

***Gathering,* A/C/E 2021-2022**

Advent to Epiphany and the Season after Epiphany

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## 

## Advent to Epiphany and the Season after Epiphany

## Season of Advent

**Dates:** Advent is the beginning of the church year for most churches in the Western tradition. It begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas Day, which is sometimes the last Sunday in November, and ends on Christmas Eve at sundown. Sometimes the fourth Sunday of Advent is Christmas Eve.

**Feast Days\* and Special Days**

\*December 6 – St. Nicholas’ Day provides a good antidote to the commercial Santa Claus.

December 6 – National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence against Women (Canada).

**Meaning of Name:** The term *Advent* comes via Old English from the Latin *adventus* (“arrival”). It is a combination of *ad* (to) + *venire* (come). In Advent, we are anticipating the arrival of the baby Jesus as well as the Second Coming of Christ.

**Liturgical Colour: Blue**

Blue is used within most United Churches for Advent, though some continue with the older practice of using purple. Blue was adopted to symbolize hope and replace the penitential purple, associated with Lent.

**Season of Christmas**

**Dates:** Christmas Day is fixed on December 25 and begins the Christmas season, which runs through January 5.

**Meaning of Name:** The word *Christmas* comes from Old English *Crīstes mæsse* or “Christ’s mass,” referring to the worship service in celebration of Christ’s birth.

**Liturgical Colours: White and Gold**

White, which is all colours of light combined, traditionally symbolizes goodness, innocence, and God’s faithfulness. Gold reflects glory, triumph, wealth, richness, and extravagance. Together, they symbolize the light of dawn and are colours of celebration.

**Season of Epiphany**

**Dates:** January 6 through to Shrove Tuesday. The length of the season of Epiphany varies, based on the beginning of Lent.

**Feast Days\* and Special Days**

**\*January 6** – Epiphany, also celebrated as Christmas Eve for Orthodox Christians.

**\*Baptism of Jesus** – the Sunday after the day of Epiphany.

**January 18–25** – Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

**\*Transfiguration** – This feast comes from the Eastern churches, who celebrate it on August 6. It became part of the Western calendar in about the ninth century and was universally celebrated by the fifteenth century. In some Western denominations, the date was moved to the last Sunday before Lent.

**\*Shrove Tuesday** – the day before Ash Wednesday, on which pancakes are traditionally served. Shrove comes from the word shriven or “to confess.” The practice of making pancakes was meant to use up rich foods in the house, such as fats and sugars, to prepare for Lenten fasting.

**Meaning of Name:** The word *epiphany* means a sudden insight or new understanding. It comes from the Greek word *epiphainein* meaning “to reveal” or “to be manifest.”

**Liturgical Colours: White and Gold; Green**

White and gold are used for Epiphany and Baptism of Jesus Sunday. Green is for the rest of the season. Green is a cool colour, evoking nature, growth, vitality, freshness, harmony, endurance, and fertility. It is associated with healing and rest. It is the depth and stability of blue combined with the warmth and joy of yellow.

## November 28 – Advent 1

*Worship materials for Advent were contributed by Juanita Austin, Salmon Arm, B.C.*

**Jeremiah 33:14–16**

A righteous branch from David’s line.

**Psalm 25:1–10** (VU p. 752)

To you, God, I lift my soul.

**1 Thessalonians 3:9–13**

How can we thank God adequately?

**Luke 21:25–36**

Signs in the heavens; parable of the fig tree.

### Creation Connection

Luke 21:25–36: What signs do we need to be paying attention to right now in the environment, locally and globally?

### Spark

Display pictures of trees that produce something, e.g., sugar maples, olive trees, fruit trees, nut trees, and a “family tree.” Have on hand the things that the trees produce: maple syrup, olive oil, figs, apples, nuts, and family photos.

### With Children

This might be an opportunity to talk about the Zatoun Peace Box and the United Church’s relationship with Zatoun, supplier of fair-trade olive products (https://zatoun.com).

Or match each tree picture with the item it produces. Talk about the goodness that comes from trees, including the fruit, nuts, olive oil, and maple syrup. If possible, offer opportunities to touch and smell the products. Share the story of Jeremiah telling a disheartened people that God will give them a leader someday who will come from their family tree. He will be a righteous branch: that means he will produce good things (love, caring, respect, hope). We see those qualities in the person of Jesus. We can share those qualities of Jesus with others, since we are part of Jesus’ family tree.

### Sermon Starter

In Jerusalem, there is a sign posted in Hebrew, Arabic, and English that says: “Olive trees will be our borders.” In a city that has known so much conflict at different times in its history, it is a beautiful and hopeful sign. Remember that the gospel was written after the destruction of Jerusalem (which involved the death of about one million people, most of them Jewish).

Consider the “signs” of our times. Which ones will we pay heed to? Why are we so unable or unwilling to pay attention? Think about Americans who said, “This is not who we are” after the Jan. 6, 2021, attack and Canadians who claim that we don’t have racism here. What does it cost us to face a more challenging side of our being? What does it cost us not to?

Jesus said, “This generation will not pass away until these things have happened.” Over the years, various religious groups have told me “THIS generation means us, now” (and implied that, therefore, I should abide by their interpretation). I wonder if they remember that every generation from the time of Jesus up to now has a “this generation” moment? Or is this a call for EACH generation to be THIS generation, and to deal faithfully and fully with what life throws at it?

### Hymns

***Jeremiah 33:14–16***

VU 1 “O come, O come, Emmanuel” (See alternate words in Drama & More file)

*A special verse for this week by Juanita Austin:*

O come, and let a righteous branch arise,

Its holy limbs up, reaching to the skies.

In you, when we are rooted, we are strong.

Together we are blest and we belong.

VU 8 “Lo, how a rose e’er blooming”

***Psalm 25:1–10***

VU 662 “Lead me, God”

MV 81 “Love us into fullness”

MV 221 “I am walking a path of peace”

***1 Thessalonians 3:9–13***

VU 602 “Blessed be the tie that binds”

***Luke 21:25–36***

VU 2 “Come, thou long-expected Jesus”

VU 688 “O day of God, draw nigh”

VU 713 “I see a new heaven”

***General/Seasonal***

VU 7 “Hope is a star”

*Juanita Austin has modified verse 1 for this week:*

Hope is a tree with roots growing strong,

In God’s creation, we all belong.

VU 9 “People, look east”

MV 220 “Hope shines as the solitary star”

## December 5 – Advent 2

**Malachi 3:1–4**

A refiner’s fire and a launderer’s soap.

**Luke 1:68–79** (VU p. 900)

Zechariah sings, “Blessed be the God of Israel.”

**Philippians 1:3–11**

I thank God every time I remember you.

**Luke 3:1–6**

A voice calling in the desert.

### Creation Connection

Luke 3:1–6: Whose are the voices calling to us from creation and about creation? Which ones are easiest to receive and which are difficult?

### Spark

Ahead of time, invite people to share pictures of themselves as babies or toddlers. How many people can match the baby pictures with the adults?

### With Children

You might have been asked, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” I’m going to ask you to imagine that you have grown up and you are doing what you want to do. And you have a child! What do you want your child to be when they grow up? What kind of life do you want them to have? When Jesus’ cousin John was born, even his neighbours had ideas about what he should do, and they thought he should be called Zechariah after his father. They never could have imagined what John really chose. Who did he become? Share the story of John the Baptist.

### Sermon Starter

Luke 1:68–79 is a good focus this week to set the stage for John the Baptist and the reading of Luke 3:7–18 next Sunday. Expand on the “With Children” by asking the adults about their dreams, concerns, and hopes for their own children and grandchildren (if they have them)\* and for nieces, nephews, and children in the congregation, community, and world. Delve into the birth story and ministry of John. Repentance and clearing the way for God are its themes. What rubble is in the way of experiencing and receiving the truth? What is in the way of being open to God? Each age has had gossip, innuendo, and conflicting ideologies, but today, with broad access to the Internet and algorithms that feed us more of what we seek, we need to be reminded of spiritual practices that help us seek the truth and clear the garbage. Share some spiritual tools, such as centring prayer, an examen prayer, or another spiritual discipline for Advent, that could be used instead of searching online or on social media.

*\*You will want to word this carefully, especially if a family in your community has experienced the intergenerational trauma of residential school survivors or the death of one of their children and all the lost hopes and dreams that go with that death.*

### Hymns

***Malachi 3:1–4***

VU 10 “Prepare the way of the Lord”

VU 28 “Herald! Sound the note of gladness”

VU 333 “Love divine, all loves excelling”

VU 660 “How firm a foundation”

***Luke 1:68–79***

VU p. 900 “Song of Zechariah” (Benedictus)

VU p. 901 “Song of Zechariah” (Blest be the God of Israel)

***Philippians 1:3–11***

VU 389 “God is here”

VU 595 “We are pilgrims”

***Luke 3:1–6***

VU 18 “There’s a voice in the wilderness”

VU 20 “On Jordan’s bank”

VU 23 “Joy shall come”

## December 12 – Advent 3

**Zephaniah 3:14–20**

Sing, daughter of Zion; God comes to bring you home.

**Isaiah 12:2–6** (VU p. 880)

Proclaim God’s deeds to the nations.

**Philippians 4:4–7**

Rejoice in God always! Again I say, rejoice!

**Luke 3:7–18**

John warns the crowds, “You brood of vipers!”

### Creation Connection

Luke 3:7–18: Pray and give thanks for all those who are offering warnings about the situation with creation and the climate.

### Spark

Parallel the reading of Luke 3:1–2 with the contemporary political scene. You may wish to have a second reader say: “In the 69th year of the reign of Queen Elizabeth II, in the sixth year of Justin Trudeau’s leadership as prime minister of Canada, in the first year of Joe Biden’s presidency (*add others from local or world community*), the word of God came to (*name your community of faith*), and the people went to all the regions around (*name of town/village/city/rural area*).”

### With Children

Share a Godly Play–style story of John at the River Jordan. Use a flowing fountain, if one is available. Talk about people being excited and curious. I wonder what stories and rumours were being told about John the Baptist? I wonder what people were expecting to experience when they went to the river? Encourage responses. Share some of the questions people asked and the answers John gave them. I wonder what John would suggest that we, individually and collectively, do to try to live in God’s way? Encourage responses.

### Sermon Starter

John didn’t draw attention to himself, but he asked people to look within and notice what was holding them back from following the God they claimed to believe in. He asked this not only of the Pharisees but also of the common folk and even of the Roman soldiers. His basic response to the question “What should I do?” was to ask people to examine their own lives and to consider if they were living with generosity and justice. If you went down to the river today and asked John what you should do, what would he say to you? Develop this into a guided meditation.

Or ask these questions: “Who is a John the Baptist figure in our world today? What is the challenge they present? How can we respond, as a church and individually? Do you find John’s words encouraging or discouraging, inspiring or uncomfortable? In today’s readings, John is more challenging, whereas Paul to the Philippians is more encouraging. What motivates you in your faith journey? How do we receive inspiration from both approaches?”

### Hymns

***Zephaniah 3:14–20***

MV 40 “Never ending joy”

**Isaiah 12:2–6**

VU 30 “Hail to God’s own anointed”

VU 677 “O God of every nation”

MV 109 “My soul is thirsting for you”

***Philippians 4:4–7***

VU 249 “Rejoice in the Lord always”

MV 211 “Go now in peace, guided by the light”

***Luke 3:7–18***

VU 18 “There’s a voice in the wilderness”

VU 20 “On Jordan’s bank”

VU 508 “Just as I am”

*Alternative words for verse 1 by Juanita Austin* (Cup of Wine and a Piece of Bread, *2016. Used with permission*.)

Just as I am—no need to hide,

releasing failures and my pride.

You welcome me—arms open wide,

O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

MV 155 “Unbounded Spirit, breath of God”

(Alt. tune: O WALY WALY, VU 372)

## December 19 – Advent 4

**Micah 5:2–5*a***

Out of Bethlehem in Judea will come a leader.

**Luke 1:47–55** (VU pp. 898–899)

Mary sings, “My soul gives glory to my God.”

or **Psalm 80:1–7** (VU p. 794 Part One)

Shepherd of Israel, hear us.

**Hebrews 10:5–10**

Made holy through the sacrifice of Jesus’ body.

**Luke 1:39–45, (46–55)**

Mary visits Elizabeth.

### Creation Connection

Luke 1:47–55: Notice the inversions in the Magnificat. What do we need to cast aside so that species at risk can be lifted up and protected?

### Spark

If choosing to focus on Hebrews and issues of sacrifice and atonement, read *Good Goats: Healing Our Image of God* by Dennis Linn, Sheila Fabricant Linn, and Matthew Linn (Paulist Press, 1994), especially pp. 58–59.

### With Children

Mary and Elizabeth are each going to have a baby and they are very excited to share this good news with each other. Mary sings a song about the wonderful things that God is doing in the world, and she believes that her baby will be a part of those wonderful changes. Ask the children: “If you were to write a song about some wonderful changes you would like God to bring into the world, what sort of things would you include?” Draw pictures or write words to record their responses. Then discuss the question, “How could you be part of helping God make that happen?” Perhaps you (or a musician in the congregation) could work the children’s responses into a song for Christmas Eve, using a familiar carol tune!

### Sermon Starter

Continuing from your reflection on the gospel and Mary’s song, perhaps celebrate some of the saints of the world who have brought about life-giving change through their faithful living (include Christian saints as well as those of other faiths, or of no faith in particular, and those well-known or known only to you or your congregation). Celebrate how, as a community of faith and justice, you are bringing life-giving change as followers of Jesus the Christ. Is there an example you could offer for each part of Mary’s song?

You might also use Juanita Austin’s “After the Magnificat” monologue and hymn found in the Drama & More file for this issue (e-mail gather@united-church.ca to request the file).

### Hymns

***Micah 5:2–5*a**

VU 59 “Joy to the world”

VU 64 “O little town of Bethlehem”

***Psalm 80:1–7***

MV 27 “Creator God you gave us life”

MV 143 “We cannot own the sunlit sky”

***Luke 1:39–45, (46–55)***

VU 16 “Mary, woman of the promise”

VU 29 “Hark the glad sound”

VU p. 899 “My Soul Gives Glory to My God”

MV 120 “My soul cries out”

*(sing at a bright, strong pace, and if you have an Irish drum—a bodhrán— all the better!)*

MV 134 “There was a child in Galilee”

## December 24 – Christmas Eve

*Worship materials for Christmas Eve to Epiphany were contributed by Gord Dunbar, Kincardine P.C., Kincardine, Ont.*

**Isaiah 9:2–7**

A child has been born for us.

**Psalm 96** (VU p. 816)

Sing to God a new song.

**Titus 2:11–14**

Live a godly, upright life.

**Luke 2:1–14 (15–20)**

Jesus’ birth.

### Creation Connection

Psalm 96: All the earth is invited to sing in this psalm. There are many traditional tales of animals being able to speak on Christmas Eve and of all creation joining in the celebration of Christ’s birth. How might you include all of creation in singing for joy on this night?

### Spark

Project, display, or include in the bulletin a series of newborn-baby pictures, possibly ones contributed by congregation members. Invite or choose ones that show an adult offering care to the newborn. Make sure to include a variety of family situations and cultural contexts. Play a lullaby over the sound system to accompany these images prior to worship.

### With Children

Read the story *On a Snowy Night* by Jean Little, illustrated by Brian Deines (North Winds Press, 2013). Relate the idea that even when we feel abandoned and alone, God is there with us, just like the unexpected friends found in the snow who helped guide the bunny back to the warmth of home. As you read, encourage the children to notice how each animal gave as they were able. Working together, they became God’s presence for the bunny just like we can be God’s presence for others. That can be our birthday gift to Jesus.

### Sermon Starter

The Isaiah passage and Luke’s birth narrative provide a wonderful space to enter the realm of midrash. Notice the similarities of theme: oppression overcome by the surprising promise of a child; the despised of society (the shepherds) chosen to joyfully proclaim divine good news while proclamations by the mighty are muted; and endless peace as authority grows from roots in the house of David. However, that peace is not promulgated by the Roman Empire (i.e., enforced by military might) but created through non-violent, self-giving love. Treat the birth narrative like a parable, a subversive story to inspire the kind of peace that turns the world upside down—from the bottom up instead of from the top down. Such is the power of the incarnation rooted in vulnerability. Our inspiration for the difficult, painful labour of birthing a transformed world is to keep our focus on what will be born.

*Editor’s note: Please be aware of how the beloved words of Isaiah 9:2 have been used to promote and support racism. While celebrating the light, be careful not to use darkness as a negative contrast. In this passage, the word* oppression *could replace* darkness*.*

### Hymns

***Isaiah 9:2–7***

VU 2 “Come, thou long-expected Jesus”

VU 65 “Ring a bell for peace”

MV 33 “Jesus came bringing us hope”

MV 137 “Welcome, Jesus, you are welcome”

***Psalm 96***

VU 29 “Hark the glad sound”

VU p. 816 “Sing to God a new song”

MV 51 “Yahweh be praised”

MV 180 “Sing, sing out!”

***Titus 2:11–14***

VU 62 “Once in royal David’s city”

VU 321 “Maker, in whom we live”

MV 91 “Cradle me in your arms”

***Luke 2:1–14 (15–20)***

VU 27 “Tomorrow Christ is coming”

VU 48 “Hark! the herald angels sing”

VU 64 “O little town of Bethlehem”

VU 69 “Away in a manger”

MV 47 “Born in human likeness”

## December 25 – Christmas Day (Saturday)

**Isaiah 62:6–12**

Prepare the way for the people.

**Psalm 97** (VU p. 817)

Let the earth be glad!

**Titus 3:4–7**

Saved by grace; heirs of hope.

**Luke 2:(1–7), 8–20**

Shepherds and angels.

### Creation Connection

Psalm 97: The theme of all the earth joining in the praise of God continues. This psalm highlights the elements: earth, air, fire, and water.

### Spark

Display or project various photos where one has to guess what is being displayed. Or have fun with some “seek and find” books or games where people have to find specific objects.

### With Children

Show the video *Selective Attention Test* (visit www.theinvisiblegorilla.com and look under the “videos & demos” tab). Use a laptop, tablet, or phone if you can’t project it. Stop the video halfway through and ask the children how many basketball passes they counted and how they did it. Then play the rest of the video. Talk with them about how looking for the wrong thing may have distracted them from what was unique and special—the gorilla. The baby Jesus was unique and special because he wasn’t what people were looking for. People are often distracted from what is important because of what they expect. God loves to surprise us with the unexpected. Let’s pay attention to how God might be surprising us.

### Sermon Starter

Luke’s birth narrative can be perceived as a story about an encounter with the Divine that propels the shepherds to go and see and to respond to the revelation of possibility in the Christ child by telling the world the good news. Psalm 97 speaks, in part, about turning away from impotent idols toward the power of right relation that is the Spirit living deeply within. Titus highlights the water of rebirth as our response to the vulnerable self-emptying we witness in the risen Christ, our opportunity to listen to the Spirit within us all. If we define reverence as “paying attention,” we are called to give reverence or pay attention to the incarnation—in Christ and in ourselves. We are to do so by cultivating union with God, or, as Richard Rohr would label it, “unitive consciousness.” Indeed, humanity has a long history of doing things wrong, yet it is through our mistakes that we discover how to do things right. Perfection is not the goal; paying attention and listening to the Spirit is.

### Hymns

***Isaiah 62:6–12***

VU 5 “All earth is waiting”

VU 61 “Of the Father’s love begotten”

MV 154 “Deep in our hearts”

***Psalm 97***

VU 45 “Joy is now in every place”

VU 213 “Rejoice, the Lord is King”

VU 356 “Seek ye first the kingdom”

***Titus 3:4–7***

VU 442 “Wash, O God, our sons and daughters”

MV 12 “Come touch our hearts”

MV 82 “Bathe me in your light”

***Luke 2:(1–7), 8–20***

VU 54 “Unto us a boy is born”

VU 72 “From heaven above to earth I come”

VU 583 “Jesus came, a child like me”

MV 89 “Love is the touch”

## December 26 – First Sunday after Christmas

**1 Samuel 2:18–20, 26**

God blesses the boy Samuel.

**Psalm 148** (VU p. 871)

Let the whole creation praise God.

**Colossians 3:12–17**

Clothe yourselves with compassion and kindness.

**Luke 2:41–52**

The boy Jesus learns at the temple.

### Creation Connection

Psalm 148: Create a psalm out of your own context in creation. What of the creation around you would join in praising God?

### Spark

On the communion table, place a variety of colourful fabrics. Arrange them around a sewing machine. Include in the display other sewing, knitting, crocheting, and quilting supplies, using as much colour as you can. As part of worship, play the song “Beautiful Things” by Gungor.

### With Children

The week before this, invite the children to bring a baby picture (if available) of themselves and a picture of themselves now. Have on hand some “then and now” photos of yourself (or other key participants in the congregation) for children who may not have photos or who have forgotten to bring them. Ask the children to share what has changed between the two pictures. Ask if they now need as much help from adults as they did when they were babies. Show an artistic rendering of Jesus as a baby and Jesus as a 12-year-old in the temple. Ask the same questions. What might it have been like for Mary and Joseph to be parents to Jesus? Do you think it was easy to be Jesus’ parents? What do you think Jesus was like as he grew up? God loved Jesus throughout his growing up years and his parents, too, even when they all made mistakes and were frustrated with each other.

### Sermon Starter

When children grow up, it may hurt for parents, even as it heartens. Hannah visits Samuel each year, longing for precious moments with her son, yet she is now so tangential to the story that she is no longer named (although her husband is). Jesus begins to live more fully into his calling, stimulated by the shared wisdom of the temple’s community of scholars, yet he infuriates his parents by ignoring them as he embraces the wider world and his nascent mission and ministry. Love is not just puppies and butterflies. It tests relationships as each person evolves and matures. So, too, must our relationships evolve. This is the garment of love about which Paul writes to the Colossians. Think of God as inviting us to wear love through the Way of Jesus. It will challenge us in ways unexpected, but if we respond through the harmony of love, even discord becomes part of the melody of faith. Each moment becomes a time for gratitude and for praise. Like the risen Christ, we bear the scars willingly when wearing the garment of love.

### Hymns

***1 Samuel 2:18–20, 26***

VU 131 “If our God had simply saved us”

VU 509 “Here I Am, Lord”

MV 157 “I am a child of God”

***Psalm 148***

VU 265 “Creating God, your fingers trace”

VU 293 “We praise you, Creator”

MV 30 “It’s a song of praise to the Maker”

MV 56 “Come, O come, let us praise”

MV 59 “Alleluia, praise to God”

***Colossians 3:12–17***

VU 599 “Living Christ, bring us love”

VU 716 “My life flows on”

MV 161 “I have called you by your name”

MV 182 “Grateful”

***Luke 2:41–52***

VU 254 “Songs of praise the angels sang”

VU 299 “Teach me, God, to wonder”

VU 357 “Tell me the stories of Jesus”

MV 158 “Dream a dream”

## January 2 – Second Sunday after Christmas

**Jeremiah 31:7–14**

The people return home, singing and dancing.

**Psalm 147:12–20**

God’s word goes out to the ends of the earth.

**Ephesians 1:3–14**

Our inheritance through Jesus Christ.

**John 1:(1–9), 10–18**

The Word became flesh and lived among us.

### Creation Connection

Psalm 147:12–20: How might God’s word, which has gone out to the ends of the earth, be coming back to us now? Are we paying attention?

### Spark

Jesus chose to become our neighbour and live among us. You might choose to share the eight-minute National Film Board movie *Neighbours*, directed by Norman McLaren (search title and director at www.nfb.ca). Note: Please watch the movie ahead of time. It has violent scenes and is not appropriate for children nor for all audiences. It may be best used in a small group setting where people can discuss what they have seen and explore the following questions:

1. This movie was made in 1952. What biases and assumptions do you notice?

2. What was disturbing in this movie for you? Why?

3. What kind of neighbour do you want to have? What kind of neighbour do you want to be?

4. When has a neighbour bugged you? When has a neighbour been frustrated by you? Have you ever had a fight with a neighbour?

5. How did you respond to the above situations?

6. What does our faith guide us to do as neighbours?

### With Children

Bring a variety of candies, fruits, or baked goods. Show them to the children. Place them all in a basket halfway down the aisle. Tell them that you are going to have a contest with everyone seated: the first person to reach the basket will get everything. Ask the children if they think this is fair. There really is a great number of treats in the basket. Suggest that there might be a different way. Brainstorm together. Instead of racing to the basket and one person getting everything, what about working together? What if they shared? Let them think about it for a bit. Go get the basket and tell them you’ve changed the rules and you are going to use Jesus’ Way. Let’s share so that everyone can enjoy. That is Jesus’ Way.

*Note: Make sure nut-, allergen-, and gluten-free options are included.*

### Sermon Starter

It’s time to deal with atonement. The exile Jeremiah refers to a mending of relationship with God, after which life will be good again. The psalm paints pictures of life’s vicissitudes and fluctuations. Ephesians claims our inheritance in Christ. John’s gospel uses theological imagery to describe Jesus as the Word. Contrary to Paul’s blood imagery in Ephesians, let’s claim atonement not as payment for sins but as the self-giving love of God. As Richard Rohr states, “Jesus died willingly, surrendering the Jesus ‘small self’ so the Christ ‘universal self’ could be born” (Richard Rohr and Tim Scorer, *Embracing an Alternative Orthodoxy: Richard Rohr on the Legacy of St. Francis, A 5-Session Study* [Morehouse Educational Resources, 2014] p. 17). Therefore, even in the seemingly random vicissitudes of life, we surrender in faith to be adopted by God as we endeavour to follow the Way of Jesus. After all, Jesus’ self-giving changed our minds about God. Now we know God as the unconditional, overwhelming, reckless love that makes all things new—even us

### Hymns

***Jeremiah 31:7–14***

VU 78 “Sing till sundown”

VU 521 “Praise to God, immortal praise”

MV 156 “Dance with the Spirit”

***Psalm 147:12–20***

VU 296 “This is God’s wondrous world”

MV 37 “Each blade of grass”

***Ephesians 1:3–14***

VU 559 “Come, O Fount of every blessing”

MV 6 “Holy Spirit, come into our lives”

MV 135 “Called by earth and sky”

***John 1:(1–9), 10–18***

VU 335 “At the name of Jesus”

VU 336 “Christ whose glory fills the skies”

VU 511 “Before you now, O God”

MV 162 “Christ, within us hidden”

## January 6 – Epiphany (Thursday)

**Isaiah 60:1–6**

Arise, shine; for your light has come.

**Psalm 72:1–7, 10–14** (VU p. 790 Parts One and Two)

God’s anointed defends the poor.

**Ephesians 3:1–12**

Boldness and confidence through faith.

**Matthew 2:1–12**

The visit of the magi.

### Creation Connection

Isaiah 60:1–6: Both darkness and light, night and day are needed for plants to grow and for humans and animals to function well. This passage has so often been interpreted by setting darkness and light as opposites, representing good and evil. Take time to reflect on the gift of both darkness and light. All of creation needs both in order to live and grow well.

### Spark

You might share the video or audio version of the song “Light” by Gungor. If you have the appropriate copyright licence, you might print the words in the bulletin. Share the back story of this song’s creation: Parents Lisa and Michael Gungor (who are the band) had a beautiful little girl with Down syndrome and two heart conditions. They named her Lucette, which means “light.” Lucie has taught them how very much every life matters. This song is for her and all the beautiful people on this planet with special needs. They affirm that all children like Lucie make this world a better place.

### With Children

Read the story *The Rainbow Fish* by Marcus Pfister (NorthSouth Books, 1992). Relate how sharing the beautiful scales made everyone beautiful. Notice that it was only the smallest fish who perceived the possibilities, only the least significant fish who opened up each fish to their own beauty. Ask the children where God was in the story. How might they help others to be included, at school, at home, in a park? Invite stories of when they have helped someone sparkle. Who has helped them sparkle? Share a story of your own experience of being helped to sparkle. Wonder whether it is sometimes the quietest ones who have deep wisdom and the smallest ones who notice things that others don’t notice.

### Sermon Starter

Matthew’s gospel tells the story of travellers searching for meaning and finding it in a vulnerable child. In juxtaposition with their agency, wealth, and formal education, the magi bend their knees to a peasant Jewish toddler displaced from home with his parents. This is the light Isaiah writes about. This is the hope the Psalmist writes about, where the marginalized are welcomed into the centre through right relation. Just as Paul confesses in his letter to the Ephesians, even those who would oppress are welcomed into the gracious embrace of God’s love. The disenfranchised are celebrated while the disdained are embraced. Yet even as the magi fade from view, taking another way home, the signs of Jesus’ own anointing are left as reminders of the true extent of God’s self-giving in Jesus.

### Hymns

***Isaiah 60:1–6***

VU 79 “Arise, your light is come”

VU 82 “A light is gleaming”

VU 96 “Will you come and see the light”

***Psalm 72:1–7, 10–14***

VU 30 “Hail to God’s own anointed”

VU 68 “All poor ones and humble”

VU 330 “Jesus shall reign”

MV 209 “Go, make a diff’rence”

***Ephesians 3:1–12***

VU 84 “O radiant Christ, incarnate Word”

VU 585 “Jesus bids us shine”

VU 588 “Many are the lightbeams”

***Matthew 2:1–12***

VU 81 “As with gladness men of old”

VU 87 “I am the light of the world”

VU 95 “Born in the night, Mary’s Child”

MV 220 “Hope shines as the solitary star”

## January 9 – Baptism of the Lord Sunday

*Worship materials for January 9 to January 30 were contributed by Kathleen King Martin, First U.C., Waterloo, Ont., and Bill Steadman, Goulais River U.C., Goulais River, Ont.*

**Isaiah 43:1–7**

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you.

**Psalm 29** (VU pp. 755–756)

Ascribe to God glory and strength.

**Acts 8:14–17**

Converts in Samaria baptized by Peter and John.

**Luke 3:15–17, 21–22**

Jesus is baptized by John.

### Creation Connection

Psalm 29: What forces of the natural world do you experience in your context? How might God’s voice be speaking into the situations unleashed by these natural forces?

### Spark

There is a lot of excitement when we first get involved in something or join a new group. Remember the baptism of your child, grandchild, or a child in the congregation, or the celebration of the baptism of an adult? What do you know or remember about your own baptism? Has baptism been a life-altering experience for you or just another life event? What about the first Christmastime when you as a child really knew what it was all about, and how excited you were? Our faith should be a source of excitement and eager participation, not a routine event. How might this excitement be captured in today’s worship?

### With Children

Speak to the children about baptism. Children are interested in baptism and appreciate it when they can witness and participate in some way in a baptism. Have them gather around the baptismal font and explain how baptism happens. Maybe a child who was older when baptized can explain how they felt that day. Talk about the difference between Jesus’ baptism in the river and our baptisms, usually using a font. In both cases, water represents the blessing of God upon us.

### Sermon Starter

The overall theme for today is baptism or blessing from God. Bill Steadman shares, “Whenever I heard this story of Jesus’ baptism while growing up in the church, I thought of Jesus wading into a massive body of water. I grew up in Sarnia, and I figured a river as important as the Jordan River had to be much bigger than the St. Clair River that I visited regularly, where Great Lakes ships and even ocean-bound vessels travelled. If it is a place for Jesus’ baptism, it must be incredibly large.” The truth is, the Jordan River, though a major thoroughfare in the time of Jesus, is relatively small. In places, it is only a few feet deep and not very wide. Most rivers we know in Canada are far wider and deeper, even in remote areas of the country.

The story about Jesus’ baptism is not about the size of the river but the commitment of the individual and the size of God’s mercy and blessing. That blessing may be administered in small congregations and large, in remote communities or major cities, by theologically trained members of the order of ministry or by anyone in an extreme emergency. Each one of us is invited to be open to God’s blessing and guidance through Jesus Christ as we enter into a new year.

### Hymns

***Isaiah 43:1–7***

VU 660 “How firm a foundation”

MV 30 “It’s a song of praise to the Maker”

MV 90 “Don’t be afraid”

***Psalm 29***

VU 220 “Praise to the Lord, the Almighty”

VU 238 “O Lord my God (How Great Thou Art)”

VU 484 “God, the All-Holy”

VU 755 “The God of heaven”

***Acts 8:14–17***

VU 376 “Spirit of the Living God”

VU 377 “Holy Spirit, hear us”

MV 79 “Spirit, open my heart”

MV 150 “Spirit God, be our breath”

***Luke 3:15–17, 21–22***

VU 100 “When Jesus comes to be baptized”

VU 101 “Songs of thankfulness and praise”

VU 644 “I was there to hear your borning cry”

MV 117 “By the well, a thirsty woman”

MV 161 “I have called you by your name”

## January 16 – Second Sunday after Epiphany

**Isaiah 62:1–5**

No longer called “Desolate” but now named “Delight.”

**Psalm 36:5–10** (VU p. 762)

God’s steadfast love is without limits.

**1 Corinthians 12:1–11**

Different kinds of gifts but the same Spirit.

**John 2:1–11**

The wedding in Cana.

### Creation Connection

Isaiah 62:1–5: In your context, what in the environment has been forsaken and become desolate? How might it be restored to delight?

### Spark

During the pandemic, we quickly came to appreciate the gifts of many who do jobs that are far from glamorous but are essential to our well-being. It is not too late to write letters of thanks or show appreciation to those in your community of faith as well as the broader community.

### With Children

Children love to be encouraged to share the gifts they have to offer, and they have many! Ask them about ways that they are helpful. They will often say they pick up their toys, make their bed, or help set the table. Encourage them to consider other gifts, such as making a card for a friend’s or relative’s birthday, art for a someone who is sick, or a special gift for a parent or grandparent; playing with someone who is sad or lonely; or reading a book to a younger child. You might share a story of a gift offered to you that has remained precious. Bill Steadman shares: “For years I used a container to hold markers that was made by my daughter when she was eight (she is now 39), created from an empty can, yarn too short for knitting given to her by her grandmother, and glue. It was colourful and useful! My best birthday gift ever!” Share in an age-appropriate way what Paul tells the Corinthians about our God-given gifts, which are meant to help others, not be kept to ourselves.

### Sermon Starter

Today’s readings present different scenarios of life, including times when people felt the future was bleak and things were about to crumble, yet they experienced the presence of God to bolster them. Are we too quick to give up on others, ourselves, or even God? We dismiss many significant passages when we characterize the First Testament as being about “law” and the Second Testament about “gospel” or “love.” Both testaments speak to God’s presence in the world and the ways that we are protected and encouraged by a caring God.

Paul’s passage on spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians repeatedly inspires and reminds us that God is the source of our human gifts, which we are encouraged to honour, develop, and share. In a community of faith, we need people with all types of gifts to bring wholeness and unity. There is diversity but not a hierarchy of gifts. God delights in the gifts that are within us all. In our congregations, we often highlight people who offer gifts in worship or in organizing larger activities and groups. Such gifts are important, but what about the people who quietly offer a prayer ministry from home, or call individuals who are alone or sick and unable to attend community events? What about those who work on the flower beds in the summer or shovel the sidewalks in the winter, or those who make sure the heat is turned up before people arrive for events? Jesus reminds us that often the most important actions are not the prominent, public acts, but those done silently and in private. The same is true about how we share our gifts within the community of faith.

### Hymns

***Isaiah 62:1–5***

VU 218 “We praise you, O God”

MV 8 “And on this path”

***Psalm 36:5–10***

VU 559 “Come, O Fount of every blessing”

MV 26 “Your love is amazing”

MV 174 “Soil of God, you and I”

***1 Corinthians 12:1–11***

VU 606 “In Christ there is no east or west”

MV 10 “Come and seek the ways of Wisdom”

MV 140 “As long as we follow”

***John 2:1–11***

VU 101 “Songs of thankfulness and praise”

VU 489 “When love is found”

MV 81 “Love us into fullness”

MV 138 “My love colours outside the lines”

## January 23 – Third Sunday after Epiphany

***Week of Prayer for Christian Unity***

**Nehemiah 8:1–3, 5–6, 8–10**

Ezra reads the Torah at the Water Gate.

**Psalm 19** (VU pp. 740–741)

The heavens declare the glory of God.

**1 Corinthians 12:12–31*a***

Now you are the body of Christ.

**Luke 4:14–21**

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me.”

### Creation Connection

Psalm 19: What might the heavens and skies, night and day be revealing to us?

### Spark

Isaiah confidently proclaimed, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me.” Have you ever experienced that reality and been confident that God’s Spirit was guiding you into a way of being and living? You might invite one or two people to share in word or sign language, in art or in drama their story of being guided by God’s Spirit.

### With Children

Paul talks about the church being like a body with many parts that work together. Let’s try a fun experiment.\* I’ll tell you a story. Please cover your ears tightly with your hands. (Speak in a soft voice to compound the challenge.) What was my story about? (Someone who reads lips might share how they “heard” the story with their eyes.) Now close your eyes and keep them closed. (Hold up a scarf or another object.) Can you describe what I am holding? (Someone might share how they could answer the question by touching the object.)

Our body parts work together in their own way to help us in this world. Each one of us has our body to use, just the way it was created. We adapt and interact, using the parts that work best to accomplish what we want to do. When we bring our gifts together, we can do great things. We all are important parts of the body of Christ.

*\*Adapt to suit the children in your context.*

### Sermon Starter

The body of Christ has many parts. Some we celebrate and others we ignore or tolerate. Yet all have something to offer. Sometimes the people we disagree with, or those we find difficult, have the most to offer to us.

In his first sermon, Jesus used a text from Isaiah to proclaim God’s favour. It was a message that people needed to hear. He clarified that his gospel was a call to justice. His was a hopeful message to those who had lost hope, so that they could be open to respond to God’s call to justice.

Consider how Amanda Gorman, American National Youth Poet Laureate, crafted her inauguration poem delivered in Washington, D.C. She began with a question—“Where can we find light in this never-ending shade?”—rather than a statement, as Jesus did when quoting Isaiah. Amanda went on to offer hope, peace, and justice in ways not dissimilar to Jesus. In the core of the poem, she offered these thoughts to a hurting nation: “If we merge mercy with might, and might with right, then love becomes our legacy.” Her words echo those of our Messiah, for it is not military might but divine light that is to lead us forward. God calls us to use the gifts we all bring, for they are gifts that we have been given by God.

### Hymns

***Nehemiah 8:1–3, 5–6, 8–10***

VU 690 “From the slave pens of the delta”

VU 697 “O for a world”

MV 10 “Come and seek the ways of Wisdom”

MV 45 “You are holy”

***Psalm 19***

VU 264 “Immortal, invisible, God only wise”

VU 315 “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God almighty”

MV 27 “Creator God you gave us life”

***1 Corinthians 12:12–31*a**

VU 402 “We are one”

MV 141 “We are all one people”

MV 171 “Christ has no body now but yours”

***Luke 4:14–21***

VU 387 “Loving Spirit”

VU 699 “Live into hope”

MV 157 “I am a child of God”

***Week of Prayer for Christian Unity***

VU 34 “Come now, O God of peace”

VU 691 “Though ancient walls”

MV 154 “Deep in our hearts”

## January 30 – Fourth Sunday after Epiphany

**Jeremiah 1:4–10**

Before you were formed in the womb, I set you apart.

**Psalm 71:1–6** (VU p. 789 Part One)

God is our fortress and sheltering rock.

**1 Corinthians 13:1–13**

Love is patient and kind.

**Luke 4:21–30**

Jesus is driven out of Nazareth.

### Creation Connection

Psalm 71:1–6: Often we find refuge for our spirits in particular places or images of nature. How are we offering long-term protection to these places?

### Spark

The end of January is often a time to ponder Christian unity. The Week of Christian Unity runs from January 18 to 25. More recently, it has become a time in the United Church to look at connections with the interfaith community. What connections and collaborations does your community of faith have to celebrate?

### With Children

Paul speaks about love for the early church. Who are some of the people we love? (Invite answers, which may include pets.)

Jesus teaches us to love everyone. How can we show our love? (Invite responses, then offer suggestions that fit the age of the children.) Each one of us can do kind things for people to show our love. Sometimes all we need to do is sit with someone who is lonely or sad and share tea or a pop and listen to them tell stories of their life. Share in age-appropriate terms what Paul says about love from 1 Corinthians 13:4–7. Acknowledge that sometimes it is hard to love in this way—to be patient and to avoid being irritated or resentful. But God helps us love in this way.

### Sermon Starter

Almost every wedding in the last half of the 20th century seemed to include 1 Corinthians 13:1–13. Often, it has been seen as a statement on wedded bliss. In truth, the passage refers to the way that the Christian community should interact with one another. It is not primarily about a married couple (although it has import to our intimate relationships), but about the way we interact with all people in our community: in the church, in our neighbourhood, in our nation, even in our world affairs. To live such love is challenging. How has 1 Corinthians 13 shaped the way you live and interact with all other people?

Or consider this: Jesus was far from an instant success. His initial sermon caused turmoil and he was thrown out of his home community. He paid the price for speaking up for truth and justice.

Being a solitary voice can be a difficult journey, and sometimes as Christians we are not part of the majority in our community. We speak for the disheartened and discouraged; we are called to defend and visit those who are imprisoned and to have time for those who are considered outcasts by society. Living the peace is more than keeping the peace. It involves finding ways to make the circle of the community of faith wider and wider.

Today would be a good opportunity to look for echoes of the message of Jesus calling us into love for neighbour with other religions.

### Hymns

***Jeremiah 1:4–10***

VU 509 “I, the Lord of sea and sky”

VU 589 “Lord, speak to me”

MV 161 “I have called you by your name”

MV 172 “God says”

***Psalm 71:1–6***

VU 654 “All my hope is firmly grounded”

VU 663 “My faith looks up to thee”

VU p. 780 “My soul finds rest in God alone”

***1 Corinthians 13:1–13***

VU 333 “Love divine, all loves excelling”

VU 372 “Though I may speak”

MV 89 “Love is the touch”

MV 170 “Ubi caritas (Where There Is Charity)”

***Luke 4:21–30***

VU 359 “He came singing love”

VU 605 “Jesus, teacher, brave and bold”

MV 98 “Like a river of tears”

MV 166 “Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ”

## February 6 – Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

*Worship materials for February 6 to February 27 were contributed by Catherine Tovell, Kilworth U.C., London, Ont.*

**Isaiah 6:1–8, (9–13)**

I saw God seated upon the throne.

**Psalm 138**(VU p. 860)

Do not forsake the work of your hands, O God.

**1 Corinthians 15:1–11**

An account of Jesus’ resurrection.

**Luke 5:1–11**

Jesus calls Simon and James and John.

### Creation Connection

Psalm 138: Has God forsaken creation? Do we feel forsaken in dealing with climate change? This psalm is a prayer inviting God not to forget or forsake the work of God’s hands.

### Spark

Project or display pictures of different types of communication devices from the last 50 or 100 years. Include things like old telephones, Morse code, a telephone switchboard, those first very clunky car- and cellphones, and the latest digital devices. You also might place a few of these items around the sanctuary, as they are available. Check with antique collectors in your congregation.

### With Children

Have some fun with the children and the whole congregation with the pictures and objects mentioned in the Spark above. Share a bit of a quiz. For example, ask, “Who knows what this device is and what it is used for?” Create room for some storytelling about older devices. Then focus on what they have in common, i.e., they are all ways that we communicate with each other. The devices may change with the context and the times, but the purpose remains the same. Then draw the analogy with a call from God. The ways in which God calls us may change with the context and the times, but the same God continues to call each of us to our task or vocation. You might choose to share your own experience of God’s call. Note: This story will lend itself well to set up next week’s children’s story.

### Sermon Starter

What does it mean to receive a call from God? How do we discern God’s call when there are so many demands in our lives all competing for our attention? Today’s lections lend themselves well to a focus on call and vocation, noting especially that each person has a call that only they can fulfill. Call is not just about religious vocations or our discipleship as Christ’s followers. How do we discern a call from God? What are the costs of following that call? Remember James and John walked away from a family business to follow their call. Perhaps more importantly, what is the cost if we choose not to answer God’s call? Are there people in your congregation who would share their stories of discovering their call to be a pharmacist, a teacher, a farmer, an electrician, a store clerk, etc.?

### Hymns

***Isaiah 6:1–8 (9–13)***

VU 315 “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God almighty”

VU 509 “I, the Lord of sea and sky”

MV 97 “Listen, God is calling”

***Psalm 138***

VU 218 “We praise you, O God”

VU 262 “A mighty fortress is our God”

MV 57 “I’ll praise eternal God”

MV 61 “I praise you, O God”

***1 Corinthians 15:1–11***

VU 159 “The strife is o’er”

VU 448 “We know that Christ is raised”

MV 125 “When grain of wheat”

MV 162 “Christ, within us hidden”

***Luke 5:1–11***

VU 507 “Today we all are called to be disciples”

VU 562 “Jesus calls us”

VU 563 “Jesus, you have come to the lakeshore”

VU 567 “Will you come and follow me”

MV 113 “Jesus saw them fishing”

MV 135 “Called by earth and sky”

## February 13 – Sixth Sunday after Epiphany

**Jeremiah 17:5–10**

Those who trust in God are like trees planted by water.

**Psalm 1** (VU p. 724)

Blessed are those who follow God’s law.

**1 Corinthians 15:12–20**

How can you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

**Luke 6:17–26**

The Beatitudes upon the plain.

### Creation Connection

Jeremiah 17:5–10 and Psalm 1 both use the image of the faithful being like trees planted by water. Water is an issue in many parts of the world today. Pray for those who need water for crops and clean drinking water. Then, what can you do to make that a reality?

### Spark

How do we know whom to trust? If possible, find someone in the congregation who will share a personal story of trusting someone and perhaps being surprised by the trusting relationship that developed. A story might be shared of learning who couldn’t be trusted, but this would need to be done with care so that no one personally involved is present and no painful stories are evoked for people who have been badly hurt by a betrayal of trust. Also, invite some stories (shared in worship or through the bulletin) about people who have learned what it means to trust God.

### With Children

Today’s story follows last week’s in that it involves discernment. The focus today is on how to discern who and what is trustworthy. Have an honest and open discussion with the children about trust. What is trust? How do we know when to trust someone? What might keep us from trusting someone? What do we do if we aren’t certain we can trust someone? If everyone else says to trust someone, but something doesn’t feel right to us, we need to follow what we feel. Leave the children with the assurance that when something feels wrong, they should to talk to a trusted adult, like a parent or a grandparent. Share Psalm 1, which talks about trusting God. Trust feels like being a tree planted by a stream of water, soaking up all the moisture it needs through its roots. It just feels so right and good. That’s what trust is about. We can trust that God is calling us when it feels right and good and full of love.

### Sermon Starter

Luke describes the Beatitudes being delivered from a level plain, whereas Matthew talks of Jesus going up on a mountain to give this address. Think for a moment of how you would hear or receive these in these two different contexts (acoustics aside). How does the context affect how we experience and process a message? Drawing on our recent experience of being isolated during the worst parts of the COVID-19 pandemic, how did this affect how we experienced God’s message in the way we needed to share it? Or did it? Churches will have their own experiences of how they provided worship and support during lockdowns. Today’s reading from Luke provides an opportunity to really consider how those changes might or might not be incorporated into our lives going forward.

### Hymns

***Jeremiah 17:5–10***

VU 266 “Amazing grace, how sweet the sound”

VU 286 “If you will trust in God to guide you”

VU 348 “O love, how deep”

VU 626 “I heard the voice of Jesus”

MV 10 “Come and seek the ways of Wisdom”

***Psalm 1***

VU 117 “Jesus Christ is waiting”

VU 337 “Blessed assurance”

VU 344 “How sweet the name of Jesus sounds”

VU 633 “Bless now, O God, the journey”

***1 Corinthians 15:12–20***

VU 157 “Christ the Lord is risen today”

VU 180 “Christ is risen, yes, indeed”

***Luke 6:17–26***

VU 213 “Rejoice, the Lord is King”

VU 215 “Hope of the world”

VU 635 “All the way my Saviour leads me”

MV 82 “Bathe me in your light”

MV 146 “The kingdom of God”

## February 20 – Seventh Sunday after Epiphany

**Genesis 45:3–11, 15**

Joseph reveals his identity to his brothers.

**Psalm 37:1–11, 39–40** (VU p. 763)

Do good, O God, to those who are good.

**James 2:1–10, (11–13), 14–17**

Faith without works is dead.

**Mark 7:24–37**

The Syrophoenician woman’s faith challenges Jesus.

### Creation Connection

Luke 6:27–38: There are many voices on many sides of the climate crisis issues. How do we lovingly listen to each other, especially when we disagree?

### Spark

Place some identifying items, such as badges, letterhead, tartans, photographs, property deeds, marriage licences, and uniforms (especially those depicting occupations or organizations) around the sanctuary. Or you might project a digital slideshow of images.

### With Children

Prior to this Sunday, ask the children to bring in something that represents who they are. Ideas include a family photograph, a Brownie or Guide scarf, a baseball jersey, or a teddy bear. During the story time, invite the children to a “show and tell.” Ask them how they are connected to that item and what it tells everyone else about them (e.g., “This is my Brownie scarf. I am a member of the ABC Brownie group. I love going to Brownies and playing with my Brownie friends”).

Those of us who come to church share another identity. We call ourselves Christians or followers of Jesus. Christian means “little Christ.” Why do you think that we are called “little Christs”? How do we show other people that this is who we are? (You might share some symbols that you wear or have in your office that show that you are Christian.)

### Sermon Starter

How do we discover or claim our identity? Joseph reveals his identity to his brothers in Genesis. Explore with your congregation the current context that includes the Black Lives Matter and #MeToo movements, Indigenous people and Settler reconciliation, and increasing recognition of the LGBTQ+ community. How do people identify themselves? Has this changed over the years? If so, what caused it to change? Is our identity tied only to our roles and relationships or do we have other identities as well? Are there identities we intentionally release in order to embrace another, more beneficial identity?

The Gospel of Luke talks about loving our enemies. In order to do that, we have to accept them and accept ourselves. This will involve changing how we understand another person’s identity and breaking old habits and attitudes. In addition, understanding our own identity and where it comes from makes acceptance and inclusion easier. Jesus challenges us to do this in love.

### Hymns

***Genesis 45:3–11, 15***

VU 382 “Breathe on me, breath of God”

VU 593 “Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your love”

MV 145 “Draw the circle wide”

***Psalm 37:1–11, 39–40***

VU 135 “Beneath the cross of Jesus”

VU 291 “All things bright and beautiful”

VU p. 806 “O God, our help in ages past”

***1 Corinthians 15:35–38***

VU 159 “The strife is o’er”

VU 186 “Now the green blade rises”

VU 189 “Hail the day that sees him rise”

MV 213 “Take up his song”

***Luke: 6:27–38***

VU 260 “God who gives to life its goodness”

VU 506 “Take my life and let it be”

VU 570 “Jesus’ hands were kind hands”

MV 78 “God weeps”

MV 182 “Grateful”

## February 27 – Transfiguration Sunday

**Exodus 34:29–35**

Moses is radiant as he comes down the mountain.

**Psalm 99** (VU p. 819)

God rules and delights in justice.

**2 Corinthians 3:12—4:2**

We are bold in our hope.

**Luke 9:28–36, (37–43)**

Jesus is transfigured upon the mountain.

### Creation Connection

Luke 9:28–43: Many of us relate deeply to our landscape. We are a “prairie person” or a “mountain person” or an “ocean person.” How does the landscape in your context shape your congregation and its mission?

### Spark

Project or display images that depict endings and beginnings and the transitions that take place in between. For example, as winter ends, snow melts, and then there is rain and slush. It’s a wet, messy time that then gives rise to spring and all its fresh smells, sounds, and sights. Or use sounds to depict similar transitions, such as a rainstorm that begins gently, rises in sound, and then tapers off.

### With Children

Talk with the children about endings. What are some endings that they like? They may say the end of the school year, the end of homework, the end of an unpleasant task at home, etc. What are some endings that they find sad? Things like the end of a vacation, the end of a granddad’s visit, etc. (Be ready to follow up after the service with any child who shares a particularly difficult or sad ending.) This is the end of one season of the church year. Explain how that works and what we can look forward to in the next season or beginning. The seasons of the church year remind us of the life of Jesus and help us as we follow his Way.

### Sermon Starter

Where do you go when you need to think things through? Moses and Jesus went to the mountains. Both the Exodus passage and Luke’s account describe faithful leaders going up to the mountain seeking God and returning changed people. Transfiguration Sunday, the last Sunday of Epiphany, leads us into Lent and the sombre reflection of the Lenten journey. Rather than preaching on the usual mountaintop experiences that prepare us for life in the valley or how the disciples wanted to freeze the moment instead of seizing the moment, what about reflecting on the closure of the Epiphany season? In most closures in our lives, we do not know or appreciate what is about to come next. We may fear or be wary of what is to come, or we might be excited.

Some people go on a retreat or pilgrimage as a way of accepting a closing door and seeking direction about the next phase of life. Some find other ways of naming the ending and preparing for a beginning. What are some ways of doing this? Does a retreat or pilgrimage always involve leaving town or making a journey somewhere? Can this happen without even leaving our homes? There are likely lots of untold stories of this very kind of retreat or pilgrimage that your own congregation members may wish to tell of the recent past when none of us were leaving our houses, except for essentials.

### Hymns

***Exodus 34:29–35***

VU 251 “God created heaven and earth”

VU 339 “When morning gilds the skies”

MV 144 “Like a healing stream”

***Psalm 99***

MV 1 “Let us build a house”

MV 145 “Draw the circle wide”

MV 212 “Sent out in Jesus’ name”

***2 Corinthians 3:12—4:2***

VU 120 “O Jesus, I have promised”

VU 333 “Love divine, all loves excelling”

VU 672 “Take time to be holy”

***Luke 9:28–36, (37–43)***

VU 102 “Jesus on the mountain peak”

VU 103 “How good, Lord, to be here”

VU 104 “We have come at Christ’s own bidding”

VU 264 “Immortal, invisible, God only wise”

VU 362 “Here, O God, your servants gather”

VU 559 “Come, O Fount of every blessing”

MV 96 “And when you call for me”