

October 3, 2016

Dear Church Partners,

In this packet are **six free object lessons** for your use! My hope is that you will find this resource helpful for you as you interpret the “Change for Children” campaign to the young people of your church. While written primarily for a Children’s Sermon format, these object lessons could be used in a Sunday school setting, youth group, or even as sermon illustrations!

In my twenty years in children and youth ministry, the object lessons I have used for children’s sermon times have been a very effective way of communicating the truth of God’s Word. Many of the adults in the congregation would tell me they preferred my children’s sermons to my “regular” sermons! Jesus taught in object lessons and word pictures, too, so it should be no surprise to us that this method is highly effective—surely Jesus knew what he was doing and set an example for us to follow!

These lessons have been carefully crafted around the stories of the Advent season (Revised Common Lectionary, Year A), how the story impacts our hearts and lives, and the ways in which your church can connect to the ministry of Intermountain. I hope this resource blesses you, saves you time in preparation, and makes your workload a little lighter. It is my hope that our relationship will truly be a partnership of mutual benefit. As Intermountain’s chaplain, I want to be a resource to you and an encouragement in your work with children and families.

Perhaps you have already visited our website: www.intermountainministry.org ? It has regular posts about our ministry with the children in residence and we’re building an ever expanding library of resources **free** for your use! There are lessons like the ones contained in this packet, as well as videos that help interpret the ministry of Intermountain to your congregation. I endeavor to update the content regularly, so I’d encourage you to check back at least twice a month. Any feedback or requests for specific types of resources or content are also welcome any time. In 2017, we plan to release a Vacation Bible School curriculum that was requested by many of our supporters!

So, enjoy these lessons for now, and let me know what you think. I’d love to hear from you and build a stronger relationship between my chaplain’s ministry at Intermountain and the good work you are doing in your church and community.

Blessings,



Chris Haughee, Chaplain

chrish@intermountain.org or 406-465-9693

Week 1: “Get Ready!”

Objects needed: a picture of Noah’s Ark, or perhaps a Noah’s Ark toy.

Theme/Main Idea: There was a lot of “noise and activity” leading up to the flood and Noah’s Ark. Many people were caught by surprise even though they had years and years to change their ways. Advent is a season of preparation, as we think about the first time Jesus came, as a little baby. Jesus said he will come again, and we should build an “advent-like expectation” into our lives so we will be ready!



Presentation:

“Today we start the season of Advent. It is a time we look forward to a celebration of the birth of Jesus. Throughout this season we will talk about the hope that knowing Jesus gives us, and if we listen to Jesus, we find our purpose in life is to love God and love other people. We can show love to others by helping them in difficult times.

Maybe you have heard that we will be taking a special offering for Advent called ‘Change for Children?’ It’s for kids like you who maybe have had a few more difficulties in life or something is making it hard for them right now to have a healthy and happy relationship with others. They need our help, support and prayers to feel the hope we’ll be celebrating this season. So, before we go any farther... let me pass these out... [pass out change cans and prayer cards]

We’ll be filling these up and collecting them at Christmas so you can have a real impact in the lives of other children. And the prayer cards are for you to keep, to remind you to pray for others. Now... where was I before I passed out the cans?

[children respond]

Ah, yes... I was talking about hope and advent. Advent is a time we celebrate Jesus coming as a baby. And, today’s reading from Matthew’s gospel reminds us that Jesus is coming again... not as a baby this time, but as King of everyone everywhere! It seems impossible that we could miss his coming that second time... Or, could we? Maybe what I have for my object lesson this morning can help us? Would you like to see what I brought? What do you think it is?

[children guess]

Well, those are all great guesses, but here it is... [bring out Noah’s Ark toy or picture] What is this?

[children respond, ‘Noah’s Ark!’]

That's right, it's Noah's Ark... but what does that have to do with Jesus coming as a baby? Or, even as Jesus coming back someday, not as a baby, but as God to rescue us and save the world? Any guesses? No... well, the connection comes from something Jesus said himself... not when he was a baby, but much later. In our gospel lesson today, Jesus told his disciples that when he comes back again it will be like "the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away" (Matthew 24:37-38).

Eating and drinking, getting married... throwing parties and totally unaware of what God was about to do. Well, it was like that in Noah's day, when Jesus was born, and Jesus is warning us that it is like that still today. It's not as if what God does is hard to miss... if you are looking, waiting, watching, and praying. However, just like getting caught up in rising flood waters, we can get caught up in all the stuff that isn't about Jesus this time of year, and when we do, we miss the amazing things God is doing and has done for us... all the things we celebrate in church at this time of year. Let's make sure that we don't miss the real reason for this season of Advent. Let's keep our eyes and our ears and our hearts open to Jesus!

Will you pray with me?

God, we thank you that you love us enough to warn us about those things that can distract us and get us carried away from what really matters. Help us to honor you this season by making Jesus the center of our holiday celebrations. Bless our Change for Children effort and remind us to pray for the work of Intermountain this season. In your mercy, fill us with your love, grace, and peace. Amen."

Key Text: Matthew 24:36-44 (NIRV)

³⁶ "But no one knows about that day or hour. Not even the angels in heaven know. The Son does not know. Only the Father knows. ³⁷ Remember how it was in the days of Noah. It will be the same when the Son of Man comes. ³⁸ In the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking. They were getting married. They were giving their daughters to be married. They did all those things right up to the day Noah entered the ark. ³⁹ They knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be when the Son of Man comes.

⁴⁰ Two men will be in the field. One will be taken and the other left. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding with a hand mill. One will be taken and the other left.

⁴² "So keep watch. You do not know on what day your Lord will come. ⁴³ You must understand something. Suppose the owner of the house knew what time of night the robber was coming. Then he would have kept watch. He would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁴ So you also must be ready. The Son of Man will come at an hour when you don't expect him."

Week 2: “Beyond the Giving Tree”

Objects needed: A copy of the book, “The Giving Tree.”

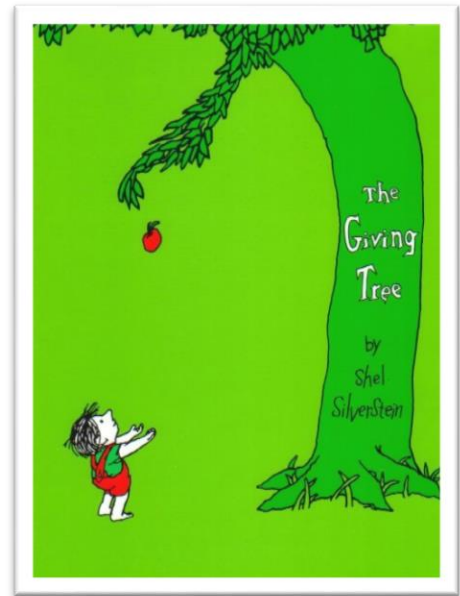
Theme/Main Idea: Even when things seem hopeless, God gives us hope. When nothing is left of the tree but the stump, there is still life there... just waiting for the right season to spring up again. Shel Silverstein’s book, *The Giving Tree*, ends with an old man sitting on a stump and the “tree” is happy again... but the ending of the book is pretty sad, really! The story of Isaiah, in today’s passage, is MUCH more hopeful.

Presentation:

“How are you this morning, children? My object lesson today is a book, and I am guessing it’s one that many of you have seen or had read to you before... anyone want to guess?”

[take time for children’s guesses... I’d be amazed if someone got it!]

No... though those are all good guesses and well known stories. The book I have [reveal book at this time] is called, *The Giving Tree*! Do you know this book? Oh, it’s really good. We don’t have time to read it all now, maybe later we could, but for now I want to point out how the Tree in the book and the boy are friends. The book moves through the story with the boy getting older and returning each time to take something more from the tree. At the very end, what is left of the tree?



[turn page to where the old man sits on what is left of the tree... now just a stump]

Right! Just a poor old stump. But still, the story tells us, the tree is happy because the “boy,” now really an old man, can sit on her and she feels connected to the boy once again. And that’s it. That’s the story... kind of happy, and kind of sad. But, of the stories I know that talk about stumps, and I am not sure there are too many, *The Giving Tree* is only the second best story. I know a better one. It’s in the Bible! It’s a great story... really!

Hmmm... you guys don’t look convinced. Maybe I better explain...

Do you know about Advent? Advent means “the arrival of an important person or event.” It’s the start of the church year, and throughout the season of Advent we recognize the coming of Jesus as a baby. We celebrate that particular miracle on what day that is coming up? Do you know?

[let kids respond]

That's right! Christmas! So, Advent is the time leading up to Christmas... It's a time when we look back on the Bible passages that foretold Jesus' coming so we can learn more about the wonderful gift Jesus was to the world! In the passage from Isaiah that we read this morning, for instance, the prophet talks about the promise of a 'branch' that was going to come and save everyone. Do you know what God was actually talking about? Or, maybe I should say... Do you know *WHO* God was talking about? [kids guess] That's right... Jesus!

Jesus was the branch Isaiah wrote about. That's kind of weird, isn't it? It gets a little less weird if you understand why God promised that branch in the first place.

Back then, the people of Israel were pretty discouraged. They had messed up big time, and they were suffering the consequences of some pretty bad choices. They had turned their backs on God and decided to do things their own way. It didn't work out very well for them. So, like a big beautiful tree getting cut down, all of the 'amazingness' of being God's people was taken away. They had to leave the places they were living and go live somewhere else. They were sad. They had gone from feeling like a big, important and beautiful tree to a lowly little stump. And, as they felt lowly like that stump, without any hope, that's when God told them that out of that stump they had become a new tree would sprout! At first it would be so small, it would just be like a little branch coming out of the side of the stump!

Wow... incredible! When they felt their worst and felt like maybe God would just throw up his hands and be done with them, God gave them a promise. God told them that they would have a future leader, a *great great great* (you keep going on and on for a little while...) grandson of King David, who would help make them the type of people who are 'right with God,' close to him, and part of God's family! That's a wonderful promise to look forward to.

So, here we are in Advent, just starting out. Let's remember how God kept his promise to send the branch—the seedling from the stump of Jesse (*that was King David's dad*)—and that branch is Jesus, and *most importantly...* God still keeps all his promises today. In our own small way, we can help extend the hope that God gives us by supporting the work Intermountain does with kids and families.

We handed out change cans last week and have some more for you if you missed that (pass out cans to any that weren't in church last week), and we're hoping you fill them up between now and Christmas. You'll hear a little more about Intermountain as we continue to move through the Advent season. But, for now...

Let's pray:

God, thank you for your presence in each of our lives. Help us remember the promises that have come true and those that will come true in the future. Give us patience to wait for all the good things you promise to those that love you and place their trust in you. Help us hold out for the best, YOUR best God—for us, and for our church and our community. In Jesus' name, Amen."

Key Text: Isaiah 11:1-10 (NirV)

Jesse's family is like a tree that has been cut down.

A new little tree will grow from its stump.

From its roots a Branch will grow and produce fruit.

²The Spirit of the LORD will rest on that Branch.

The Spirit will help him to be wise and understanding.

The Spirit will help him make wise plans and carry them out.

The Spirit will help him know the LORD and have respect for him.

³The Branch will take delight

in respecting the LORD.

He will not judge things only by the way they look.

He won't make decisions based simply on what people say.

⁴He will always do what is right

when he judges those who are in need.

He'll be completely fair

when he makes decisions about poor people.

When he commands that people be punished,

it will happen.

When he orders that evil people be put to death,

it will take place.

⁵He will put on godliness as if it were his belt.

He'll wear faithfulness around his waist.

⁶Wolves will live with lambs.

Leopards will lie down with goats.

Calves and lions will eat together.

And little children will lead them around.

⁷Cows will eat with bears.

Their little ones will lie down together.

And lions will eat straw like oxen.

⁸A baby will play near a hole where cobras live.

A young child will put its hand into a nest

where poisonous snakes live.

⁹None of those animals will harm or destroy anything or anyone

on my holy mountain of Zion.

The oceans are full of water.

In the same way, the earth will be filled

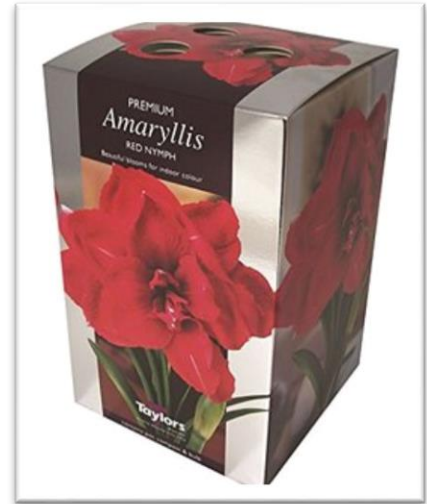
with the knowledge of the LORD.

¹⁰At that time, here is what the man who is called the Root of Jesse will do. He will be like a banner that brings nations together. They will come to him. And the place where he rules will be glorious.

Week 3: “Farming takes patience.”

Objects needed: One of those packaged Christmas Amaryllis plants, bottle of water

Theme/Main Idea: It can be hard to wait: waiting for Christmas to come, waiting to see family, waiting for school break, waiting for a crop to come, or waiting for a flower to bloom. We can choose to wait patiently, or we can get frustrated—grumbling and setting a bad example—while we wait. James reminds us that while we wait for Jesus to come back, we should be careful HOW we wait, so that when he comes, we are truly ready!



Presentation:

“Oh boy, oh boy! Am I excited... I have a gift here that I got for myself at the store. It’s really pretty. Want to see it?”

[children respond]

Okay, here it is... just look at it! [reveal boxed amaryllis] Look at the pretty picture. There is a beautiful flower inside this box. Shall we open it?

[children respond... as you open the box, your attitude should go from excitement to disappointment]

Wait... wait... there is something wrong. This isn’t a flower! It’s just a pot with dirt in it. Wow! I am really disappointed. What? Some of you are looking at me funny... why? Did I do something wrong? Where is my flower?

[children respond, maybe explaining that you will need to take care of the pot, and that the bulb will grow into a pretty flower]

Oh, so the flower is in here in the dirt somewhere, and I just need to take care of it and it will grow? Okay, I can do that! Flowers and plants need water to grow, right? Okay... I’ll just add a little water! [your attitude should improve temporarily as you gain hope that adding a little water will help your plant grow]

Okay... [pour a little water on the bulb] I gave it some water... now... it’s going to grow and bloom, right? [getting frustrated again] Where’s my flower!?! Arg! *This is so hard and frustrating!!* What am I doing wrong? Do you know?

[children explain that you need to wait... to be patient... and, eventually, the flower will bloom]

You mean I have to wait? I don't like waiting... I just want it to be pretty and bloom now! Raise your hand if you are like me and you have a hard time waiting... [most kids will raise their hands]

Yes. Waiting is hard. In today's lesson from the book of James, chapter 5, we read:

Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. Beloved, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged.

Did you catch that last part? When we don't wait with patience, like a farmer for his crop, we are in danger of becoming grumblers and complainers. Then, what's no fun for us becomes no fun for anyone we're around! And, we don't want to be the type of people that others are avoiding this Advent season! No, we'd love for others to want to be around us so we can have the opportunity to tell them about the best gift of all... Jesus!

Let's pray:

Jesus, thank you for being so patient with us even when we are not patient in waiting for you or for some good thing we are hoping we might get in the future! As Advent is a time of waiting and patiently preparing our hearts, guard us from a grumbling spirit. Help us encourage one another to be like the faithful farmer, who plants the seed in the spring and waits until harvest time trusting in your provision. We can trust in you, Jesus, because you love us and patiently care for us. In your name, Amen.

Key Text: James 5:7-10 (NirV)

⁷ Brothers and sisters, be patient until the Lord comes. See how the farmer waits for the land to produce its rich crop. See how patient the farmer is for the fall and spring rains. ⁸ You too must be patient. You must remain strong. The Lord will soon come back. ⁹ Brothers and sisters, don't find fault with one another. If you do, you will be judged. And the Judge is standing at the door!

¹⁰ Brothers and sisters, think about the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. They are an example of how to be patient when you suffer.

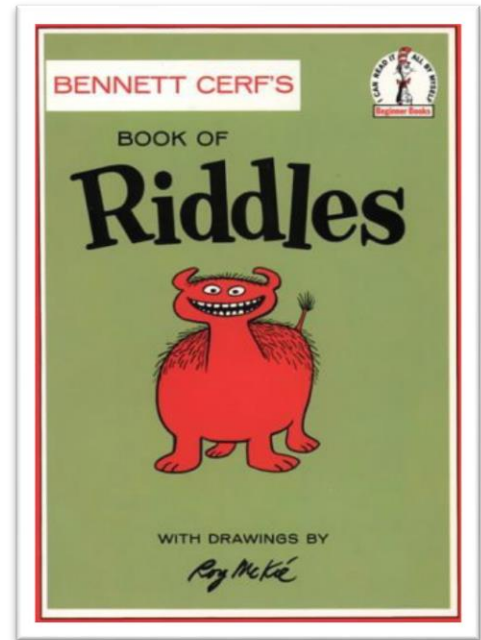
Week 4: “It helps to have all the information!”

Objects needed: a book of riddles, possibly an ‘object’ that ties into the riddle you choose to read for the children

Theme/Main Idea: Riddles are fun—or “work”—because they use assumptions we make about things and turn them on their heads. Maybe it’s a word or phrase that has a double-meaning, but once we know the answer to the riddle it all makes sense. Before then, without all the information, it might confound us. Joseph was ready to “dismiss Mary quietly” when he heard she was pregnant... then he got all the information and the riddle was solved!

Presentation:

“Good morning boys and girls. I have something fun for us today, and maybe a little different. Would you like to see what my object lesson is today?”



[kids respond, “Yes!” and then maybe are disappointed when they see it’s a book...]

Some of you don’t look too impressed. But this book can be a lot of fun, because it has riddles in it. Do you know what riddles are?

[children respond... some may even have a riddle to teach you!]

Yes, they are fun and puzzling questions that are hard to answer at first because the answer is unexpected. Here’s one of my favorites... [if you don’t have a book of riddles or a favorite one you’d like to use, I’d suggest you use the following riddle!]

Ready? Okay, what’s black and white and red all over? No, adults... it’s not a newspaper! And, I’m guessing most of our kids are not that familiar with newspapers and why people read them!

So... What’s black and white and red all over? Any guesses?

[children guess, hopefully without success]

Okay, nice guesses... I’ll tell you the answer. It’s black and white and red all over, and it’s... wait for it... a *PENGUIN WITH A SUNBURN!* Isn’t that funny?!

That’s a pretty silly riddle, but sometimes riddles are more serious. Sometimes riddles are questions that don’t present any easy answers. Joseph had a riddle on his hands when he found out that his bride to be, Mary, was pregnant and going to have a baby!

He knew enough to know where babies came from and how they came to be... I'm not going to get into that this morning... but Joseph knew that Mary was a good person, but that the child couldn't possibly be his! "*How could Mary have done this to me?*" Joseph surely thought! He couldn't find an easy answer, so he was going to break off the engagement and not get married to Mary.

But, that's when he heard the answer to the riddle he had been given. In Matthew 1:20-21 we read:

'An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.'

Wow! Totally unexpected, maybe like the answer to my riddle earlier? But, once Joseph knew the answer to the riddle it all made sense... Mary was a good person, and she didn't do anything wrong. In fact, she was such a good person, God chose her to carry the baby Jesus and give birth to the Savior of the world! Now, Joseph was asked to be like a foster dad or adoptive parent to Jesus... Jesus wouldn't be blood-related to him, but he would very much be Jesus' dad on earth. What a wonderful riddle and an amazing gift to be given... God trusted Joseph to figure out that riddle and love Jesus as his son and raise him well.

Maybe you've had some tough riddles in life. Maybe you can't figure out how God could possibly bring some good out of a parent's divorce or a friend moving away. Maybe your riddles are more serious, like they are for the kids at Intermountain, where you wonder if you can trust anyone but yourself, or perhaps you wonder if loving someone is worth the hurt that you open yourself up to?

Let's close our time this morning by asking God to help show us where he is in the midst of our riddles in life, especially the ones that don't have any answers that we can figure out. Maybe we won't get an answer like Joseph did, but hopefully we can trust that God will help us and love us through our questions no matter what.

Let's pray:

God, we know that you trust us just like you trusted Joseph. We get riddles in life, and often we try to figure them out all on our own. Help us to trust you in return, that if and when we need an answer to any riddle in life, you can give us the answer. And, if the answer isn't coming to us, maybe you are just asking us to trust you and have faith that it will be okay. We pray for the kids that Intermountain serves, and for the huge questions they have, about you and about other relationships. Show us and show them your love this day and always. In Jesus name, Amen."

Key Text: Matthew 1:18-25 (NirV)

¹⁸ This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about. His mother Mary and Joseph had promised to get married. But before they started to live together, it became clear that she was going to have a baby. She became pregnant by the power of the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Her husband Joseph was faithful to the law. But he did not want to put her to shame in public. So he planned to divorce her quietly.

²⁰ But as Joseph was thinking about this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. The angel said, “Joseph, son of David, don’t be afraid to take Mary home as your wife. The baby inside her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She is going to have a son. You must give him the name Jesus. That’s because he will save his people from their sins.”

²² All this took place to bring about what the Lord had said would happen. He had said through the prophet, ²³ “The virgin is going to have a baby. She will give birth to a son. And he will be called Immanuel.” ([Isaiah 7:14](#)) The name Immanuel means “God with us.”

²⁴ Joseph woke up. He did what the angel of the Lord commanded him to do. He took Mary home as his wife. ²⁵ But he did not sleep with her until she gave birth to a son. And Joseph gave him the name Jesus.

Christmas Eve/Christmas Day: “Go share the Good News!”

Objects needed: A sheep, or a picture of a shepherd

Theme/Main Idea: Just as the angels announced the good news of Jesus birth to the shepherds, we can tell others about why we really celebrate Christmas. There are plenty of people out there that don’t really know, and we can point them to Jesus!



Presentation:

“Who here likes to tell other people good news? I know I do. It’s fun to share a message with someone when you know it’s going to encourage them, make them happy, or give them a reason to celebrate. So, if you like to share good news, and I like to share good news, I am guessing that almost everyone does. And, on that first Christmas Eve, there was some very good news to tell. But, before I get ahead of myself, maybe you would like to see what I brought for the object lesson today?”

[take out sheep, or picture of shepherds and sheep]

Yes! It’s a sheep. Can you guess why I have a sheep? Well, the angels on that first Christmas Eve got to share some very good news. Do you remember what it was? The angel told the shepherds,

“Do not be afraid. I bring you good news. It will bring great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you. He is the Messiah, the Lord. Here is how you will know I am telling you the truth. You will find a baby wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in a manger.”

This news did bring great joy to all the people! God’s people had been waiting for a LONG time for the Messiah, God’s chosen messenger, to come. I am not sure they understood fully that not only would the Messiah be a messenger for God, but that he would be God himself—the Lord! And, who is it that got to hear about this great news first?

[the children respond]

Right! It was the shepherds just outside the town of Bethlehem. They ran to see the baby Jesus... What amazing news to receive, that God came to us as a baby! Jesus came to live with us and to experience everything it means to be a human being. And, just as the shepherds were told to go and see and **THEN** to go and tell, we are asked to do the same.

It's good that we have come together tonight to celebrate Jesus' birth. The shepherds, too, went to the stable and found the baby Jesus. But—and this is important—the shepherds didn't stay at the stable. They left there and told anyone that would listen about what they had seen and heard. And, the Bible says, all were amazed to hear the story. I think if we trust God enough to share the story, too, we might find that there are more people out there willing to listen and be amazed as well.

I see some have brought their Change for Children cans back tonight. Thank you. I'll make sure they all get rounded up and on to Intermountain for the children and families to be blessed by your generosity. We'll wrap up our collection next Sunday, as we talk about how Jesus, Mary and Joseph didn't have much time to enjoy being a new family together before they were running for their lives! But... that's next Sunday and I don't want to get ahead of myself...

Thank you so much for being great listeners, for filling up your change cans, and for coming along with me on this journey through Advent. I hope you have a blessed Christmas.

Let's pray:

God, thank you for giving us Jesus. You have entrusted to us the very best news in all the world— You love us so much You sent your Son to be with us! Christmas is not just about presents and lights, it's about the joy that comes from knowing that we are loved by You. That is great news, and we hope that we can share this news with others so that all can share in our joy! In Jesus' name, Amen."

Key Text: Luke 2:1-14, (15-20), (NirV)

In those days, Caesar Augustus made a law. It required that a list be made of everyone in the whole Roman world. ² It was the first time a list was made of the people while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³ Everyone went to their own town to be listed.

⁴ So Joseph went also. He went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea. That is where Bethlehem, the town of David, was. Joseph went there because he belonged to the family line of David. ⁵ He went there with Mary to be listed. Mary was engaged to him. She was expecting a baby. ⁶ While Joseph and Mary were there, the time came for the child to be born. ⁷ She gave birth to her first baby. It was a boy. She wrapped him in large strips of cloth. Then she placed him in a manger. That's because there was no guest room where they could stay.

⁸ There were shepherds living out in the fields nearby. It was night, and they were taking care of their sheep. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them. And the glory of the Lord shone around them. They were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news. It will bring great joy for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you. He is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² Here is how you will know I am telling you the truth. You will find a baby wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in a manger.”

¹³ Suddenly a large group of angels from heaven also appeared. They were praising God. They said,

¹⁴ “May glory be given to God in the highest heaven!
And may peace be given to those he is pleased with on earth!”

¹⁵ The angels left and went into heaven. Then the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem. Let’s see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

¹⁶ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph and the baby. The baby was lying in the manger.

¹⁷ After the shepherds had seen him, they told everyone. They reported what the angel had said about this child. ¹⁸ All who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. ¹⁹ But Mary kept all these things like a secret treasure in her heart. She thought about them over and over.

²⁰ The shepherds returned. They gave glory and praise to God. Everything they had seen and heard was just as they had been told.)

Supplemental lesson for the First Sunday after Christmas: Collection day for Change for Children!

Objects needed: a few loose pennies or coins, and a jar or change can FULL of pennies or coins

Theme/Main Idea: By itself, a penny isn't worth very much. But lots of pennies together can buy much more! Small gifts can seem insignificant alone, but together many small gifts can be used by God to make a huge difference.



Presentation:

"I see you have brought your jars and change cans back with you today! That's great! I can hear the satisfying sound of clinking coins being moved around in your jars. To help us focus during this time, however, why don't we pass all those cans to me...? [Take a moment to collect the jars/can from the children, thanking each of them]

Wow! Look at all this... fantastic! And, this leads us right into what I wanted to share with you today.

[hold up a penny]

What is this? Right! It's a penny. What can you buy with a penny these days? Anything? No, not really... not anymore. When I was a child, you could still buy candy for a penny in the store... now, well, it costs at least a quarter, right? That's 25 pennies! Boy, how things have changed.

Did you know that the government is talking about not making pennies anymore? It seems it costs more to make them than they are actually worth! In fact, our neighbors to the north in Canada have stopped making pennies, and now every purchase gets rounded up (or down?) to the nearest nickel. The penny doesn't get much respect.

A penny isn't worth much. We know that. And, sometimes we might feel like what we are doing for God isn't worth much either. No one seems to notice it, or nothing seems to change. Sometimes we might think... 'Why bother?!'

I wonder if that's what happened after the excitement of the first Christmas settled down. Jesus was born. His family fled to Egypt. The Bible lesson today goes so quickly through that part of Jesus' story, we are tempted to miss just how scary it must have been! The young Jesus and his family are just settling into being a family together when they are forced to run and hide in Egypt from people that want to get rid of Jesus. Wow! That's a long way from receiving the gift of Jesus as God's present to the whole world...

Now Jesus and his family did return years later and went to live in Nazareth. Then, until Jesus is 12, we don't hear anything about him. And, after that, two decades pass until he starts his ministry of preaching, teaching, healing and telling others of God's love. As all that time passed between that first Christmas day and his baptism by John in the wilderness, I wonder what some of those shepherds thought. I wonder what the wise men thought. Maybe they were tempted to believe that it didn't really happen. Maybe it wasn't a big deal, after all? Maybe a little baby wasn't going to change everything...

But the amazing thing is this... ***that baby did change the world. As little and as helpless as baby Jesus was, he was God's gift to us: The promise that everything was going to change.***

You know what else is amazing? Let's see... though a penny by itself isn't worth much... let's take a look at what we have here...

[hold up your jar of pennies, as well as some of the jars the children have brought in]

We've got lots of pennies and other coins here! Lots of little coins making one big collection! Wow! You guys are amazing... great job!

All together, we are making a difference. That's why it's important to remember that our efforts are not isolated. We are doing what we do for Jesus' sake alongside many others that also love Jesus. Our Change for Children cans will join those from many other churches and many other families. Added up, it will make a big difference. God can take lowly little pennies and make them the most important part of what He is doing in the lives of children at Intermountain.

Thank you. Today makes my heart very happy, and I can see it makes you happy, too. Let's pray and thank God for this opportunity we have been given to take all our gifts and prayers and add them to the amazing work that He is doing at Intermountain...

Let's pray:

"God, take our small gifts and multiply them many times. You are in the business, God, of taking what we would count as nothing much at all—throw away junk, even—and using it to build your coming Kingdom. Bless our change can offering, Jesus, not for our sake, but for yours, and for the sake of the families and children at Intermountain. As we have been blessed, we seek to be a blessing. As you have encouraged our hearts, we pray that our efforts and our gifts would encourage others. In Jesus name, Amen."

Key Text: Matthew 2:13-23 (NirV)

¹³ When the Wise Men had left, Joseph had a dream. In the dream an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph. “Get up!” the angel said. “Take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you to come back. Herod is going to search for the child. He wants to kill him.”

¹⁴ So Joseph got up. During the night, he left for Egypt with the child and his mother Mary. ¹⁵ They stayed there until King Herod died. So the words the Lord had spoken through the prophet came true. He had said, “I brought my son out of Egypt.” ([Hosea 11:1](#))

¹⁶ Herod realized that the Wise Men had tricked him. So he became very angry. He gave orders about Bethlehem and the area around it. He ordered all the boys two years old and under to be killed. This agreed with the time when the Wise Men had seen the star. ¹⁷ In this way, the words Jeremiah the prophet spoke came true. He had said,

¹⁸ “A voice is heard in Ramah.

It’s the sound of crying and deep sadness.

Rachel is crying over her children.

She refuses to be comforted,

because they are gone.” ([Jeremiah 31:15](#))

¹⁹ After Herod died, Joseph had a dream while he was still in Egypt. In the dream an angel of the Lord appeared to him. ²⁰ The angel said, “Get up! Take the child and his mother. Go to the land of Israel. The people who were trying to kill the child are dead.”

²¹ So Joseph got up. He took the child and his mother Mary back to the land of Israel. ²² But then he heard that Archelaus was king of Judea. Archelaus was ruling in place of his father Herod. This made Joseph afraid to go there. Joseph had been warned in a dream. So he went back to the land of Galilee instead. ²³ There he lived in a town called Nazareth. So what the prophets had said about Jesus came true. They had said that he would be called a Nazarene.