

Fourth Sunday of Advent, Year B

"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed . . ."

- [Revised Common Lectionary Readings](#)
- [Worship Notes](#)
- [Resources in *The United Methodist Book of Worship*](#)



Latin [introduction to the Song of Mary \(Magnificat\)](#), one of many plaques containing the song itself in many languages at the Church of the Visitation, Ein Karem, Israel.

Photo by “Tango7174.” Used by permission. [CC BY-SA 3.0](#). The painting reads: “Mary entered into the home of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.

And it came to pass that when Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the child in her womb rejoiced. And being filled with the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth cried out, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!” And Mary said to her: “My soul magnifies the Lord...”

Revised Common Lectionary Readings

See the texts, artwork and Revised Common Lectionary Prayers for this service at the [Vanderbilt Divinity Library](#).)

Leccionario en Español, [Leccionario Común Revisado: Consulta Sobre Textos Comunes](#).

Para obtener más recursos leccionario, [Estudios Exegético: Homiléticos](#).

2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16

Nathan brings good news and a reality check to David. The good news: God intends to establish David's lineage permanently, though conditionally. The reality: God has been present with God's people by being in their midst as they have traveled (the tabernacle, "incarnation") and has no need for David to build a temple.

Luke 1:47-55.

The Song of Mary. If you don't hear and feel Mary pregnant with the end of this age and the hope for the coming one in this song, you're not listening or singing her song yet!

Romans 16:25-27.

A concluding doxology that joins the eternal praise of God for revealing the mystery of salvation intended for the whole world in Jesus Christ.

Luke 1:26-38.

The angel Gabriel announces to Mary that she will become pregnant by God and bear the Son of the Most High whose throne will be eternal. She consents. Do we?

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Worship Notes

Calendar

Today is the last Sunday in Advent. Every year, the final Sunday in Advent focuses in some way on Mary. In Year A, the focus is on Mary's visitation to Elizabeth and her song, the Magnificat (so named because in Latin its first words are "Magnificat anima mea Dominum," My soul magnifies the Lord). Mary's song captures the implications of the Advent of God's kingdom in the Advent of Christ upon the whole world, God lifting up the lowly, taking down the lofty, feeding the hungry and sending the rich away empty.

The season of Advent concludes with sunset, December 24, this coming Wednesday. So whatever additional resources you have developed or practices you have encouraged throughout this season should continue until the Christmas Eve services, if not longer.

This night, December 21, is also "Longest Night," the Winter Solstice. Here are five resources to consider if you wish to have a special service this night.

[A Longest Night Service of Word and Table](#) (McCoy/Burton-Edwards)

[A Service of Refection for Longest Night](#) (Benedict/Hawaiian)

[Blue Christmas? Or Longest Night Communion?](#) (Reflection on the practice)

[Blue Christmas: Music Musing 28](#) (Dean McIntyre)

[Blue Christmas: Longest Night with Those Who Mourn](#) (Benedict)

See our webinar, "[Planning for Advent 2014](#)," for five different approaches to planning for this season in ways that enable you to celebrate both Advent and Christmas Season as fully as possible.

See also our [extensive collection of Advent and Christmas Season leadership and worship resources.](#)

December

December 24/25 [Christmas Eve/Day](#) Resources

December 31 [Watch Night](#)

January

January 1 [New Year](#) or [Holy Name of Jesus](#)

January 4/6 [Epiphany Sunday/Epiphany](#)

January 11 [Baptism of the Lord](#) (also [this](#)) [Human Trafficking Awareness Day](#)

January 18 [Human Relations Day](#) ([Discipleship Ministries Resources](#))
[Week of Prayer for Christian Unity](#)

January 19 [Martin Luther King Jr. Day](#)

January 25 [Ecumenical Sunday](#) in The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

February

All Month: [Black History Month](#) (USA)

February 8 [Scouting Ministries Sunday](#) (USA)

February 15 [Transfiguration of the Lord](#)

February 18 [Ash Wednesday](#)

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Atmospherics: Advent 4—Glorying in the Promised End to Come

Every Sunday in Advent focuses on the end of all things in the coming of Jesus Christ. We have seen the need for God to make such an end. We have heard the call to prepare our lives now for the judgment and end to come. We have rejoiced in the salvation we already experience and that is promised for us in the age to come.

Today, the final Sunday of Advent, is also segue to Christmas Season. But as segue, in Year B, this Sunday addresses not the birth, but the story from **Luke**'s gospel of the announcement to Mary that the birth would happen, and through her. Solemn joy continues. And so does the sense of anticipation. We join this anticipation, as Mary does in her song, not as an anticipation of a birth. That birth has already happened. We cannot anticipate it now, unless we're kind of pretending.

But we're not pretending. Instead, we really join the real anticipation of what Mary anticipated, sang about, and still lies ahead as part of Christ's second coming. We anticipate with her the day when the hungry will be filled with good things while the rich are sent empty away, the thrones of the mighty will be toppled and those kept down will rise, the humble will be exalted, and the prideful will be scattered.

We still wait for that. But we wait, like Mary, as those made pregnant by the Holy Spirit, bearers of the image of Christ, and members of his body. So we wait with hope. We wait with joy. We wait in suffering and in solidarity with all who suffer until it comes. But we wait, together, in confidence that it will.

Today, these moments of anticipation are the linchpin of our celebration.

The [Advent Wreath Meditation](#) for today includes excerpts from both readings from Luke. It would be a very appropriate way to begin worship. Remember the character of these words—they are annunciation and exclamation. Voice them accordingly! Then sing a hymn of entrance that likewise voices the annunciatory and exclamatory character of Mary’s Song. Here are several suggestions:

“Tell Out My Soul,” UMH 200

“My Soul Gives Glory to My God,” UMH 198

“Canticle of the Turning,” *Upper Room Worshipbook* 18

We move in this service from glory to glory, from Mary’s song to Paul’s benediction in **Romans**. This reading would function as a great segue into another hymn of praise, such as “Glory to God” (Gloria a Dios) from *The Faith We Sing*, 2033, or, “Hark, the Herald Angels Sing” (UMH 240), or the “Gloria in excelsis” from “Angels We Have Heard on High” (UMH 238).

With such a bold opening, we may be ready to move to some counterpoise in readings and response.

You may wish to do the reading from **2 Samuel** next.

This reading may seem an odd one for today. We’ve been focused on rejoicing in what the coming One will finally accomplish, and here we read of what appears to be a case of failed ambition.

But only if we fail to read carefully.

Why does God tell David not to build a temple?

Because, God says, in effect, that’s not Who I Am. I am not a God who becomes localized or domesticated. I am a God who moves with and among the people. (2 Samuel 7:6-7). God has no interest in David building a house for God. God wants to build a house out of David and his lineage (7:11, 16).

God is the God on the move who builds relationships with people to strengthen people.

David stands for Christ, his descendent, and for us, Christ’s body. All that Mary sings and Paul prays is what we have been baptized to bear witness to, and to be agents of, with this ever-moving God in the world.

Advent is a time of anticipating not just Christ’s coming, but our coming into our fullness in Christ as we go on the move with him in the power of the Spirit here and now.

A note to pastors and worship planners here: You may be sorely tempted to be more “building bound” than ever this time of the year. You may have lavished lots of time decorating your worship space with greens, trees, poinsettias, garlands, and Advent wreath. These are fine things to do in anticipation of the celebration of incarnation at Christmas Season. But they also present a challenge, do they not, to the nature of our Advent calling, articulated here by Gabriel, Mary, Paul and Nathan. God is on the move (Nathan). God calls us to listen and obey (Gabriel, Paul). God invites us to live into and toward that day about which Mary could only explode in song (Mary). Every witness calls us beyond our buildings, even and especially on this day when we may be about as focused on them as we will be at any time throughout the year.

Advent continues through this Wednesday night. Inspire and challenge your congregation today to stay on the move with this God. Give them concrete opportunities to be witnesses in the world, between now and Christmas Eve, of the things Mary sang about already coming to pass.

Sing with rejoicing. Read boldly. Preach powerfully. Pray Mary's song, too. Celebrate around the Lord's Table. And send folks forth on a note of ecstasy and commitment to the way of Jesus in daily life that will only continue to crescendo through Christmastide.

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Resources in *The United Methodist Book of Worship/UM Hymnal/Worship & Song* and Other Suggestions

Greeting & Entrance:

- BOW 242 (2 Samuel)
- BOW 243 (Romans)
- BOW 245 (Luke)
- *Worship & Song*, 3017, "Come, Join the Dance of Trinity." The text is cosmic in scope. The tune is a Renaissance dance, almost a jig. Revel in it as you begin worship today!

Response to the Word

- *The Upper Room Worshipbook*, 18, "Canticle of the Turning" – A version of Mary's Song set to the same tune as "Come, Join the Dance of Trinity." Keep the Renaissance dance feel, but with different instrumentation, and perhaps more energetic rhythms or even dancing. Consider inviting everyone to jump and turn around at the words "And the world is about to turn" at the end of each line.

Opening Prayer:

- BOW 253 (Advent), BOW 473 (Luke), BOW 256 (Luke)

Confession and Pardon:

- UMH, p. 8
- Let us confess our brokenness and sin to God and to one another:
**God of David and Mary, we confess our impatience and lack of discipline.
The pace of the holidays sweeps us along like leaves before the wind.
We are set on what we want
so that we are blind and deaf to angels.
We are not yet prepared to say with Mary,
"Let it be to me according to your word."
We need moments of stillness,
even in snarled traffic or noisy store,
when Christ is conceived in us.
We yearn for love to find a home in us.
Forgive us for attitudes and anxieties that keep you out.
Turn our hearts and spirits toward you and each other
in acts of compassion and justice,
through Jesus who brings your rule among the nations. Amen.**

- (silence)
[Here continue with the pardon sequence as on UMH p. 8.]

Concerns and Prayers:

- BOW 256 (Luke), BOW 255 (Advent), BOW 257 (Luke)
- BOW 527 (2 Samuel, Luke) — Consider the use of visuals with this form, such as various containers — including the baptismal font — as both font and womb
- [Ecumenical Prayer Cycle](#): *Ghana, Nigeria*

The Great Thanksgiving: BOW 54-55

Prayer of Thanksgiving if there is no Communion: BOW 552

Dismissal with Blessing: BOW 563

:

A Great Thanksgiving for Advent

by Taylor Burton-Edwards

Prepare the way of the Lord!
Straighten our crooked paths, O God!

The day of the Christ's coming draws near.
Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

The Spirit of the Lord is in this place.
Pray through us now, Holy Spirit.

Pray through us now,
that we may praise you,
Holy, Triune God,
with angels and archangels,
with beings in heaven and all creatures on earth,
with all who have ever sung this hymn of praise:

**Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts,
Heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest!**

**Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest!**

Blessed are you, Jesus Christ,

Word made flesh,
making all things new.

Blessed are you, Jesus Christ!

Blessed are you, Holy Spirit,
dissolving every chain of sin that binds us,
rebuking every power that enslaves,
purifying our hearts,
challenging every action not moved by love,
and setting all creation free.

Blessed are you, Holy Spirit.

Blessed are you, El Shaddai,
feeding your people,
gathering us like lambs in your arms,
and leading us to life eternal.

Blessed are you, El Shaddai!

We know the end that lies before us and all things:
The elemental powers of this universe shall be burned away,
the heavens vaporized,
the earth and all our doings exposed for all to see.

We know the end, and we tremble.

We also know your promise,
out of conflagration to re-create,
out of chaos to re-order,
out of such destruction to renew.

We know your promise, and we rejoice.

We rejoice, for you are with us,
coming to us in flesh long ago,
coming into our flesh in bread and cup at this, Christ's table,
coming into this world through your Church
in the power of the Spirit,
and coming again to complete what you have begun,
and now feed us to continue.

Feed us, O God.

Feed us as Jesus fed his disciples
on the night he was betrayed,
taking bread, blessing you, breaking it,
saying to those to whom he gave it:

This is my body given for you. Take, eat, and remember me.

Quench our thirst now as Jesus did that night,
taking cup, giving thanks to you,
and saying to those to whom he gave it:

This is my blood poured out for you. Drink, and remember me.

Only you can feed us, God.

Only you can make us holy.

Only you can prepare us for the end to come.

Only you can purify our hearts.

So come, Holy Spirit,
on these gifts of bread and wine,
and on us.

Come, Holy Spirit.

Feed us with the bread that lasts forever,
the body of Christ.

Slake our thirst with the cup of immortality,
the blood of Christ.

Come, Holy Spirit.

And so nourish us in holy living,
today and all our days,
that on that day
when all things are recreated,
and on these days
as we wait for the fullness to come,
the world may see and know in us
the love that moves the universe
to its true end in new beginning
through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

By him, with him, and in him,
united in the power of the Holy Spirit,
all honor and glory are yours,
seated upon the Throne,
one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

2014 Advent Wreath Meditations: Fourth Sunday of Advent (McIntyre)

by Dean McIntyre

Fourth Sunday of Advent: December 21, 2014

[Light the first three candles of the Advent wreath.]

After the angel came to Mary and told her that she would conceive the child in her womb and would call him Jesus, Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” ([Luke 1:38, NRSV.](#))

And Mary sings her Song of Praise:

...My soul magnifies the Lord...he has scattered the proud

...He has brought down the powerful from their thrones

...He has lifted up the lowly

...He has filled the hungry

...He has provided for the poor ([Luke 1:46-55](#))

We marvel at Mary, the mother of the Messiah, herself a single, teenaged mother, herself poor and powerless. But she understood that the baby she would call Jesus was sent, not just to her, but to the world...

...To the hungry

...To the weak

...To the very young and the very old

...To those who suffer or are in pain

[Light the fourth candle of the Advent wreath.]

We light this fourth candle to remember Mary, the mother of Jesus. May the light of this candle also remind us that the light of Jesus shines for everyone.

ALL: COME, LORD JESUS. AMEN.

Recommended Songs:

- “Come, Let Us Dream,” *Worship & Song*, no. 3157, st. 2&3
- “Star Child,” *The Faith We Sing*, no. 2095
- “Sing of Mary, Pure and Lowly,” *The United Methodist Hymnal*, no. 272, st. 1

Links



[First Sunday of Advent](#)

[Second Sunday of Advent](#)

[Third Sunday of Advent](#)

[Christmas Eve](#)

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Here I Am: A 21st Century Worship Resource for the Fourth Sunday of Advent, Year B

by Carlene Lenore

An Interpretation of Luke 1:26-38

(For 2 Readers)

Mary (*pensively*): I see an angel, Lord. What are you sending this messenger to say? What have I done? Lord, please open my ears that I may hear and understand him.

Angel: Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.

Mary: Sir, please explain. The Lord is with me? I am favored?

Angel: Be calm! God has chosen you. Very soon your womb will be filled with a son, and his name will be Jesus. God has a great future planned for him. He will be called the Son of the Most High; God will give him King David's throne; He will always rule over Jacob's house, and His kingdom will have no end.

Mary (*gasp*): A son? (*pause*) I am engaged to Joseph and ... we are waiting ... I am still a virgin ... (*Pauses, looks at the angel and ands says slowly*) Say that again?

Angel: This will happen differently. The Holy Spirit will deposit this child in you. He will be born holy and called the Son of God. God can do anything! Do you remember what He did for your cousin Elizabeth? Now it is your turn to see him do something miraculous for you. So...

Mary (*tenderly*): Here I am Lord. I believe you can do anything. Yes, I am willing to be your servant. You must really trust me ...

Mary (*prayerfully*): Lord, I heard and reflected on what Gabriel said. Here's my unused womb. Use it to bear the Gift of your Son to the world. It is your plan and it is my will.

(*Softly begin the song "Here I am to Worship" as Mary's voice trails...*)

Mary: I wonder, what will Joseph think? What will others think? ...

Carlene Lenore is a member of Kairos Community African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church located in Antioch, Tennessee.

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Love Inconceivable Came Down to Earth: A 21st Century Resource for the Third Sunday of Advent

by Ciona Rouse

Gathering

Leader:

Joy indescribable,
Hope unbelievable,
Love inconceivable came down to earth!

All:

**We gather excitedly,
We stand expectantly,
We wait patiently for Christ to come again!**

Confession

Lord, we confess that we are anxious. As we prepare to celebrate the Messiah's birth, we also wait for Jesus to come again. Sometimes we are hopeless when we think of peace. Sometimes we are doubtful when we think of healing. Sometimes we cannot imagine what it will be like to see your full glory. Yes, we wait; but we confess that we are sometimes impatient, Lord.

Words of Assurance

Christ is coming again. Believe! God will help our unbelief.

Ciona Rouse is a freelance writer and a former staff member of the General Board of Discipleship, Nashville, TN.

From the [Africana Worship Book for Year A](#). Copyright Discipleship Resources. Used with permission.

Blue Christmas/Longest Night Worship With Those Who Mourn

Blue? Yes, blue as in the blues. As in "I am feeling blue." Not everyone is up and cheery for the Christmas holidays. Dealing with the death of a loved one, facing life after divorce or separation, coping with the loss of a job, living with cancer or some other dis-ease that puts a question mark over the future, and a number of other human situations make parties and joviality painful for many people in our congregations and communities. There is a growing attentiveness to the needs of people who are blue at Christmas. Increasing numbers of churches are creating sacred space for people living through dark times. Such services are reflective, accepting where we really are, and holding out healing and hope.

Some churches hold a service of worship on the longest night of the year, which falls on or about December 21st, the Winter Solstice. There is an interesting convergence for this day as it is also the traditional feast day for Saint Thomas the Apostle. This linkage invites making some connections between Thomas's struggle to believe the tale of Jesus' resurrection, the long nights just before Christmas, and the struggle with darkness and grief faced by those living with loss.

If you are looking for resources and ideas about how to plan such a service for your setting, or if you just want to know what a "Blue Christmas Service" is, the following links should be helpful to you.

Articles that further explore the concept of "Blue Christmas" and Longest Night services:

["Blue Christmas services a comfort for many"](#) by Tiffany Vail

Hymns and songs in *The United Methodist Hymnal (UMH)* and *The Faith We Sing (TFWS)*

- 205 Canticle of Light and Darkness (UMH)

- 211 O Come, O Come, Emmanuel (UMH)
- 221 In the Bleak Midwinter (UMH)
- 223 Break Forth, O Beauteous Heavenly Light (UMH)
- 230 O Little Town of Bethlehem (UMH)
- 452 My Faith Looks Up to Thee (UMH)
- 461 For Those Who Grieve (prayer) (UMH)
- 505 When Our Confidence Is Shaken (St. Thomas connection especially) (UMH)
- 516 Canticle of Redemption (Psalm 130) (UMH)
- 525 Well Understand It By and By (UMH)
- 854 Psalm 139 (UMH)
- 2199 Stay With Us (a wonderful simple healing song) (TFWS)
- 2204 Light of the World (especially if Holy Communion is celebrated) (TFWS)

Resources for weaving in St. Thomas the Apostle, whose feast day is on December 21st

Collect for Saint Thomas, December 21

Everliving God, who didst strengthen thy apostle Thomas with firm and certain faith in thy Son's resurrection: Grant us so perfectly and without doubt to believe in Jesus Christ, our Lord and our God, that our faith may never be found wanting in thy sight; through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Scripture Readings:

Habakkuk 2:1-4

Psalm 126

Hebrews 10:35-11:1

John 20:24-29

All of the texts in the Book of Common Prayer are available [online](#). All of the texts are public domain and those used here are gratefully acknowledged.

This page was compiled by Daniel Benedict, who is retired from the staff of the General Board of Discipleship.

Blue Christmas: A Service of Reflection for the Longest Night

by The Cathedral Church of Saint Andrew, Honolulu, HI

[This service was used at The Cathedral Church of Saint Andrew, Honolulu, HI. The service is available by arrangement with the cathedral's Provost, The Very Rev. Timothy W. Sexton. Churches wishing to use this service in whole or in part should acknowledge the source with this or a similar attribution: "The 'Blue Christmas' service used today/tonight is based on an order developed and used at The Cathedral Church of Saint Andrew, Honolulu Hawaii." [For additional commentary and notes on the service, click here.](#)]

Call to Worship

Officiant: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
All things were made by God, and without God nothing came to be.
What came to be through God was life, and this life was the light of the world.

People: The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Welcome

Hymn (Tune: *St. Louis*)

Sung by all, standing

O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie;
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by
Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light
The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.

For Christ is born of Mary, and gathered all above,
While mortals sleep, the angels keep their watch of wondering love
O morning stars together, proclaim the holy birth
And praises sing to God the King, and peace to men on earth.

How silently, how silently, the wondrous Gift is given;
So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of his heaven.
No ear may hear his coming, but in this world of sin
Where meek souls will receive him still, the dear Christ enters in.

O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us we pray
Cast out our sin, and enter in, be born in us this day
We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell
O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel.

The First Reading: Ecclesiastes 3:1-11

(All sit)

Psalm 22

(All read the boldface verses together.)

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from helping me, so far from the words of my groaning?

**O my God, I cry by day but you do not answer,
and by night, but I find no rest.**

In you, our ancestors trusted. They trusted and you delivered them.

**It was you who brought me from the womb,
you who kept me safe on my mother's breast.**

Since my mother bore me, you have been my God.

Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help.

God does not despise the affliction of the afflicted.

God does not hide from me.

When I cry to God, God hears me.

Thanks be to God.

Psalm 23

(All read together.)

The LORD is my shepherd; *

I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; *

he leadeth me beside the still waters.

He restoreth my soul; *

he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his Name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

I will fear no evil; *

for thou art with me;

thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies; *

thou annointest my head with oil;

my cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, *

and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

Music Interlude

The Second Reading: Isaiah 40

(Selected verses)

Memory Stars

(As people entered the cathedral, ushers gave each person several paper stars with ornament hooks and a marker.

Following the second reading from Isaiah 40, people were invited to write on each star their concerns for others or their own concerns).

Music Interlude

Litany of Remembrance

(The first candle is lighted.)

Officiant: We light this first candle to remember those whom we have loved and lost.
We pause to remember clearly, their faces, their voices, their bodies.
We embrace and give thanks for the memories that bind them to us in this season of expectation,
when all Creation waits for the Light.

All: We remember them with love. May God's eternal love surround them.

**O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here, until the son of God appear
Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.**

A period of silent reflection

The second candle is lighted.

Officiant: We light this second candle to remember the pain of loss:
loss of relationships, loss of trust, loss of jobs, loss of health, loss of faith, the loss of joy.
We acknowledge and embrace the pain of the past, O God, and we offer it to You,
asking that into our wounded hearts and open hands You will place the gift of peace, shalom.

**All: We remember that through You all things are possible.
Refresh, restore, renew us, O God, and lead us into Your future.**

**O come thou Wisdom from on high, who orderest all things mightily
To us the path of knowledge show, and teach us in her ways to go
Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.**

A period of silent reflection

The third candle is lighted.

Officiant: We light this third candle to remember ourselves this Christmas time.
We pause and remember the past weeks, months, and for some of us years, that have been heavy with our
burdens.
We accept and lay before you, God, the sharpness of memory, the sadness and grief, the hurt and fear, the anger
and pain.
We accept and lay before you the ways we feel we have fallen short, and the times we have spent blaming
ourselves, and you,
for all that we have suffered.
We accept and lay before you the time we have walked alone, in darkness; and in knowledge of our own
mortality.

**All: We remember that though we have journeyed far, and that, while lost, we may have turned away from the light,
the light itself has not failed.**

**We remember that though winter be upon us and though the night be dark,
with the turning of the Wheel the dawn will come, and dawn defeats the darkness.**

**O come thou day-spring, come and cheer our spirits by thy advent here
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night, and death's dark shadows put to flight
Rejoice, rejoice Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.**

A period of silent reflection

The fourth candle is lighted.

Officiant: We light this fourth candle to remember faith, the gift of light and hope that God offers to us in the stories of Hanukkah and of Christmas, which both also began in abandonment, insecurity, and humbleness, in a time of war and in a poor stable. We remember that the loving God who kept the light shining in the temple and who came to share this life with us promises us comfort and peace.

**All: We remember the One who shares our burdens, who shows us the way to the Light,
and who journeys with us into all our tomorrows.**

**O come desire of nations, bind in one the hearts of all mankind
Bid then our sad, divisions cease, and be thyself our King of Peace
Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.**

A period of silent reflection

The Prayers of the People
(All stand.)

Leader: God of wisdom, we come to you this Christmas Season tired, in turmoil, and in pain. As the nights have grown longer, so has darkness grown and wrapped itself around our hearts. In this season of longest night, we ask your healing blessings upon all that we carry in our hearts -- sorrow we fear may never end, wounds we cannot even put into words.

Lord, hear our prayer,

All: And in Your merciful love, answer.

Leader: God of mercy and compassion, there are those among us who are grieving over what might have been. Death or loss or terrible hurt has changed our experience of Christmas.

We remember that once it was a special day for us, too, but someone or something precious has gone away from us in this life.

We have lost a beloved, a job, a goal, a cause, a dream. We find ourselves adrift and alone.

We are weary from the journey, and we have found no room at the inn.

We come to you seeking rest, and peace, and shelter from the storm. Lord, hear our prayer.

All: And in Your merciful love, answer.

Leader: God of grace, in the spirit of the season, grant us all that we need to comfort us as we journey through

this Christmas season.

We ask that you shelter and sustain all those of us, both here and throughout the world, who wander or want or weep or are heavy laden,
that we may be lifted up in courage and journey on in Thy peace. Lord, hear our prayer.

All: And in Your merciful love, answer.

Leader: God of love, in this Christmas Season we embrace and offer up to you all that used to be which is now lost to us, and cannot be again.

With celebration all around us, memories of what was, and fears of what may be, weigh heavy on our hearts. Please hold us close in your embrace, be near to us this night, until the light returns and morning comes.

Lord, hear our prayer,

All: And in Your merciful love, answer.

Officiant: Keep watch, dear Lord, with those who work, or watch, or weep this night, and give thine angels charge over those who sleep.

Tend the sick, Lord; give rest to the weary, bless the dying, soothe the suffering, pity the afflicted, shield the joyous; and all for thy love's sake. Amen.

Hymn (*Tune: American*)

(*Sung by all, standing.*)

Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,
the little lord Jesus laid down his sweet head
The stars in the sky looked down where he lay,
the little lord Jesus asleep in the hay.

The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes,
but little Lord Jesus no crying he makes.
I love thee, lord Jesus, look down from the sky
And stay by my cradle till morning is nigh.

Be near me lord Jesus, I ask thee to stay
Close by me forever and love me, I pray.
Bless all the dear children in thy tender care
And take me to heaven to live with thee there.

Third Reading: Luke 2:1-7

(*All sit.*)

Offering of Light

Officiant: One legend we celebrate in this season tells how a few brave fighters, defending their temple, had only enough oil to light the sacred lamp for one day, but it burned eight days until relief arrived. Another legend tells how in a little hill town a homeless couple with tax problems took shelter in a stable among the animals and gave birth to a light that would change the world.

Let us pray.

All: Gentle God of love, help us reach out together for the light of faith, for renewal and recovery and a new day coming.

Grant that hope may come to rest in our hearts, and let it go forth with us into the darkness, this night and in the nights to come, until we see the dawn.

Officiant: Lighten our darkness, we beseech you, O God; give us light in the night season; and by your great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night. Amen.

Anthem *(Trad. Appalachian)*

Guide me, O thou great Jehovah, pilgrim through this barren land.
I am weak, but thou art mighty; hold me with thy powerful hand.
Bread of heaven, feed me till I want no more

Open now the crystal fountain whence the healing stream doth flow;
Let the fiery, cloudy pillar lead me all my journey through.
Strong deliverer, be thou still my strength and shield. *(From Exodus 13:21)*

Tapers found near the Advent Wreath may be placed in the tub with sand.

Psalm 122

(All read together.)

**I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills,
from whence cometh my help.
My help cometh from the Lord,
who hath made heaven and earth.
He will not suffer thy foot to be moved;
he that keepeth thee will not slumber;
behold, the God that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.
The Lord is thy keeper; the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand.
The sun shall not smite thee by day nor the moon at night.
The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil and shall sustain thy soul.
He shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in,
from this time forth and even forevermore.**

Prayer

(All stand)

Officiant: Let us pray.

**All: Almighty God, we thank you for your constant love and for the blessings of this day.
We know that even when we cannot see or feel you, still you are there.
Help us to remember you and to listen for your voice in the words of family, friends, and strangers.
Kindle our hearts and awaken hope, that we may know you as you reveal yourself in the world and in our lives.
Let the light of your holy Spirit shine like these candles in the darkness,
lighting the way for all who feel despairing, lost, or forgotten,
and grant that it may come to dwell so deeply in our hearts
that when we leave this place it may shine on, for us and for those we meet along the way. Amen.**

Hymn *(Tune: Stille nacht)*

(Sung by all, standing.)

Silent night, holy night,

All is calm, all is bright
Round yon Virgin Mother and Child,
Holy Infant, so tender and mild.
Sleep in heavenly peace.

Silent night, holy night,
Shepherds quake at the sight;
Glories stream from heaven afar,
Heav'nly hosts sing alleluia;
Christ, the Savior, is born!

Silent night, holy night,
Son of God, love's pure light
Radiant beams from thy holy face,
With the dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus, Lord, at thy birth.

Concluding Prayers

(Remain standing.)

Officiant: Let us pray.

All: Another day will come, O God.

I know not what it may bring forth, but make me ready, God, for whatever it may be.

If I am to stand up, help me to stand bravely.

If I am to sit still, help me to sit quietly.

If I am to lie low, help me to do it patiently.

And if I am to do nothing, help me do it gallantly.

Make these words more than words, and give me the Spirit of thy Peace. Amen.

Officiant: O God, support us all the day long in this troubled life,
until the shadows lengthen and the evening comes, and the busy world is hushed,
and the fever of life is over, and our work is done.
Then Lord, in thy mercy, grant us safe lodging, and a holy rest, and peace at the last. Amen.

Blessing and Dismissal

Officiant: The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you;
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace, both now and forever more. Amen.

Officiant: The peace of the Lord be always with you.

People And also with you.

People may greet one another in the name of the Lord.

Cathedral Church of St. Andrew, 229 Queen Emma Square, Honolulu, HI 96813; 808-524-2822;
saintandrewscathedral.net

A Service of Word and Table for Longest Night/Blue Christmas

by The Rev. Robb McCoy with Taylor Burton-Edwards

Where I am in Moline, Illinois, the longest night of 2012 will begin at 4:35 on Friday, December 21. Wherever you are, I suggest you start this service half an hour before sunset.

This service is especially designed for people who have lost loved ones in the past year. Be sure to invite all families that have had funerals in the last year. You may wish to contact local hospital, hospice and other institutional chaplains as well.

Preparing the Worship Space

Place one or two large vases with water and dead, gray sticks coming out of them in a prominent place near the Lord's Table. Place unlit votive candles around the vase.

Place a supply of blue or purple carnations or roses near the entrance so greeters may hand one to each person who enters.

If you use an Advent wreath, light three candles before the service.

ENTRANCE

Call to Worship

Many in this season are ready to sing "Joy to the World." Whether this is the first Christmas without someone we love, or we are still hurting from loss or suffering for a long time, we gather this evening as darkness comes to worship God in the midst of mourning. We gather to shed tears if they come, to hold hands if they are available, and to join our voices with one another and our forebears in the faith who still cry out, "How long?"

And so we pray:

Come, Holy Spirit.

Comfort us and all who mourn this night.

Give us strength to grieve as we must.

Help us receive your healing in the midst of our pain,

and find new order after the chaos of loss;

through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Hymn

Suggestions from *Worship & Song*

"We Cannot Measure How You Heal" (3139)

"Hear My Prayer, O God" (3131)

"In God Alone" (3135) -- Sing through quietly 5-7 times

Suggestions from *The Faith We Sing*

"Now It Is Evening" (2187)

"When We Are Called to Sing Your Praise" (2216)

"By the Babylonian Rivers" (2217)

Suggestions from *The United Methodist Hymnal*

"Out of the Depths I Cry to You" (515)

"Canticle of Redemption" (516)

"By Gracious Powers" (517)

"Nobody Knows the Trouble I See" (520)

"Saranam, Saranam" (523)

WORD AND RESPONSE

Psalm 80:1-7 (UMH 801) *Pray responsively or chant to Tone 2, UMH 737*

Silence (one minute or longer)

Leader: Restore us, O God of hosts.

All: Turn the light of your face toward us, that we may be saved.

Silence

Hebrews 10:32-39

Hymn

Suggestions from *Worship & Song*

"Give me Jesus" (3140)

"Holy Darkness" (3141)

"When the Waves are Crashing" (3144)

Suggestions from *The Faith We Sing*

"Why Stand So Far Away, My God?" (2180)

"Unsettled World" (2183)

"Faith is Patience in the Night" (2211)

"You Are Mine" (2218)

"Goodness Is Stronger than Evil" (2219)

Suggestions from *The United Methodist Hymnal*

"Beams of Heaven as I Go" (524)

"Nearer, My God, to Thee" (528)

"How Firm a Foundation" (529)

"Jesus, Priceless Treasure" (532)

"Be Still, My Soul" (534)

Homily: "In the Midst of Longest Night"

Act of Remembrance

Lights may be lowered.

Musicians: Play "Kyrie" (Worship & Song, 3133) or "O Lord, Hear My Prayer" (The Faith We Sing, 2200) quietly in several arrangements throughout this section, and to accompany the prayers of the people that follow.

Pastor to People: You were given a carnation as you entered. As the music plays, you are invited to place the flower among the sticks in one of the arrangements alongside the Lord's Table. Silently or aloud, say the name of the person, persons or situation of suffering or grief as you do so. Then light a votive candle from one of the Advent candles and take it to your seat and kneel in prayer as you are able."

Prayers of the People

Musicians: Hold the first chord of "Kyrie" or "O Lord, Hear My Prayer" as a "chanting tone" for the prayer leader for each of the intercessions, then accompany the congregation to sing the whole song.

Prayer leader: Pray or chant each intercession on the same tone, and then gesture for the congregation to join you in singing the response, "Kyrie" or "O Lord Hear My Prayer."

For all who seek you for restoration, and all who eat the bread of sorrow...

*(Sing "Kyrie," **Worship & Song**, 3331, or "O Lord, Hear My Prayer," **The Faith We Sing**, 2200)*

For all who are sick, weak, or worn down...

("Kyrie" ... or "O Lord, Hear My Prayer ")

For the sufferings of our ecosystems and our fellow creatures...

("Kyrie" ... or "O Lord, Hear My Prayer ")

For all who are abused and afflicted, and all those imprisoned, especially for the sake of the gospel...

("Kyrie" ... or "O Lord, Hear My Prayer ")

For all who have experienced loss through death, separation, or the ending of relationships...

("Kyrie" ... or "O Lord, Hear My Prayer ")

For the gifts of faith, hope, and endurance...
("Kyrie" ... or "O Lord, Hear My Prayer ")

For the forgiveness of our sins.....
("Kyrie" ... or "O Lord, Hear My Prayer ")

Pastor: Hear the prayers of your people, O God, forgiving our sins, and granting us and all for whom we pray the sure and certain knowledge of your saving love. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, One God forever.**Amen.**

Forgiven people of God, the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be always with you.
People: And also with you.

Share the peace of Christ with one another.

Great Thanksgiving

From *The United Methodist Book of Worship*
Great Thanksgiving for Advent, 54
Great Thanksgiving for All Saints and Memorial Occasions, 74
Great Thanksgiving for Services of Death and Resurrection, 150

From the [GBOD Website](#), adapted here:

The Lord be with you.
And also with you. Lift up your hearts.
We lift them up to the Lord.
Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
It is right to give our thanks and praise.

It is right, and a good and joyful thing,
always and everywhere to give thanks to you,
Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth.
From the silence before creation
your Word spoke all that is into being.
You saw the darkness and called forth light,
dividing the day from the night,
and giving each its name and your blessing.

We abused your blessing,
**choosing to control rather than tend,
to consume rather than nourish,
to turn away from your light,
and turn your darkness into a hiding place,
a place of fear and shame.**

Still you chose to bless us and redeem us,
calling us to restored fellowship
through prophets, leaders, and faithful people.

And so,
with your people on earth
and all the company of heaven
we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
Heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

Holy are you, and blessed is your Son Jesus Christ.

From the darkness of a stable,
you brought forth the light of the world,
He carried your light into every darkened corner,
calling those kept in darkness
to rejoice in your love,
and exposing those who hid from your Truth
to the light of your righteous judgment.

By the baptism of his suffering, death and resurrection you gave birth to your church, delivered us from slavery to sin and death, and made with us a new covenant by water and the Spirit.

On the night in which he gave himself up for us
he took bread, gave thanks to you, broke the bread,
gave it to his disciples, and said:
"Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you.
Do this in remembrance of me."

When the supper was over, he took the cup,
gave thanks to you, gave it to his disciples, and said:
"Drink from this, all of you;
this is my blood of the new covenant,
poured out for you and for many
for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this as often as you drink it,
in remembrance of me."

And so,
in remembrance of these your mighty acts in Jesus Christ,
we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving
as a holy and living sacrifice,
in union with Christ's offering for us,
as we proclaim the mystery of faith.

Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again.

Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here,
and on these gifts of bread and wine.
Make them to be for us the body and blood of Christ,
that we may be for the world the body of Christ,
redeemed by his blood.

By your Spirit, make us one with Christ in his sufferings,
one with each other in mutual love,
and one in ministry to all the world with healing grace,
until Christ comes in final victory,
and we feast at his heavenly banquet.

Through your Son Jesus Christ,
With the Holy Spirit in your holy church,
All honor and glory is yours, almighty Father,
now and forever.

Amen.

And now as our Savior Christ has taught us, we are bold to say:

The Lord's Prayer

The pastor breaks the bread and says:

Alleluia! In the midst of our longest night, Christ our Savior dwells among us!

Therefore let us keep the feast. Alleluia!

Songs during Communion

From *Worship & Song*

"Still" (3134)

"Lord Jesus Christ, Your Light Shines" (3137)

"There's a Spirit of Love in This Place" (3148)

"What Feast of Love" (3170)

From *The Faith We Sing*

"How Can I Keep from Singing" (2212)

"Come Now, O Prince of Peace" (2232)

"Here Is Bread, Here Is Wine" (2266)

"Taste and See" (2267)

From *The United Methodist Hymnal*

"O Thou, in Whose Presence" (518)

"Eat This Bread" (628)

"Una Espiga" (637)

Thanksgiving after Communion

(The Song of Simeon)

**Lord, you now have set your servant free
to go in peace as you have promised.
For these eyes of mine have seen the Savior
whom you have prepared for all the world to see:
A light to enlighten the nations,
and the glory of your people Israel.**

Blessing and Dismissal

May God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, bless us and keep us, this night and always.
Amen.

Hymn

From *Worship & Song*

"The Risen Christ" (3179)

"Benediction Hymn" (3182)

From *The Faith We Sing*

"When God Restored Our Common Life" (2182)

"Healer of Our Every Ill" (2213)

From *The United Methodist Hymnal*

"Lift Every Voice and Sing" (519)

"Precious Name" (536)

Pastor: You have seen the Savior!
Go now into this longest night
knowing the love of Christ
and of his people,
a love without end.

Thanks be to God.

The Rev. Robb McCoy is a United Methodist elder serving as Associate Pastor of Riverside United Methodist Church in Moline, Illinois. You may follow his [blog here](#). Another form of this service may be found [here](#).

Additional Resources for Longest Night/Blue Christmas

- [Blue Christmas \(Music Musing 28\)](#)
- [Blue Christmas and Longest Night Worship with Those Who Mourn](#)
- Tiffany Vail, ["Blue Christmas Services a Comfort for Many"](#)
- UMC Worship Blog, ["Blue Christmas? Or Longest Night Communion?"](#)

- [Notes for Luke 1:26-38E](#)
- [Notes for 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16](#)
- [Notes for Romans 16:25-27](#)

[Notes for Luke 1:26-38](#)

I mentioned in these notes last year around this time that every year for twenty-five years my father wrote a Christmas Sonnet. Each sonnet was based on the one of the lectionary readings for the fourth Sunday in Advent. So he has several sonnets for Year B of the lectionary, including one I will share in this post. The poem is about this text in which Mary is visited by the angel Gabriel and learns that she is pregnant and about to give birth to a baby boy, and that she is to name him Jesus.

For my father, writing poetry was a whole lot like what writing sermons is like for me. That is, what happens in the creation of a piece of creative writing, be it a sermon or a sonnet, is not really our work. Rather, it is a gift that each of us receives from God. The real “work” of writing a sermon is the opening yourself up to allow the grace of God to flow through you.

Whether a preacher engages that process while in the quiet of her home, in front of a computer screen, and tries to capture it on paper in advance of Sunday, or she allows that to happen live on Sunday morning in a more extemporaneous way doesn’t really matter. The process is pretty much the same for all of us, I think. Each one of us is really just a vessel through which the Holy Spirit is somehow revealed.

This sonnet is interesting to me in how it talks about Mary having a personal relationship with God. But before I make any further comments, let me share it with you. (Please note that you are welcome to read this poem in your worship service, but if you wish to print it please contact me (dchesser@gbod.org) for permission, so I can tell you how to credit it to my father.)

CHRISTMAS TREE

(Based on Luke 1:26-38)

For Mary, the personal relationship
 With God was harder by far than preachers tell.
 Just twelve, her dreamy adolescence eclipsed
 By the startling appearance of Gabriel
 And her bonded future with its prearranged
 Gold-bordered betrothal contract
 Summarily sullied and shortchanged
 By the Holy Spirit’s overshadowing act,
 Mary, more than anybody on earth,
 Knew God’s relationship was personal.
 She didn’t know her son’s calling, birth
 Through death, would be sacrificial.
 Consider her cross when you hang your tree.
 God’s love alone is our security.

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It was those first couple of lines that really caught me: “For Mary, the personal relationship with God was harder by far than preachers tell.” I think that is so true. People throw around those words so easily: “I have a

personal relationship with Jesus Christ,” or “I have a personal relationship with the Lord.” Or we sing lyrics that suggest that the nature of our relationship with God is intimate and very personal: “I am a friend of God,” “What a friend we have in Jesus,” “He walks with me and he talks with me and he tells me I am his own.”

We make it seem as if having a personal relationship with the creator of the universe is an easy and expected thing. As if all we have to do is SAY the words and they become true. I must confess, I’ve always struggled with this idea. Because I do think that having a personal relationship with God is “harder by far than preachers tell.”

What does it mean, after all, to be in a personal relationship with the Lord God? Does it mean that we talk to Jesus as if he is our best buddy, our closest confidant, our most cherished personal friend? Does it mean that we imagine Jesus as being a lot like us, only better?

Mary of all people in history knew what it was to have a personal relationship with God. And can you imagine?

Just like last week when I suggested you invite your congregation to try to picture John the Baptist, this week you might ask them to try to picture Mary. In all likelihood she was a very young girl. Scholars think Mary was only 12 or 13 years old when she became pregnant with Jesus.

Picture a young and innocent girl who has been betrothed to a carpenter named Joseph. According to ancient customs, Mary’s marriage to Joseph would have been arranged by her father. Betrothal was a legal contract, so even though Mary was still living at home until the period of betrothal ended with the marriage ceremony, if Joseph had died during the time of betrothal, Mary would have been considered a widow.

Picture her sleeping, there in the home of her parents where she lived, in the town of Nazareth, when suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared in her room. And the angel greets her and tells her the Lord had found favor with her.

Clearly Mary was shocked and frightened by the angel, because Luke reports that the angel told her not to be afraid. And as if fear itself were not enough to shake her world, the angel Gabriel delivered his even more shocking news. She would become pregnant and would soon bear a son, and she was to name her baby Jesus. He would be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God would give to him the throne of his ancestor David, and he would reign over his kingdom forever.

Well, Mary must have been quite a confident young woman, because even in the midst of this alarming situation she was able to maintain enough composure to ask the most obvious question: How can it be that I will become pregnant since Joseph and I are not yet married?

So the news goes from bad to worse. Gabriel explains that the Holy Spirit will come upon her and *overshadow* her, and that is how her baby will be conceived in her womb. Talk about a *personal* relationship with God! I can’t imagine anything more intimate and personal than what is described here in Luke.

The interesting thing about this whole story that has been revealed for me as a result of my father’s Christmas poem is that in response to the overwhelming and deeply frightening prospect of being overshadowed by the Holy Spirit and becoming pregnant, Mary becomes strangely calm.

She isn’t *more* frightened. On the contrary, she seems to be *less* so!

The prospect of being in a personal relationship with God seems to make her feel more secure than she did before. So she says, “Okay God. Here am I, the servant of the Lord, let it be with me according to your Word.”

Then, according to Luke, she begins to sing. She sings the most beautiful song to her Lord God. She sings that gorgeous love poem that we call the “Magnificat”:

My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.
Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.
His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy,
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever (Luke 1: 47-55, NRSV).

Maybe that’s just what it is to have a personal relationship with God. Maybe it is simply to feel less afraid and more secure. Maybe it is to trust and to be filled with a sense of great calm and to be able to find enormous strength in the face of that which we might otherwise have feared.

My dad was exactly right when he wrote this poem. Mary, more than anybody on earth, knew God’s relationship was personal.

It surely wasn’t easy, but because of her trust in God’s overwhelming love for her, she hung in there. She didn’t run. She didn’t try to hide from what God was asking of her. She stayed right where she was and she welcomed the Holy Spirit into her heart and soul. And because of her strength and her trust, she became the one to give birth to our Savior Jesus Christ, the one through whom our own relationship with God becomes very personal. She gave birth to our Lord, Jesus, who *is* our friend and our Savior and the one in whom we put our greatest hope and trust, not just for ourselves, but for the whole world.

I’m sure that this amazing young woman didn’t know, as my father’s poem suggests, what her son’s calling would end up being. She didn’t know the sacrifice that she would have to make, or that he would make. What she did know, and that was enough, was that God’s love for her was very real and very present and very, very personal. What she did know is that God’s love alone was not just her security, but the security of us all.

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Notes for [2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16](#)

The books of First and Second Samuel describe the reigns of Israel’s first two kings: Saul and David. The stories contained here mark the high point in Israel’s history, when the northern and the southern portions of the kingdom became united into one strong nation. Israel has seized the Promised Land from invaders and managed to defeat any Philistines that remained within her borders. The Ark of the Covenant, which houses the presence of the Lord, has come home to Jerusalem. And King David has built himself a nice, comfortable house in which to live. Life is good!

Oddly, however, David finds himself a little uncomfortable with the situation. He has, after all, spent much of his life as a nomad, traveling around from place to place and moving his home with him. Now, all of a sudden, he's got it all: a kingdom, a palace to live in, peace and prosperity. What do you do next, when you have it all and life finally settles down? Apparently what David was bothered by it.

We can understand this a little bit, right? As ministers serving in an itinerant system, we've all lived somewhat nomadic lives. We've all been on the move. And we've all realized that the nomadic lifestyle creates some peculiar tendencies after a while that may make it hard to truly settle in anywhere.

I can't speak for all of you, but I can say that I became overly attached to my furniture over my years of itinerating. Most people are very attached to their houses. I had never had any control over the houses I live in, because I lived in parsonages for most of my life. But the things that moved with me endured from one place to the next. So my furnishings became marks of my identity, the things that I knew meant "home."

I also became dependent on regular moves to clean and purge. When you move every three or four years, a move is an opportunity to really sort through and get rid of stuff, organize everything, put things in order. The nomadic life helps some of us stay uncluttered.

A third thing that has happened to me as a nomad is that I start to get a little stir-crazy after a certain period in time. I begin feeling like I need to make a change. Do any of you reading my words identify with this?

The need for a change can sometimes be relieved by buying something new, or rearranging the furniture, or painting a room. Sometimes it requires something more, such as taking on some new huge project such as a doctoral degree, or a massive effort to get in shape, or a trip to the Middle East. All of these examples represent ways I have dealt with my need as a basically nomadic person to try to imagine myself and my future in a different way or in a new place. Because as a nomad, I just can't be comfortable staying in one spot for too long. Moving around all the time is the way I live, the way I dream.

And of course, there are variations on this theme. Some people do what I do in a slightly different form. They remodel or redecorate, or they move *up*, to a larger or fancier house in the same community. Or they make some other kind of life change: they find a new church, find a new spouse, have another baby, get a vacation property, or buy a motorcycle.

Of course, there are those who don't have this problem and who are perfectly content to stay in one place for a lifetime. I used to have these women in the first church I served—three sisters who were all in their eighties—who had lived in that town and attended that church since they were children. I admired that they had this long consistency to their lives that I knew I would never have.

Like itinerant preachers and many people today, the people of the ancient world were always on the move. They were nomads, constantly moving from place to place in order to find a little green grass to feed their flocks, a little water to grow some wheat, and a little land on which to pitch their tents. The Israelites, the Philistines, the Edomites, and the Canaanites were all nomadic people. So for them, the whole idea of having a kingdom, of owning a portion of land and calling it their nation, and committing to settle there for a long, long time, just wasn't part of their experience.

It's no wonder that David was a little uncomfortable. If I start to get squirmy after a few years, I can't imagine what David must have felt! So what does he do? He says to himself, "Okay, I've got it all. What to do now?"

And his first thought is, "Wow. I'm settled. I'm comfortable. I've got this really nice home to live in, and the

Lord God is still in a tent. I should build a really nice, big house—a TEMPLE—for God to live in! I've moved up. God needs to move up too."

What a great idea!

You know, that's what churches always do. They get settled, they get comfortable, they get into a groove, and pretty soon the people start to become bored and itchy. They find fault with the pastor. They get into fights about carpet color or the number and style of the worship services. And all good pastors know exactly what to do when this happens. Start a building campaign! Start raising money! Build an addition or a new sanctuary, add an education wing or a family life center! That'll get everybody moving along in the same direction!

So David goes to his trusted friend and confidant, the prophet Nathan, and tells him his big idea. And Nathan says, "Great, David! Go for it!"

But then, that night, the Lord comes to Nathan, maybe in a dream, maybe in a vision. It doesn't exactly say how. It just says the Word of the Lord came to Nathan, that very night. And the Lord says,

Go and tell my servant David, "Hey, what do you think you are doing? Did I ask you to build me a big fancy house? What makes you think I want to settle in one spot? Haven't I been on the move, present and living among the people of Israel all these years? Have I ever said, "Why don't you people ever build me a temple to live in? No, no, no, David. This is not for you. Your son can build me a house. You already have a job. You are to build a different kind of house.

You are the one I have chosen to tend my flock, to shepherd my people. I have given you a land on which to live, and you are now enjoying a respite from your enemies, but I am here to tell you that the solution you are seeking isn't for you to build me a big, fancy house. In fact, I'm going to make YOU a house, but not the kind of house you are thinking of. And what will be important about your house will be the people who live in it, not some fancy building. Your house will not be a physical structure of brick and mortar. Your house will be a dynasty. I want you to bear a line of ancestors. I want to build the house of David, which will be established in my name, and which will endure forever."

Christians have read the last lines of this Scripture lesson through the particular lens of Jesus Christ. We see him as the one who has a special father-son relationship with the Lord, the one who suffered, the one God has chosen, the one through whom a new kingdom is established, a kingdom that is open to all who believe, and not just to the house of David and the ancestral line of Israel.

So the establishment of the house of David is something really different, not just for David, but for Israel. There is not just a physical shift, but a theological shift, that comes with moving in this way:

- Moving from being a nomadic people to being a people with a promised land
- Moving from being a people bound by covenant to being people bound by place and land
- Moving from being a people wandering with God to a being a powerful kingdom

Laying it out this way helps us see that these are big changes, not just in thinking, but in priorities.

People get awfully attached to their land, their houses, their things, and their places. They may be so attached to things that they really can't conceive of life without them. Attachments to homelands, resources, power, and kingdoms are so strong that people go to war and are willing to die to keep them.

And yet, God seems to be saying, "Hey, having a particular house, a particular space, a particular land to call your own, isn't of first and foremost importance. Yes, it is important. And your son can build me a temple. But

what really matters, what really counts in this life, isn't just houses or spaces or land. What is really important is your relationship with God and with God's people."

As we spend these final days of Advent preparing to receive the Lord into our homes and sanctuaries, and as our people prepare to receive lots of new things, it would behoove us to find a way to help our people remember what is most important to God.

The truth is, all of us are really just nomads passing through, foreigners, and wayfarers on this earth. All of these lands we fight for and die for—lands we supposedly own and control, and buildings which seem so important, and the houses where we live and work and play and worship, and the trinkets that we possess—all of these things are forever changing hands, being thrown up and torn down, rearranged, repurposed and remodeled. They are really nothing but tents in the long run, temporary dwelling places. Come to think of it, our very bodies are only temporary dwelling places, are they not?

From the time that we are born to the time we die, our bodies are changing. Did you know that every seven years or so, every cell in your body except for bone cells and brain cells, is replaced? None of us is living in the same body we had seven years ago. We are really nomads, even in our own bodies. They are only tabernacles, tents, temporary dwelling places.

As we read these stories, the history of David's rise, and the rise of Israel from being a group of nomads to becoming a nation, especially in light of what is happening in that very land today, I can't help but think that the move from understanding ourselves as fundamentally nomads to understanding ourselves as landowners wasn't really a move UP.

It is this move that has been, after all, at the center of human destruction throughout history. If we didn't own the land, we wouldn't think it was ours to even put up a house, and then a bigger house, and then a palace. If we understood that our first priority was to be God's family, a family that was created by God and that belongs to God, and that never was and never will be ours, then maybe we'd be able to stop all this destruction and killing in the name of God in which we engage.

This Christmas, maybe we could try to hear God saying these words and not think of a physical space to occupy and own, but rather, of the household of the family of God, the heirs of this promise to David:

When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him and he shall be a son to me. When he commits iniquity, I will punish him with a rod such as mortals use, with blows inflicted by human beings. But I will not take my steadfast love away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.

(1 Samuel 7: 11-16 NRSV)

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Notes for [Romans 16:25-27](#)

Paul's words are believed to have come from an early doxology: a hymn or poem of praise to God. As such, you might employ them on this last Sunday in Advent, as we spend these final days of awaiting the coming of our Lord, as part of the liturgy for the day. Perhaps you could use them as my colleague suggests, as a way to

transitioning from Mary's song of praise (if you are using it or reading it) to another hymn of praise. See the Worship Planning notes for more specific suggestions.

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Hymns

BOW - *The United Methodist Book of Worship*

CLUW - *Come, Let Us Worship (Korean)*

MVPC - *Mil Voces Para Celebrar (Spanish)*

SOZ - *Songs of Zion*

TFWS - *The Faith We Sing*

UMH - *The United Methodist Hymnal*

URW - *Upper Room Worshipbook*

WSM - *Worship & Song, Music Edition*

WSW - *Worship & Song, Worship Resources Edition*

2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16	UMH	MVPC	CLUW	TFWS	SOZ	URW	WSM	WSW
Blessed Be the God of Israel (MERLE'S TUNE)	209					12		
Days of Elijah							3186	
God Will Take Care of You (Nunca desmayes)	130	260						
Hail to the Lord's Anointed	203	81						
It Came upon the Midnight Clear	218	90						
Jesus Shall Reign Where'er the Sun	157							
O Come, O Come, Emmanuel	211	80						
That Boy-Child of Mary	241							
The Family Prayer Song				2188				
Luke 1:47-55 (UMH 199)	UMH	MVPC	CLUW	TFWS	SOZ	URW	WSM	WSW
All the Music Sung and Played Here								
Arise, Shine				2005				

Bless His Holy Name				2015	
Blessed Be the God of Israel (MERLE'S TUNE)	209				12
Blest Are They				2155	163
Canticle of Mary	199				
Canticle of the Turning					18
Come, let us dream					3157
Freedom Is Coming				2192	
Gather Us In				2236	54
Give Thanks		247		2036	
Glory to God				2033	
God Is So Good				2056	231
Hail to the Lord's Anointed	203	81			
He Is Born, the Holy Child	228	117	156		
Holy Ground				2272	
Holy Is Your Name					20
I'm So Glad Jesus Lifted Me				2151	
In the Bleak Midwinter	221				
It Came upon the Midnight Clear	218	90			
Joseph Dearest, Joseph Mine				2099	
Joy to the World, the Lord Is Come!	246	100	161		
Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming	216				
Loving God, You Have Blessed Us					148
My Soul Gives Glory to My God	198				
My Soul Proclaims the Greatness of the Lord					17

My Soul Proclaims with Wonder				19
O Come, All Ye Faithful	234	106		
O Come, O Come, Emmanuel	211	80		
Once in Royal David's City	250		159	
People, Look East	202			
Praise to the Lord			2029	309
Savior of the Nations, Come	214			
She Comes Sailing on the Wind			2122	
Sing for God's Glory				62
Sing of Mary, Pure and Lowly	272			
Tell Out, My Soul, the Greatness of the Lord!	200			
That Boy-Child of Mary	241			
The First One Ever, Oh, Ever to Know	276			
The First Song of Isaiah			2030	
The Snow Lay on the Ground			163	2093
The Virgin Mary Had a Baby Boy			2098	
To a Maid Engaged to Joseph	215		151	
What Does the Lord Require	441			
When the Poor Ones (Cuando El Pobre)	434	301	138	
Ye Who Claim the Faith of Jesus	197			

Romans 16:25-27

UMH

MVPC

CLUW

TFWS

SOZ

URW

WSM

WSW

All Earth Is Waiting to See the Promised One (Toda la Tierra)	210	78						
Come, Holy Ghost, Our Hearts Inspire	603		218					
Glory to God						2033		
Let All the World in Every Corner Sing	93							
To God Be the Glory, Great Things He Hath Done!	98	169	78					

Luke 1:26-38	UMH	MVPC	CLUW	TFWS	SOZ	URW	WSM	WSW
All Earth Is Waiting to See the Promised One (Toda la Tierra)	210	78						
At the Name of Jesus Every Knee Shall Bow	168							
Blest Are They				2155		163		
Come, let us dream							3157	
Creator of the Stars of Night	692					218		
Gracious God, your servant Mary								6
He Is Born, the Holy Child	228	117	156					
I'm So Glad Jesus Lifted Me				2151				
In the Bleak Midwinter	221							
It Came upon the Midnight Clear	218	90						
Jesus, Name above All Names				2071				
Joseph Dearest, Joseph Mine				2099				
Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming	216							
Make Me a Servant				2176				

My Soul Gives Glory to My God	198		
O Come, All Ye Faithful	234	106	
Of the Father's Love Begotten	184	52	66
Once in Royal David's City	250		159
People, Look East	202		
Savior of the Nations, Come	214		
She Comes Sailing on the Wind			2122
Sing of Mary, Pure and Lowly	272		
Tell Out, My Soul, the Greatness of the Lord!	200		
That Boy-Child of Mary	241		
The First One Ever, Oh, Ever to Know	276		
The Snow Lay on the Ground		163	2093
The Virgin Mary Had a Baby Boy			2098
There's Something About That Name	171	74	
To a Maid Engaged to Joseph	215		151
Ye Who Claim the Faith of Jesus	197		

December 21, 2014 -- Fourth Sunday of Advent

Dear Lord, you are the only wise God! Thank you for your faithfulness through the ages. You spoke promises through the prophets. In time, you revealed your glory in Jesus Christ. Strengthen us in faith to follow your will today. Empower us to tell our neighbors about you. May these offerings support the ways our church exhibits your steadfast love for all generations. Amen. (*Romans 16*)

See [Offertory Prayers and Invitation for December 2014](#)

[Advent and Christmas: Sharing the Greatest Gift of All](#)

Purple or Blue

- [Romans 16:25–27](#)
- [Luke 1:26–38](#)
- [Luke 1:47–55 \(UMH 199\)](#)
- [2 Samuel 7:1–11, 16](#)

<http://www.gbod.org/worship/lectionary-calendar/fourth-sunday-of-advent-year-b>



Open hearts. Open minds. Open doors.
The people of The United Methodist Church*