

ADVENT, CHRISTMAS, EPIPHANY 2018-2019: PREPARE THE WAY

SERIES OVERVIEW

Advent marks the beginning of another year in the cycle of Scriptures that presents the narrative of the love of God revealed to the world. As is our usual fashion, we — the worship resource planning team—have chosen to take Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany together as a seven-part series to begin Year C in the Revised Common Lectionary. Each week (with the exception of the first Sunday after Christmas Day) includes two Scriptures—the Old Testament and Gospel readings—that complement one another in illustrating how we are to “prepare the way of the Lord” (Lk. 3:4).

The first week of Advent points directly at Christ’s coming. Even though there is some apocalyptic language, the overall tenor of the passage is one of hope and encouragement. Though fear and foreboding are significant elements of this event, Jesus says, “stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near” (Lk. 21:28). Signs will be given, and God’s people must be alert, constantly praying for strength, in preparation to “stand before the Son of Man” (Lk. 21:36, NRSV). Week two begins with the question from Malachi, “who can stand when he appears?” (Mal. 3:2), which serves as a hinge point from the “stand” imagery of the previous week. This week’s readings address issues of justice, purification, and refining that will accompany Jesus’ coming. The third week of Advent, *Gaudete* Sunday, is always an occasion of joy. With these Scripture lessons, however, comes an expectation that the people of God will “do” something to be a part of the inheritance promised to Abraham. Zephaniah instructs the people to “not let your hands grow weak” (Zep. 3:16), and John offers further teaching: “Bear fruits worthy of repentance” (Lk. 3:7-16). The promise to Abraham is not forgotten in week four, in which Mary sings and recalls the covenant of old that shows God’s mercy and justice. There are senses of preparation and nesting as both Bethlehem and Mary receive word of Jesus’ coming. Both Bethlehem and Mary will be agents of welcoming God in flesh to earth.

Christmas Eve then becomes the point of arrival as Christ—the “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace”—comes to the world. In the ways Jesus comes, however, it is often easy to become so overwhelmed that we cannot see the presence or work of Christ around us. Just like Mary and Joseph, we find ourselves searching for Jesus, despite knowing all the places and ways in which Christ can be found. With enough searching, however, the promise we are given with the story of the Epiphany, is that all who search for Jesus will find him.

Jesus is coming! It is our responsibility to “prepare the way” and get ready. What is your church doing to make a place for Christ to be known in your community?

Week 1: First Sunday of Advent
[Jeremiah 33:14-16](#)

December 2

Stand

[Luke 21:25-36](#)

Week 2: Second Sunday of Advent

December 9

Refine

[Malachi 3:1-4](#)

[Luke 3:1-6](#)

Week 3: Third Sunday of Advent

December 16

Do

[Zephaniah 3:14-20](#)

[Luke 3:7-18](#)

Week 4: Fourth Sunday of Advent

December 23

Welcome

[Micah 5:2-5a](#)

[Luke 1:39-55](#)

Christmas Eve

December 24

Arrive

[Isaiah 9:2-7](#)

[Luke 2:1-20](#)

Week 5: First Sunday after Christmas Day

December 30

Search

[Luke 2:41-52](#)

Week 6: Epiphany Sunday

January 6

Find

[Isaiah 60:1-6](#)

[Matthew 2:1-12](#)

*All scripture quotations are NRSV.

**PREPARE THE WAY
ADVENT 1: STAND**

**First Sunday of Advent, Year C
December 2, 2018**

**PLANNING NOTES
Reading Notes**

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

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

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

Lectionnaire en français, [Le Lectionnaire Œcuménique Révisé](#)

Calendar Notes

December

- December 1 [World Aids Day](#) (GBCS resources, [Discipleship Ministries Resources](#))
- December 21 [Longest Night/Blue Christmas](#)
- December 24 [Christmas Eve](#)
- December 25 [Christmas Day](#)
- December 31 [Watch Night/ New Year's Eve/ Holy Name of Jesus](#)

January

- January 1 [New Year's Eve/ Holy Name of Jesus](#)
- January 6 [Epiphany Sunday/Epiphany](#)
- January 13 [Baptism of the Lord](#)
- January 11 [Human Trafficking Awareness Day](#)
- January 20 [Human Relations Day](#)
- January 21 [Martin Luther King Jr. Day](#)
- January 18-25 [Week of Prayer for Christian Unity](#)
- January 20 [Ecumenical Sunday](#)

February

- All Month* [Black History Month](#)
- February 10 [Scouting Ministries Sunday](#)
- February 18 [Presidents Day](#) (USA)

March

- March 1 World Day of Prayer
- March 3 [Transfiguration of the Lord](#)
- March 6 [Ash Wednesday](#), and [Lent Begins](#)
- March 31 UMCOR Sunday

Planning for This Series

The first Sunday of Advent marks the beginning of the Christian year. In 2015, Taylor Burton-Edwards wrote this:

“The word Advent comes from the Latin verb *advenire*, which means “to come toward, to draw near, to approach.” During Advent, we remember and celebrate God’s drawing near to us in Jesus Christ, but primarily in the promise of his second coming to bring the promise of the kingdom of God and the renewal of all things to culmination.”

For the series “Prepare the Way,” we decided to use two of the lectionary texts for every week except the Sunday after Christmas. We were called to the traditional Luke texts that present Advent and the Christmas story in a familiar way. We were also called to the prophets of the Old Testament and how their words and stories connected with story of the coming of Christ. We hope that in your church, you will use both sets of texts to illuminate your Advent season. This first week, the theme word is “Stand.” We pulled this verb from the end of the Luke text, when we are called to stand up when the Son of Man will come on a cloud.

This year, Advent begins with the roaring of the seas, and ends with words of hope and blessing. Consider having different voices read the two Scripture passages in worship, from different places in the congregation. Perhaps the gospel is read traditionally from the lectern, but the prophets speak from the back. Or the prophet may be pre-recorded. Keep the tension of the words from the gospel and the Old Testament in mind as you choose music, art, and ritual for the season.

MUSIC NOTES

The following selections are congregational songs (most of which are chosen from this week’s Hymn Suggestions) with notes on key, tempo, and instrumentation, along with some practical and creative considerations in singing.

O Come, O Come Emmanuel

Source: *The United Methodist Hymnal*, 211
Recommended Key: E minor
Tempo: 108–116 bpm
Instrumentation: A cappella (unison or parts), organ, piano, or band
Notes: Very few Advent songs will be sung as well by congregations as this hymn. The tune is old (15th century), but the text is older (9th century)! Join in singing a song embraced by the church for ages as a theme song throughout the Advent season. Because of the key, there are numerous possibilities for instrumental accompaniment, including keyboard instruments, or any variety of bands or ensembles. Create a

zimbelstern effect with a handbell random ring on one or more stanzas. The “O Antiphons” are included on the opposite page of the hymns, and they also work well as complementary liturgical pieces for worship.

Resources:

[History of Hymns](#)

[VENI EMMANUEL Doxology](#)

Even So Come

Source:

CCLI [7036288](#)

Recommended Key:

Eb–F

Tempo:

52–55 bpm (dotted quarter)

Instrumentation:

Full band, guitar, or piano

Notes:

This modern favorite would also make a great theme song throughout the season of Advent. The line, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus, come,” will stick in the ears and minds of parishioners through the week. Conversation needs to be had in your context around some of the language in the song, however. Even though the use of “bride” and “bridegroom” is scriptural, the context of a “bride waiting for her groom” may need some attention for worship planning teams. See the CCLI Top 100 Project lists and rationales (found in resources below) for more information.

Resources:

[CCLI Top 100 Song Lists and Rationales](#)

Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates

Source:

The United Methodist Hymnal, 213

Recommended Key:

D

Tempo:

80–88 bpm

Instrumentation:

Organ or piano

Notes:

This hymn makes for quite a regal text and tune, and the allusions to Psalm 24 are notable. The addition of brass always makes this a great choice, should you have a brass ensemble at your disposal. An alternate harmonization and descant can be found in *The United Methodist Hymnal Music Supplement*.

Resources:

[History of Hymns](#)

Wounded World that Cries for Healing

Source:

The Faith We Sing, 2177

Recommended Key:

G

Tempo: 80–84 bpm
Instrumentation: Piano or organ; flute or violin doubling melody
Notes: One of the best elements of Shirley Erena Murray’s hymns is the opportunity to sing words and phrases you may not expect to encounter in hymnody. One example of this is the way she paints image-driven pictures that fit the message of the hymn (In this case, “wounded systems, bruised and bleeding” to illustrate the pain of systematic brokenness). Be sure to choose a tempo that allows four-measure phrases if possible, even though the textual phrasing of this hymn can also be supported with two-measure phrases.
Resources: [History of Hymns](#)

Beams of Heaven as I Go

Source: *Songs of Zion*, 10 (titled “Some Day”); *The United Methodist Hymnal*, 524
Recommended Key: Eb–F
Tempo: 56–64 bpm
Instrumentation: Organ or piano
Notes: Charles Albert Tindley penned this dramatic song of hope near the beginning of the twentieth century, and the yearning for liberation holds true today. The melody sings easily, although the length of the hymn and the high tessitura at times requires a good bit of congregational stamina. If necessary, have a soloist sing the stanzas, and invite the congregation to sing the refrain only.
Resources: [History of Hymns](#)

Freedom Is Coming

Source: *Zion Still Sings*, 110 ; *The Faith We Sing*, 2192
Recommended Key: G
Tempo: 96–102 bpm
Instrumentation: A cappella with percussion (djembes, shakers, other hand drums); keyboard only if needed
Notes: If your choir is interested in singing global song, this is a great place to start. This song offers a repetitive rhythm and SATB parts. Make note that since the song comes from apartheid-era South Africa, however, that this poignant origin needs to be made known to the choir and the church so they can work to fully understand the suffering and oppression in

its original context. See the History of Hymns article for more information.

Resources: [History of Hymns](#)

I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light

Source: *The United Methodist Hymnal*, 206

Recommended Key: Db–D

Tempo: 124–132 bpm

Instrumentation: Organ, piano, or guitar

Notes: Many organists would not choose to play in the key of Db, but that is easily remedied with this song. Just instruct your organist to play it as if it were written in the key of D, with the G naturals played as G sharps. This may win you some points with your organist! The key of D also works well with guitar. With this hymn's origins in the folk genre, keep the tempo light, with emphasis on beat one of each measure (instead of heavy emphasis on each quarter note). Let it dance with a gentle lilt.

Resources: [History of Hymns](#)

Until Jesus Comes

Source: *Worship & Song*, 3050

Recommended Key: F

Tempo: 84–92 bpm

Instrumentation: Piano or organ

Notes: Dean McIntyre created this tune to be played in a gospel style, with heavy emphasis on each quarter note and a stride pattern in the left hand of the piano. Because of the brevity of the text, it would make a great call to worship or song of sending during the season of Advent.

Resources: [Hymn Study](#)

PREACHING NOTES

Rev. Dr. Irving Cotto is an ordained elder in The United Methodist Church. A former district superintendent and director of congregational development in the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference, he is currently the pastor of St. Paul's United Methodist Church in Warrington, Pa. Dr. Cotto is the author of Fiesta en la Casa de Dios, a book on pastoral reflections regarding worship. He has led training workshops for lay missionaries and has written training modules for the National Hispanic Latino Plan.

Advent 1—Stand
[Jeremiah 33:14-16](#)
[Luke 21:25-36](#)

Key words: *hope, redemption, alert*

It almost seems inevitable for some local churches to rush into singing Christmas carols once they get past Thanksgiving. One can understand how the fascination with lights, food, music, and family gatherings can raise the anticipation and, thus, the desire to jump rather quickly into celebrating the birth of Jesus. As I was growing up, that was certainly the case. And although I have fond memories of those days when my home church would sing hymns alluding to the nativity with little or no reference to the Advent Season, over the years, I have increasingly developed a greater awareness of the need to wait, reflect, and prepare during the weeks prior to Christmas Day. It has helped me spend more time thinking about how the gospel message has multiple implications for our daily living from matters pertaining to our personal lives, to matters pertaining to our collective life as a nation.

Concerning Advent, *The United Methodist Book of Worship*, states the following: “The season proclaims the comings of the Christ—whose birth we prepare to celebrate once again, who comes continually in Word and Spirit, and whose return in final victory we anticipate.”[1]

Therefore, in preparing the sermon for this week, the audience will benefit greatly from a message that captures the “yet and not yet” of our eschatological hope. In the liturgical assembly, the homilist is given a wonderful opportunity to enhance the coming of Jesus, particularly in the Eucharist, since it is usually celebrated on the first Sunday of the month, as well as at the end of history.

In the gospel for this first Sunday in Advent, Jesus is uttering a prophetic message concerning the future. Several signs are to precede the final “coming of the Son of man,” which can be interpreted as sources for distress, anxiety, hopelessness, and ultimate annihilation. Many preachers of doom and destruction have capitalized on this, which harms many of the faithful and damages the credibility of Christianity in society.

Without a doubt eschatological preaching presents a word of judgment against injustice, inequalities, and indifference toward love, compassion, unity, and fraternity. It also brings a word of hope. For persons of faith, particularly the Christian community, Jesus’ message of “end times” is about “joyful expectation”[2] in light of the coming kingdom that promises release and deliverance (Greek: *apolytrōsis*). A responsible and caring

preacher will not hide the message of hope, even as he or she points out the things that are wrong, evil, and against God's will.

The text from the book of Jeremiah (33:14-16) points to the coming of a "righteous Branch to spring up for David" (v.15) who will bring a message of social restoration, giving way to a new season of celebration and possibilities. Herein, the vision for the future is not a panacea or a decontextualized prophetic word. It is a vision with concrete implications for the present circumstance in which the people of God find themselves. As an Advent community, the church claims the message of this first Sunday of the season as an opportunity "to announce a future that enters around the restoration of this world to its proper character as God's creation." [3]

There are thousands of believers in all world religions, and, in particular, in the Christian world, who are constantly working toward the elimination of oppression, dehumanizing policies and practices that cheapen our God-given life and that deprive the most vulnerable and disenfranchised human beings, (children, elderly, ethnic minorities, women) from enjoying a life of respect, fairness, and freedom.

Jesus offers words that call us to be ready when the kingdom of God bursts into our daily existence. The *kairos* of God disrupts our human *chronos* (God's time and human time, respectively), and things cannot remain the same. For those who live to step on others, the message of Jesus is a message of judgment and a call to repentance. For those who cling to the promises of God in spite of all the social injuries they have been exposed to, the coming kingdom is a time to look up with hope and celebration. Jesus says, "stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near" (Lk. 21:28).

Thus, the Sunday sermon during this first week Advent could include words of concern and lamentations for the bruises and brokenness caused by a culture of violence, discrimination, prejudice, and intimidation, followed by or alongside words of encouragement, and assurance, in anticipation of the coming Savior.

In addition, the sermon could center on challenging the faithful to deepen their spiritual disciplines as a way of being available to God and, therefore, being renewed to engage in activities that reflect the values and the priorities of the coming kingdom. Jesus asks his disciples to be watchful and prepared, "Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man" (Lk. 21:36).

It seems critical that listeners be made aware of the “signs of time” so that they appreciate and welcome the Parousia. (Parousia is the Greek word meaning presence, arrival or visit.) This means daring to connect present socio-political realities working against the reign of God in contrast to the witness of Christian communities who, along with other faith communities, are fulfilling their prophetic vocation.

For personal reflection and sermon preparation:

1. How can we adequately communicate a message of hope to people in our congregation who are facing all sorts of discouraging circumstances?
2. At a time when the political climate of the nation is one of division, what seems to be the mission these Scriptures call us to fulfill?
3. Where do we see signs of the coming kingdom?
4. The season of Advent calls us to live in joyful expectation of a new thing God promises to do through the coming Savior. What are some possibilities for new initiatives that will make a difference in our surrounding community?

[1] *The United Methodist Book of Worship* Nashville, TN: Methodist Publishing House, 238.

[2] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Anchor Bible*, vol 28 A, 1349.

[3] *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. vi., 828, Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001.

GRAPHICS AND RESOURCES

Articles and Resources

[Advent Wreath Meditations: Year C \(Garland\)](#)

[Advent Wreath Meditations: Year C \(McIntyre\)](#)

[21st Century Africana Liturgy Resources: Worship Resources for the First Sunday of Advent, Year C](#)

Seasonal/Secular

[Planning for Advent, Year C](#)

[Planning for Advent and Christmas, Year C](#)

[Advent/Christmas Liturgies, Year C](#)

[Advent](#) (introductory article from the *Book of Worship*)

[Advent Wreath Meditations Year C](#)

[Three Ways to Celebrate Advent and Christmas Season Fully in 2015/2016](#)

[When Should You Hang the Greens?](#)

[Extended Advent Webinar](#) (to learn more about how to implement Extended Advent)

[Planning for Advent and Christmas, Year C](#)

[Webinar Slides: Planning for Advent and Christmas 2015](#)

[Full Webinar: Planning for Advent and Christmas Season 2015-2016](#)

[Christmas Season](#) (introductory article from the *Book of Worship*)

[The Three "M's" of Christmas Season: Mystery, Martyrs, and Magnificat](#)

[The Season after Epiphany](#) (introductory article from the *Book of Worship*)

Offertory Prayer

Graphics Downloads

PREPARE THE WAY
ADVENT 2: REFINE
Second Sunday of Advent, Year C
December 9, 2018

PLANNING NOTES
Reading Notes

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

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

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February

- All Month* [Black History Month](#)
- February 10 [Scouting Ministries Sunday](#)
- February 18 [Presidents Day](#) (USA)

March

- March 1 **World Day of Prayer**

March 3 [Transfiguration of the Lord](#)
March 6 [Ash Wednesday](#), and [Lent Begins](#)
March 31 **UMCOR Sunday**

Planning for This Series

This is the second Sunday of Advent. This week, our readings are on John the Baptist's ministry and from the prophet Malachi. Today, the Song of Zechariah is the response to the reading from Malachi, and it also serves as a kind of introduction to the ministry of John the Baptist in the gospel. Strongly consider singing it, as countless generations of Christians have done and still do. Several versions are available in *The United Methodist Hymnal* (208, 209), *Mil Voces para Celebrar* (78), and the *Upper Room Worshipbook* (10-12). The word this week is *Refine*. This word is pulled from the Malachi text, and it reflects on John the Baptist's words of the one who is coming who will *refine* us as with fire.

For the series "Prepare the Way," we decided to use two of the lectionary texts for every week except the Sunday after Christmas. We were called to the traditional Luke texts that present Advent and the Christmas story in a familiar way. We were also called to the prophets of the Old Testament and how their words and stories connected with story of the coming of Christ. We hope that in your church, you will use both sets of texts to illuminate your Advent season.

This year, Advent begins with the roaring of the seas and ends with words of hope and blessing. Consider having different voices read the two Scripture passages in worship — from different places in the congregation. Perhaps the gospel is read traditionally from the lectern, but the prophets speak from the back. Or the prophet may be pre-recorded. Keep the tension of the words from the gospel and the Old Testament in mind as you choose music, art, and ritual for the season.

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Notes: Very few Advent songs will be sung as well by congregations as this hymn. The tune is old (15th century), but the text is older (9th century)! Join in singing a song embraced by the church for ages as a theme song throughout the Advent

season. Because of the key, there are numerous possibilities for instrumental accompaniment, including keyboard instruments, or any variety of bands or ensembles. Create a *zimbelstern* effect with a handbell random ring on one or more stanzas. The “O Antiphons” are included on the opposite page of the hymns, and they also work well as complementary liturgical pieces for worship.

Resources:

[History of Hymns](#)

[VENI EMMANUEL Doxology](#)

Even So Come

Source:

CCLI [7036288](#)

Recommended Key:

Eb–F

Tempo:

52–55 bpm (dotted quarter)

Instrumentation:

Full band, guitar, or piano

Notes:

This modern favorite would also make a great theme song throughout the season of Advent. The line, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus, come,” will stick in the ears and minds of parishioners through the week. Conversation needs to be had in your context around some of the language in the song, however. Even though the use of “bride” and “bridegroom” is scriptural, the context of a “bride waiting for her groom” may need some attention for worship planning teams. See the CCLI Top 100 Project lists and rationales (found in resources below) for more information.

Resources:

[CCLI Top 100 Song Lists and Rationales](#)

Change My Heart, O God

Source:

Zion Still Sings, 178; *The Faith We Sing*, 2152

Recommended Key:

C

Tempo:

80–92 bpm

Instrumentation:

Piano or guitar with Latin percussion

Notes:

The tempo range provided is wide because of the difference in the character of the song at a given time in worship. It can be more reflective and slower, or more up-tempo and anticipatory. This song can work well in either Advent or Lent and as a general response to a prayer of confession.

Love Divine, All Loves Excelling

Source:

The United Methodist Hymnal, 384

Recommended Key: Bb (BEECHER) or F (HYFRYDOL)
Tempo: 104–108 bpm (either tune)
Instrumentation: Organ or piano
Notes: Many 87.87 D tunes are appropriate for this Charles Wesley text. Note that the format of the hymn mirrors the Wesleyan Way of Salvation and understanding of grace.
Resources: [History of Hymns](#)

Prepare the Way of the Lord

Source: *The United Methodist Hymnal, 207*
Recommended Key: Eb
Tempo: 66–72 bpm
Instrumentation: A cappella, with or without percussion
Notes: This brief chorus from the Taizé Community in France is intended to be sung as a four-part canon, with each group beginning two measures apart. This can be more easily undertaken by having the congregation sing the entire melody through once or twice in unison, and then directing them to enter by the position of the seating section. A choir can be most helpful, with choir members ready to sing in canon as well. This short chorus works well as a processional by a choir at the beginning of worship, and children can also lead this short song effectively! If you have handbells, a repetitive ostinato pattern with the chords Eb, Ab, Eb can also add a musical and visual element to the worship service, and this simple of a pattern can be played while processing.

Toda la Tierra (All Earth Is Waiting)

Source: *Mil Voces Para Celebrar, 78; The United Methodist Hymnal, 210*
Recommended Key: D
Tempo: 88–94 bpm
Instrumentation: Organ, piano, or guitar with percussion
Notes: The anticipation in this text is best supported with a lively tempo and bouncy, energetic rhythms. Both the Spanish and English, however, are quite wordy, so don't let the tempo get too fast, or the text will become chaotic. The hymn cries out for justice and liberty, so it makes a perfect addition for the Advent season.

Resources: [History of Hymns \(Hawn\)](#)
[History of Hymns \(Davis\)](#)

People, Look East

Source: *The United Methodist Hymnal*, 202
Recommended Key: D
Tempo: 56–60 bpm (dotted quarter)
Instrumentation: Organ or piano
Notes: A treble wind or string instrument and even a light hand drum or tambourine would be great additions to this hymn. Keep the lilt of the 6/8 meter in a dance-like character. If you have an SATB choir, be sure to rehearse them ahead of time on the parts. The staggered entrances on the third line are especially exciting for choir members!

Resources: [History of Hymns](#)
[Simplified keyboard accompaniment](#)

Wade in the Water

Source: *Songs of Zion*, 129; *Zion Still Sings*, 189; *The Faith We Sing*, 2107
Recommended Key: D minor–E minor
Tempo: 78–84 bpm
Instrumentation: A cappella, piano, guitar, or percussion if needed
Notes: This spiritual is well known throughout the church, even if it has not been sung in certain contexts. It makes a great congregational song, but it also offers the possibility of being a choral piece as well. The setting in *The Faith We Sing* can work well with an SATB choir and soloist. The phrase “God’s a-gonna trouble the water” can also serve as a sung response to other spoken parts of the liturgy (call to worship, call to prayer, etc.)

Resources: [History of Hymns](#)

Wild and Lone the Prophet’s Voice

Source: *The Faith We Sing*, 2089
Recommended Key: G minor (LA GRANGE), E minor (ABERYSTWYTH)
Tempo: 68–79 bpm (LA GRANGE), 84–90 bpm (ABERYSTWYTH)
Instrumentation: Organ or piano
Notes: I have offered two tunes for this hymn text to offer an

alternate option that might be more familiar to your congregation. The LA GRANGE tune is very teachable and accessible for congregations, however, and I highly commend its use. The very title of this hymn creates an image of John that can be powerful and memorable, especially when combined with the hymn's singing.

Resources: [History of Hymns](#)

PREACHING NOTES

Rev. Dr. Irving Cotto is an ordained elder in The United Methodist Church. A former district superintendent and director of congregational development in the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference, he is currently the pastor of St. Paul's United Methodist Church in Warrington, Pa. Dr. Cotto is the author of Fiesta en la Casa de Dios, a book on pastoral reflections regarding worship. He has also led training workshops for lay missionaries and has written training modules for the National Hispanic Latino Plan.

Advent 2 Refine

[Malachi 3:1-4](#)

[Luke 3:1-6](#)

Key words: *injustice, change, covenant*

The second Sunday in Advent focuses on John the Baptizer. Since he is the forerunner of Jesus' coming, his ministry reminds the Christian community that they also are to prepare the way for the good news of the gospel to be received by others as well as to live it out in its particular social location.

The focus of the Malachi text is the coming of a messenger, which "at least one stream of Jewish tradition" identifies with the prophet Elijah, and in the synoptic gospels with John the Baptizer (Matt, 11:10; Lk. 7:27; Mk. 1:2; Lk 1:76). Although there seems to be in the text a reference to a hunger for this messenger and the messenger's message to reach the ears and hearts of a people longing for God, the truth is that the content is a message of judgment. What is the judgment about, and what is expected of both the people to whom the message is addressed and the carrier of the message?

First of all, the judgment has to do with justice. The whole book, consisting of four chapters and developed in the post-exilic period, addresses the soul of the covenant people. The name of the book, "Malachi" means, "my messenger." And the main concern of his message is the internal life of the community. Living as a small post-exilic people most likely with weak economic resources, under Persian domination, with

marked neglect in their liturgical and moral responsibilities, they were also awaiting a timely word from God. Malachi brings the same concerns that other prophets have had, namely, “a passion for justice, a concern for the widow and orphan and laborer.”[1]

Brought to our present time, the preacher may approach his or her congregation as a community connected to a covenant. The congregation’s covenant is based on Jesus Christ, to whom they have confessed allegiance and devotion. However, this covenant is quite often jeopardized whenever other loyalties get in the way of the congregation’s relationship to God. Whenever the church keeps silent before policies, practices, and projects enacted by government or church judicatories that are in direct opposition to God’s vision for humanity and the whole of creation, there is an urgent need for a prophetic voice like the messenger alluded to in this Sunday’s texts — particularly Malachi.

Unfortunately, there are places where prophetic preaching is understood as a message of destruction, condemnation with little emphasis on the redeeming and restorative aspect of such preaching. Thus, the preacher does well to heighten the audience’s appreciation for the transforming hope that the Advent season brings as it sees its continuation of the baptizer’s ministry and the Hebrew Scripture’s use of the words “refiner” and purifier.” These last two words related to the messenger’s mission offer a promise of change and new beginnings. Rather than things, structures, or objects, it is actually people, “the descendants of Levi,” who will undergo transformation.

While Advent, like Lent, calls for a time of reflection and even repentance and mourning, it also invites people to a joyful celebration in anticipation of a radical divine intervention with the coming of the Messiah. The preacher should proclaim with confidence that along with an invitation to recognize one’s participation in injustice and moral decay, there is also a word of grace capable of aligning us with God’s reign of justice.

The word “refine” is the primary focus this week. It stems from the effects of the coming messenger’s work. It is a call to renewal on the part of God’s people. It is not so much the idea of punishment as it is the idea of being convicted in light of the Great Day of the Lord and a time of a new beginning. The prophet concludes with a promise of hope, “...I will not come and strike the land with a curse” (Malachi 4:5).

Malachi and the Gospel of Luke, although containing imagery and language that may seem unattractive to some, nevertheless offer a word for our present times filled with a language of division and inhospitality particularly toward foreigners. The fact that the coming of the Son of Man is draped with a prelude of cosmic signs calls for listeners in the pew to pay attention to their surroundings, not in a frantic or desperate way, but with

the joyful expectation that God will break through the myriad situations happening in opposition to God's purposes.

Given both Malachi and Luke, on the one hand, the preacher is before an imperative of judgment; and on the other hand, the preacher is before the promise of a future of hope.

For personal reflection and sermon preparation:

1. Given the abuses of power, the message of terror, and inhuman policies affecting the most vulnerable members of society (children), how can this week's message bring a sense of hope and joyful anticipation to the congregation?
2. How does a message based on this text speak to the undocumented? How does it speak to those in positions of power and leadership?
3. How does one follow in the footsteps of the coming messenger of Malachi and the baptizer is the gospel?
4. Consider assigning brief statements expressed by different people throughout the congregation as part of the sermon. These statements could voice lamentations of people who have been victims of unjust and abusive maneuvers in the church, government, business, and so on.
5. Conclude by exalting the refining effects of our eschatological hope now and in the future.

[1] *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. VII, 846.

GRAPHICS AND RESOURCES

Articles and Resources

[Advent Wreath Meditations: Year C, \(Garland\)](#)

[Advent Wreath Meditations: Year C \(McIntyre\)](#)

[Prayer for the Second Sunday of Advent, Year C](#)

[21st Century Africana Liturgy Resources for the Second Sunday of Advent, Year C](#)

Seasonal/Secular

[Planning for Advent, Year C](#)

[Planning for Advent and Christmas, Year C](#)

[Advent/Christmas Liturgies, Year C](#)

[Advent](#) (introductory article from the *Book of Worship*)

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[Extended Advent Webinar](#) (to learn more about how to implement Extended Advent)

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[Webinar Slides: Planning for Advent and Christmas 2015](#)

[Full Webinar: Planning for Advent and Christmas Season 2015-2016](#)

[Christmas Season](#) (introductory article from the *Book of Worship*)

[The Three “M’s” of Christmas Season: Mystery, Martyrs, and Magnificat](#)

[The Season after Epiphany](#) (introductory article from the *Book of Worship*)

Offertory Prayer

Graphics Downloads

PREPARE THE WAY
ADVENT 3: DO
Third Sunday of Advent, Year C
December 16, 2018

PLANNING NOTES
Reading Notes

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

Leccionario en Español, [Leccionario Común Revisado: Consulta Sobre Textos Comunes](#).
Para obtener más recursos leccionario, [Estudios Exegéticos: Homiléticos](#).

Lectionnaire en français, [Le Lectionnaire Œcuménique Révisé](#)

Calendar Notes

December

December 1 [World Aids Day](#) (GBCS resources, [Discipleship Ministries Resources](#))

December 21 [Longest Night/Blue Christmas](#)

December 24 [Christmas Eve](#)

December 25 [Christmas Day](#)

December 31 [Watch Night/ New Year's Eve/ Holy Name of Jesus](#)

January

January 1 [New Year's Eve/ Holy Name of Jesus](#)

January 6 [Epiphany Sunday/Epiphany](#)

January 13 [Baptism of the Lord](#)

January 11 [Human Trafficking Awareness Day](#)

January 20 [Human Relations Day](#)

January 21 [Martin Luther King Jr. Day](#)

January 18-25 [Week of Prayer for Christian Unity](#)

January 20 [Ecumenical Sunday](#)

Planning for This Series

This is the third Sunday of Advent, the “Joy” Sunday. While most people associate this with the Advent wreath themes, the Joy Sunday goes back much further than the Advent wreath. Taylor Burton-Edwards explains it,

While most of the “themes” attached to the Sundays of Advent by twentieth-century church supply houses (Hope, Love, Peace) have no precedence in church history except that created by those church supply houses, today’s “Joy Sunday” does have some.

Advent had initially been an extended season of preparation for baptism, lasting seven weeks, much like Lent. As a season of baptismal preparation, and with its themes of readiness for the second coming, judgment, and new creation, it was also a generally “admonitory” or “penitential” season as well. So just as Lent has its “Laetare Sunday” (fourth Sunday in Lent) to “lighten the mood” a bit, so Advent has its “Gaudete Sunday” (originally, the sixth Sunday of Advent). Vestments and pavement candles (candles placed in large stands around, but not on, the Lord’s Table) would shift from purple to rose on this day. If you have pink or rose things, go for it. If not, it’s fine to stay with what you have while adding other elements that make your worship space feel joyous today.

Our theme word this week is *Do*. It comes from the Luke passage, where the crowd asks, “What then should we *do*?”

For the series “Prepare the Way,” we decided to use two of the lectionary texts for every week except the Sunday after Christmas. We were called to the traditional Luke texts that present Advent and the Christmas story in a familiar way. We were also called to the prophets of the Old Testament and how their words and stories connected with the story of the coming of Christ. We hope that in your church, you will use both sets of texts to illuminate your Advent season.

This year, Advent begins with the roaring of the sea and ends with words of hope and blessing. Consider having different voices read the two Scripture passages in worship— from different places in the congregation. Perhaps the gospel is read traditionally from the lectern, but the prophets speak from the back. Or the prophet may be pre-recorded. Keep the tension of the words from the gospel and the Old Testament in mind as you choose music, art, and ritual for the season.

MUSIC NOTES

The following selections are congregational songs (most of which are chosen from this week’s Hymn Suggestions) with notes on key, tempo, and instrumentation, along with some practical and creative considerations in singing.

O Come, O Come Emmanuel

Source: *The United Methodist Hymnal*, 211
Recommended Key: E minor
Tempo: 108–116 bpm
Instrumentation: A cappella (unison or parts), organ, piano, or band
Notes: Very few Advent songs will be sung as well by congregations as this hymn. The tune is old (15th century), but the text is older (9th century)! Join in singing a song embraced by the church for ages as a theme song throughout the Advent season. Because of the key, there are numerous possibilities for instrumental accompaniment, including keyboard

instruments, or any variety of bands or ensembles. Create a *zimbelstern* effect with a handbell random ring on one or more stanzas. The “O Antiphons” are included on the opposite page of the hymns, and they also work well as complementary liturgical pieces for worship.

Resources:

[History of Hymns](#)

[VENI EMMANUEL Doxology](#)

Even So Come

Source:

CCLI [7036288](#)

Recommended Key:

Eb–F

Tempo:

52–55 bpm (dotted quarter)

Instrumentation:

Full band, guitar, or piano

Notes:

This modern favorite would also make a great theme song throughout the season of Advent. The line, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus, come,” will stick in the ears and minds of parishioners through the week. Conversation needs to be had in your context around some of the language in the song, however. Even though the use of “bride” and “bridegroom” is scriptural, the context of a “bride waiting for her groom” may need some attention for worship planning teams. See the CCLI Top 100 Project lists and rationales (found in resources below) for more information.

Resources:

[CCLI Top 100 Song Lists and Rationales](#)

Hail to the Lord’s Anointed

Source:

The United Methodist Hymnal, 203

Recommended Key:

A

Tempo:

100–106 bpm

Instrumentation:

Organ or piano

Notes:

This traditional Advent hymn includes Scripture references from Psalm 72, but it also uses some fairly florid language (i.e., “he comes with succor speedy”) that might require some more explanation. Images of justice and hope are prevalent, so sing boldly with confidence.

Resources:

[History of Hymns](#)

[Simplified keyboard accompaniment](#)

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty

Source:

The United Methodist Hymnal, 139

Recommended Key: F
Tempo: 100–106 bpm (in three); 130–136 (in one)
Instrumentation: Organ or piano
Notes: This Joachim Neander hymn is widely sung across the western church and has a special place in the repertoire of many choirs. Building to the climactic phrase in the last stanza, “Let the amen sound from his people again,” this hymn makes a great option to sing any time during the Christian year.
Resources: [History of Hymns](#)

When Words Alone Cannot Express

Source: *Worship & Song*, 3012
Recommended Key: Eb
Tempo: 68–74 bpm
Instrumentation: Organ or piano
Notes: Using the familiar LASST UNS ERFREUEN tune, this hymn has a timely quality that draws attention to times of celebration and times of grief and pain. Hymn writer John Thornburg expertly does this by using the word “when” several times throughout the work. The response is the same every time: “Bring music!” This hymn works well to sing in the midst of trying circumstances, but it also is most appropriate to celebrate the ministry of music within a congregation.
Resources: [History of Hymns](#)

Depth of Mercy

Source: *The United Methodist Hymnal*, 355; *Worship & Song*, 3097
Recommended Key: D (CANTERBURY); G (GOTTES ZEIT)
Tempo: 88–94 bpm (CANTERBURY); 66–72 bpm (GOTTES ZEIT)
Instrumentation: Organ or piano
Notes: Either of these tunes works well to support Charles Wesley’s highly emotional and personal text. This hymn stands at the forefront of Wesley’s canon to speak to individuals who find themselves as the recipient (new or experienced) of God’s grace. The GOTTES ZEIT tune allows the congregation to repeat the last line and have a lengthened moment of reflection upon each stanza.
Resources: [History of Hymns](#)

[Hymn Study](#)

It's Me, It's Me, O Lord (Standing in the Need of Prayer)

Source:	<i>Songs of Zion</i> , 110; <i>Zion Still Sings</i> , 149; <i>The United Methodist Hymnal</i> , 352
Recommended Key:	G
Tempo:	110–116 bpm (in 4)
Instrumentation:	A cappella, keyboard if needed
Notes:	As with spirituals, it is preferred to sing them authentically by singing a cappella if possible. Between the arrangements in these collections, there are options on how to sing. In <i>Songs of Zion</i> and <i>Zion Still Sings</i> , the first part of each stanza is sung by a leader, with the congregation responding with “standing in the need of prayer.” It is possible for the congregation to sing the entire song, but performance practice from these sources would recommend using a leader/response format. This song is also well-led by children in the church, so have them exercise their leadership by singing and leading this in worship.

Down by the Jordan

Source:	<i>Worship & Song</i> , 3045
Recommended Key:	F
Tempo:	100–106 bpm (in three); 130–136 (in one)
Instrumentation:	Organ or piano
Notes:	Using the same tune (LOBE DEN HERREN) as “Praise to the Lord, the Almighty,” Carolyn Winfrey Gillette has crafted a text that includes John’s call for repentance and righteous living.
Resources:	<u>Hymn download</u>

Wild and Lone the Prophet’s Voice

Source:	<i>The Faith We Sing</i> , 2089
Recommended Key:	G minor (LA GRANGE), E minor (ABERYSTWYTH)
Tempo:	68–79 bpm (LA GRANGE), 84–90 bpm (ABERYSTWYTH)
Instrumentation:	Organ or piano
Notes:	I have offered two tunes for this hymn text to offer an alternate option that might be more familiar to your congregation. The LA GRANGE tune is very teachable and accessible for congregations, however, and I highly

commend its use. The very title of this hymn creates an image of John that can be powerful and memorable, especially when combined with the hymn's singing.

Resources: [History of Hymns](#)

PREACHING NOTES

Rev. Dr. Irving Cotto is an ordained elder in The United Methodist Church. A former district superintendent and director of congregational development in the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference, he is currently the pastor of St. Paul's United Methodist Church in Warrington, Pa. Dr. Cotto is the author of Fiesta en la Casa de Dios, a book on pastoral reflections regarding worship. He has led training workshops for lay missionaries and has written training modules for the National Hispanic Latino Plan.

Advent 3 Do

[Zephaniah 3:14-20](#)

[Luke 3:7-18](#)

Key words: repentance, rejoice, festivity

This week in the Advent season is known as *Gaudete* Sunday, or the Sunday of joy. It is represented by a pink candle on the traditional Advent wreath. The liturgical space should support the preacher's message.

There is a strong reason for joy. Both texts make references to a happening from God. The Hebrew text promises that the people's fortune and future have been changed from judgment to hope, from destruction to restoration, from oppression to liberation and from dread to praise (Zeph. 3:14-20). In the gospel text, John the Baptizer opens the curtains before the human drama to introduce the coming of the One who will bring a new chapter of salvation, (Lk. 3:7-18).

There is no hurry to discuss the nativity story. We are now in the third week of Advent, and we hear Christmas carols on the radio and Christmas music on TV. It can be a challenge to refrain from going overboard with a full-fledged Christmas emphasis. Whoever is responsible for the sermon on this day has a great opportunity to refrain giving away the final chapter of the Advent-Christmas season and focus more on joyful expectation, a building up toward the final celebration of the birth of Jesus. The festivity right now should center on the fact that God has promised to change the people's plight from a world of corruption, failed leadership, captivity under an oppressive power, and inequities and injustices severely affecting the most vulnerable members of the covenant community.

The sermon for the day should capitalize on that joyful divine promise and bring a fresh word to the listeners of the twenty-first century who are part of the Christ-centered covenant community (Lk. 3:18). Like John the Baptizer, the preacher should leave the pulpit at the conclusion of the message “with many exhortations, he or she proclaimed the good news to the people” (v.18).

I was a co-founder and volunteer camp director for at least ten years. One week during the summer, the camp took on the name of Semana Hispana. (Hispanic Week; now it is called Latino Camp.) Its three objectives were:

- (1) foster a closer relationship with Jesus Christ,
- (2) provide a healthy environment for peer relationships, and
- (3) promote and affirm campers’ cultural heritage.

After 40 years, these continue to be the basic purposes for the camp, which makes it somewhat unique. However, like any other camp, it had to follow the same rules and procedures. The rules and procedures included: adequate supervision, a health provider on the premises, a combination of Bible lessons, recreation, crafts, talent shows, and worship experiences.

I remember vividly how some of my own youth eagerly participated in all activities, including activities that led them to break the rules. That’s when the camping experience became a nightmare. I had to call for emergency meetings with my volunteer staff and then approach the culprits with harsh news: “You are all being sent home; you broke the rules, and we can’t allow this to happen. The reputation of the camp, and your safety are at stake.” After a time of confrontation, then hearing the accused’s pleas for mercy and forgiveness, we decided on a different tactic.

Rather than sending them home, the counselors and I gave them penalties: no pool for the entire day, no games, little interaction with the rest of the campers, and “hard labor” (helping the paid staff clean up certain small roads). It was both sad and a bit funny to see these young men in the back of a pickup truck holding shovels while the truck drove near the pool during free time. But they knew that they had brought the penalties upon themselves. One of them said, “Please don’t let my parents know. I’ll be grounded for as long time, and it could even affect my going to college!” Mercy and compassion shaped my final judgement, but there were some consequences.

The next day it was amazing to see their faces of relief, when the “sentence” was lifted and their privileges at camp were restored. The joy on their faces was obvious as they were reintegrated to the rest of the community.

Of course, what happened during Zephaniah's time was nothing like this. It was much worse. Big time worse! The spiritual leaders, the concern for holiness in worship, love for the poor, respect for Yahweh's laws were all abandoned, and the prophet was sent to call the covenant people on it; God's judgment extended to other nations (Zephaniah 1-3).

Eventually, God's mercy is granted, and the promise expressed in the final chapter of Zephaniah's divine oracle brings a new beginning. There is a song of joy in the air and a call to Do! This tiny word has a message of assurance and comfort. In 3:16-17, we hear the prophet's message: "On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: DO NOT FEAR, O ZION; DO NOT LET YOUR HANDS GROW WEAK. THE LORD, YOUR GOD IS IN YOUR MIDST."

After a period of indictment and punishment, the covenant people hear a refreshing word of encouragement. Like my young campers, relief shows on their faces. They laugh again; they party with their fellow sojourners; they are a part of the community. The results: "Loud singing, a day of festival, disaster removed, renewal in God's love and much more" (vv. 17-18).

In the gospel, Jesus is the "reason for the season." He is the one who releases us from condemnation and makes us an integral part of a transformative movement of the Holy Spirit. So, what is the good news? What should be this week's message? What are some possible homiletical angles for this day? Consider:

1. Make sure to contrast the consequences of injustice, shallow leadership, and indifference in worship with examples of compassion work done by the congregation and/or by neighborhood organizations.
2. Show how the Holy Spirit is more than a concept or the silent person of the Holy Trinity. Even during Advent it is okay to connect the Spirit's renewing power in anticipation of the coming of Jesus.
3. A children's sermon emphasizing the importance of giving our best to Jesus might be a way of balancing the message of judgment with a message of hope and restoration.
4. The sermon could include an action plan to be implemented congregation-wide, perhaps a community project bringing the local church closer to the surrounding needs in the neighborhood or nearby areas that might be disenfranchised.

GRAPHICS AND RESOURCES

Articles and Resources

[Advent Wreath Meditations: Year C, \(Garland\)](#)
[Advent Wreath Meditations: Year C \(McIntyre\)](#)
[21st Century Africana Resources for the Third Sunday of Advent](#)

Seasonal/Secular

[Planning for Advent, Year C](#)
[Planning for Advent and Christmas, Year C](#)
[Advent/Christmas Liturgies, Year C](#)

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[Full Webinar: Planning for Advent and Christmas Season 2015-2016](#)
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[The Three “M’s” of Christmas Season: Mystery, Martyrs, and Magnificat](#)
[The Season after Epiphany](#) (introductory article from the *Book of Worship*)

[Advent 3, Year C, 2015 resource](#)

PREPARE THE WAY
ADVENT 4: WELCOME
Fourth Sunday of Advent, Year C
December 23, 2018

PLANNING NOTES
Reading Notes

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

Leccionario en Español, [Leccionario Común Revisado: Consulta Sobre Textos Comunes](#).
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Lectionnaire en français, [Le Lectionnaire Œcuménique Révisé](#)

Calendar Notes

December

December 1 [World Aids Day](#) (GBCS resources, [Discipleship Ministries Resources](#))

December 21 [Longest Night/Blue Christmas](#)

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January

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January 20 [Human Relations Day](#)

January 21 [Martin Luther King Jr. Day](#)

January 18-25 [Week of Prayer for Christian Unity](#)

January 20 [Ecumenical Sunday](#)

Planning for This Series

This is the fourth and final Sunday of Advent. Taylor Burton-Edwards says,

The fullest expression of Advent for this day is found in Mary's Song. Consider focusing worship and preaching around what the world looks like through the lens of her pregnancy with Jesus. Consider, too, using the Mary Song in a variety of ways and settings throughout worship—as a song of praise (opening worship)

to a song of examination (preceding a confession of faith or the sermon) to a Confession of Faith (following the sermon), and possibly even as the concluding hymn of sending. But do sing it!

This week's theme word is *Welcome*. This is a natural word for the week, as we look forward to welcoming the Christ child.

Tomorrow, on the 24th, Christmas season will begin. We will have Christmas Eve and the first Sunday after Christmas, and close our season with Epiphany of the Lord on January 6. But for Advent 4, keep the mood expectant on the coming of Christ child.

MUSIC NOTES

The following selections are congregational songs (most of which are chosen from this week's Hymn Suggestions) with notes on key, tempo, and instrumentation, along with some practical and creative considerations in singing.

O Come, O Come Emmanuel

Source: *The United Methodist Hymnal*, 211
Recommended Key: E minor
Tempo: 108–116 bpm
Instrumentation: A cappella (unison or parts), organ, piano, or band
Notes: Very few Advent songs will be sung as well by congregations as this hymn. The tune is old (15th century), but the text is older (9th century)! Join in singing a song embraced by the church for ages as a theme song throughout the Advent season. Because of the key, there are numerous possibilities for instrumental accompaniment, including keyboard instruments, or any variety of bands or ensembles. Create a *zimbelstern* effect with a handbell random ring on one or more stanzas. The "O Antiphons" are included on the opposite page of the hymns, and they also work well as complementary liturgical pieces for worship.

Resources: [History of Hymns](#)
[VENI EMMANUEL Doxology](#)

Even So Come

Source: CCLI [7036288](#)
Recommended Key: Eb–F
Tempo: 52–55 bpm (dotted quarter)
Instrumentation: Full band, guitar, or piano
Notes: This modern favorite would also make a great theme song

throughout the season of Advent. The line, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus, come,” will stick in the ears and minds of parishioners through the week. Conversation needs to be had in your context around some of the language in the song, however. Even though the use of “bride” and “bridegroom” is scriptural, the context of a “bride waiting for her groom” may need some attention for worship planning teams. See the CCLI Top 100 Project lists and rationales (found in resources below) for more information.

Resources: [CCLI Top 100 Song Lists and Rationales](#)

Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus

Source: *The United Methodist Hymnal*, 196

Recommended Key: F

Tempo: 108–116 bpm

Instrumentation: Organ or piano

Notes: One of the most well-known hymns in Methodism, this text by Charles Wesley is often sung in churches on the first Sunday of Advent, although it can be sung on any day in the Advent season. Though Wesley often wrote many more stanzas to hymns than are included in our collections, this hymn was originally printed as two stanzas only. The brevity of the hymn creates both a longing for more and a sense of anticipation, signaling the beginning of the season of Advent. Though often sung with the bold tune, HYFRYDOL as found in *The United Methodist Hymnal*, the tune [JEFFERSON](#) may be even more fitting for this season, which is characterized by the present paradox of hope and despair.

Resources: [History of Hymns](#)
[Hymn Study](#)
[Simplified keyboard accompaniment](#)

Joy to the World

Source: *The United Methodist Hymnal*, 246

Recommended Key: D

Tempo: 82–88 bpm

Instrumentation: Organ or piano, additional brass if possible

Notes: While this is often thought of as the grand opener on Christmas Eve, the text truly harkens to the reign of God in its fullness. Therefore, “Joy to the World” is indeed a

wonderful Advent hymn. This hymn is usually set in the key of D for a reason — tone color presents D as one of the brightest keys in western music. Let the brightness of the tune, ANTIOCH, shine as you sing it in worship. There are plenty of arrangements and hymn accompaniments of this for brass, including a descant duet in *The United Methodist Hymnal Music Supplement*. Put those band students and local musicians to work!

Resources:

[History of Hymns](#)

[Simplified keyboard accompaniment](#)

Joy to the World (Unspeakable Joy)

Source: CCLI [5607039](#)

Recommended Key: A–Bb

Tempo: 120–128 bpm

Instrumentation: Full band, guitar, or piano

Notes: Chris Tomlin’s new setting of this hymn incorporates the stanzas of the original with a new chorus. The CCLI Top 100 vetting team from Discipleship Ministries recommended the use of this song with further conversation because of a few points: 1) The range of the chorus, which can be quite high when sung in the common key of D, and 2) the shift in focus from joy to the *world* to the *individual*. This doesn’t cause the vetting team to not recommend the song, but worship planners and leaders need to be aware of this dynamic and find ways to balance the individual concerns with the concerns of the world.

Resources:

[CCLI Top 100 Song Lists and Rationales](#)

O Little Town of Bethlehem

Source: *The United Methodist Hymnal*, 230

Recommended Key: F

Tempo: 94–102 bpm

Instrumentation: Organ or piano

Notes: Any time we find the Micah 5 passage in the lectionary, our first thought is usually to turn to this hymn. This Scripture also appears in the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols, so “O Little Town of Bethlehem” is also an optimal choice in that service. Many choirs will choose to sing at least a portion of this hymn a cappella. If that occurs in your context, be sure

to keep the tempo moving forward. The choir and/or song leader will be responsible for maintaining a good pace.

Resources:

[History of Hymns](#)

[Simplified keyboard accompaniment](#)

[French hymn translation](#)

Holy Ground

Source: *The Faith We Sing, 2272*

Recommended Key: Eb

Tempo: 68–72 bpm

Instrumentation: Full band, rhythm section, organ, or piano

Notes: This brief chorus may have more connection with the story of Moses and the burning bush, but it is also well placed in Advent because of the “holy ground” experienced when Elizabeth suddenly finds herself in the presence of the Son of God. What ensues is a loving example of Christian community as Elizabeth and Mary rejoice together. Sing this chorus as a standalone work at the beginning of worship, or use it as a response surrounding the Scripture reading or prayer.

Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming

Source: *The United Methodist Hymnal, 216*

Recommended Key: F

Tempo: 88–96 bpm

Instrumentation: Organ or piano

Notes: Many tune arrangements paired with this fifteenth-century text have been composed, but this harmonization by Michael Praetorius of the original tune remains the most prominent. This piece can serve as congregational singing and is also a wonderful way to introduce four-part, SATB singing with your choir. Somewhat of a musical image of the theotokos (Mary, mother of God, often shown with the infant Jesus), this hymn is replete with metaphors that can present many teaching moments within the birth narrative and the passages that precede it. The ideal accompaniment is organ, but I also recommend listening to a recording of this hymn as arranged by [Sufjan Stevens](#) to get some other creative ideas with rhythm and instrumentation. It is possible to accompany with instruments you may not be used to using!

Resources:

[History of Hymns](#)

[Simplified keyboard accompaniment](#)

PREACHING NOTES

Rev. Dr. Irving Cotto is an ordained elder in The United Methodist Church. A former district superintendent and director of congregational development in the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference, he is currently the pastor of St. Paul's United Methodist Church in Warrington, Pa. Dr. Cotto is the author of Fiesta en la Casa de Dios, a book on pastoral reflections regarding worship. He also led training workshops for lay missionaries and has written training modules for the National Hispanic Latino Plan.

Advent 4—Welcome

[Micah 5:2-5a](#)

[Luke 1:39-55](#)

Key words: *joy, hospitality, encouragement*

This week's word is "Welcome." I can see how any local church would raise the volume of its proclamation. We are getting closer to the coming of the Messiah. We are one day away from the birth of Jesus, and so the image of the manger is becoming more intense and the days of sorrow, judgment, anxiety, and fear are left behind. It's also important to note that although this is a time of welcome and celebration, this can be a time of loneliness or intense sorrow for some people. Be sure to look at Blue Christmas resources to address those concerns.

This is why it is so important that as we get ready to welcome the Savior, we also welcome our neighborhoods, especially those who are suffering the most during the holidays.

The gospel for this fourth Sunday of Advent places us at the home of Zechariah and Elizabeth. Mary, the mother of Jesus, is pregnant and is paying a visit to her cousin. As expected in any culture, it is always a happy time when relatives come to visit. We hear the bell ringing and little kids running and jumping, while we hear them saying, "They're here..." While mom and dad, are also saying, "They're here" with a slanted tone; "We haven't finish all the cleaning; dinner is still half way done....oh my, there are more relatives than we initially expected." Especially in my own experience with my loving extended family, you can't always be sure how many people are going to show up. A fact of life! So, you move on and you get ready. "It's party time!"

Elizabeth was happy, and being farther along in her own pregnancy, the baby in her womb jumped of joy, as if knowing that his baby cousin Jesus is in his mommy's womb. Elizabeth is excited to see Mary, and her baby John is equally excited to hear who's at the door. Elizabeth says, "For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy" (Lk. 1:44). What a powerful Advent image! Elizabeth already knew that the baby carried by Mary is her Lord and Savior (v.44). Can we also be that excited each time we gather for worship? Can we communicate this joyful anticipation through our preaching? Are people truly excited about Jesus?

The passage from Micah serves as a preview of the nativity story. Bethlehem and Mary are the recipients of coming Lord, and as the people of Israel and Elizabeth, we are to open the door and welcome the God who has decided to set up tent in the midst of our neighborhood and who is more fascinated with each one of us than with a throne surrounded with angels and archangels (Jn. 1:14; Phil. 2:6-8), facing all the risks and passions of all human beings.

Most likely a Judean prophet during the eighth-century before Christ, Micah was responsible for delivering the divine oracle to God's covenant people. We are told that "the prophecy about a new ruler to come from the town of Bethlehem (5:2), and the response to the question of what the Lord requires of them, signal Micah's importance."^[1]

By December 23, our nation will have experienced midterm elections. Hopefully, the people newly elected or reelected will have the integrity to follow through on their promises. Hopefully, their promises will be in harmony with God's concern for the "least of these." The sermon for this entire Advent season and in particular for this fourth Sunday of Advent serves as a way to acknowledge and warmly welcome those who visit our church, those we meet in our paths, those who are thirsting for love, fellowship, help, and counsel. The sermon can encourage people to serve as volunteers serving hot meals, visiting nursing homes, setting up a caroling church group. The sermon can raise open questions that invite people to find their answers after the worship service is over, or posit a list of possibilities by which people can incarnate the message of welcoming. This may mean hospitality among their own circle of friends and acquaintances, but especially beyond. Offer an invitation to widen the circle, to knock at the doors of others, and to open our doors to others.

Preaching on this Sunday should be full of joy and encouragement of the gathered saints. To hear an uplifting message is always a good thing, but especially so during Advent, as we are approaching Christmas day and the end of another year. What a wonderful way to encourage people to cling to the promises of God and to live out more

intentionally their Advent-Christmas vocations. People might decide to become more involved in causes that promote justice and love; they may choose to support people going through transitions: mourning, surgery, relocation, sending kids away to college; they may stand alongside the poor and oppressed, incarcerated men and women, orphan kids, missionaries on furlough, and others.

The Gospel of Luke emphasizes “God’s concern for the lowly, the hungry, and the disadvantaged, and God’s judgment upon the self-indulgent.”[2] A part of our Wesleyan DNA is ministry for and with the poor. Just as Advent leads us toward encountering the infant Christ in a stable and with the announcement of the Good News being first shared with lowly shepherds, so we are invited to become more mindful and aware of ministries with and for the excluded. The sermon serves a profound pastoral purpose if it offers words and images of hospitality helps us to be more receptive toward people who are hurting, abandoned by their families or the social system, or who are church visitors.

For personal reflection and sermon preparation:

1. How do I and my congregation welcome Jesus into our area of greatest weakness, brokenness, or loss?
2. Do I leap for joy when I spend time in Scripture, worship, and fellowship with God’s covenant people?
3. How can I inspire parishioners to make the poor and the oppressed the center of their Christian concern and witness?
4. At some point in the sermon, pose an inductive question, such as “Who am I in this text? Am I Micah, the carrier of good news? Am I Mary who is welcomed by her family? Am I the leaping child in Elizabeth’s womb, excited about the presence and coming of Christ?”
5. Is this congregation a fellowship of excitement, an Advent community with a contagious faith and neighborhood involvement?
6. How can I set the tone through preaching for a greater passion for justice?

[1] *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol 11., Nashville, TN. Abingdon Press, 533.

[2] *The Wesley Study Bible, NRSV*. Nashville, TN. Abingdon Press, 1239.

GRAPHICS AND RESOURCES

Articles and Resources

[Advent Wreath Meditations: Year C, \(Garland\)](#)

[Advent Wreath Meditations: Year C \(McIntyre\)](#)

[21st Century Africana Liturgy for the Fourth Sunday After Advent, Year C](#)

Seasonal/Secular

[Planning for Advent, Year C](#)

[Planning for Advent and Christmas, Year C](#)

[Advent/Christmas Liturgies, Year C](#)

[Advent](#) (introductory article from the *Book of Worship*)

[Advent Wreath Meditations Year C](#)

[Three Ways to Celebrate Advent and Christmas Season Fully in 2015/2016](#)

[When Should You Hang the Greens?](#)

[Extended Advent Webinar](#) (to learn more about how to implement Extended Advent)

[Planning for Advent and Christmas, Year C](#)

[Webinar Slides: Planning for Advent and Christmas 2015](#)

[Full Webinar: Planning for Advent and Christmas Season 2015-2016](#)

[Christmas Season](#) (introductory article from the *Book of Worship*)

[The Three “M’s” of Christmas Season: Mystery, Martyrs, and Magnificat](#)

[The Season after Epiphany](#) (introductory article from the *Book of Worship*)

**PREPARE THE WAY
CHRISTMAS EVE: ARRIVE
Christmas Eve, Year C
December 24, 2018**

**PLANNING NOTES
Reading Notes**

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

Leccionario en Español, [Leccionario Común Revisado: Consulta Sobre Textos Comunes](#).
Para obtener más recursos leccionario, [Estudios Exegéticos: Homiléticos](#).

Lectionnaire en français, [Le Lectionnaire Œcuménique Révisé](#)

Calendar Notes

December

December 1 [World Aids Day](#) (GBCS resources, [Discipleship Ministries Resources](#))

December 21 [Longest Night/Blue Christmas](#)

December 24 [Christmas Eve](#)

December 25 [Christmas Day](#)

December 31 [Watch Night/ New Year's Eve/ Holy Name of Jesus](#)

January

January 1 [New Year's Eve/ Holy Name of Jesus](#)

January 6 [Epiphany Sunday/Epiphany](#)

January 13 [Baptism of the Lord](#)

January 11 [Human Trafficking Awareness Day](#)

January 20 [Human Relations Day](#)

January 21 [Martin Luther King Jr. Day](#)

January 18-25 [Week of Prayer for Christian Unity](#)

January 20 [Ecumenical Sunday](#)

Planning for This Series

After yesterday's *Welcome*, today we have *Arrive*. *Arrive* sums up the event of the Christ entering into the world. We read the familiar story in Luke 2, where Mary and Joseph arrive in Bethlehem; Jesus arrives into the world through birth; and the shepherds arrive to worship the baby. The Isaiah texts look to the arrival of the Messiah.

Christmas Eve, or the Evening of Christmas. In the cultures of the Bible, the day begins not at sunrise, but sunset. In Judaism, Sabbath begins on Friday at sunset. Christians continue to commemorate this ancient way of telling time in the various “Eve” services of the year, including All Saints Eve, The Great Vigil of Easter (Easter Eve) and beginning the daily office with evening prayer. With sunset on December 24, Advent ends and Christmas begins. After the Easter Vigil (Easter Eve), this is the holiest night in the church's celebration of the gospel of Jesus Christ. (Taylor Burton-Edwards).

Also remember that Christmas Eve and Easter are your highest visitor Sundays. Be sure to have extra ushers on hand to greet and help seat people. Sing familiar Christmas hymns. Consider having a gift for visitors that they can take when they exit the church that includes information about upcoming events or worship series and your church's contact information.

Above all, celebrate the coming of Christ into the world. This is a night of joy and celebration!

If you are interested in developing more services within the Christmas Season this year, be sure to look at [The Three “M’s” of Christmas Season: Mystery, Martyrs, and Magnificat](#). For our series, we will continue with “Prepare the Way” until Epiphany, and then launch a four-week series called “Greater Things.”

MUSIC NOTES

The following selections are congregational songs (most of which are chosen from this week's Hymn Suggestions) with notes on key, tempo, and instrumentation, along with some practical and creative considerations in singing.

Hark! the Herald Angels Sing

Source: *The United Methodist Hymnal*, 240; *Mil Voces Para Celebrar*, 101

Recommended Key: F

Tempo: 108–112 bpm

Instrumentation: Organ or piano

Notes: Not many Christmas hymns are as well known as this Charles Wesley hymn, which is set to a familiar melody by Felix Mendelssohn. Sing it with gusto, and keep the tempo moderate — not too fast, and not too slow. Accompany with

organ, brass, handbells, or any other instruments you have available on Christmas Eve.

Resources:

[History of Hymns](#)

[Original Wesley text](#)

[French translation](#)

[Simplified keyboard accompaniment](#)

It Came upon the Midnight Clear

Source: *The United Methodist Hymnal*, 218; *Mil Voces Para Celebrar*, 90

Recommended Key: Bb

Tempo: 124–144 bpm

Instrumentation: Organ or piano

Notes: Having found as much use as an Advent hymn as a Christmas hymn, “It Came upon the Midnight Clear” offers a clear sense of anticipation toward a time when peace shall rule over all the earth. The hymn begins with the angels’ song and moves toward text more reminiscent of the biblical language of the reign of God. This would serve as a great addition to the hymn singing of Christmas because it is a very well known hymn with themes of hope and peace. The recommended tempo is a wide range, depending on the nature of singing this hymn in your own context. Somewhat slower or faster with a lilt are both appropriate.

Resources:

[History of Hymns](#)

Jesus, Jesus, Oh, What a Wonderful Child

Source: *Worship & Song*, 3060

Recommended Key: G

Tempo: 88–96 bpm

Instrumentation: Organ, piano, or rhythm section

Notes: This short chorus is a song of celebration at the arrival of Jesus, who brings “new life” and “new hope.” Keep the tempo swinging and supplement with instruments of all kinds! Children also love this song, so engage them in leading the congregational singing. This song would work well in any setting, including a children’s worship service on Christmas Eve.

Resources:

[Hymn Study](#)

Amen, Amen

Source: *Songs of Zion*, 147; *The Faith We Sing*, 2072
Recommended Key: F–G
Tempo: 108–112 bpm (Quarter note, in 4)
Instrumentation: A cappella, organ or piano if needed
Notes: At first glance, the connection with Christmas might not be apparent. The first verse of the song, however, ties in the Christmas narrative. The congregation would always sing the “Amen” pieces of the song, with an energetic leader singing the solo parts between phrases. Engage the congregation with hand claps on 2 and 4.

Like a Child

Source: *The Faith We Sing*, 2092
Recommended Key: Eb
Tempo: 68–72 bpm
Instrumentation: Organ or piano
Notes: Originally written with no capital letters and no punctuation, this hymn is one of Dan Damon’s most well-known texts and tunes. In the singing of this hymn, we may be surprised in whom we see Jesus, and who we have to become in order to welcome in the reign of God. Whatever the accompaniment, keep it simple to allow the childlike nature of the tune to support the text. It may also be preferable to introduce the tune with a child singing the first stanza as a solo.
Resources: [History of Hymns](#)

The Friendly Beasts

Source: *The United Methodist Hymnal*, 227
Recommended Key: F
Tempo: 112–118 bpm
Instrumentation: Organ, piano, or guitar
Notes: Continuing the theme of children singing on Christmas Eve, we must include this French carol, which entertains the thoughts of what animals may have been present at Jesus’ birth. If presenting a spontaneous (or pre-planned) nativity, this hymn may be an excellent choice for congregational singing as children relive the story of Christmas. Include a

variety of instruments if possible, including flute, violin, recorder, or other melodic instruments.

Resources:

[History of Hymns](#)

PREACHING NOTES

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Christmas Eve—Arrive

[Isaiah 9:2-7](#)

[Luke 2:1-20](#)

Key words: *praise, amaze, joy*

Finally, *Noche Buena*. (A Good Night): It is not a signing off remark, like “good night; I’m going to bed.” It is more like, “this is certainly a good night” as in waiting for a treat, a surprise, a gathering where everyone is loved, accompanied, and no knows for sure when the gathering will be over.

For Christians, Christmas Eve is a moment of open arms— as a midwife who extends her arms to receive the newly born child. As the church, we also extend our arms to receive Jesus once again, with all that he has to offer: an incomparable love, a huge smile, the smile of God over humanity and directed individually at every human being.

Unfortunately, even on the night of Christmas Eve, there are thousands of people who cannot smile back. In the first place, they don’t seem to see Jesus. Maybe what they truly capture is Jesus crying, as any other baby does throughout the world. In pain and in sorrow, throughout the world there are precious little babies, precious elderly men and woman, young people who are lacking food, shelter, jobs, loved ones; therefore, they are not smiling on Christmas Eve. Still, in many of those places, because of a deep faith, they also extend their arms to the arriving Jesus.

Both Scriptures for this day have the element of reception. A baby has been born, and it has made an extraordinary difference. A variety of activities take place at church and home: Christmas plays, concerts, family dinners—all celebrating the birth of the Messiah.

The text from Isaiah 9:2-7 is a short poem full of hope, in spite of whatever days of suffering may have preceded. Christians see this promise fulfilled in the birth of Jesus of Nazareth (Lk. 2:1-20). The Israelites themselves went through harsh divisions between the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom. There are many other historical events behind this text that the preacher will most likely not have time to address. Perhaps the most important aspect that needs to be underlined on Christmas Eve is the inauguration of a new day that is the centerpiece of the occasion. The Israelites heard from Isaiah of a new day after experiences of war, division, and captivity. Christians will hear a message of the birth of a baby that makes a difference in the world. Paradoxically, we still hear about wars; a great segment of humanity experiences hunger, strife, squalor, and poverty. But still, the message of Christ's birth has resulted in schools, hospitals, orphanages, agricultural work, public demonstrations against injustice, corruption, and discrimination. Baby Jesus has been in the hearts of the innocent, the elderly, the terminally ill, and those who have just his followers.

There is much to celebrate on Christmas Eve. I can still hear the "jibaro" music^[1] on the countryside in Puerto Rico. I can still savor the special foods shared by family and friends. I can picture a night of worship that included the choir and the drama team. Afterward, people went home to meet with more family members. In certain places, gifts will be opened on Christmas Day; but in others, right at midnight or before, while the children are still awake.

What an extraordinary event. And what a formidable opportunity for evangelization, the sharing of the good news. In both Isaiah 9:2-7 and Luke 2:1-20, we are given the foundation for a message of hope through the coming of a very special baby. With the arrival of Jesus, there is the promise of freedom for those in bondage, justice on behalf of those who have been wronged, light in a world of darkness, deliverance from the rod of the oppressor. No one could stop God's sovereign will, "While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child" (v. 6). The preacher can hinge on this last verse to accentuate the fact that amid confusion and different turns of events, God is in charge of history; no one can stop God from bringing redemption to the world. Galatians 4:4-5 has the same tone of an unstoppable moment, "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children."

That we are adopted and made part of God's covenant people, that we have become sisters and brothers of Jesus, that we have the blessing to open our arms to the One who has arrived, is a fascinating message. Amid the powers that be to proclaim that the One who has come is at the same time, Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting

Father, Prince of Peace, with an ever increasing authority, with the promise of peace, and an agenda of justice and righteousness is at the same time good news and bad news —good news for those who long for deliverance; bad news for those who have placed the chains of oppression and violence on others.

In the gospel text, the newborn child disrupted— in a good way —the lives of Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, and even the angels. The whole universe is engaged in offering praises to the One who is God’s best gift to the world. The angels sing, “glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace among those whom he favors” (v.14).

For personal reflection and sermon preparation:

1. The titles given to the coming king (Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace) continue to be a good foundation for a message that addresses the character of God and the blessing the newborn child, Jesus, brings to the life of the individual believer and the gathered assembly.
2. Discussions on the conflicts between the Jewish kingdoms of north and south, while a potential distraction and a bit boring for some if not properly handled, could set the tone for a message on how the arrival of Jesus can be and has been a source of reconciliation, peace, and harmony.
3. The Christian message, while claiming the sovereignty and uniqueness of Christ, can recognize that among people of other faiths and of good will our faith is confirmed. In other words, what Christians proclaim in terms of peace, justice, love, fraternity, reconciliation will find affirmation in other belief systems. We can continue to elevate Jesus as Lord and recognize at the same time how the goodness of God is surprisingly present in many places. The spark of the divine is everywhere.
3. A reflection on the first witnesses of the new arrival can be the focus of this occasion’s message. A particular focus on Mary as God’s instrument to bring in the Savior might offer a new insight to faith communities where the mother of Jesus is hardly ever mentioned.

[1] Jibaro is a term used in Puerto Rico to describe a peasant or farmworker, but in general terms it refers to that which is typical, at the core of the culture. And jibaro music would mean music from the countryside among humble people.

GRAPHICS AND RESOURCES

Articles and Resources

[Advent Wreath Meditations: Year C, \(Garland\)](#)
[Advent Wreath Meditations: Year C \(McIntyre\)](#)
[21st Century Africana Liturgy Resources for Christmas Eve, Year C](#)
[The Great Thanksgiving for Christmas Eve, Day, or Season](#)

Seasonal/Secular

[Christmas Eve Musical Hospitality](#)
[Christmas Eve Hospitality: Twelve Ways to Welcome](#)

[Planning for Advent and Christmas, Year C](#)
[Advent/Christmas Liturgies, Year C](#)

[Advent](#) (introductory article from the *Book of Worship*)
[Advent Wreath Meditations Year C](#)
[Three Ways to Celebrate Advent and Christmas Season Fully in 2015/2016](#)
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[The Three “M’s” of Christmas Season: Mystery, Martyrs, and Magnificat](#)
[The Season after Epiphany](#) (introductory article from the *Book of Worship*)

[Christmas Eve, Year C, 2015](#)

PREPARE THE WAY
FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS DAY: SEARCH
First Sunday After Christmas Day, Year C
December 30, 2018

PLANNING NOTES
Reading Notes

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Leccionario en Español, [Leccionario Común Revisado: Consulta Sobre Textos Comunes](#).
Para obtener más recursos leccionario, [Estudios Exegéticos: Homiléticos](#).

Lectionnaire en français, [Le Lectionnaire Œcuménique Révisé](#)

Calendar Notes

December

December 31 [Watch Night/ New Year's Eve/ Holy Name of Jesus](#)

January

January 1 [New Year's Eve/ Holy Name of Jesus](#)

January 6 [Epiphany Sunday/Epiphany](#)

January 13 [Baptism of the Lord](#)

January 11 [Human Trafficking Awareness Day](#)

January 20 [Human Relations Day](#)

January 21 [Martin Luther King Jr. Day](#)

January 18-25 [Week of Prayer for Christian Unity](#)

January 20 [Ecumenical Sunday](#)

Planning for This Series

For this Sunday, we chose the word “Search” because in the story in Luke, Jesus’ family has to search for him. When they finally find him, Jesus asks them, “Why were you searching for me?” With your worship planning team, remember that this is another great week to sing those familiar Christmas hymns. Even though it is December 30, and people may be gearing up to go back to work, it is still the Christmas season!

MUSIC NOTES

Niño Lindo (Child So Lovely)

Source: *Mil Voces Para Celebrar*, 114; *The United Methodist Hymnal*, 222

Recommended Key: E minor

Tempo: 54–58 bpm

Instrumentation: Guitar or piano

Notes: The Spanish language sung in this hymn is so beautiful and is preferred over and above the English translation. If singing as a solo in Spanish in a primarily English-speaking context, invite the congregation to follow along with the English translation in the hymnal. Otherwise, teach at least the refrain in Spanish and invite the congregation to sing that each time, with soloists or choir on the stanzas.

Infant Holy, Infant Lowly

Source: *The United Methodist Hymnal*, 229; *Mil Voces Para Celebrar*, 116; *Come, Let Us Worship*, 152

Recommended Key: G

Tempo: 88–96 bpm

Instrumentation: Organ, piano, or guitar

Notes: Be sure to keep a gentle lilt with the triple meter when singing this work. Since it is only two stanzas, it will seem quite brief by the conclusion of the carol. The last two measures are listed as an interlude/ending, but it is also possible to repeat the closing phrase (“Christ the babe is Lord of all”/ “Christ the babe was born for you”).

Resources: [History of Hymns](#)

Love Came Down at Christmas

Source: *The United Methodist Hymnal*, 242

Recommended Key: F

Tempo: 70–74 bpm

Instrumentation: Organ or piano

Notes: Poet Christina Rossetti has a couple of hymn texts in *The United Methodist Hymnal*: “Love Came Down at Christmas” and “In the Bleak Midwinter.” Her hymn texts are very image- and metaphor-driven and serve as prominent representations of nineteenth-century British poetry. Sing with a simple tempo and tone, and allow the focus to reside on “Love” (a very Wesleyan practice of personifying Love) as the coming of Jesus.

Resources: [History of Hymns](#)

Once in Royal David's City

Source: *The United Methodist Hymnal*, 250; *Come, Let Us Worship*, 159

Recommended Key: F

Tempo: 80–86 bpm

Instrumentation: Organ, piano, or acoustic ensemble

Notes: One of my personal Christmas favorites, this hymn focuses on the humanity of Jesus and his ability to understand our human condition in the midst of his divinity. Following the lead of musicians like [Sufjan Stevens](#), one of the best ways to accompany this hymn is with a folk, “grassroots” ensemble of guitar, mandolin, banjo, and brushed snare drum with a unison or harmonized melody.

Resources: [History of Hymns](#)
[Lead sheet for acoustic ensemble](#)

That Boy-Child of Mary

Source: *The United Methodist Hymnal*, 241

Recommended Key: F

Tempo: 54–58 bpm (dotted quarter)

Instrumentation: A cappella with light percussion; organ or piano

Notes: The refrain for this song is easily learnable, and the stanzas are also quite accessible. The stanzas are short enough that the bulk of the aural memory will be centered upon the refrain after the singing of this song.

Resources: [History of Hymns](#)

We Would See Jesus

Source: *The United Methodist Hymnal*, 256; *Come, Let Us Worship*, 168

Recommended Key: Bb

Tempo: 56–60 bpm

Instrumentation: Organ or piano

Notes: This text focuses upon the birth, childhood, and ministry of Jesus. Sometimes the broad scope of the narrative found in the hymn can prove difficult in finding a good time for its use in worship, but this Sunday provides one such occasion to sing it heartily. A new folk setting by Jackson Henry is also available. In the first four stanzas, the melody is found in the bottom notes; but in the fifth stanza, the melody is found in

the middle notes. The other harmony provided is optional. The tempo is very slow and is reminiscent of a slow, bluegrass ballad.

Resources:

[History of Hymns](#)

[Bluegrass Score by Jackson Henry](#)

PREACHING NOTES

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First Sunday After Christmas Day—Search

[Luke 2:41-52](#)

Keywords: parents, obedience

This text is the only text where Jesus' life between infancy and adulthood is recorded. Although a very brief description of these years, it gives us enough to think about him as a normal boy, trained well in the traditions of Judaism.

On the occasion of Passover, Jesus' parents, along with many other faithful Jews, took the journey to the city of Jerusalem. At some point on the return trip back to their home, they noticed Jesus was missing. They thought twelve-year-old Jesus was among the travelers. After a three-day search, to their surprise, they found Jesus in the temple in the middle of a conversation with religious teachers. Typical of a concerned parent, Mary questions Jesus about his disappearance. She must have been very worried and upset because he had stayed in Jerusalem. Mary says, we've been "searching for you in great anxiety" (v.48). To which, Jesus replies, "Why were you searching for me?" Any parent would have responded with a, "What do you mean, 'Why?' We are your parents." Every child know the drill. But this is the fascinating thing about this text: it enhances Jesus' humanity, and it gives us a small, but significant entry into his family, "the holy family."

The word for this week is "Search." Mary and Joseph search for their lost child, Jesus. Jesus is on a search for answers; he is developing into adulthood, and—above all—discovering his mission as Son of God. I know this presents serious questions for some people regarding Jesus' nature as both human and divine. For some, the question is, "Didn't he understand his own divinity?" For others, the question is, "If he understands

his divinity, how authentic was his experience as a human being?" The text reads, "And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor" (v.52).

The epistle to Hebrews affirms Jesus' experience as common to all other human beings, "In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and having made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him" (5:7-9). Thus, like any other human being, Jesus learned to obey his Heavenly Father. And so, we find him learning the ropes of his faith, and perhaps deepening his understanding of who is and what he is called to do as the Messiah.

The presence of the parents and the dynamic of family interactions make this text very accessible. Concerns about family life, child rearing, spiritual formation, faith discoveries, family rules, and communication between parents and youth are places where the theme of "search" can surface. Even Jesus was under the tutelage of a family; he had questions and was thirsting for truth and meaning. Jesus shows depth and maturity as a young twelve-year-old boy. We are not privy to the content of his interaction in the temple, but he is both "listening to them and asking them questions." Additionally, he had a grasp of the faith and tradition as "all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers" (v. 47).

This passage brings back memories of my visit to Israel. My brother and I had a chance to approach the Western Wall (or wailing wall). We carried in our pockets a list of petitions from our respective parishioners to be inserted between the stones that make up the wall. We began our journey toward the wall in the middle of a huge crowd made up of hundreds, if not thousands, of men praying. Many of them stood in circles sharing questions and answers, under the tutelage of either a rabbi or an elder Jew.

In the text, we see a very Jewish moment, with Jesus and his parents caught in between Jesus' search for answers and Mary and Joseph's search for their son. For us Christian listeners in the twenty-first century on this first Sunday after Christmas Day, we have an invitation to continue our search for depth and greater maturity in our faith journey. Like Jesus, we want to have the freedom to raise questions and to share our view on things spiritual. It would be wonderful if every faith community could be that place where people would feel they could go on their own to find answers. We will always be surrounded by self-appointed leaders who like fathers and mothers will question our whereabouts, our independent thinking, or our going in the opposite direction.

The preacher has an enormous task this morning. The preacher should juggle the importance of family life, the uncontainable and inevitable coming of age of all human beings, and the reminder that like Jesus, we also must be about our heavenly parent's business. As a mother and a father, God wants us to give an account of our whereabouts, but at the same time wants us to explore, discern, ask questions, and search for answers.

In practical terms, Scripture, prayer, worship, small-group Bible studies, meditation, and all kinds of spiritual discipline are important tools to help us continue our search. From different angles, this text in the Christmas season can lay a foundation for what is yet to come in the next several weeks as we see Jesus becoming an adult and fully engaged in his messianic mission.

For personal reflection and sermon preparation

1. Sermon preparation is a spiritual discipline in itself. The exercise of immersing in the text week in and week out can be a tedious task. It can also become monotonous and a matter of doing the job as opposed to an adventure in learning new things about ourselves, about God, and about the applications of our faith in the real world.
2. This text can motivate parishioners to give themselves permission to explore biblical, theological, and catechetical matters.
3. Consider a presentation on the reality of family life, coming of age, and independent thinking in our children. By the same token, also consider a homiletical lesson on subjects such as: sensitivity on the part of spiritual elders toward young inquiring minds and the importance of providing spaces for in-depth discussions on faith matters.
4. The homilist might identify a text or two from the Hebrew Scriptures that might serve as a framework for the spiritual formation of both our children and children involved in our churches (i.e. Joshua 24:15; Proverbs 22:6).

GRAPHICS AND RESOURCES

Articles and Resources

[The Great Thanksgiving for Christmas Eve, Day, or Season](#)
[21st Century Worship Resources for Christmas 1C](#)

Seasonal/Secular

[Watch Night Oulah Service](#)

[21st Century Africana Resources for New Year's Day](#)

[Christmas Season](#) (introductory article from the *Book of Worship*)

[The Three "M's" of Christmas Season: Mystery, Martyrs, and Magnificat](#)

[The Season after Epiphany](#) (introductory article from the *Book of Worship*)

[First Sunday after Christmas, 2015](#)

**PREPARE THE WAY
EPIPHANY SUNDAY: FIND
Epiphany Sunday, Year C
January 6, 2018**

**PLANNING NOTES
Reading Notes**

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

Leccionario en Español, [Leccionario Común Revisado: Consulta Sobre Textos Comunes](#).
Para obtener más recursos leccionario, [Estudios Exegéticos: Homiléticos](#).

Lectionnaire en français, [Le Lectionnaire Œcuménique Révisé](#)

Calendar Notes

January

January 1 [New Year's Eve/ Holy Name of Jesus](#)

January 6 [Epiphany Sunday/Epiphany](#)

January 13 [Baptism of the Lord](#)

January 11 [Human Trafficking Awareness Day](#)

January 20 [Human Relations Day](#)

January 21 [Martin Luther King Jr. Day](#)

January 18-25 [Week of Prayer for Christian Unity](#)

January 20 [Ecumenical Sunday](#)

Planning for This Series

This year, Epiphany falls on a Sunday. Sometimes the week is split between Epiphany and Epiphany Sunday. The word for this week is *Find*.

We have come to the end of the Advent-Christmas season. Next week will kick off a new series—"Greater Things."

MUSIC NOTES

Arise, Shine

Source:

The Faith We Sing, 2005

Recommended Key: G
Tempo: 60 bpm
Instrumentation: Organ or piano, also hand drum or tambourine if available
Notes: This short chorus by Gary Alan Smith, former music editor at Abingdon Press, offers a great statement of Isaiah 60 in what would make a wonderful procession. Have the song leader sing the leader part from the front, with the choir and congregation singing the “all” part as they process in on this Epiphany Sunday. The percussion would add some character to the 6/8 meter as well.

De Tierra Lejana Venimos (From a Distant Home)

Source: *The United Methodist Hymnal*, 243
Recommended Key: D minor
Tempo: 54–56 bpm
Instrumentation: Piano or guitar
Notes: One of the most dramatic texts about the Epiphany, this song works well in either Spanish or English. The Spanish is quite engaging, but it can prove difficult for congregations for whom Spanish is not their first language. Keep the rocking left hand steady in the accompaniment as a way to mimic the journey of the magi.

Bethlehem

Source: *Zion Still Sings*, 58; *Worship & Song*, 3053
Recommended Key: D minor
Tempo: 94–100 bpm
Instrumentation: Piano
Notes: Marilyn Thornton has created this modern song as a way to tell the story of the birth of Jesus that includes the holy family of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus. The repetitive phrases, “Mary had-a Jesus on Christmas morn” also create a way to establish a leader/response dynamic between a choir or song leader and the congregation. Swing it!

Resources: [History of Hymns](#)

Light, Light

Source: UMCDiscipleship.org
Recommended Key: D
Tempo: 116–120 bpm

Instrumentation: Full band, piano, or guitar
Notes: This modern song written by Jackson Henry centers on the images of the Epiphany (light, star, love) and Jesus coming as the light of the world. The vocals need to lead the singing of this song, and there are numerous syncopations. However, the rhythm is fairly consistent through most of the song, which should offer enough repetition to help with accessibility.
Resources: [Musical score](#)

The First Noel

Source: *The United Methodist Hymnal*, 245; *Mil Voces Para Celebrar*, 89
Recommended Key: D
Tempo: 88–94 bpm
Instrumentation: Organ, piano, or guitar
Notes: This traditional English carol is often thought of as a carol for Christmas Eve or Christmas Day, but it centers more upon the story of the Epiphany than the birth of Jesus. The refrain is news of Jesus' birth, and this news is shown in this hymn by the angel and the star. Unlike "We Three Kings," if you need to sing less than five stanzas (depending on its liturgical use), it is possible to sing stanzas 1, 2, and 5 and still tell the story effectively. If it is possible, have your choir sing all four parts in the refrain throughout, and have the sopranos sing the tenor part of the refrain up one octave for a powerful descant on the final stanza.
Resources: [History of Hymns](#)

We Three Kings of Orient Are

Source: *The United Methodist Hymnal*, 254; *Mil Voces Para Celebrar*, 108
Recommended Key: E minor
Tempo: 48 bpm
Instrumentation: Organ, piano, guitar, and possible percussion
Notes: A favorite to sing for the observance of the Epiphany, this hymn tells the story of the magi and their visit to Jesus. In recent years, however, this hymn has fallen under a bit of scrutiny because of its declaration that there were three magi even though the gospel writer of Matthew doesn't

assign a number. It is clear that the hymn writer assigned one per gift — gold, frankincense, and myrrh. This inaccuracy may need to be fleshed out more outside of worship because it doesn't necessarily make this hymn unsingable. The story itself (and its singing) is one children and adults both can and need to sing together. Keep in mind this is not a five-stanza hymn that can be trimmed down because stanzas 2-4 each address one of the gifts given to Jesus by the magi. The lilting time signature (3/8) gives this hymn a rocking feel that I have often pictured as of a "song for a journey." One of the best instruments to accompany this tune, other than an organ and/or piano, is a tambourine. It gives it an Eastern flair that can create a memorable effect on this day.

Resources: [History of Hymns](#)

PREACHING NOTES

Rev. Dr. Irving Cotto is an ordained elder in The United Methodist Church. A former district superintendent and director of congregational development in the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference, he is currently the pastor of St. Paul's United Methodist Church in Warrington, Pa. Dr. Cotto is the author of Fiesta en la Casa de Dios, a book on pastoral reflections regarding worship. He also led training workshops for lay missionaries and has written training modules for the National Hispanic Latino Plan.

Epiphany Sunday: Find

[Isaiah 60:1-6](#)

[Matthew 2:1-12](#)

Keywords: Star, light, praise, gift, journey

Epiphany Sunday is a transition Sunday; the ending of the Christmas Season and the beginning of ordinary time. This transition is the third stage in the cycle of light or the cycle of the nativity. First, we have Advent; then we have Christmas, followed by Epiphany.

Growing up in Puerto Rico and then serving for 25 years in parishes involving families from different Spanish-speaking countries, I found that these texts were often used as the framework for big congregational celebrations aimed at making children happy, *Día de los Tres Santos Reyes* (Three Kings Day). This is still an extraordinary festivity in

many U.S. communities. Many of these have been sponsored by social agencies, Catholic, protestant, or Pentecostal congregations.

My wife and I taught my own children to find a shoe box, fill it with grass, and place it under their beds on January 5 (the eve of Three Kings Day). It was like a second Christmas Day for them, but with a slight difference: It's a special occasion that has not been extremely commercialized in the U.S. Among many families, it is an extra time for sharing gifts or the only time. In some places, the gifts are very humble; in other places, it's a time for a family reunion, carol singing, or attending special church services. Many of the cultural Puerto Rican songs shared during this time highlight the three kings as saints, who also deserve our respect because of their love for Jesus.

For the preacher, Epiphany is a time to call the congregation to jump into the crescendo of the history of salvation. The light of Christ will become more intense as we progress into the Epiphany season. This particular Sunday, however, the main attention should be placed on the homage, the adoration that we owe our Savior.

The special word for this week is "Find." In both Isaiah 60:1-6 and Matthew 2:1-12, there is movement toward the new king who was born in Bethlehem. According to Isaiah's prophecy, the land of Israel will witness how "nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn"(v.3). The text makes reference to young camels of Midian and Ephah and Sheba will come with gold and frankincense to proclaim the praise of the Lord (v. 6,7). In the gospel of Matthew, the visit of the magi is also about rendering praise not to a land, but to a newborn king.

In these texts, there is an invitation to give honor, glory, and praise to God, who has acted in favor of the covenant people and who has come to us through the Messiah. In the gospel, the wise men from the East have had a brief encounter with King Herod. We know that Herod had an ulterior motive when having what seemed like an honest and sincere conversation with these visitors. He was intending to begin a search for the newborn king to get rid of him (vv.13). Once they went to Bethlehem and were welcomed by Joseph and Mary, the first thing they did was kneel and honor the newborn child.

Epiphany offers myriad theological possibilities: a spiritual journey that takes us to Jesus; divine signs on our path that point us to where God wants us to go; the importance of the stewardship of our lives: time, talent, treasure, knowing when to start a new adventure in faith, and when to come to halt.

The Matthean text says, "they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising until it stopped over the place where the child was" (v.9). Where

are those places where Jesus is and that we must stop? Under the bridges where the homeless live? At a hospice where someone is facing the very last hours of life? Among the hungry, the imprisoned? In front of the White House, demanding justice for the dreamers, the children who have been separated from their parents? At every opportunity where people are longing for the light of Christ, the Christ of Epiphany is already there.

The text and the occasion can take us in the direction of following the star in terms of prevenient grace; that is, how God has been working in our lives before we even realize it — or following the star in terms of a new direction God wants us to take; Or following the star in terms of discernment. What decision, new project, new relationship or adjustment do we need to follow through on that will ultimately bring honor to the name of Christ?

For personal reflection and sermon preparation:

1. The sermon on this occasion can precede or follow a skit or a brief entrance of the three magi; follow by offering simple gifts for the children of the community.
2. The sermon could highlight the importance of worship and its connection to specific social issues affecting people's lives.
3. The sermon could be a teaching moment regarding the meaning of Epiphany in the life of the church, as part of the liturgical year, and its implications for evangelization, mission, and community outreach. The themes of light, journey, gifting, and discernment can be places where the sermon could begin or arrive.
4. The sermon may center on the need to be aware of our surroundings; Israel was to suddenly be inundated with people from all places, and a wave of abundance and blessing (v.5). They are to be "thrilled and rejoicing." Do we notice how God has blessed us? Do we stop and give God praise for all that has brought joy and happiness to our existence?

GRAPHICS AND RESOURCES

Articles and Resources

[21st Century African Liturgy Resources for Epiphany, Year C](#)
[Affirmation of Faith for Epiphany and the Season After Epiphany](#)

Seasonal/Secular

[Family Observance of Epiphany](#)
[Epiphany Reflections](#)
[An Epiphany Blessing of Homes and Chalking the Door](#)

[The Season after Epiphany](#) (introductory article from the *Book of Worship*)

[Epiphany Sunday, Year C, 2015](#)

[Epiphany of the Lord, Year C, 2015](#)