



## Children's Church / Sunday School / Activity Time Lessons for Advent 2021

Complete with **liturgical/worship elements** to tie-in to the service, **songs, crafts, games, snack** and **object lesson** based on each Sunday's lesson (Year C)

Written by Rev. Sami Pack-Toner, Chaplain  
and Rev. Chris Haughee of Intermountain  
for our supporting churches





## A note about this curriculum...

This year, Chris reached out to Chaplain Sami and said, *"I've done Object Lessons for Advent in the past, but how about we write a whole Sunday School or Children's Activity Time curriculum complete with songs, games, suggested crafts and snacks?"* And, Sami said, *"Yes!"* So, here you have it... our first comprehensive Advent curriculum that will connect your children to the lectionary readings that are part of the traditional Advent observance, as well as suggestions for how you can get the whole church in on the fun!

The **worship/liturgical element** is mentioned first, before the lesson, but mainly for reference as to what could be done to tie worship and education together for the children.<sup>1</sup> If you want to simply make these a part of your classroom or children's education department, that is also an option! The idea is to suggest something fun that will help set the mood and engage young people's imaginations.

The **object lesson** leads each week, letting you know the object you need to gather and a suggested script for presenting the lesson to the children. This time concludes with a prayer.

Next is a **game** or activity which builds on the theme introduced in the object lesson.

Next comes a **song**... an Advent standard, **"Come Thou Long-Expected Jesus."** One verse each week, both the original words as well as some more kid-friendly and lectionary-themed words Chris wrote. If you are using the Candle Lighting Liturgy, you'll find another point of connection here for the children and their families!

After the song, a **snack**... also connected to the day's theme and with suggestions for continuing the conversation on the lesson through this relaxed time together.

Finally, a **craft**... again, connected to the theme and not too complicated or involved so getting supplies won't break the budget.

There is a tie-in to Intermountain's **Change for Children** program, which involves getting collection cans to send home with the children to gather loose change throughout the season. We hope you will consider participating and sharing the mission of Intermountain with your children and families this Advent. It is a great way to reinforce the values of charity and compassion during a season where the world will be encouraging your children to be thinking primarily about themselves and what they want for Christmas. We have **cans and prayer cards**, as well as a "Coordinator's Instruction Sheet," should you choose to bless the children of Intermountain by participating in Change for Children. Let us know what you need and we'll be happy to send it out to you!

With our sincere appreciation,

The Development Team at Intermountain

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<sup>1</sup> Also available from Intermountain are **Candle Lighting Liturgies for Advent** that further make this connection between the children's experience and worship, and if you want those, just let us know!



# **Advent Week 1:**

## **Liturgical/Worship element: A stump for Christmas**

For your worship area, ask someone to create a banner picturing a branch growing out of a stump, with the words of Jeremiah. If you have a youth group that meets during the week, the group could also make posters with this theme to hang up around the church.

Another idea would be to replace the usual flowers with a stump from which a branch is growing. (This may be a real stump into which a seedling or leafed branch has been tucked into a hole that was drilled. Another option is to use a potted seedling wrapped with brown paper or burlap to look like a stump.)

It would be awesome to have the pastor or reader refer to this display before reading Jeremiah's promise, urging worshipers to listen for the unusual "stump" in the reading.

## **Object Lesson: "The Branch"**

**Objects Needed:** A seedling, branch, or picture of stump/seedling/nursery log.

**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.

### **Presentation:**

"How are you this morning, children? Can I be honest with you about how I am feeling? I am a little sad... disappointed.

[what would be best here is for you to share a personal story about a time you felt let down... what I include here is for illustrative purposes]

I was really hoping that I had made a friend the other day at church. We made plans to meet for lunch, but when the day came, she said she had too much going on at work and had to cancel. I had my hopes up, and they just fizzled. So, I am feeling pretty low. Anyone else here ever feel that way?

Well, I guess I better get on with the lesson. You want to see what I have for the object lesson today? [let kids respond] Yes? Okay... here we go, I am so excited!

[pull out a seedling/stick or picture of a stump]



Isn't it beautiful? [kids will likely give you puzzled looks] What? You don't agree?

I think it is beautiful because I just read about what this means in the Bible... In Jeremiah, chapter 33, God promised a branch—or a little seedling—that would grow up and save everyone! Isn't that amazing? I really like trees, and that must mean this will be an amazing tree!

Hmmm... you guys don't look convinced. Do you suppose this is one of those places in the Bible where it's like a word picture—and maybe God wasn't really talking about a branch, a seedling, or a stump? I think that might be right, especially since this passage comes up on our first day of Advent.

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.

Well, with that in mind, let's take another look at this 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 Jeremiah wrote about. That's kinda 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 their amazement 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 Israel—known as Jesus, and that he 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're handing out change cans

today, and we're hoping you fill them up between now and Christmas. You'll hear a little more about Intermountain as we 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:** Jeremiah 33:14-16, New International Reader's Version (NIRV)

<sup>14</sup> "The days are coming," announces the LORD. "At that time I will fulfill my good promise to my people. I made it to the people of Israel and Judah.

<sup>15</sup> "Here is what I will do in those days and at that time.

***I will make a godly Branch grow*** from David's royal line.

He will do what is fair and right in the land.

<sup>16</sup> In those days Judah will be saved.

Jerusalem will live in safety.

And it will be called

The LORD Who Makes Us Right With Himself."

## Game: Is it "fair" or "unfair?"

Challenge children to draw a picture (act out a scene) of an unjust or unfair situation and a picture (or scene acted out) of the same people in the same situation acting justly or fairly.

Or, give a scenario and have kids act out either fair or unfair situation based on that scenario... i.e. making cookies, kids draw a card that tells them either fair or unfair, then act out for others to guess... unfair might be not letting little brother help make cookies, not sharing the cookies after, etc. Fair would be the opposite... (you get the idea!)

For those that are tying in the worship time to these children's lessons... If you wanted to include children who didn't come for children's activity time or Sunday school, you could double up on this "game" by providing blank space on the worship bulletin or suggest using the back of a pew card for children in worship to draw their fair/unfair comparisons. Invite them to share the pictures with you as they leave the sanctuary. Take time to ask the children what caused the difference in the two pictures.

## Song: “Come Thou Long Expected Jesus,” verse 1<sup>2</sup>

Original:

Come thou long expected Jesus, born to set thy people free  
From our sins and fears release us; let us find our rest in thee  
Israel’s strength and consolation, Hope of all the earth thou art.  
Dear desire of every nation, joy of every longing heart.

PROMISED COMING

Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus 196

1. Come, thou long - ex - pect - ed Je - sus, born to set thy  
2. Born thy peo - ple to de - liv - er, born a child and

peo - ple free; from our fears and sins re - lease us,  
yet a King, born to reign in us for - ev - er,

let us find our rest in thee. Is - rael's strength and con - so -  
now thy gra - cious king - dom bring. By thine own e - ter - nal

la - tion, hope of all the earth thou art; dear de - sire of  
spir - it rule in all our hearts a - lone; by thine all suf -

ev - ery na - tion, joy of ev - ery long - ing heart.  
fi - cient mer - it, raise us to thy glo - rious throne.

WORDS: Charles Wesley, 1744  
MUSIC: Rowland H. Pritchard, 1830; harm. from *The English Hymnal*, 1906

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<sup>2</sup> Words by Charles Wesley, 1744. Music by Rowland H. Pritchard, 1830, harmony from *The English Hymnal*, 1906. Alternative words by Rev. Chris Haughee, 2021.



Optional lyrics:

Jesus, we are ready for you, free us from this web we're in  
Stuck in patterns of wrong-doing, tired and weary from our sins  
Promised leader from David's family, bring hope to all the world  
Each race and people sing your praises, joy to every boy and girl!

## Snack: Broccoli “trees” (w/ Ranch) & pretzel sticks for “branches”

Make sure you cut up the broccoli into small dipping sizes that look like little “trees.” Have plenty of Ranch dressing or dip on hand, as some children won't eat broccoli otherwise.

As you hand out the pretzels, perhaps make the point that often a branch will look like it's dead (especially in winter), but new life springs forth every year.

Ask the children if they have any experiences to share about trees being cut down and seeing little shoots come from the stump or from the root system.

Ask them why they think God used that imagery with Jeremiah to show that a promised helper was coming from David's family line.



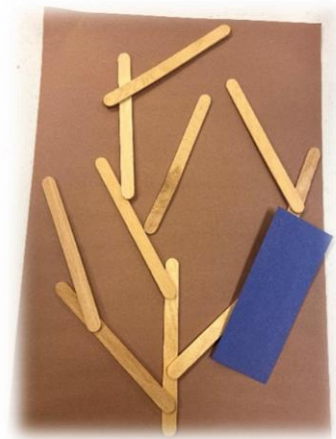
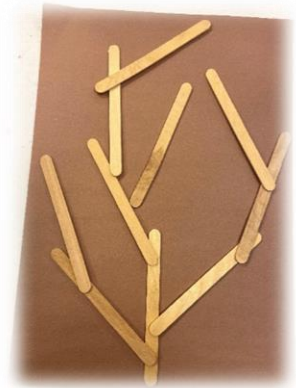
## Craft: Advent Wreath Jesse Tree

Supplies needed: **craft sticks**, **construction paper** (purple/blue, pink, white, brown/tan), **glue**, **markers/color pencils**.

Optional: **Ziplock bags** for the additional “candles” that will be added in coming weeks. Also, if you have children that won't have access to a glue stick or bottle of glue at home, you could include a small glue stick in this bag to make it easy to add the candles for each week.

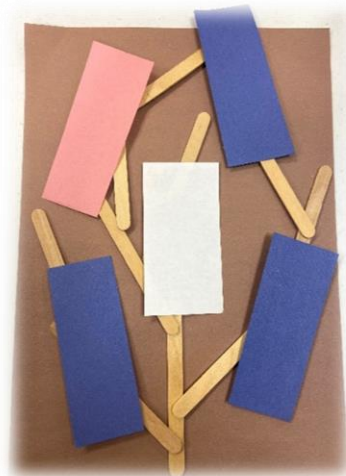
Directions: Try this new take on the Advent Wreath... the “Jesse Tree” (a reference to the “godly branch from David’s family line” as Jesse was his father!).

1. Have the kids design a tree trunk and branches on a piece of paper using the craft sticks. (see picture of bare sticks on brown colored paper for an idea of what this could look like)
2. Glue all the sticks down.
3. Make 5 total paper candles using the construction paper: 3 blue/purple, 1 pink, 1 white
4. Glue down 1 of the blue/purple paper candles and decorate it with pictures or words of hope. (Hope is the theme of the first Advent candle... ask the children if they know the themes for the following weeks—Faith, Joy, Peace, and the Christ candle)



Each week, the kids can add the corresponding candle up the branches of their Jesse Tree wreath. If you choose to send the project home with the children, make sure you give them all the supplies in a Ziplock bag as suggested. For those keeping the projects at the church, make sure you have the children write their name on the paper that has their Jesse Tree, as well as all of their “candles.”

Each paper candle can be decorated with the week’s theme.



## **Advent Week 2:**

### **Liturgical/Worship element: Construction theme**

For your worship area, set out some cones, construction barriers or other elements that would suggest an area where construction or work is being done. It could be fun to come up with your own “signs” to place around the sanctuary with themes from the scripture... “Prepare a way for the Lord... flaggers ahead,” or “Falling Rocks... valleys being filled in,” etc. Refer to this display before reading Isaiah’s promise in the gospel passage, pointing out the work that the “voice calling out in the wilderness” should be done to make a way for the Lord.



If you have a really cooperative pastor who is excited about theming, you could possibly convince them to wear a toolbelt or nail apron for service... or if not the pastor, maybe the ushers/greeters? The more you get into the theme by dressing up and including others, the more fun the children will have, and as an added bonus, it’s likely to be more memorable for the adults, too!

### **Object Lesson: “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 ‘thinking 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:** Luke 3:1-6, New International Reader's Version (NIRV)

Tiberius Caesar had been ruling for 15 years. Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea. Herod was the ruler of Galilee. His brother Philip was the ruler of Iturea and Traconitis. Lysanias was ruler of Abilene. <sup>2</sup> Annas and Caiaphas were high priests. At that time God's word came to John, son of Zechariah, in the desert. <sup>3</sup> He went into all the countryside around the Jordan River. There he preached that people should be baptized and turn away from their sins. Then God would forgive them. <sup>4</sup> Here is what is written in the book of Isaiah the prophet. It says,

"A messenger is calling out in the desert,

'Prepare the way for the Lord.

Make straight paths for him.

<sup>5</sup> Every valley will be filled in.

Every mountain and hill will be made level.

The crooked roads will become straight.

The rough ways will become smooth.

<sup>6</sup> And all people will see God's salvation.' " ([Isaiah 40:3-5](#))

## Game: Which one doesn't belong?

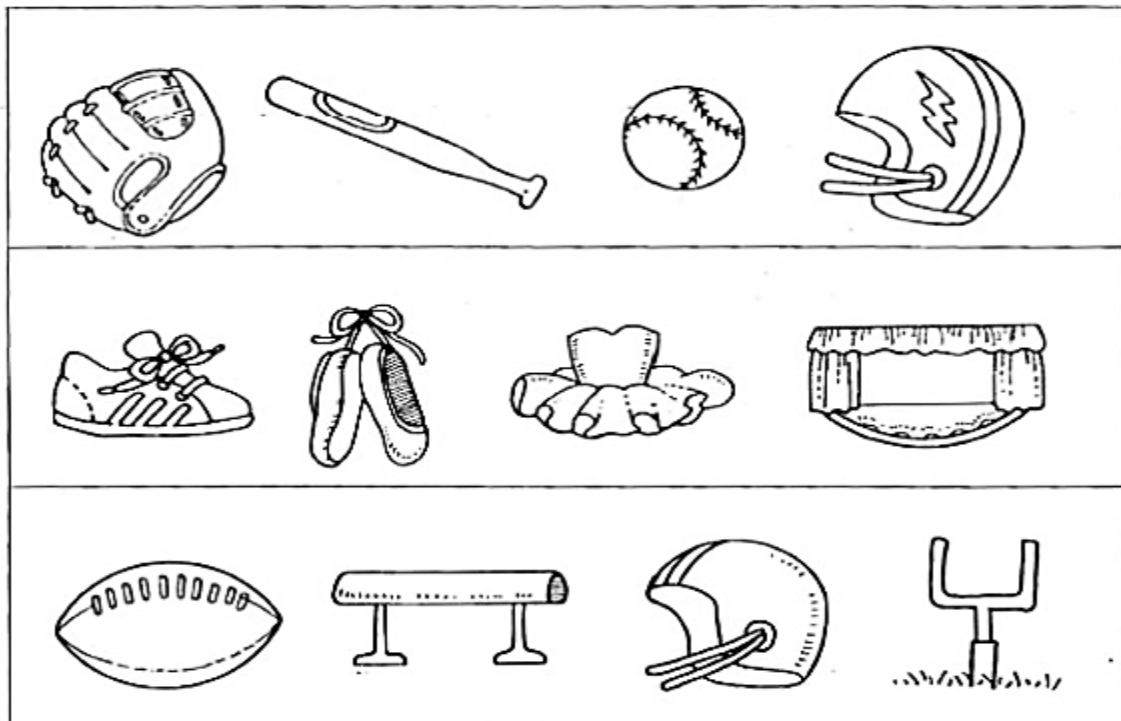
The idea of making straight and level paths for God's Messiah, by sending someone to "prepare the way" (i.e., John) might sound like a "Bob the Builder" episode to most younger children. The abstract application will not be able to be assumed and must be taught. So, a simple way to do this would be to draw a parallel for the children of getting ready for a special guest by straightening up our rooms, putting toys away, etc.

When we prepare a space for a special guest or visitors, there are some things that might belong out (perhaps because we anticipate playing with them with our guest!), but there are somethings that won't belong out and should be put away. (Note: if you have this discussion with the children, be prepared to have the slightly embarrassing moment where a child talks about a family member's underwear being left out on the bedroom floor!)

Use the following puzzle to explain this concept (cut and paste on a half sheet of paper if you want to hand it out for children to do):

## Sports Fan

Circle the picture in each group that does not belong. Color the pictures that go together.



Once students have the idea of coming up with three items that go together and one that doesn't, see if they can come up with some examples to "quiz" the rest of the group.

Close by suggesting that the same thing can apply to characteristics, behaviors or attitudes that we might have to change or sort through in order to be ready for Jesus this Christmas. (This is the pivot to the more "abstract" thinking that your younger children just might not get, and that's ok!) If the children are thinking about what attitudes of heart are most appropriate in preparing for Jesus, let them know that Advent is a great time to do some of that sorting out!

Here are some examples of "which one doesn't belong" that you could talk through (Bolded one doesn't belong):

Joy, Hope, Love, **Selfishness**

Giving, Seeking, **Hiding**, Watching

**Complaining**, Worship, Singing, Serving

## Hymn: “Come, Thou long expected Jesus,” verse 2

Original:

Joy to those who long to see thee, Dayspring from on high, appear  
Come, thou promised Rod of Jesse, of Thy birth we long to hear!  
O’er the hills the angels singing news, Glad tidings of a birth  
“Go to him, your praises bringing; Christ the Lord has come to Earth.”

Optional:

John came to prepare your way, Lord, opening both our hearts and minds  
Align our lives with holy purpose, leaving selfish ways behind  
Singing, sharing, hoping, telling, finding ways to share the news  
Dear promised child, you’re coming quickly! May we all make room for you.

## Snack: Trail mix

Have a variety of ingredients set up with a recipe with ratios (or the number of “scoops” that are appropriate). Have the kids help prepare the mix by following the directions for the ratios of each ingredient or “scoops” needed in a large bowl. Mix together and then serve in Dixie cups.



NOTE: If you do not know the food allergies that the children in your class might have, **DO NOT** include nuts in the trail mix! You cannot count on the children to give you an accurate accounting for the food allergies they may or may not have.

While the children are eating, ask them about preparing for trips, camping, or hiking... what sort of things do they do to prepare? Have they ever been in a situation where the weather changed and they were not prepared? [For older kids] If we think about our faith as a journey, what things should we do to prepare for what might be coming as we grow older?

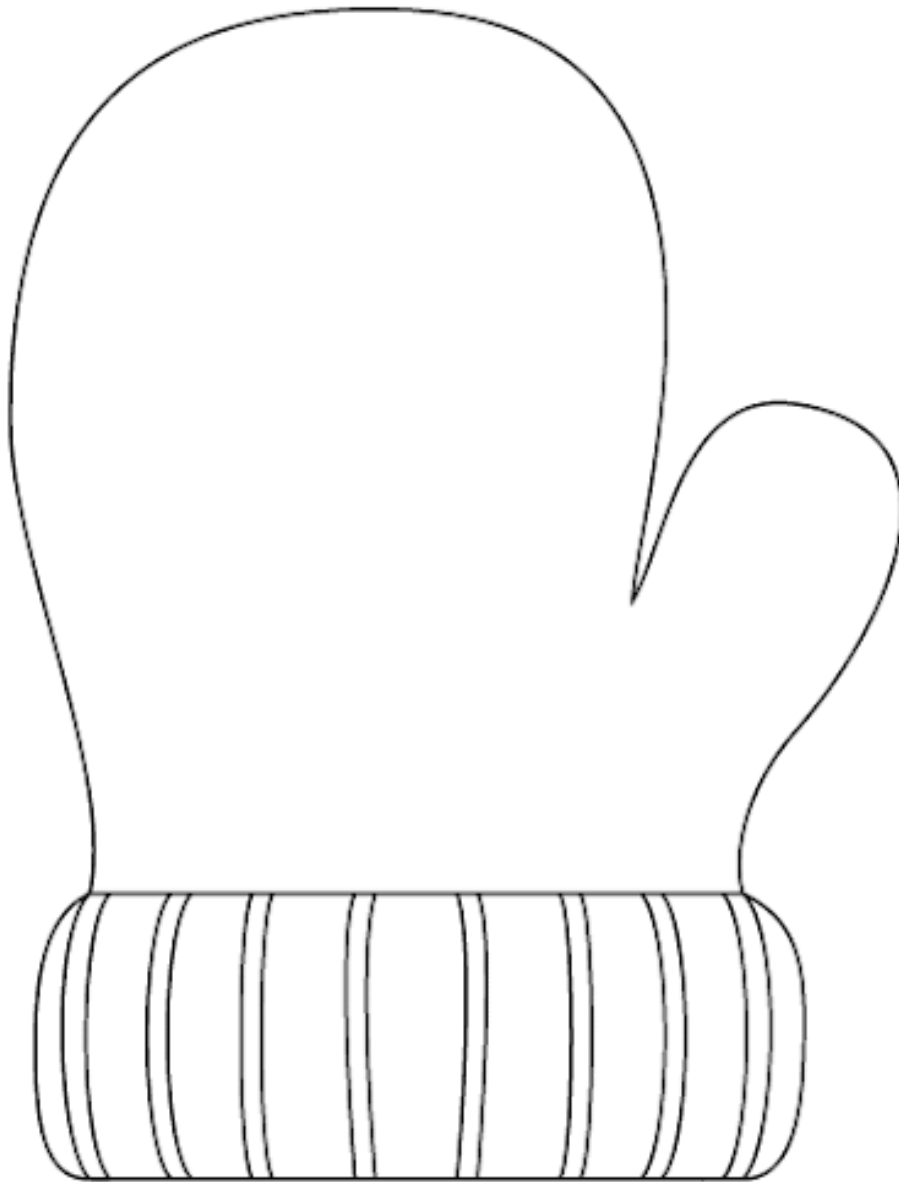
## Craft: “Prepare the Way” mitten craft

Supplies needed: a craft medium of your choice (**construction paper**, felt, etc.), **markers**, **pompoms**, **stickers**, **glue**, **magazine scraps**, etc.

Directions:

1. Using the mitten template, make a few mittens for each child with your chosen medium. (template is on the following page, or you are welcome to find your own)

2. Decorate the mittens describing/illustrating ways we can prepare the way for Jesus. Some questions to get the kids thinking: "What are some ways we can use our brains, hands, and hearts to get ready for Jesus' birth?"
3. String the mittens together in your room or in your worship space.





## Advent Week 3:

### Liturgical/Worship element: The axe laid at the foot of the tree



Find a small hatchet and a tree that you can place up front, where people are able to see it clearly. Again, like with the construction theme, if you can get the pastor or members of the church leadership to dress up like lumberjacks (and lumberjanes!) it will be a lot of fun for everyone!

In the bulletin—or handed out to visitors in worship as they come in—you can have all sorts of fruit-shaped cut-outs. Instruct worshippers to write down a loving action that mirrors the instruction of John the Baptist in the gospel passage (e.g., donate extra clothes to the poor, share food with the local food bank, be generous with your money, tell the truth, be grateful for your work, etc.) on the fruit cut-out they were given. Then, as they come forward for communion, instruct them to hang their fruit on the tree (if it's fruit on a pine tree, that's fine... it's a metaphor, after all, so it doesn't have to "make sense!") before returning to their seat. At the close of the service, hold up the axe/hatchet, and say something to this affect:

*"It is not God's will that judgment be inevitable. John's warning then to God's people is ours today. May we repent and live lives that give glory to God through our acts of love and compassion. Then, the axe laid at the foot of the tree will not be needed, as the tree will bear its fruit in and out of season! With God's grace this is possible. Go, now, in peace and share the good news of the coming Christ. Amen!"*

### Object Lesson: "Where's the fruit?"

**Objects Needed:** A piece of fruit, or several different fruits.

**Theme/Main Idea:** What we do to help others shows that on the inside something has changed. Just as a good tree bears good fruit, we want people to see the "fruit" from our lives and see that it's because God has changed our hearts!



## Presentation:

“Good morning! How are you this morning? Are you filling up your change cans at home or here at church? I sure hope so! It makes a big difference in the lives of the children at Intermountain. And, it’s a sign that you understand what Advent is really all about... but I’ll get back to that in a bit.

First, I bet you want to see what the object lesson is this week? Yes? Okay... let me get it out for you.

[take out fruit that you brought with you]

You know what this is? No... it’s not my breakfast or my snack for after the service! It’s fruit. Yep. Just fruit. Our Bible story today talks about fruit, so I thought I’d bring some in.

In the story, John the Baptist warned the people that Jesus was going to come soon to teach them and show them what God was all about. John told them to live lives that showed others that they had really turned away from sin to follow God. Then he said something kinda funny... He said, trees that don’t produce good fruit, like this [hold up an apple, pear, or orange], are going to get cut down! Apparently, fruit is pretty important.

But, do you think John was really worried about fruit trees? [kids respond, “No...”]

I think this is one of those word pictures, again, that we see all over the Bible. The people John was talking to seemed to understand that, because they asked him, ‘What should we do, then?’ They didn’t ask him about how to take better care of their apple and orange trees! They knew that John was talking about their actions and how they treated other people.

In response, John told them to do some really practical things, like take care of people who don’t have enough clothes or food, and to be honest with their money.

As we are getting ready to celebrate Jesus’ birthday this Advent season, we can take some of John’s advice. Just as the people back then were told to take care of one another and to use their money in ways that pleased God, those things can be signs of ‘good fruit’ in our lives too!

It’s part of the reason that we take special offering from time to time at church, like the Change for Children cans we gave out a few weeks ago. It’s not because giving money or doing nice things for others earns us God’s approval; it’s that doing these things changes our attitude towards others. Our hearts rearrange from just thinking about what we will GET during the Advent season to what we can GIVE to others.

And, as we build in ourselves the characteristics of gratitude and generosity, we prepare ourselves to truly celebrate the One we recognize this Advent and Christmas season—Jesus!

Let's pray:

*God, thank you for meeting our needs so abundantly. We hope that when you look at our lives you see lots of good 'fruit'—gratitude, generosity, kindness, and love. Help us show others by our actions that our hearts have changed for the better. We don't want to give into the selfishness that sometimes comes with the Holiday season, but instead live as examples of your love and grace. In Jesus' name, Amen."*

**Key Text:** Luke 3:7-18 (NIRV)

John spoke to the crowds coming to be baptized by him. He said, "You are like a nest of poisonous snakes! Who warned you to escape the coming of God's anger? <sup>8</sup> Live in a way that shows you have turned away from your sins. And don't start saying to yourselves, 'Abraham is our father.' I tell you, God can raise up children for Abraham even from these stones. <sup>9</sup> The ax is already lying at the roots of the trees. All the trees that don't produce good fruit will be cut down. They will be thrown into the fire."

<sup>10</sup> "Then what should we do?" the crowd asked.

<sup>11</sup> John answered, "Anyone who has extra clothes should share with the one who has none. And anyone who has extra food should do the same."

<sup>12</sup> Even tax collectors came to be baptized. "Teacher," they asked, "what should we do?"

<sup>13</sup> "Don't collect any more than you are required to," John told them.

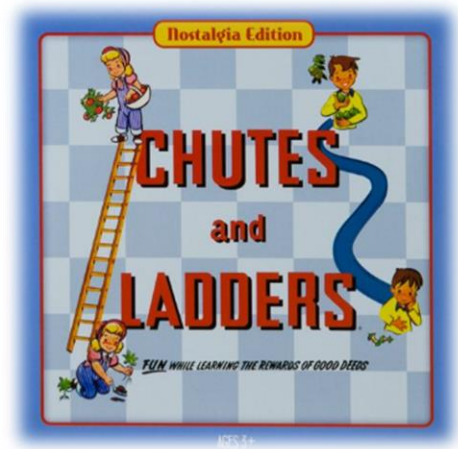
<sup>14</sup> Then some soldiers asked him, "And what should we do?"

John replied, "Don't force people to give you money. Don't bring false charges against people. Be happy with your pay."

<sup>15</sup> The people were waiting. They were expecting something. They were all wondering in their hearts if John might be the Messiah. <sup>16</sup> John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I am will come. I'm not good enough to untie the straps of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. <sup>17</sup> His pitchfork is in his hand to toss the straw away from his threshing floor. He will gather the wheat into his barn. But he will burn up the husks with fire that can't be put out." <sup>18</sup> John said many other things to warn the people. He also announced the good news to them.

## Game: Snakes and Ladders/Chutes and Ladders

Explain to the children something they might not have noticed before... the pictures on a Snakes and Ladders/Chutes and Ladders game are meant to show either good or bad behaviors and their consequences. If you have a Chutes and Ladders game, make reference that to the origin of the game in India, where it is called “Snakes and Ladders.” Now, for those that don’t like snakes, it could be easy to see why the snakes don’t appeal as much to an American audience, so when the game was introduced here, it became “Chutes and Ladders,” and they added the moral lessons in for children. But, what do snakes have to do with poor moral choices? Well...



John called the people that were coming to see him “snakes,” because he was concerned that they were only there to try and *appear good*, while they were really only concerned for themselves. When they asked him what they should do to show that they weren’t snakes, or trying to be sneaky and “put one past God,” John suggested that they exhibit behaviors that look a lot like the “good deeds” rewarded by climbing up the ladder in the “Chutes and Ladders” game. So, as you play as a group, when someone either climbs a ladder or goes down a chute, have them explain the action and the consequence depicted on the drawing... and, if it is a “chute,” what they would suggest instead of the bad behavior depicted on the board (i.e. instead of sneaking a bunch of cookies, wait until after dinner to ask Mom for one, etc).

## Song: “Come, Thou long expected Jesus,” verse 3

Original:

Come to earth to taste our sadness, He whose glories knew no end;  
By His life He brings us gladness, Our redeemer, Shepherd, Friend.  
Leaving riches without number, born within a cattle stall  
This the everlasting wonder, Christ was born the Lord of all.

Optional:

Come to earth to feel our hurting, his love and power have no end  
Jesus’ way brings healing gladness, redeems us and now calls us friends  
Set aside the feasts of heaven, came to dine with me and you  
Holy baby in the manger, come to the world making all things new.

## Snack: Fruit salad (or fruit cups)

This one should be an easy “win” as far as popularity goes for the snack time. If you have the ability to make your own fruit salad together as a group it can be a lot of fun, too. Most of the fruit could be cut up with a simple table knife, so the risk would be minimal. Bananas, apples, grapes, pears, and even canned options like canned peaches or pineapple can be added. If you have a concern that the fruit isn’t going to be ripe, a little dose of honey can sweeten things up to the point where you will have smiles all around!

While snacking it would be a great time to check in with the kids and see how their Advent experience has been so far. What part of the celebrations and preparations have they enjoyed most? What has been hardest (perhaps last week’s focus on preparing the attitude of our hearts? Thinking of others rather than just ourselves?)

## Craft: God Is Up to Something! Hope chain

Supplies needed: **craft paper** of various colors (cut into strips), **tape**, **markers**, **decorations** for paper strips (like stickers, etc.)

Directions:

1. Have various color strips of paper cut and ready for the children.
2. Ask the question: “What is God up to these days?” and have them think of places they have *seen others* bearing God’s fruit. Summarize these stories in a few words like “saw my father helping my mother with dishes,” or “sat with new kid at lunch.” Have children write these instances on their strips of paper. Those who are not writing yet could draw a picture for each story.
3. Decorate a paper chain strip for each “fruit” they have witnessed, adding pictures of fruit or other decorations, such as stickers.
4. Toward the end of your time, have a chain ceremony where you connect all the chain links, and kids can share what they wrote with the whole group.
5. Invite them to keep their eyes and ears open during the next week and add to the chain the next week.





## **Advent Week 4:**

### **Liturgical/Worship element: Things that jump**

Jumping for joy... what possibilities!? If you wanted to spark a little discussion and strike a slightly comical note, you could place a small baby doll and a jump rope on a table in the front of the sanctuary!

The theme of “jumping for joy” could also be explored in any number of ways... small trampoline (how long could the pastor preach while bouncing on the trampoline?), stuffed animal kangaroos, or even Mexican jumping beans handed out to families as they come in? Be creative and have fun... the joy is building as we near Christmas day!



[Note: those Mexican jumping beans can be kind of loud in their little cases... so, if it is going to be too distracting in your estimation, I would suggest handing them out at the CLOSE of service!]

### **Object Lesson: “Jumping for Joy!”**

**Objects Needed:** A jump rope.

**Theme/Main Idea:** God keeps his promises, and that should cause us to jump for joy!

#### **Presentation:**

“Have you ever been so happy that it was hard to hold it in? Yes? What are some of the reasons you have had to be happy?”

[let children share]

Wow! Those are great reasons to be excited and happy. Now, I am wondering if anyone here can tell me, without using a word, that they are happy? Can someone here act out being happy for us without shouting or making any noise?

[as time permits, let a few children ‘act out’ their expressions of happiness]

Amazing, you guys! I could tell that each of you were happy and you didn’t have to say a thing. But, I suppose I should get on with the object lesson... what do you think? Would you like to see what I brought today? Yes... okay. Here is it!

[take out the jump rope]



I suppose you all know what this is? Right. It's a jump rope. Do you know why I have a jump rope? It has something to do with our lesson from Luke, chapter 1 today. It's the story of Mary, just pregnant with Jesus, visiting her relative, Elizabeth, who is pregnant with John the Baptist. When Mary calls out to greet Elizabeth, the baby inside her jumps for joy! Even still inside Elizabeth, waiting to be born, John recognizes how important it is that Mary is going to be the mother of Jesus.

Incredible, isn't it? Elizabeth certainly thought it was. She made sure to tell Mary that the baby in her jumped for joy. There was a lot of joy and anticipation coming before that first Christmas morning. I hope that we can hold on to some of that excitement, too, and even let our bodies express it. Maybe thinking about how amazing it is that Jesus was born to show us God's love makes you jump for joy, too? I sure hope so.

We are so close to Christmas! Part of the joy of celebrating comes not only from the gifts we think we are going to receive, but also from the gifts we give and are excited to see others get! I am excited to know that we are almost done with our Change for Children effort. Please remember to bring your Change cans back next Sunday, or if you'll be gone, maybe you can bring them to our special Christmas Eve service?

I am jumping for joy to know what a blessing our gifts will be to the children and families that Intermountain serves.

Let's pray:

*"God, thank you for the best Christmas present we could have ever received: the joy that comes from knowing Jesus. Help us express that joy with our bodies, with our faces, and with our generosity towards others. Bless our last little effort to fill our Change Cans and help the children and families of Intermountain. In Jesus' name, Amen."*

### **Key Text: Luke 1:39-45 (NIRV)**

<sup>39</sup> At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in Judea's hill country. <sup>40</sup> There she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. <sup>41</sup> When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, *the baby inside her jumped*. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. <sup>42</sup> In a loud voice she called out, "God has blessed you more than other women. And blessed is the child you will have!" <sup>43</sup> But why is God so kind to me? Why has the mother of my Lord come to me? <sup>44</sup> *As soon as I heard the sound of your voice, the baby inside me jumped for joy.* <sup>45</sup> You are a woman God has blessed. You have believed that the Lord would keep his promises to you!"



## Game: A game of “trash can basketball J-O-Y”

The game of “J-O-Y” is to be played similarly to the game of HORSE, a basketball game. Of course, the indoor version necessitates that we play with crumpled paper and a trashcan. One wrinkle... before each shot, have the child write/draw a “joy-buster” on their piece of paper (i.e., mean people, rudeness, having to wait too long, a dead cell phone battery, etc.), then crumple it up and shoot for the basket. If they make it, the next person must shoot from the same spot. The next person does the same thing with a scratch piece of paper (you’ll need a large stack), and shoots. If they make it, the game continues with the next person writing their joy-buster, sharing it with everyone, and then shooting from wherever s/he chooses. If there is a miss, that person gets a “letter” of the word “J-O-Y.” If someone gets all three letters, they have to do ten jumping jacks in order to join the game again. Play for 6-8 minutes, or longer if you have the time!



## Song: Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus, verse 4

Original:

Born thy people to deliver, Born a child and yet a king  
Born to reign in us forever, Now thy gracious kingdom bring.  
By thy own eternal spirit; rule in all our hearts alone  
By thine all sufficient merit, Raise us to thy glorious throne.

Optional:

Born for us and for our neighbor, born a child but still our king  
Born to rule in love and justice, now with praise your people sing  
With the presence of your Spirit, take first place in heart and mind  
You alone unite us to heaven, where perfect peace and joy we find.

## Snack: String (jump rope) cheese or pull-apart Twizzlers licorice

This is one snack where you get to encourage kids to play with their food! Point out the similarity between the snack and a jump rope, and maybe get silly and ask how tall you’d have to be to have the string cheese or licorice be your jump rope?! Or, maybe what animal could use a jump rope that small? Does anyone think they could train a mouse, hamster or gerbil to jump rope?

On a slightly more serious note, children could also share what they are excited for in the season. Sometimes children are asked to “calm down” a lot during the holidays, and this could be a fun time to be excited together. Jump and cheer as a class when children share what they are excited for—maybe one jump for each word? *“You (jump) get (jump) to (jump) see (jump) your (jump) new (jump) baby (jump) cousin! (jump and cheer)”*

## **Craft: Joy, the Jumping Frog Origami project**

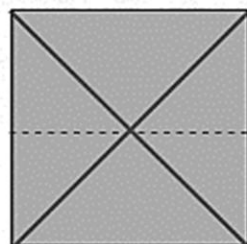
Supplies needed: **origami paper** or paper cut into a large square, **coloring supplies**

Directions:

1. Cut white copy paper into 6 x 6 inch squares (if you don’t have origami paper to work with).
2. Have kids decorate/color both sides of their paper.
3. Use the directions on the next page for folding your origami frog... I would suggest practicing this at home prior to your lesson time with the kids so you feel comfortable helping them as it gets hard, especially for the little ones!
4. If there is time, have a jumping contest at the end of class... you could have contests for distance, accuracy, jumping off the table onto a target, etc.

Check out this helpful link for instruction on how to fold a jumping origami frog: <https://adideban.wordpress.com/2012/07/14/jumping-origami-frog/>

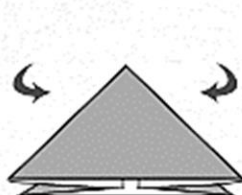
Step 1



— Regular fold  
- - - Reverse fold

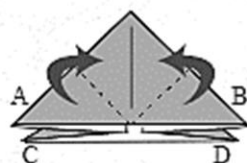
Fold a square piece of paper in half diagonally and then horizontally.

Step 2



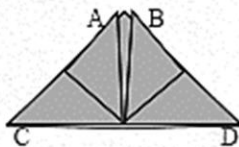
Next, fold the horizontal line inwards, pinching the paper into a tent. The paper should look like this.

Step 3



Now fold the two top flaps A and B so that their edges meet at the middle

Step 4



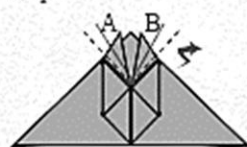
It should now look like this.

Step 5



Fold points A and B so that they meet at the center.

Step 6



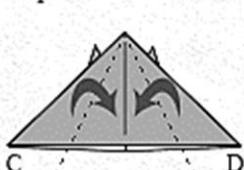
The belly of your frog is almost finished. To create the arms, pleat flaps A and B by folding...

Step 6 cont'd



... them down along the dotted line and then back along the solid line.

Step 7



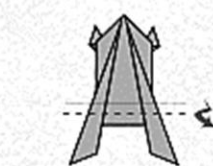
Fold sides C and D so that their long edges meet at the center.

Step 8

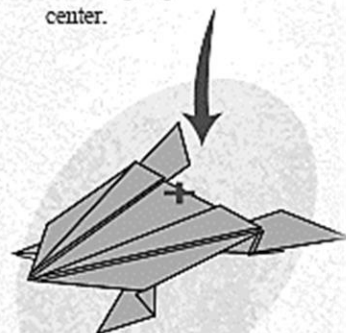


Fold the inner edges of flaps C and D towards the outer edges.

Step 9



To create the spring, pleat the lower quarter of the figure by folding under along the solid line and then out along the dotted line.



To make the frog jump press the end of its back with the tip of your finger.



## **Christmas Eve/Christmas Day:**

### **Liturgy/Worship element: You are the message**

Undoubtedly, songs of angels and banners or other worship art will feature angels on this night... so, we don't need to set out another angel and draw the children's attention to it. Instead, find a "message board" of some sort... some light up, others have the same track system and letters that the old non-electronic church reader-boards use.

Regardless of the exact message board you find, place the words "YOU ARE THE MESSENGERS THIS CHRISTMAS" as big and bold as you can. Point out to the children that "angelos," the word in Greek from which we get "angel," simply means messenger. The angels came to tell the shepherds of the Christchild on the first Christmas Eve... now, we are the Christmas "angels" who take the message of Jesus out to others!

### **Object Lesson: "Angels point the way!"**

**Objects Needed:** An angel ornament, or picture of an angel.

**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 angel ornament]

Yes! It's an angel. 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! They 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!

That’s the best and greatest news of all: 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 the one story in the Bible we have of Jesus as a boy.

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 2:1-20, (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.

## Game: Angel scavenger hunt

Most churches try and keep the families together for Christmas Eve service. So, a "game" that can be played would be a simple pencil and paper "scavenger hunt" done with ears and eyes... and the categories can be generated based on your local tradition.

Here are some ideas of what children could tally or write down:

1. Number of angels in the sanctuary
2. Number of times the word "angel" is sung or said
3. What gospel does the reading come from tonight about the angels appearing to the shepherds?
4. How many people are in the choir/praise team/etc.?
5. How many people went up to light the Advent candles?
6. How many candles are lit on the Advent wreath?

## Song: Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus (all four verses)

Original:

1. Come thou long expected Jesus, born to set thy people free  
From our sins and fears release us; let us find our rest in thee  
Israel's strength and consolation, Hope of all the earth thou art.  
Dear desire of every nation, joy of every longing heart.
2. Joy to those who long to see thee, Dayspring from on high, appear  
Come, thou promised Rod of Jesse, of Thy birth we long to hear!  
O'er the hills the angels singing news, Glad tidings of a birth  
"Go to him, your praises bringing; Christ the Lord has come to Earth."
3. Come to earth to taste our sadness, He whose glories knew no end;  
By His life He brings us gladness, Our redeemer, Shepherd, Friend.  
Leaving riches without number, born within a cattle stall  
This the everlasting wonder, Christ was born the Lord of all.
4. Born thy people to deliver, Born a child and yet a king  
Born to reign in us forever, Now thy gracious kingdom bring.  
By thy own eternal spirit; rule in all our hearts alone  
By thine all sufficient merit, Raise us to thy glorious throne.

Optional wording by Rev. Chris Haughee:

1. Jesus, we are ready for you, free us from this web we're in  
Stuck in patterns of wrong-doing, tired and weary from our sins  
Promised leader from David's family, bring hope to all the world  
Each race and people sing your praises, joy to every boy and girl!
2. John came to prepare your way, Lord, opening both our hearts and minds  
Align our lives with holy purpose, leaving selfish ways behind  
Singing, sharing, hoping, telling, finding ways to share the news  
Dear promised child, you're coming quickly! May we all make room for you.
3. Come to earth to feel our hurting, his love and power have no end  
Jesus' way brings healing gladness, redeems us and now calls us friends  
Set aside the feasts of heaven, came to dine with me and you  
Holy baby in the manger, come to the world making all things new.
4. Born for us and for our neighbor, born a child but still our king  
Born to rule in love and justice, now with praise your people sing  
With the presence of your Spirit, take first place in heart and mind  
You alone unite us to heaven, where perfect peace and joy we find.



**Supplemental Object Lesson (for Christmas Day or first Sunday after Christmas):** *Collection day for Change for Children!*



**Objects Needed:** a few loose pennies or coins, and a jar 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 cans back with you today! That's great! I can hear the satisfying sound of clinking coins being moved around in your cans. To help us focus during this time, however, why don't we pass all those cans to me...? [Take a moment to collect the cans 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. They returned 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 cans 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...

*"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: Luke 2:41-52 (NIRV)

Every year Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem for the Passover Feast. <sup>42</sup> When Jesus was 12 years old, they went up to the feast as usual. <sup>43</sup> After the feast was over, his parents left to go back home. The boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. But they were not aware of it. <sup>44</sup> They thought he was somewhere in their group. So they traveled on for a day. Then they began to look for him among their relatives and friends. <sup>45</sup> They did not find him. So they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. <sup>46</sup> After three days they found him in the temple courtyard. He was sitting with the teachers. He was listening to them and asking them questions. <sup>47</sup> Everyone who heard him was amazed at how much he understood. They also were amazed at his answers. <sup>48</sup> When his parents saw him, they were amazed. His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been worried about you. We have been looking for you everywhere."

<sup>49</sup> “Why were you looking for me?” he asked. “Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?” <sup>50</sup> But they did not understand what he meant by that.

<sup>51</sup> Then he went back to Nazareth with them, and he obeyed them. But his mother kept all these things like a secret treasure in her heart. <sup>52</sup> Jesus became wiser and stronger. He also became more and more pleasing to God and to people.

