that baby Jesus, which means “the Lord saves.” They also called him Emmanuel, which means “God with us.”

If I had known then, what I know now, I would have done things differently. If Joseph and Mary knocked on my door, looking for a place to give birth to Jesus, I’d make room for them.

You bet I would! Hey, I’d go sleep in the stable if I had to! I’m sure you would too, if you knew who it was.

But what I learned from that night was that God comes to us kind of sneaky, in ways we don’t expect. If God came to me as another stranger, or as one who was hungry or thirsty, or cold, or sick, I wonder if I would have room then. If God came, not to make me rich, but to teach me how to give, I wonder if I would have room then. If God came, not to conquer my enemies, but to show me how to love them, I wonder if I would have room then.

This is the season you call Advent. Advent means “coming.” What if God came to you this Advent, catching you by surprise as He knocked on your door to see if there’s room for Him in your life? Would He find a life full of selfishness and bitterness, as He did with me? Would He find a life full of busyness and unimportant details to tend to, with no time for His people? This Advent, right now, is there room in your life for Emmanuel, “God-with-us,” to be born?

SCRIPT FOR THE SHEPHERD

I have been wanting to share what happened to me on that starry night so long ago. So I got up my courage, and here I am. I can't quite believe that no one has objected yet! See, I am a shepherd, and we aren't allowed to be in places of worship or to associate with righteous people. Many called us unclean. Why? Because the Scribes and the Pharisees taught the people that in order to be acceptable to God, you had to go through all this ritual hand washing every time you turned around, and cook your food in certain ways, and obey lots of other little rules that we shepherds just can't do way out in the wilderness where we spend most of our time.

But you know something? I think the real reason people look down on us is because they had gotten so citified, they just don't like the way we smell! So on the rare occasions when I venture into town, I use the back streets and stay away from the synagogue, and I try not to let it bother me that people make funny faces when they catch my rustic aroma.

As you can imagine, it is a pretty lonely life, being a shepherd. But my father was a shepherd, and his father before him. So I just accepted my lot in life, and spent day after lonely day wandering over the distant hills, trying to keep my flock of sheep alive.

Sheep aren't the wisest of animals. I don't think I ever met a sheep that had any sense. Sheep can't see any farther than what is right in front of them. They need a shepherd to find good grazing land for them, and even to show them where the water is. If one sheep starts heading for a cliff and acts like he knows what he is doing, the others just follow right along. Sheep are always getting hurt, or getting lost. And they have no way to defend themselves against the wolves and even lions that live in the wilderness. Without a good shepherd leading them, I don't think a flock of sheep would last two days out there.

I often thought about my people as being like a flock without a shepherd. I knew that my people worshiped a God who had supposedly chosen us to be His own special flock. He had rescued us from slavery in Egypt, and given us the Law and the prophets, so we could be a light to the nations. That's the way the story went. But now it seemed like God had just left His flock to fend for themselves. My people were lost. And who am I, one smelly, lonely no-account shepherd, that God would have any interest in me?

But I have gotten off track it was a night with a sky full of stars that I wanted to tell you about. On that particular night, I wasn't alone. It was early in the season, and there was still good grazing in the hills close to Bethlehem. So four of us shepherds herded our flocks over to the same hill and gathered at the top to keep each other company. As the sun set, we took out our flute pipes and shared our favorite tunes with each other. Each man's tunes spoke of the loneliness he carried in his heart. Then we talked about our lives as shepherds. Was there any hope that life would ever yield any more for us than loneliness, shame, and the disgusted stares of the righteous people? No, we decided. Our fate was as set as the courses of the stars that were filling the sky overhead.

But that was a curious thing. There was a bright new star, directly over us, a star that we had not noticed on recent nights of star gazing. We all lay on our backs trying to figure out what it could mean. Was something new going to happen here below? That night, as we pondered the dazzling sky together the heavens seemed to shimmer in mystery.

And then, as we lay there, I began to have the sense that we weren't alone. There was a presence there with us. And then it was as though that presence began to become visible in the form of a light, a light that was more radiant than any light we had ever seen. We all scrambled to our feet, wondering where to run for cover! But a voice spoke to us. I still don't know if I heard it through my ears or through my heart. It said, "Don't be afraid. Listen. I bring you good news of great joy which will come to all the people. For to you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

What was happening to us? Out of this immense vault of the heavens came a voice speaking to *us*, a bunch of smelly shepherds, "To you is born a Savior, the Messiah." Didn't this angel know who we were? I vaguely remembered hearing as a child that the prophet Micah had said that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. But that had been 700 years ago. If this prophecy was to be fulfilled after all this time, it surely wouldn't be a few lowly shepherds who would get the advance notice! We didn't know *what* was happening to us, but it couldn't be real.

The angel seemed to sense our disbelief. The voice spoke again, “This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” And then, I kid you not, it was like the whole sky burst into singing. It was beautiful voices filling the whole sky, singing praises to God.

The Bible says that we made haste to go to Bethlehem. That sounds so polite! We didn’t just make haste, we ran out of there so fast our feet hardly touched the ground—less in eagerness to see a baby than in fear for what might happen next if we stuck around! But when we finally slowed to a walk close to town and caught our breath, we tried to make some kind of sense of what had just happened. The Messiah being born that day in Bethlehem...that part we could half believe. But lying in a manger, a dirty, smelly feeding trough? That’s not what God would choose for a king.

We wandered around town a little, almost hoping we wouldn’t find anything unusual, and we could dismiss the whole thing as some kind of dream. But then we heard the cry of a baby. It seemed to be coming from behind that shabby old inn. We followed the sound to a stable. Even for us shepherds, this didn’t seem right. Back in the corner were a frightened girl and a man eyeing us suspiciously. And right between them was a manger, with a baby moving around and making baby noises! We just stood there with our mouths hanging open. “To you is born a Savior”. Not to the wealthy, or the righteous, or the powerful. “To you,” the angel had said, and that meant us! Here was a baby, born in a manger to parents who were shut out of the inn. Maybe here was a Savior who would know the suffering of his people! Maybe here was a Shepherd who would really know his sheep!

Without thinking, we fell to our knees in front of that helpless little baby. I felt like I should pray or do something holy, you know? I thought I would never know anything but being rejected by people and forgotten by God. Why God chose us nobodies to give His gift to, I couldn’t explain. But here it was, just like the angel had said!

We tried to tell the young couple what had happened to us out on the hill. They didn’t look at us like we were crazy. In fact, the frightened, defeated look on their faces gave way to a look of hope. Then they began talking really fast, about how angels had talked to them too. It was like we were the first ones who had ever believed them!

Before we left, we all stood around the manger, arms around each other in a holy circle of love and hope.

Then as we shepherds made our way back out to the hill, our feet hardly touched the ground again. But this time it was because we were almost floating. Our eyes were transfixed by the brilliant stars, which seemed to dance around the new star in the sky. What a night that was!

ADVENT - "Mary Had a Baby" Scripture & Spirituals

The Advent Season is the preparation in our hearts for the second coming of Jesus Christ. Spirituals provide an excellent medium for us to better understand the unconditional love, justice, mercy, hope, faith, and community that Jesus brings. Each Sunday we will engage the birth narrative of Jesus in the Gospels of Matthew & Luke and be invited to a time of rebirth and renewal, to not only welcome the Christ Child but the coming Kingdom of God.

1st SUNDAY OF ADVENT – "MARY HAD A BABY"

- HOPE Bulletin & MARY Candle

"Look! You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus."
(Luke 1:31)

Glad Tidings and Great Wonderment – Luke 1:28-38, Matthew 1:18-25

2nd SUNDAY OF ADVENT – "CHILDREN, GO WHERE I SEND THEE"

Communion

- PEACE Bulletin & JOSEPH Candle

"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." (Luke 2:4)

Where Will They Go? – Luke 2:1-7

3rd SUNDAY OF ADVENT – "RISE UP SHEPHERD AND FOLLOW"

- JOY Bulletin & SHEPHERD Candle (pink)

"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.'" (Luke 2:15)

Searching and Seeking – Luke 2:8-20

4th SUNDAY OF ADVENT – "GO, TELL IT ON THE MOUNTAIN"

JOY Offering Received - PRAISE Bulletin &

"The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them." (Luke 2:20)

Miraculous Messengers – Luke 1:26-38, Matthew 1:20-23, Luke 2:10-14
(Angels)

LENTEN SEASON - "COME TO THE TABLE"

Table Talks with God – Blessing Bowls & Devotional Book – Bowls created on Transfiguration Sunday in Worship

ASH WEDNESDAY "God Prepares a Table"

Psalm 23

Imposition of Ashes & Invitation to "Come to the Table"

1st SUNDAY IN LENT "Table of Mercy"

At Table with Sinners – Calling Levi

Matthew 9:9-13, Mark 2:13-17, Luke 5:27-32,

Party Table – 109th Church Birthday Celebration

2nd SUNDAY IN LENT "Table of Forgiveness"

Jesus Anointed at Simon's Table

Luke 7:36-50 (Matthew 26:6-13, Mark 14:3-9)

Table in Bible time Home Prayer Practice=Anointing

3rd SUNDAY IN LENT "Table of Grace"

At Mary & Martha's Table-Luke 10:38-42 (Zaccheaus-Luke 19:1-10)

Kitchen Table Prayer Practice= Sitting with Jesus

4th SUNDAY IN LENT "Table of Blessing" – Workship

"A Hungry Table" – Banquet Feast

Luke 14:15-24, Matthew 22:2-14

Banquet Table – "Hunger Meal" Prayer Practice=Plate of Excuses

5th SUNDAY IN LENT "Table of Hospitality" – Communion

At Table with Pharisees – Luke 14:1-14 (Proverbs 25:6-7)

Pharisees' Table Prayer Practice=Paper Prayers/Prayer Wall

PALM SUNDAY Mark 11:1-10, 15-18

Trouble at the Table – Luke 11:37-41 & Turning Tables in Temple

MAUNDY THURSDAY – 7pm with Communion

"The Last Supper" Table in the Upper Room

1st SUNDAY AFTER EASTER "Table By the Sea"

Eating with the Resurrected Jesus John 21:1-14; 15-19

Picnic Table

Table of Blessing (Season of Lent)

SETTING THE TABLE

LIGHTING THE CANDLES

INVITATION TO THE TABLE

SONG “We Come to This Table” (Carolyn Winfrey Gillette)

RESPONSIVE CALL TO THE TABLE

ONE: When did we see you hungry, Jesus?

ALL: I work two jobs so we can eat—I search for food we can afford—I am your neighbor down the street.

ONE: When did we see you thirsty, Jesus?

ALL: People: I carry water miles each day—I long for water, close and pure—I am your neighbor far away.

ONE: Jesus your presence here is real; You came, a servant to feed and quench thirst. May your church serve you in “the least of these.”

ALL: At this Table of Blessing may we worship God together.

*HYMN “We Come as Guests Invited” Presbyterian Hymnal

*CALL TO PRAYER

*UNISON TABLE PRAYER

It was at Table Side that our Christ learned the power of feeding one another. It was at Table Side that our Christ witnessed the telling of truth. And so Christ invites us to Table Side; the Table that has been passed down through the generations, rubbed with oil, refinished with care from family to family to us. God’s Blessing made visible. Amen.

*ASSURANCE OF GRACE AND FORGIVENESS

*GLORIA PATRI

GOD’S TABLE TALK

SCRIPTURE “The Banquet Table” - Luke 14:15-24

PRAYER PRACTICE *Plate of Excuses*

(As everyone comes into Worship invite them to take a paper plate and a marker)

Excuses, excuses, excuses! Jesus’ parable is about the invitation to enjoy God’s presence forever and ever, feasting and celebrating, receiving God’s blessing at the table. But there are many who will make excuses for not responding, for not accepting the invitation to be in relationship with God.

We all get busy and tired. We all get afraid and have doubts. Sometimes these things and other things get in the way of our participation and enjoyment of the great gifts, the banquet table that God provides for us.

Today, we get to let go of those excuses. Think about our scripture story this morning and write on your plate the reasons, the excuses that you might make today for not coming to the banquet that you have been invited to.

As we leave this place today, you are encouraged to leave your plate of excuses on the Table of Blessing, knowing that God receives your excuses, forgives them and leaves you blessed as you go out from this place.

(remind folks at Blessing/Charge and model by leaving my plate on the Table)

REFLECTION

The Parable of the Great Banquet begins with the invitation. Like many parties that we might be invited to, these guest would have received a formal invitation long before the banquet feast occurred, a “save the date” kind of invitation. It appears that their RSVP’s had accepted the invitation. Jewish custom included the invitation and then a second announcement the day of was made, when the feast was ready. It is then that the invited guests, who had said they were coming before, gave their excuses to not attend, other interests took priority, they are not coming after all. So the host sends his servants out to invite new guests; the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame. Once that is done there is still room at the table, so the roads and country lanes in addition to the streets and alleys are searched and more guests are invited until the house is full and every seat at the banquet table is filled. Ancient meals were a form of social theater, where honor and wealth were put on display for all to see. Quality and quantity of good food, location and the status of those invited (and the status of the host) served to inscribe the hierarchies and values of the society deeply into the minds of both participants and observers. In this parable about those who would ordinarily be excluded, or invited only to be shamed, Jesus disrupts the social scripts of everyday life and challenges the norms of who is welcome at the table. We are told that the master then says--we hear this as Jesus’ words to the Jewish religious leaders and elite -- “I tell you, not one of those who were invited [initially] will get a taste of my banquet”. Jesus’ point is that the welcome that God extends has a special audience. It is not only for those “insiders” who already know and follow the path God has set out. The kingdom banquet isn’t just for those who expect to attend; it is for those for whom God has particular care for. God invites “many” or “all” to be part of the kingdom, to feast at the great banquet. But to sit at the Table of Blessing, God’s invitation must be accepted. Our challenge for today’s Workship Experience is to consider all of those who are invited to the Table of Blessing but are unable to be fed or to be filled with enough food to sustain them. How do we extend God’s invitation to the banquet table and reach out with care and compassion to our community so there is enough for everyone, so that no one goes away from the party hungry.

I want to share a story with you from an article written by Dave Schrock-Shenk in *“Trek: Venture into a World of Enough, Mennonite Central Committee My American Airlines flight was packed. Passengers from a cancelled United Airlines flight had switched to American at the last minute. The pilot addressed us on the intercom: “We’re glad we had enough seats for our friends from United. Unfortunately, we don’t have enough meals. When the flight attendants come by, tell them if you’re ‘American,’ in which case you get dinner, or ‘United,’ in which case you will get a soda.” At first, I was relieved. I was an American passenger. I would get supper. Then I thought of my seatmates. Would I share my food with them if they*

were United? I was relieved when my seatmates told the attendant they were also American. But then I started wondering if the people in the seats right behind me got food, and the people behind them. Should I share my food with them? If I started sharing, where would I stop? I didn't turn around to check. As long as I didn't see them, I was able to eat. I face the temptation "to not look" at the hungry and homeless people in the world. But I know looking away makes me more calloused, and a bit less human. Gaining awareness of those with too little – better yet, sharing a meal with them – makes me more human.

- What strikes you about this story?
- How would you react in this situation?
- What do you think this person learned?

THE WORLD AT TABLE

Invite 3 people to volunteer and seat them at the Table of Blessing

(each person represents the following based on a ratio for every 10 people & our congregation of 20)

#1 = represent 2 people = wealthiest (Fancy place setting) – Includes the USA

Full course meal on the fancy table setting with banquet pieces – what does that meal look like?

#2 = represent 12 people = middle class (Remove the fancy – paper plate & napkin, plastic silverware, paper cup) Have a sustainable lifestyle – a simple meal - rice serving and cup of water

#3 = represent 6 people = poorest (No place setting just a napkin) Represent the world's poorest people - a small portion of rice, you would have stood in line for your rice and then stood in another line for a small glass of water which of course is "polluted"

Thoughts? How does that feel? What would you do in this situation if it were real?

"If the World Were a Village of a Hundred People"

In the world today, 6 billion 300 million people live. If this world were shrunk to the size of a village, what would it look like? If 100 people lived in this village,

- 20 are undernourished, 1 is dying of starvation, while 15 are overweight
- Of the wealth in this village, 6 people own 59%, all of them are from the United States—74 people own 39% and 20% share the remaining 2%
- 75 people have some supply of good and a place to shelter them from the wind and the rain, but 25 do not. 17 have no clean, safe water to drink.

Discuss the statistics above in "*If the World Were a Village of 100 People.*" What could we do about the inequalities we have learned about?

*UNISON PRAYER FOR THE HUNGRY – A walking prayer

(Pictures are on the wall that represent our world's hungry. Invite you to get up and walk down the far aisle from the back to the front moving along as you read this prayer and look at the images.)

O God, we pray now for the hungry— not the spiritually hungry not the emotionally hungry (though they surely need our prayers)—we pray now simply for the hungry. We know that Jesus showed us no one goes hungry, no one lacks daily bread.

God we know that You expect, those with food to remember the hungry, those with food to share their food with the hungry, those with food to work on behalf of the hungry, God, we are grateful you never forget about the hungry—that you long for the hungry to be fed.

God, we are grateful you never forget about those who aren't hungry—that you long for them to feed the hungry. God, the hungry and unhungry stand as one before you; loved with the same love, both in need of you and each other.

God of the Hungry, so many are hungry. Rescue your hungry children, fill their stomachs with food and their hearts with gladness, so that they, too, might experience the luxury of dealing only with their spiritual hunger and their emotional hunger.

Send your Spirit to the hungry hungry, and to the unhungry, until all feast with Jesus in the new age. In the name of Jesus and the hungry hungry we pray. Amen.

FAMINE FACTS

How well do you know hunger?

(cut apart each of the Trivia questions & give to 7 people to share)

ANSWER SHEET:

1. How many people will go to bed hungry tonight?

a) 500,000

b) nearly a million

c) 500 million

d) nearly a billion

Every night, 925 million people go to bed hungry. That's roughly three times the population of the U.S. Remember, these aren't numbers: they're people. Imagine if this was your best friend, your brother, your sister . . . what would you do to help them?

2. TRUE or FALSE: Starvation is usually what kills hungry kids.

FALSE Hunger-related causes kill as many as 11,000 kids a day. However, most die not because of starvation, but from "chronic hunger"—meaning they went too long without getting the right kind of food. Eating just enough to stay alive weakens their bodies so much that disease can swoop in and end their lives.

3. TRUE or FALSE: You can tell malnourished kids from their swollen bellies or skeletal appearance.

FALSE You don't have to have a bloated belly or look emaciated to be malnourished. All it takes is continually missing out on the key nutrients your body needs. So while some malnourished kids may not look hungry, there's still a silent battle going on beneath the surface. In many cases, basic body systems quit working right—for example, the immune system can no longer fight off illness and the brain loses its ability to concentrate.

4. TRUE or FALSE: The effects of hunger on a child are totally reversible with the right treatments.

FALSE The effects of short-term hunger can be reversed with the right nutrients, but long-term hunger can permanently damage a child's body. The heart can literally shrink—making it beat harder than it should and shortening its lifespan. Bones can stop growing at the right pace, permanently stunting height. And as the brain starves, intelligence drops and the personality can change—irreversibly.

5. Which of the following is a measurement of hunger?

- a) famished
- b) wasting
- c) starving
- d) all of the above

b) wasting

“Wasting” is severe weight loss caused by hunger and is calculated using a child's weight-to-height ratio. Two other terms used to measure hunger are “stunting” (below-normal height) and “underweight.”

6. Where do most hungry people live?

- a) the Middle East
- b) Asia
- c) Latin America
- d) Africa

b) Asia

About two-thirds of the world's hungry people (578 million) live in Asia and the Pacific. Sub-Saharan Africa has the next-largest number of hungry people (239 million). But a higher percentage of people are hungry in sub-Saharan Africa (1 in 3) than in Asia.

7. What do most parents in impoverished countries do for a living?

- a) work in an office or school
- b) farm
- c) work at a school or hospital
- d) sell goods

b) farm

Most families depend entirely on what they can grow, so they are never more than one disaster away from hunger. Called “subsistence farmers,” these people produce barely enough crops to feed their families, let alone harvest enough extra to sell.

LUCK OF THE DRAW & ACTION

- *Ask the congregation to count off numbers one to six*
- *Ask the number six person(s) to stand up*

In our world, one of every six people lives on less than a dollar a day. What does it mean to live on less than a dollar a day? What would

your life look like? For all of those standing this is what life might look like?

- First, turn out the lights and turn off the TV. You won't have electricity; even if you have access to it, you can't afford it. Turn off your source of music, too. If you want music, you'll have to make it yourself.
- Get rid of your cell phone, too
- Clean out your closet, you can keep one set of clothes – but no shoes
- Now you have to leave your house – it's far too grand. You can move into your tool shed in the backyard, if you have one
- Then, get rid of your car keys. When you travel, you walk.
- Speaking of walking, you will need to leave soon to go get water. You don't have plumbing or tap water. All the water you use must be carried, sometimes for miles.
- After you get back from carrying the water, you'll then need to walk some more for firewood. That's how you cook your food.
- With all this walking, there's little time for anything else, like school, especially for girls. So, you probably won't be able to read.
- Food is a problem, of course. Living on less than a dollar a day means you are hungry much of the time.
- With food and safe water uncertain, you are sick a lot and health care is hard to come by – if it is available.

That means your life is short.

The reality of life for people struggling with extreme poverty is very harsh indeed. But it doesn't have to be that way.

(you may all sit down, thank you for helping us picture hunger issues in our world)

How might you make a difference in the lives of one-sixth of our human family?

What are ways that we are working to end Hunger?

Supporting our denominational hunger program – OGHS

Local food bank – volunteering on Fridays, donating food items – our basket in the entryway, Thanksgiving Eve Worship, Souper Bowl of Caring - \$25

Our Little Pantry – thanks to those who donate items to stock the Pantry, Souper Bowl of Caring donations – 58 items

Shopping for others every time we grocery shop for ourselves – even if you are picking up one item that was on sale – box of cereal, can of chili, jar of peanut butter – you are making a difference. If everyone of us picked up one item we would have 15-20 items a week – enough to provide meals for 3-4 families for a week.

Snacks for School for the Counselor to distribute to hungry kids in our community – for some of our kids that is the only food they get over a weekend. Thank you for your gifts donated today and all month!

We can make a difference! Together we can do our part to end hunger right here in our community.

*HYMN

“Come, You Hungry Ones”

(Carolyn Winfrey Gillette)

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE & COMMUNITY

PRESENTATION OF OUR GIFTS

*DOXOLOGY (inside cover of hymnal)

*UNISON PRAYER OF BLESSING

Thank you, God, for all you have given to satisfy our needs. You quench our thirst and alleviate our hungers when we turn to you. You turn scarcity into plenty and give us the opportunity to help others. May our offerings proclaim your goodness and mercy. May they be devoted to extending the beloved community of your people. Keep our words and actions attuned to your will, that we may offer to all what they need from your hand. Amen.

SHARING GOD'S TABLE

*HYMN "Count Your Blessings"

*THE CHARGE AND BLESSING
GOSPEL ACCORDING TO DR. SEUSS

"GREEN EGGS & HAM"

Reconciliation/Paul's Mission

Ezekiel 18:30-32; 37:1-11, 2 Corinthians 5:14-20

YOUTH SUNDAY --"OH THE PLACES YOU'LL GO"

Christian Service/Mission, Paul's Journey

Ephesians 3:8-13, 2 Corinthians 12:9

"CAT IN THE HAT COMES BACK"

Christ and our Messes of Life

Isaiah 1:15-20, Revelation 21:1-5

JULY FELLOWSHIP – ALL SEUSS Themed snacks

MOVIE NIGHT! – "The Lorax" with Fun snacks

"THE LORAX"

Creation Stewardship

1 Timothy 5:25, Matthew 17:21, John 15:1-2

"HORTON HEARS A WHO"

Equality & Justice

Psalms 24:1-2, Romans 8:18-25, 1 John 4:4-16

"THE SNEETCHES"

Unity & Acceptance

Galatians 3:6-9; 28, James 2:1-4

“GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MISTER ROGERS”

Generations of kids have grown up with Mister Rogers as their kind and gentle friend. Mister Rogers' Neighborhood created a calm, safe space where all children were welcome. From his living room with real-life characters like Mr. McFeely & Officer Clemons, Trolley would take us to the Neighborhood of Make-Believe where we would meet charming puppets like King Friday & Daniel the Striped Tiger. Fred Rogers was a Presbyterian ordained pastor with a simple and fundamental theological conviction. He believed that life is precious, that every human being is precious, and that all of us are called to treat others with dignity and respect as beloved children of God. Join us as we explore this summer the message of Mister Rogers that reinforces the Gospel message through this Patron Saint of Children's Television.

“Gospel According to Mister Rogers: It's a Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood” – Intro & Community, Mister Rogers' philosophy – Micah 6:8; Psalm 117; 2 Corinthians 6:3-11

“Gospel According to Mister Rogers: I Like You Just the Way You Are!” - Be the you that God made you to be; Appreciating our uniqueness - Genesis 1:26-27; Psalm 139:1-14; 1Corinthians 15:42-49 (Matthew 19:13-15)

“Gospel According to Mister Rogers: Look for the Helpers” – Bad days & Good days & Feelings – 1 Chronicles 12:16-18; Psalm 121; Hebrews 13:1-2, 3-8

“Gospel According to Mister Rogers: Hello Neighbor” – What it means to Love your neighbor – Proverbs 3:27-30; Matthew 5:43-48

“Gospel According to Mister Rogers: Some Things Change, Some Things Stay the Same” - Sharing Responsibility in the Community – Isaiah 43:18-21; Psalm 100; 1 Corinthians 12:12-26

“Gospel According to Mister Rogers: You are Special”
Deuteronomy 7:6-9; Psalm 86:11-13; Matthew 19:13-15

GOSPEL ACCORDING TO PEANUTS

“You Shall GOD Your Neighbor as Yourself”

Micah 6:8, John 13:34, 1 John 4:10-11, 16

Resources: “You Shall GOD Your Neighbor As Yourself” from The Parables of Peanuts by Robert L. Short, chapter 9 and “The New Neighbor” from The Peanuts Movie – Movie Novelization by Schulz

“Where Your Blanket Is, There Will Your Heart Be Also”

Isaiah 40:1-5, 25-31, Luke 6:22-23, Matthew 4:8-11, 1 Timothy 6:17-19

Resources: “Where Your Blanket Is, There Will Your Heart Be Also” from The Parables of Peanuts by Robert L. Short, chapter 4 and “Something in Common”, “Dance” and “Birds of a Feather” from The Peanuts Movie – Movie Novelization by Schulz

“The Doctor is IN. Advice. 5 Cents”

Psalm 84:3-4, Matthew 9:20-22, 1 Thessalonians 5:17

Resources: “Slip-ups, Doghouses, and Free Psychiatric Help” from The Parables of Peanuts by Robert L. Short, chapter 12

“Good Grief”

Ezekiel 36:26-28, Mark 11:22-23, Hebrews 4:12-13, Romans 9:19-21

Resources: “Good Grief” from The Gospel According to Peanuts by Robert L. Short, chapter IV and “The Broken Heart” from The Parables of Peanuts by Robert L. Short, chapter 6

“Just Who is in Charge Here?”

Isaiah 40:9-14, Romans 12:1-8, Ephesians 2:4-10

Resources: “Just Who’s in Charge Here?” from The Parables of Peanuts by Robert L. Short, chapter 11 and “Why Choose Me?” & “The Tree” from The Peanuts Movie – Movie Novelization by Schulz

We showed “The Peanuts Movie” mid Summer - maybe you can do a Drive-in Movie Night outside?

Bulletin Covers were Peanut Cartoons that related to the Sunday Theme – Mostly pulled from “The Pastor Is In: A Thirty Day Faith Devotional Inspired by Peanuts” by Rigel J. Dawson featuring the comic strips of Charles M. Schulz and The Gospel According to Peanuts by Robert L. Short

For this series I just used Litanies that fit the scripture but I think you could adapt confession & prayers to use some Peanuts language.

“The Gospel According to Pixar”

This summer series is intended to connect Christianity with our everyday lives, using the powerful illustration found in the films made by Pixar Animation Studios. Over fifteen years, Pixar has produced remarkable films that speak in fresh terms about the reality of life and the complexities of the human heart. In these films are the closest thing we have to modern-day folk tales. Offering hope, imagination, beauty and a degree of purity, virtue and innocence that is counter cultural to our society.

“*Toy Story 2*” – Friendship – Theology of Friendship

“You’ve got a Friend in me.”

Mark 12:28-31; John 15:13-17

“*The Incredibles*” - Courage

“Be Incredibly Strong & Courageous”; The problem of being a “Super”
Joshua 1:6-7,9,18; Mark 8:34-36; Matthew 16:25; Luke 9:24; John 12:25

“*Cars*” – Adventure – “Life is a Journey”

What keeps us from having the adventure God intends for us?

Exodus 3,4,7; Matthew 6:33-34; John 14:6-7

“*A Bug’s Life*” - Justice - “The Golden Rule”

Making a difference in favor of justice

Isaiah 1:16-17; Micah 6:8; Matthew 7:7-12; Luke 11:5-13; Mark 12:29-31

“*Ratatouille*” – Ambition - Using your gifts to make a difference in the world.

“I’m tired of taking. I want to make things. I want to add something to this world.”

Matthew 18:1-5; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11; 2 Corinthians 5:7-9;

“*Up*” – Love – The Greatest Commandment

“I have just me & you, and I love you!”

Isaiah 65:16-17; Matthew 22:36-40; Romans 8:35-39; 1 Corinthians 13:1-8a,13; 1 John 4:7-12,16.

Use clips of the Movies in Worship since all are not familiar to most.

Show “*A Bug’s Life*” the week before as a Fellowship Movie?