

Advent 2020

Dear Church Partners,

In this packet are five free 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, though none of these lessons are dependent on your church’s participation in Change for Children. 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 over 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 written with Advent and the Christmas season in mind (based on Revised Common Lectionary, Year B), focusing on a message of hope and joy, and provide a great opportunity for your church to 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.

In addition to these object lessons, we have prayer cards that you can use for Advent services and a number of videos on Intermountain’s YouTube channel that can be helpful for a “Moment for Mission” or announcement time. If there is something you need to help explain your church’s connection to Intermountain and you don’t see it on [www.intermountainministry.org](http://www.intermountainministry.org), just reach out to us and we’ll work with you to help meet your needs.

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 the ministry of Intermountain and the good work you are doing in your church and community.

Blessings,

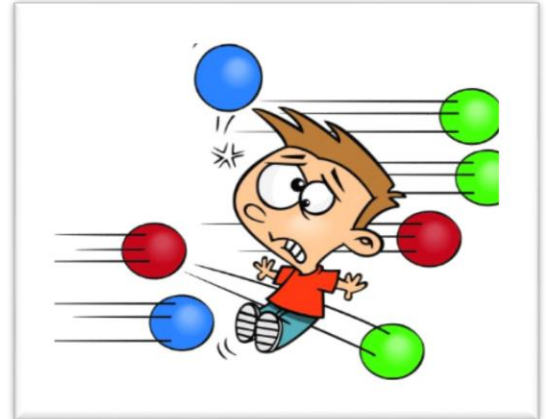


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## Week 1: “Watch Out!”

**Objects needed:** a “dodgeball” or similar playground ball/small foam ball

**Theme/Main Idea:** In the gospel passage, Jesus reminds us that we need to “watch out” for what God is doing and his eventual return... the *Second* Advent. When we aren’t attentive to what matters, we can get caught off guard.



### **Presentation:**

“We are beginning the season of Advent, a time we look forward to a celebration of the birth of Jesus. Throughout this season we will talk about the hope that Jesus gives us. As we think about Christmas and Jesus coming for the first time as a little baby, we should also keep in mind that Jesus has said he will come back again someday... and not as a baby!

I’ve brought something to share with you today... a simple toy that gives many children a great deal of joy no matter where they might live. It doesn’t need batteries and you can play for hours with them. Can you guess what this toy is?

[take time for children to guess, encouraging their participation, then take out the ball that you have brought]

I have a ball! That makes sense, right? I bet you have all played with a ball. One game that can be played with a ball is dodgeball... do you know how to play that game? [give children a chance to respond]

Yes, the point of dodgeball is to stay aware and alert so you don’t get hit with a ball and get knocked out of the game. I’ll admit that sometimes I’ve lost my concentration when playing dodgeball and can you guess what happened?

[pause while children answer, maybe even sharing similar experiences]

Yep! I got whacked with a ball, and it was kind of embarrassing. I wasn’t paying attention, so I didn’t really stand a chance of dodging the ball or catching it. Did you know that Jesus warned us about the need to be alert?

Yes, in today's gospel passage, we hear Jesus say, "Be on guard! Be alert!" No, we don't have to watch out for dodgeballs coming at us, but we should be careful that we don't just trudge through this time of the year without staying alert to what it is really all about: Jesus. We have hope because of Jesus—he came once as a baby to keep God's promise for a Savior, and he'll come back again someday to make good on all of his promises. Let's stay awake and alert to what this season is all about.

As we wrap this up, can I tell you why I am excited about this season of hope? Sure, I am excited because of all the family gatherings and celebrations and the beautiful lights and decorations, yes. But, most of all, I am excited because we get a chance to celebrate Jesus' birth, and because Jesus came to be born, live, died for our sins, and was raised again—because of these things—my life is different. I can be filled with hope and joy and love. And, I can be a part of bringing hope to others!

Before you leave today, I want to give you a "Change for Children" change can. During the season of Advent, we're going to do our best to fill these up. The money we raise will go to Intermountain, to help children and families find hope by building stronger, healthier relationships. For some children, it will mean having a forever home for the first time in their lives. For other children, Intermountain is helping them be successful in school and in the community, so they can handle their big feelings and the hard things that have happened to them while staying safe and knowing they are loved.

Will you pray with me?

*God, we thank you that each and every life matters. When we share love, hope, and grace with others we know that we are staying alert to what your Spirit is doing all around us. Help us to make loving you and others the center of our Christmas celebrations. Bless our efforts to bring hope to the children and families that Intermountain serves. In your mercy, fill us with your love, grace, and peace. Amen."*

**Key Text:** Mark 13:24-37

<sup>24</sup> "But in those days, following that distress,

"the sun will be darkened,  
and the moon will not give its light;

<sup>25</sup> the stars will fall from the sky,  
and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.'

<sup>26</sup> "At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. <sup>27</sup> And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.

<sup>28</sup> "Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. <sup>29</sup> Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door. <sup>30</sup> Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. <sup>31</sup> Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

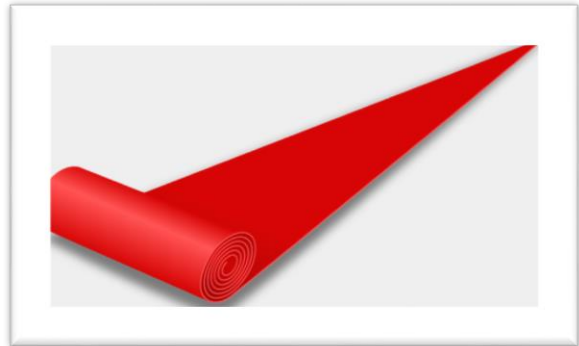
<sup>32</sup> "But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. <sup>33</sup> Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. <sup>34</sup> It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.

<sup>35</sup> "Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. <sup>36</sup> If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. <sup>37</sup> What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!'"

## Week 2: “Preparing the Way”

**Objects needed:** A piece of red fabric that could be “rolled out” like a red carpet.

**Theme/Main Idea:** When someone important is coming, we prepare. At certain special events, we “roll out the red carpet,” either figuratively or literally. How are we preparing for Jesus this season?



### **Presentation:**

“I have a question for you this morning... have you got your thanking caps on? Are you ready? Here it is... Raise your hand if you can tell me something special that you might do if an important person was coming to visit us?”

[children respond]

Great answers! Fantastic ideas. I have something in my [bag, box... whatever you are “hiding” the object lesson in!] that I thought of as a special way to greet someone important that might come to visit us. Want to see?

[take piece of red cloth out and lay it out in front of the children.]

This is my red carpet! Do you like it? What do we do with a red carpet for special important visitors? Does anyone know?

[children respond]

That’s right, we put it out for them to walk on as they enter. It’s a super special thing that doesn’t happen very much except maybe for celebrities and politicians these days. It’s an idea that is thousands of years old, starting even before Jesus was born. Do you know why the color is red? Well, in ancient Greece they believed red was the color of the gods! One of their playwrights included a reference to rolling out a red carpet for one of their important leaders because he was supposed to be like a god! Crazy, right?

We roll out red carpets for Presidents, Popes, and world leaders. We put out red carpets for actors and musicians. But... none of these people are gods, are they? Are they?

[children respond emphatically... “NO!”]

There was only one human being in all of history that really deserved to get the “red carpet treatment.” Do you know who that was? That’s right... Jesus!

In the Bible story today, we hear about John, Jesus’ cousin and the wild prophet of the Judean wilderness. He called out to the people, quoting words from another prophet of old, Isaiah, saying, “Prepare the way for the Lord!” He asked the people to change their hearts and get ready for Jesus.

No. He didn’t tell them to roll out a red carpet, but John did ask the people to do something even more important. He told them to get their hearts ready to receive Jesus. He wanted them to make sure that when Jesus started preaching, teaching and healing people that they would recognize that he was God’s only son, sent to save them from their sin.

Have you thought about preparing your heart for Jesus? Maybe you can picture rolling out a red carpet in your heart and mind, saying, ‘Jesus, you are the most important thing in my life. It’s not about the lights and the glitter and the glow. It’s not about the presents and the bows. It’s about you, and how much you love me. I want to return that love by making you first in my life.’

You know, if each one of us here did that, I think our Advent season would be incredible!

One more thing before we close in prayer. How are your change cans coming along? Are they starting to fill up? I hope so. Giving to others is a great way to turn our focus from ourselves and place it on loving God and loving our neighbors—even if those neighbors are kids from Intermountain that we’ll never personally meet! Thanks for thinking about and praying for those kiddos, too. It makes a big difference. Okay, now...

Let’s pray:

*“God, thank you. Thank you for being the One we were waiting for. Lots of important people get special treatment in our lives... we roll out the red carpet or maybe just give them a lot of our time and attention. But, of all the people we could focus our love and devotion towards, no one is more worthy than you! Help us open our hearts and minds to all you have for us this Advent season. Bless our efforts to extend the love you have shown us to others. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”*

## **Key Text: Mark 1:1-8 (NIV)**

The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, <sup>2</sup>as it is written in Isaiah the prophet:

“I will send my messenger ahead of you,  
who will prepare your way” —  
<sup>3</sup>“a voice of one calling in the wilderness,  
‘Prepare the way for the Lord,  
make straight paths for him.’”

<sup>4</sup>And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>5</sup>The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. <sup>6</sup>John wore clothing made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>7</sup>And this was his message: “After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. <sup>8</sup>I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”



### Week 3: “A witness to the light”

**Objects needed:** a mirror

**Theme/Main Idea:** John testified that he was not the light, but only a “witness” or testimony to the light—Jesus Christ—and his job was to reflect that light so others would be drawn to Jesus and ready to receive him. Similarly, a mirror “uses” light to testify to whatever is reflected on its surface. Like a mirror, we can reflect Jesus’ light to others this season, just as John did.



#### **Presentation:**

“Today, let’s pretend today, as we start, that it is totally dark in here... would you be able to see anything?”

[children respond]

Well, assuming that we had no source of light, you are right... we would not be able to see anything at all. But, I don’t really like the dark all that much. I like being able to see things in that are in the room with me. I like being able to see you and all your happy faces this morning! Now, you are probably wondering what I brought in my box (bag, or whatever you have been using to ‘hide’ your item until it’s time) this morning. Any guesses?

[children guess, likely picking up on the “light” theme]

All great guesses... you are all getting so good at this! But, I have you fooled this morning. What I have brought is a mirror!

[take mirror out and show the children]

So, what does a mirror have to do with light? Well, a mirror reflects light and shows us an image because of the light it reflects. If we are sitting right in front of it, we can see our own reflection in the light. If we turn it just a bit, we can see some of what is behind us or to the side. Mirrors are pretty amazing, but they are no good if there is no light.



In the Bible story today, John the Baptist tells those that ask him if he is the one they have been waiting for God to send—the Messiah—that he is not. They ask him if he is the prophet Elijah, returned from heaven or another prophet sent by God, and again he says, “no.” He says he is simply someone that is preparing the way for another... for Jesus.

John was an important person, but instead of drawing attention to himself, he chose to reflect God’s light and shine it on Jesus. He could have pointed to how important his job was in getting people ready to receive Jesus, but he didn’t. He realized that he was like this mirror, and no matter how nice, big, or fancy and important a mirror is... it’s just there to reflect the light and reveal whatever image is before it.

Let’s pray:

*Jesus, the time of celebrating your birth is coming soon. Help us to follow John’s example of reflecting the Light you have brought to the world. Allow us the privilege of being like a mirror and reflecting your goodness and grace to others, especially to those who need to experience your love and acceptance, like the children of Intermountain. In your name we pray, Amen.”*

**Key Text: John 1:6-8, 19-28 (NIV)**

<sup>6</sup> There was a man sent from God whose name was John. <sup>7</sup> He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. <sup>8</sup> He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

<sup>19</sup> Now this was John’s testimony when the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. <sup>20</sup> He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, “I am not the Messiah.”

<sup>21</sup> They asked him, “Then who are you? Are you Elijah?”

He said, “I am not.”

“Are you the Prophet?”

He answered, “No.”

<sup>22</sup> Finally they said, “Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?”

<sup>23</sup> John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, “I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way for the Lord.’”

<sup>24</sup> Now the Pharisees who had been sent <sup>25</sup> questioned him, “Why then do you baptize if you are not the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?”

<sup>26</sup> “I baptize with water,” John replied, “but among you stands one you do not know. <sup>27</sup> He is the one who comes after me, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.”

<sup>28</sup> This all happened at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

## Week 4: “That’s Super!”

**Objects needed:** a few superhero figures or pictures

**Theme/Main Idea:** We celebrate superheroes in our culture. Often, around Christmastime, the Hollywood studios try and put out a superhero movie to capture our imaginations and draw a lot of people to the movie theater. The angel spoke to Mary and affirmed what we all know to be true: nothing is impossible for God, or the “word of God will never fail.” So, if God says something is going to happen that we think is not possible... well, it clearly is possible. God is more powerful than any superhero we could imagine!



### **Presentation:**

“Hi boys and girls. I have some things with me today that I am guessing you will recognize. They are toys that lots of boys and girls play with. Want to guess?”

[allow for a few guesses from the children]

All good guesses, but perhaps I should just show you...

[take the pictures or figures of superheroes out and display them for the children]

Who are these toys? What do we call them? Yes... they are superheroes. Perhaps you recognize some of them or have a similar character or figure in your toy box at home? We have superheroes that can fly, shoot webs, have amazing strength, and so much more! Amazing isn't it.

But let's say I came to church on Christmas Eve dressed up like this one here [hold up a figure or picture]... and I said, 'I CAN DO ANYTHING! I am super-pastor!'

What? Why are you looking at me like that? You don't think I would be able to fly, shoot webs, or any of the other amazing things that superheroes do? Hmm... you are probably right. Because you know me, and just because I put on a costume wouldn't mean I gained the powers and abilities I wished I had.

Now, in today's Bible story, Mary is visited by an angel that tells her some amazing things are going to happen, and that she is going to be the mother of a child that would be God's son—the Savior of the world! Whoa, right?!

Now, Mary was a pretty amazing young lady. She didn't say, "No way!" like you all did when I said I was a superhero... but she did wonder how it was going to happen. It was then that the angel reminded her of who God was, and that God was making her this promise having chosen her to be the mother to Jesus. The angel said, "The word of God will never fail." Other versions of this story translate the angel's words as "nothing is impossible with God." Maybe they changed the translation because they didn't like the double negative? Nothing is impossible... that just means everything IS possible. Everything is possible with God. So, if God says it's going to happen, it's going to happen.

That's wonderful news for all of us. It's been a crazy year, hasn't it? But through it all, God tells us "I love you, I am caring for you, and you can have hope in me." Wow. I needed to hear that today... how about you?

Let's pray:

*God, we know that you keep your promises. You promised that Jesus would come, and He did. We celebrate his birth only a few days from now. Everything is possible for you, God. You are greater than all our superheroes. We are looking forward to packages wrapped with bows and special presents and times together in the days ahead, but the most special gift is knowing you love us. For all the gifts that will be exchanged this Christmas season, this gift of new life and hope for a future is the best gift of all. May the offering we are collecting in our Change Cans help make it possible for Intermountain's children to receive this gift as well. Thank you, God. In Jesus name, Amen."*

### **Key Text: Luke 1:26-38 (NLT)**

<sup>26</sup> In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee, <sup>27</sup> to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David. <sup>28</sup> Gabriel appeared to her and said, "Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!"

<sup>29</sup> Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean. <sup>30</sup> "Don't be afraid, Mary," the angel told her, "for you have found favor with God!" <sup>31</sup> You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. <sup>32</sup> He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him

the throne of his ancestor David. <sup>33</sup> And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!”

<sup>34</sup> Mary asked the angel, “But how can this happen? I am a virgin.”

<sup>35</sup> The angel replied, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God. <sup>36</sup> What’s more, your relative Elizabeth has become pregnant in her old age! People used to say she was barren, but she has conceived a son and is now in her sixth month. <sup>37</sup> For the word of God will never fail.”

<sup>38</sup> Mary responded, “I am the Lord’s servant. May everything you have said about me come true.” And then the angel left her.

## 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. <sup>2</sup> It was the first time a list was made of the people while Quirinius was governor of Syria. <sup>3</sup> Everyone went to their own town to be listed.

<sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> He went there with Mary to be listed. Mary was engaged to him. She was expecting a baby. <sup>6</sup> While Joseph and Mary were there, the time came for the child to be born. <sup>7</sup> 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.



<sup>8</sup> There were shepherds living out in the fields nearby. It was night, and they were taking care of their sheep. <sup>9</sup> An angel of the Lord appeared to them. And the glory of the Lord shone around them. They were terrified. <sup>10</sup> But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news. It will bring great joy for all the people. <sup>11</sup> Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you. He is the Messiah, the Lord. <sup>12</sup> 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.”

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

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

*<sup>15</sup> 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.”*

*<sup>16</sup> So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph and the baby. The baby was lying in the manger. <sup>17</sup> After the shepherds had seen him, they told everyone. They reported what the angel had said about this child. <sup>18</sup> All who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. <sup>19</sup> But Mary kept all these things like a secret treasure in her heart. She thought about them over and over. <sup>20</sup> The shepherds returned. They gave glory and praise to God. Everything they had seen and heard was just as they had been told.)*