



Overview

Friends, we live in troubled times. As I began to think about what Advent/Christmas series I would write in 2025 (the year this is being created), I was filled with questions: how do I offer something that can address the complexities of our time? What is the Gospel Word to us as we worry about so many things? How do we struggle to be faithful witnesses to the horrors we see unfolding all over this world of ours yet still proclaim the Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love of the season?

And so I decided that the Advent/Christmas series this year could help us see “Beyond the Lullaby” into the difficulty of the socio-political-economic context that shaped the identity and story of the birth and life of Jesus. One of the most beloved carols we know, “What Child Is This?”, came into focus as a way to do what the carol does—ask and answer the question of Jesus’ identity. It is set to a tune that offers the minor key of pathos, and so we will lean into it as we deal with the difficulties of the story’s context. The Good News is that God chose to enter our trauma-filled world in order to know us, tend to us, teach us how to be in these times.

Worship is first and foremost connection with the Divine One. And so I believe you will find many things reflected in these scripts—comfort, challenge, assurance, delight, and depth—I believe Spirit will help us hold all of it. The liturgy, as you will see, is a container for the overarching message. The preacher in this series will have the role of discerning the degree of engagement with the difficulties of our day based on your context.

I was deeply inspired and helped by the book, *The First Advent in Palestine* by Kelley Nikondeha, as well as a conversation with her early in my writing process. She cares deeply about liberative community and this shows up in the stories she shares. You will see some quotes from that book in the worship scripts during the introduction to scripture. My interview with her will be helpful as you prepare your hearts and your

worship leadership. She even has a preserved lemon recipe from the region of the Holy Land that takes four weeks to prepare... what a great Advent practice!

The “anchor image” (visual metaphor) for this series is the nativity scene, or crèche. The photo of me on this page (and the one in the logo) contains my childhood nativity set. These character’s faces have lived in my imagination all my life, a kind of romantic vision of a “silent night.” Yet the actual reality of each of these characters was fragile and difficult. This worship series is meant to help us know more about who Jesus is by looking at the actual lives and circumstances of these narratives. And to see that God is also with us in our fragility, as we are to be with others. We have lots of ideas about highlighting this theme’s messages and spiritual metaphors with the use of nativity sets in the church and outdoors.

Advent is usually about waiting. But we cannot wait to have hope; it is essential now. We cannot wait to work for peace; lives are at stake. We cannot wait to embrace joy, even and especially when it seems in short supply. We cannot wait to love, most of all, because we are the ones who follow the saving love of Jesus Christ, God-With-Us.

My prayers are with you, always.

Peace & Passion,
Dr. Marcia McFee
Creator and Visionary
Worship Design Studio



Downloads

What's included and what to do with it

This Overview - Have your whole team read this to get a good foothold on the theme and order.

Scriptures and Synopses - This is your at-a-glance look at the movement of the series and the scriptures highlighted.

Six Worship Scripts - You WILL adapt these for your context (Tip: Do this in one fell swoop before the season begins, and you'll feel amazingly prepared and your team will thank you!). We are also throwing in a complimentary Blue Christmas script!

Children's Time Scripts - Decide who is doing this and get it into their hands early so they can have fun with it, adapt it, and connect it to what children are doing in other settings like education.

Communion Script - Incorporate this into whatever weeks you are doing communion as you adapt your weekly scripts.

Sermon Fodder - Scan it pre-season so you know what is there and how you might begin to prepare your research, then use it to help jumpstart your own sermon preparation each week. We also have sermon discussions on our website for preachers to connect with each other on this series.

Visual and Media Ideas - Make some time early in your planning process to go through the ideas with your team and land on how you'll apply the main images to your space, then get folks working on it (the earlier, the more fun they'll have!).

Music Documents and Files - Get this in the hands of your musicians so they can adapt hymns/song/anthems and learn the music that repeats each week.

Small Group Suggestions - Take a look at our suggestions and decide whether you will engage small groups or book studies or one-off gatherings for study or for fellowship and mission. This series also has a special document about nativity display options.

Guided Journal - We created a devotional journal that you can edit or use as-is that invites people to connect worship with daily prayer during Advent.

Logo and Trailer - Put your own branding on these early (directions in the Visual and Media Ideas doc) so you can begin to get the word out pre-season.

Order of Worship

This series is designed to give you everything you need—all words, hymn and song suggestions, anthem and band/soloist suggestions, leader introductions, etc. But also, please know that if you want to adapt to fit your current order of worship, you can easily lift any of the suggested material out of my scripts and place it in your more familiar structure.

The order of worship is the same each week. This goes with the concept I teach that repetition is a good thing and a solid foundation is necessary in order to be creative within it. Doing series can give you the opportunity to try on a slightly different order of worship or a different way of doing an element of the service for a season but keep it the same during that season, therefore offering some sense of familiarity and a rhythm. If you'd like to follow along with a sample script while reading through this description of the order, click [HERE](#).

GATHERING

Like the iconic figures gathered around the Christ Child in our nativity scenes, we gather together because we want to know Jesus more as we seek to bring his Reign of Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love on earth.

The description above (and under each of the four main movements of the worship) is meant to only live on the screen or in the worship guide (my word for “bulletin”). It helps to literally “set the scene” for people and connect them right away to the anchor image of the nativity.

Prelude

The Preludes and Postludes are up to your musicians. We have offered some ideas for instrumental versions of the “What Child Is This?” carol in the Music Document. This could be a great way to highlight the carol and offer delight through various versions.

Welcome (and Announcements)

This can be done as is your custom. I recommend that you make a deliberate move (like a lighting change, a slide change, or a position change (perhaps close to a nativity scene?), especially if it the same person is doing the welcome and the next leader part.

We Gather at the Scene (Threshold Moment)

This concept of a “threshold moment” that I teach introduces people to the journey and the theme of the day at the beginning of the service so that every part of the service is seen through that thematic lens. Advent has a natural “threshold moment” in the lighting of the Advent candles. For this series, leader words help to bring us into the “scene,” and this is all woven with singing bits of “What Child Is This?” (special musical arrangement of this is in the downloads) and the candle lighting. You are encouraged to have different readers/people/families participate if this is your custom. The Advent candles could be incorporated into whatever nativity scene you are using in the space (whether large or small). A unison Prayer of Invocation concludes this section.

“Bring Him Laud” – Opening Hymn/Song

Some of the titles of the elements of the service, like this one “Bring Him Laud,” draw phrases from the lyrics of “What Child is This?” We have chosen hymns (for more “traditional/classic” worship) and songs (for more “modern/contemporary” worship) as suggestions. But you can also feel free to adapt our suggestions if you choose. Just look at the hymns/songs we have chosen and try to find something that keeps the “essence of the message” but is something more beloved by your congregation.

Signs of Hope

The passing of the peace comes directly out of the hymn. I give you some language to remind people to send peace “through the camera to the people worshiping remotely.” If you do not stream your services, simply omit this. The children are invited to come forward during the peace.

PROCLAIMING

We open ourselves to the full story of Christ’s birth, knowing that his story is the ground of our faith and the light for our path.

“Haste, Haste” – The Children Gather

The children’s time features the nativity scene. You will decide if you want to create a larger version than you usually do so that it feels like the children get to be “in it,” or if you will feature perhaps several different nativity sets that depict the Holy Family in various ways. The scene is different each service: it starts empty, then animals are added, then Mary, then Joseph, then the Shepherds, then the Wise Ones.

We Hear the Story

This series is non-lectionary and I have chosen to use the beautiful [Inclusive Bible](#) translation. Of course, you may change that if you wish. You can see the scriptures at-a-glance in the Scriptures and Synopses document. There are introductions to scripture that can be done by a pastor/leader before a reader begins, or the reader could read the introduction and go right into the scripture. As always, if there is a scripture that you would like to dramatize with several voices, there is plenty of opportunity to do that. Christmas Eve features scripture and monologues for the nativity characters.

“Anthems Sweet” – The Word in Music *(Anthem/Band)*

As with congregational song selections, we offer a classical/traditional choral option as well as a soloist/band-style option. You may wish to listen to the suggestions we made in the scripts and decide if they suit your choir or band. As always, please choose from your existing repertoire if that makes your preparation more doable.

Sermon

I have written Sermon Fodder in a separate document for each of the services. As I mentioned in the introduction to this document, the sermon really will be the place where the context of “then” and “now” will be carefully woven by the preacher, and your congregation’s context will make a big difference for how you do that. Preachers, you will have lots of help through the study suggestions that I offer in that Sermon Fodder document. I want to highly recommend that you start by reading *The First Advent in Palestine* and watch my interview with the author well before the season starts. This will help you discern how you will prompt the conversations with your congregation.

RESPONDING

Our faithful response is to praise God for this story of Emmanuel, God-With-Us, even and especially in the midst of difficulty, for God is indeed with us even still.

“We Keep Watch” – Prayers

Beloved hymn writer, Brian Wren, and his spouse, Susan Heafield, wrote a lovely phrase in their song, “Great Holy One,” that gets right to the heart of this series: “show us who you are in a human face.” We use this hymn as a “thread prayer song” throughout the series. Prayers include silence, a scripted leader prayer, and the

opportunity for intercession or continued pastoral prayer, whatever is familiar to your congregation.

“So Bring Him...” (Offering)

The introduction to the offering could be a wonderful time to invite someone to give a testimony to a “reflection of the sacred” regarding the theme for the week. If you are not collecting a physical offering, you could simply move to the Doxology after the offering announcement. I have written a doxology for this series to the tune of “What Child is This?”

[Communion]

This is the place where you can insert the communion script I have written on the weeks when that is appropriate for your tradition. I have written sung responses for the prayer continuing the use of the tune “What Child Is This?” Again, please adapt what I have written as needed to fit your tradition of the prayer before communion. This one is based largely on the ecumenical standard from 2nd century Hippolytus prayer. If you commune weekly, you may want to adapt the language I have written to include references from that week’s scripture or message. You will see that I have already indicated places to change hope/peace/joy/love.

SENDING FORTH

Just as our theme carol asks, “what child is this?” we, too, have come with our questions this day. We go into the world with answers of Good News, being the Body of Christ through our words and deeds.

We Ask, We Answer

This closing litany is based on the question “What Child is This?” and affirmations that summarize the week’s liberating message of the Jesus we follow.

Closing Hymn/Song

Sometimes I incorporate Christmas carols into the whole Advent series (I know, scandalous!), but in this one I have not because we get that sense of a carol through our use of “What Child is This?” throughout. If singing carols during Advent has become a tradition for your church, please, as always, adapt my suggestions.

Benediction

The blessing at the end of the service is the same structure each week, but tweaked just a little bit to incorporate the hope/peace/joy/love words and message for the week.

Postlude

This is a good place to incorporate instrumental versions of Christmas carols that people can leave humming along!

I hope this helps you get an at-a-glance feel for the series!

See the synopses for every worship experience in the series [HERE](#)

To see the first week's script, click [HERE](#)

If you haven't purchased the series yet (free to WDS Subscribers), click [HERE](#)

If you'd like to get access to ALL our series, check out a Worship Design Studio subscription [HERE](#)