



Community of Christ

COMMUNITY OF CHRIST LESSONS

ADULT

27 NOVEMBER 2016–1 JANUARY 2017

COMMUNITY OF CHRIST LESSONS



Lifelong Disciple Formation in Community of Christ is the shaping of persons in the likeness of Christ at all stages of life. It begins with our response to the grace of God in loving community and continues as we help others learn, grow, and serve in the mission of Jesus Christ. Ultimately, discipleship is expressed as one lives the mission initiatives of the church through service, generosity, witness, and invitation.

We invite you to use these lessons for your class, group or congregation.

Lectionary-based: The weekly lessons connect the *Revised Common Lectionary* for worship with Community of Christ identity, mission, message, and beliefs.

Quick, easy: The lessons are designed for approximately 45-minute class sessions with two to three pages of ideas, discussion starters, and activities. Additional preparation help may be found in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, with focus on the Gospel according to Matthew, available through Herald House.

Lessons are available for these age groups:

Children (multiage, 6–11): Help children engage in the Bible and introduce mission and beliefs with stories, crafts, and activities.

Youth (ages 12–18): Engage teens in scripture study and provocative questions about identity, mission, and beliefs.

Adult (ages 19 and older): Deepen faith and understanding with reflective questions, theological understanding, spiritual practices, and discussion ideas.

Note: Unless otherwise noted, all Bible scripture references are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) Bible, copyright 1989, by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT (HOPE)

LESSON 1
27 November 2016

Focus Scripture Passage: Matthew 24:36–44/24:43–51 IV

Lesson Focus: Disciples live in hope and prepare for God’s peaceful reign.

Objectives

The learners will...

- find messages of hope in Isaiah’s prophecy.
- discuss the focus scripture passage and its invitation to disciples today.
- explore opportunities for living in hope.

Supplies

- Copies of response sheet (optional)
- Pens or pencils
- Flip chart or large erasable writing surface and marker (optional)
- *Community of Christ Sings*

Note to instructor: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Matthew 24:36–44 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, p. 18.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge, prepares and motivates for lesson
(15% of total lesson time)

Today is the first Sunday of Advent (which means coming) and marks the beginning of the liturgical year. A different theme is upheld on each Sunday in Advent, and today’s theme is *hope*. This lesson will guide exploration of the disciple’s call to live in hope.

Read Isaiah 2:1–5.

Isaiah’s prophecy delivers a message of hope through the coming Messiah.

- What messages of hope do you find in this passage that relate to current circumstances in your congregation, community, or in the world?

The promise of hope, justice, and peace to the people of Israel remains the promise to us today.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction
(35% of total lesson time)

Today’s focus scripture passage in Matthew’s Gospel is taken from Jesus’ speech about the end times. It follows warnings of the temple’s destruction and the coming of the Son of Man and precedes Jesus’ passion narrative. The passage feels out of harmony with the season that prepares us to receive the Christ child.

Read Matthew 24:36–44 and discuss the following:

- Do you feel fearful or hopeful after reading or hearing this passage? Explain.
- In what ways do you find this passage represented in cultural or religious trends?
- How does this passage compare and contrast with the passage from Isaiah?

It is common to fear the unknown. Examples from this passage speak to our fear of loss and destruction of

what we hold dear. Some have used this passage to promote fear of being “left behind.” But Jesus proclaims a message of hope for the here and now through actions that prepare for God’s kingdom made real. The example of Noah shows how preparation allowed Noah’s family to be part of the new creation. Being “left behind” is not punishment for sin; it is an opportunity to be part of what God makes new in the world. In this passage, Jesus calls us to active preparation for the coming reign of God.

“Son of Man” can be understood as a self-reference by Jesus or as a general reference to Jesus’ humanity and solidarity with all humankind. First-century hearers may have understood it as a reference to the coming judge at the end of time—the Messiah.

- Where do you see examples of people living in fear of presumed destruction?
- Where do you see examples of people preparing for God’s peaceful reign?
- What activities, attitudes, and behaviors steal from us the time and energy that might otherwise be devoted to bringing forth the reign of God?

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from hearing to doing
(35% of total lesson time)

Read or sing the first verse of “View the Present through the Promise” CCS 401 or “Nada te turbe” CCS 241.

If a large writing surface is available, make a list of circumstances present in your local or global community, which represent a grieving world (such as violation of human rights, poverty, war, or environmental degradation).

- How do these examples represent people living in fear?

Pause and offer silent prayers for circumstances which promote fear and rob people of hope. You may choose to have one person offer a prayer aloud.

Form groups of two or three and assign each group a circumstance from the list created.

Read or sing the second verse of “View the Present through the Promise” CCS 401 or “Nada te turbe” CCS 241.

- What daily actions of love, generosity, justice, and forgiveness create hope for the circumstance you are considering?

Share insights from small groups with the larger group.

Read or sing the third verse of “View the Present through the Promise” CCS 401 or “Nada te turbe” CCS 241.

- What congregational ministries match the present circumstance with the promise of hope in Christ?

4 SEND

Explores how the lesson might be lived
(10% of total lesson time)

Our call as disciples is to live in active hope, to create communities of hope, and to prepare for Christ to be made known in our daily living. Record responses to the following questions on response sheets, or share in groups of two or three.

- How will you approach this Advent season with greater attention and intent?
- What practices will help you live in hope?
- How will you prepare for Christ’s hope made real in your life? In the lives of others?

5 BLESS

Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope
(5% of total lesson time)

Invite each person to share one phrase from a scripture passage or hymn, a new insight, or message of hope that will bring blessing to them throughout the coming week.

*Additional lectionary texts: Isaiah 2:1–5, Psalm 122, Romans 13:11–14

LESSON 1 RESPONSE SHEET

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT (HOPE)

27 November 2016

*Additional lectionary texts:
Isaiah 2:1–5, Psalm 122, Romans 13:11–14

Isaiah 2:1–5 NRSV

¹The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. ²In the days to come the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the mountains shall stream to it. ³Many peoples shall come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. ⁴He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. ⁵O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!

Matthew 24:36–44 NRSV

³⁶"But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³⁷For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, ³⁹and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man. ⁴⁰Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. ⁴¹Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left. ⁴²Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. ⁴³But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁴Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

Our call as disciples is to live in active hope, to create communities of hope, and to prepare for Christ to be made known in our daily living. Record responses to the following questions on response sheets, or share in groups of two or three.

- **How will you approach this Advent season with greater attention and intent?**
- **What practices will help you live in hope?**
- **How will you prepare for Christ's hope made real in your life? In the lives of others?**

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT (JOY)

LESSON 2
4 December 2016

Focus Scripture Passage: Matthew 3:1–12/3:27–40 IV

Lesson Focus: Repentance leads to new life aligned with God's purposes.

Objectives

The learners will...

- tell about receiving and sharing blessings of joy.
- discuss the focus scripture passage and its invitation to repentance and new life.
- consider what keeps individuals and communities from bearing good fruits of justice and peace.

Supplies

- Copies of response sheet (optional)
- Pens or pencils
- *Community of Christ Sings*

Note to instructor: In preparation for this lesson, read "Exploring the Scripture" for Matthew 3:1–12 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, p. 20.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge, prepares and motivates for lesson
(15% of total lesson time)

Today is the second Sunday of Advent, and the Advent theme is joy. Share moments of joy from the past week in groups of two or three or as a larger group.

- Describe a time this week when you received a blessing of joy.
- Describe a time this week when you shared a blessing of joy.

Offer a prayer of thanksgiving for moments of divine encounter through joy received and joy shared.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction
(35% of total lesson time)

Today's focus passage from Matthew's Gospel introduces John the Baptist who prepares the way

for the Messiah. An important focus for the author of Matthew is proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah.

Read Matthew 3:1–12 and discuss the questions that follow. You may choose to discuss each part as a group or form small groups to discuss each part and share responses with the larger group.

Repentance and Preparation (vv. 1–6)

John was an important Jewish prophet with connections to Old Testament prophets. He looked like Elijah (dressed in clothing made from camel's hair) and preached in the wilderness as Isaiah had prophesied (see Matt. 3:3 and Isaiah 40:3). Matthew's use of "kingdom of Heaven" (found only in Matthew) is synonymous with "kingdom of God," which is understood as the reign of God. Heaven is not a place but a condition of God's reign. John's proclamation, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near," points to Jesus as the living example of God's reign. To repent is to turn from an old way of being to a new way aligned with God's purposes. Preparing the way of the Lord involves turning toward the way of justice, liberation, a faithful living.

- How would you describe John’s proclamation, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near,” to a new disciple?
- When has repentance turned you toward a new way of being? Your congregation? The church?

Bear Good Fruit (vv. 7–10)

John offers harsh criticism of the Pharisees (interpreters of religious law) and Sadducees (religious elite) when they come to be baptized. Both John and Jesus find themselves in opposition to these religious leaders who were often in opposition to themselves. John’s language is not to be misrepresented as anti-Jewish propaganda. Rather, he is proclaiming a renewal of Israel that does not rely on ancestry, religious status, or baptism alone, but on actions that promote justice and peace. John’s message challenges all to turn away from perceptions, biases, and actions that do not promote God’s purposes of justice, mercy, and love.

- What religious trends in your community stand in opposition to God’s purposes of justice and peace?
- In what ways do you see your congregation bearing good fruits of justice and peacemaking?
- Are there traditions, perceptions, or barriers in your congregation that stand in opposition to God’s purposes of justice and peace?

Water and Spirit (vv. 11–12)

The final verses of this passage point to the coming of Jesus and baptism of the Holy Spirit. John’s baptism of water is not the same as we understand being baptized into Christ. John’s baptism in the wilderness connected to Israel’s journey toward freedom through the Red Sea and wilderness disobedience. John’s baptism is seen as a renewal of Israel, but through Jesus’ baptism of the Holy Spirit grace and salvation are extended to all—grain and chaff alike.

- How do you understand baptism of water? Of Spirit?
- How have baptism and confirmation prepared you for actions of justice and peace?
- How has the Holy Spirit strengthened you to bear good fruit?

3 RESPOND
Takes the learners from hearing to doing
(35% of total lesson time)

The Reign of God

The reign of God is the coming triumph of love, justice, mercy, and peace that one day will embrace all of creation. Jesus’ life and ministry were the living expression of this promise. He taught

his disciples to pray for the kingdom’s full coming and sent them out into the world to be living emblems of that new creation. “Zion” expresses our commitment to herald God’s peaceable kingdom on Earth by forming Christ-centered communities in families, congregations, neighborhoods, cities, and throughout the world.

—“We Share Basic Beliefs,”
Sharing in Community of Christ, 3rd Edition, p. 16

Form small discussion groups or pairs. Provide each with a copy of the paragraph above describing Community of Christ’s understanding of the reign of God (also provided on response sheets). Discuss the following questions and share insights with the larger group.

- How does your understanding of repentance prepare for the reign of God?
- What is the greatest barrier to God’s purposes in your community? Explain.
- How are Christ-centered families, congregations, villages, and cities challenging barriers and promoting God’s purposes?
- How is your congregation challenged to prepare the way for Christ’s mission this Advent season?

4 SEND
Explores how the lesson might be lived
(10% of total lesson time)

Prayerfully consider your response to the following questions and record on a response sheet or share in groups of two or three. Make these questions part of your personal spiritual formation throughout the coming week. Pay attention to the ways you are being called to prepare the way for Christ in your life and in your community this Advent season.

- With whom does your life most closely align: John the Baptist (calling for reform), the Pharisees and Sadducees (bound by tradition), or someone in the crowd (seeking renewal)? Explain.
- From what do you need to turn to experience new or renewed life in Christ?

5 BLESS
Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope
(5% of total lesson time)

Close this time of learning and sharing with this statement of blessing from Romans 15:13:

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

LESSON 2 RESPONSE SHEET

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT (JOY)

4 December 2016

*Additional lectionary texts:
Isaiah 11:1–10; Psalm 72:1–7, 18–19; Romans 15:4–13

Matthew 3:1–12 NRSV

¹In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, ²“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” ³This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, “The voice of the one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.’”

⁴Now John wore clothing of camel’s hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, ⁶and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

⁷But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ⁸Bear fruit worthy of repentance. ⁹Do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our ancestor’; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. ¹⁰Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

¹¹“I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹²His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.

The Reign of God

The reign of God is the coming triumph of love, justice, mercy, and peace that one day will embrace all of creation. Jesus’ life and ministry were the living expression of this promise. He taught his disciples to pray for the kingdom’s full coming and sent them out into the world to be living emblems of that new creation. “Zion” expresses our commitment to herald God’s peaceable kingdom on Earth by forming Christ-centered communities in families, congregations, neighborhoods, cities, and throughout the world.

—“We Share Basic Beliefs,” *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition, p. 16

Prayerfully consider your response to the following questions. Make these questions part of your personal spiritual formation throughout the coming week. Pay attention to the ways you are being called to prepare the way for Christ in your life and in your community this Advent season.

- **With whom does your life most closely align: John the Baptist (calling for reform), the Pharisees and Sadducees (bound by tradition), or someone in the crowd (seeking renewal)? Explain.**
- **From what do you need to turn to experience new or renewed life in Christ?**

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT (PEACE)

LESSON 3
11 December 2016

Focus Scripture Passage: Matthew 11:2–11

Lesson Focus: Disciples are called to witness to the transforming power of love.

Objectives

The learners will...

- find examples of peace described in Psalm 146:5–10.
- discuss Matthew 11:2–11 and its invitation to disciples today.
- explore avenues for witnessing of Christ's transforming love

Supplies

- Copies of response sheet (optional)
- Pens or pencils

Note to instructor: In preparation for this lesson, read "Exploring the Scripture" for Matthew 11:2–11 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, p. 22.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge, prepares and motivates for lesson
(15% of total lesson time)

Today is the third Sunday of Advent. The Advent theme is *peace*.

- Read Psalm 146:5–10 as an opening prayer of praise.
- What messages of peace do you find in this passage?
- Which phrases align with or challenge your understanding of justice and peace? Explain.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction
(35% of total lesson time)

Today's passage from Matthew differs radically from the previous lesson's passage about John the Baptist. In the previous passage (Matthew 3:1–12), John the Baptist proclaimed Jesus as the coming Messiah. In

today's passage, John is imprisoned and questions his belief and judgment.

Read Matthew 11:2–11 and discuss the following.

The people of Israel awaited a Messiah who would deliver them from the unjust Roman rule in first-century Palestine. The original hearers of Matthew's Gospel, written around 80–90 CE, were post-resurrection Jewish Christians caught in the tension of restructuring Judaism (following the Temple's destruction in 70 CE) and the developing church community. John doubts his proclamation because his messianic hopes for political freedom were not realized. The stories he hears are of healing and restoration, as Isaiah prophesied (see Isaiah 35:5–6).

- What are your "expectations" of Jesus as the Messiah?
- Have you ever doubted your belief in Christ Jesus? Explain.
- How have you experienced new understandings of who Jesus is?

Jesus contrasted the kingdom of heaven (justice and peace, healing and restoration) with the kingdom of the

world (power and wealth). He affirmed John's significant role in preaching repentance (turning to a new way of being) and proclaiming the coming of the Messiah.

- How have you experienced the transforming power of love?
- What is the invitation in this passage to you during this season of Advent? To congregations?
- In what ways is your congregation proclaiming and living the transformative power of Christ's mission?

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from hearing to doing
(35% of total lesson time)

Today's passage contains contrasts between John and Jesus, belief and doubt, expectations and reality, and the kingdom of God and the kingdoms of the world. We are invited, through this text, to explore the contrasts in our life and in our congregations, between what we believe and proclaim, and how we live that belief. Form three small groups or pairs and assign to each one of the following Community of Christ belief statements about Jesus Christ.

We Proclaim Jesus Christ

- Christ is our peace, breaking down the dividing walls of hostility between us. He promises us the redemption and healing of our relationships with God, one another, and all of creation.
- The church, the body of Christ, is called to proclaim the gospel until Christ comes again. It is he who forgives us in baptism, and feeds us at his table. As disciples of Christ, we are all called to conform our lives to his by living in loving community with others, seeing Jesus in the faces of the least of God's children, and serving those whom the world has forgotten. It is to Christ and to his gospel that we declare our loyalty and by which we will be judged.
- The promises of God in Jesus Christ are sure—that by the Holy Spirit we will be given grace to do the things we have been asked: courage in the struggle for justice, passion for peace in the midst of violence, forgiveness of our sin, stewardship in place of materialism, healing of body and spirit where there is hurt, and eternal life in the face of death.

—*Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition, p. 22

Discuss the following questions in small groups or pairs and share insights with the larger group.

- Where do you see the contrast between this belief statement and conditions (cultural, political, or religious) in your community?
- Where do you see the contrast between this belief statement and how it is lived in your life, your congregation, or your community?
- To what circumstances in your life, congregation, or community does this statement provide hope in place of doubt?

4 SEND

Explores how the lesson might be lived
(10% of total lesson time)

Spend a few moments in silence and complete the following statements. You may record responses on the response sheet, in a personal journal, or share in groups of two or three.

- I experience doubt in my faith journey when...
- I experience Christ's peace through...
- I will witness of God's love and peace by...

5 BLESS

Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope
(5% of total lesson time)

Close with the following prayer of blessing, or offer your prayer of blessing.

Gracious God,

Amid the contradictions of faith and doubt, of joy and pain, of what is and what can be... breathe peace in us. Speak peace through us... until our lives become a true reflection of your love and peace. Amen.

*Additional lectionary texts:
Isaiah 35:1–10, Psalm 146:5–10, James 5:7–10

LESSON 3 RESPONSE SHEET

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT (PEACE)

11 December 2016

*Additional lectionary texts:
Isaiah 35:1–10, Psalm 146:5–10, James 5:7–10

Psalm 146:5–10

⁵Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God, ⁶who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith forever; ⁷who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry.

The Lord sets the prisoners free; ⁸the Lord opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous. ⁹The Lord watches over the strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

¹⁰The Lord will reign forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the Lord!

Matthew 11:2–11 NRSV

²When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples ³and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?” ⁴Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: ⁵the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. ⁶And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.”

⁷As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? ⁸What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal places. ⁹What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ¹⁰This is the one about whom it is written, ‘See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.’

¹¹Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

We Proclaim Jesus Christ

- Christ is our peace, breaking down the dividing walls of hostility between us. He promises us the redemption and healing of our relationships with God, one another, and all of creation.
- The church, the body of Christ, is called to proclaim the gospel until Christ comes again. It is he who forgives us in baptism and feeds us at his table. As disciples of Christ, we are all called to conform our lives to his by living in loving community with others, seeing Jesus in the faces of the least of God’s children, and serving those whom the world has forgotten. It is to Christ and to his gospel that we declare our loyalty and by which we will be judged.
- The promises of God in Jesus Christ are sure—that by the Holy Spirit we will be given grace to do the things we have been asked: courage in the struggle for justice, passion for peace in the midst of violence, forgiveness of our sin, stewardship in place of materialism, healing of body and spirit where there is hurt, and eternal life in the face of death.

—*Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition, p. 22

Spend a few moments in silence and complete the following statements. You may record responses on the response sheet, in a personal journal, or share in groups of two or three.

- **I experience doubt in my faith journey when...**
- **I experience Christ’s peace through...**
- **I will witness of God’s love and peace by...**

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT (LOVE)

LESSON 4
18 December 2016

Focus Scripture Passage: Matthew 1:18–25/2:1–8 IV

Lesson Focus: Jesus is born anew in compassionate acts of disciples.

Objectives

The learners will...

- share acts of compassion through which God's love was given and received.
- discuss Matthew 1:18–25 and what it reveals to us today about Christ Jesus.
- explore opportunities for social and relational salvation through compassionate ministry.

Supplies

- Copies of response sheet (optional)
- Pens or pencils
- *Community of Christ Sings*

Note to instructor: In preparation for this lesson, read "Exploring the Scripture" for Matthew 1:18–25 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, p. 24.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge, prepares and motivates for lesson

(15% of total lesson time)

Today is the fourth Sunday of Advent, and the Advent theme is love. Invite all who would like to share their response to one or both of the following statements.

- Describe an act of compassion from which you received God's love this week.
- Describe an act of compassion through which you shared God's love this week.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction

(35% of total lesson time)

Today's passage is part of Matthew's birth account. The passage is preceded by the genealogy of Jesus, which differs from the genealogy found in Luke. Matthew's inclusive genealogy (women, foreigners,

sinners, and saints) affirms God's purposes are carried out in unexpected ways. Keeping in mind the post-resurrection authorship of Matthew, the introduction reflects the complete Christ story. Jesus the Messiah is connected to the history of Israel (son of Abraham), and is a descendant of King David, as prophesied by Isaiah (see Isaiah 7:13–14).

Read Matthew 1:18–25 and discuss the following. Note to instructor: You may choose to form three small groups or pairs and assign one of the following people to each group or pair. Have each group or pair read the paragraph about their person and discuss the questions that follow. Share insights with the larger group.

Mary

Mary is the fifth woman mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus, which breaks the pattern of male lineage. The other women mentioned—Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba—have unique ties to Israel. Mary was engaged to Joseph, which in first-century Judaism involved a binding contract. Her conception through the power of the Holy Spirit is simply stated in this passage and is known to the audience, but not to Joseph before his dream. According to Jewish law,

the punishment for adultery was death (Deuteronomy 22:23–27), and although that practice was less strictly kept in Matthew’s time, the punishment remained public, severe, and shameful.

- What is significant about Mary’s role in Matthew’s birth story?
- How is Jesus born anew in Mary-like responses of disciples today?

Joseph

When Joseph learned of Mary’s pregnancy, his decision to dismiss her quietly was an act of compassion that contrasted what obedience to the law dictated. His action introduced an understanding of righteousness beyond the literal interpretation of the Law of Moses. After his dream visitation, he took Mary to his home as his wife, claimed the baby as his own, and named him Jesus as instructed. By doing so, he fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah that the Messiah would be a descendant of David.

- What is significant about Joseph’s role and response in Matthew’s birth story?
- How is Jesus born anew through Joseph-like actions in the world today?

Jesus

The name Jesus (Yeshua in Hebrew) was a common Jewish name in first-century Palestine. It means “Yahweh helps” or “Yahweh saves.” The name Jesus serves as a bridge between the holiness of God and the commonness of humanity (*Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, p. 24). The name also connects with Isaiah’s prophecy (Isaiah 7:14) that the child shall be named Emmanuel, meaning “God with us.” The author of Matthew uses this passage to connect Jesus to Israel’s history and affirm both his divinity and his humanity.

- What is significant about Jesus’ name in Matthew’s birth story?
- How do you understand God’s salvation through Jesus?

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from hearing to doing
(35% of total lesson time)

Community of Christ upholds the following statements about Jesus Christ.

1. Christ is our peace, breaking down the dividing walls of hostility between us. He promises us the redemption and healing of our relationships with God, one another, and all of creation.

2. As disciples of Christ, we are all called to conform our lives to his by living in loving community with others, seeing Jesus in the faces of the least of God’s children, and serving those whom the world has forgotten.

—“We Proclaim Jesus Christ,” *Sharing in Community of Christ*, 3rd Edition, p. 23

- Where do you find connections between discussion of Matthew’s birth story (Engage section) and these belief statements about Jesus Christ?
- How do the statements reflect an understanding of God’s salvation through Jesus Christ?

Form two groups and assign “Compassionate Ministries” to one group and “Social or Relational Salvation” to the second group. Discuss the questions in smaller groups, record responses, and share with the larger group.

Compassionate Ministries

- What compassionate ministries are provided through your congregation or community?
- How do these ministries promote social and relational salvation?

Social or Relational Salvation

- How do Joseph’s actions in today’s passage promote social and relational salvation?
- What ministries in your congregation or community promote social and relational salvation?

4 SEND

Explores how the lesson might be lived
(10% of total lesson time)

Respond to the following questions on response sheets, in small groups of two or three, or as a large group. Spend time in prayer with these questions as part of your personal spiritual practice in the coming week.

- How does Matthew’s birth story affirm God’s love for you? For all creation?
- How have you experienced Jesus’ birth anew through compassionate acts of disciples (others and your own)?

5 BLESS

Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope
(5% of total lesson time)

Read or sing “As God Is Joy” CCS 366 as a statement of blessing and commitment.

*Additional lectionary texts: Isaiah 7:10–16; Psalm 80:1–7, 17–19; Romans 1:1–7

LESSON 4 RESPONSE SHEET

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT (LOVE)

18 December 2016

*Additional lectionary texts:
Isaiah 7:10–16; Psalm 80:1–7, 17–19; Romans 1:1–7

Matthew 1:18–25 NRSV

¹⁸Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. ²⁰But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." ²²All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ²³"Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us." ²⁴When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, ²⁵but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

Mary

Mary is the fifth woman mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus, which breaks the pattern of male lineage. The other women mentioned—Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba—have unique (some even scandalous) ties to Israel, which affirms God's purposes are carried out in unanticipated ways. Mary was engaged to Joseph, which in first-century Judaism involved a binding contract. Her conception through the power of the Holy Spirit is simply stated in this passage and is known to the audience, but not to Joseph before his dream. According to Jewish law, the punishment for adultery was death (Deuteronomy 22:23–27), and although that practice was less strictly kept in Matthew's time, the punishment remained public, severe, and shameful.

Joseph

When Joseph learned of Mary's pregnancy, his decision to dismiss her quietly was an act of compassion that contrasted what obedience to the law dictated. His action introduced an understanding of righteousness beyond the literal interpretation of the Law of Moses. After his dream visitation, he took Mary to his home as his wife, claimed the baby as his own, and named

him Jesus as instructed. By doing so, he fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah that the Messiah would be a descendant of David.

Jesus

The name Jesus (Yeshua in Hebrew) was a common Jewish name in first-century Palestine. It means "Yahweh helps" or "Yahweh saves." The name Jesus serves as a bridge between the holiness of God and the commonness of humanity (*Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, p. 24). The name also connects with Isaiah's prophecy (Isaiah 7:14) that the child shall be named Emmanuel, meaning "God with us." The author of Matthew uses this passage to connect Jesus to Israel's history and affirm both his divinity and his humanity.

Spend time in prayer with these questions as part of your personal spiritual practice in the coming week.

- How does Matthew's birth story affirm God's love for you? For all creation?

- How have you experienced Jesus' birth anew through compassionate acts of disciples (others and your own)?

CHRISTMAS DAY

LESSON 5
25 December 2016

Focus Scripture Passage: Luke 2:1–20

Lesson Focus: Disciples proclaim Jesus Christ—God’s love made visible.

Objectives

The learners will...

- share experiences from Advent journeys.
- discuss the birth story in Luke and compare with Matthew’s birth story.
- consider how Christ is being born anew in the lives of individuals, congregations, and communities.

Supplies

- Copies of response sheet (optional)
- Pens or pencils
- *Community of Christ Sings*

Note to instructor: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Luke 2:1–20 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, p. 25.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge, prepares and motivates for lesson
(15% of total lesson time)

Advent Sundays are celebrated every year, but celebrating Christmas Day on Sunday happens less frequently. As people gather, greet one another with the following statement:

As God is _____ (hope, joy, peace, love) may you be blessed with _____ (hope, joy, peace, love).

Invite all who would like to share moments of blessing or insight from their Advent journey.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction
(35% of total lesson time)

Read Luke 2:1–20 and discuss the following questions.

- Compare Luke’s birth story with Matthew’s birth story (previous lesson). What are the significant differences between the birth stories?
- What is the author’s emphasis in each birth story?
- What is important for disciples today to understand about each author’s emphasis?

Read the following paragraph. Form three groups or pairs and assign each group one of the themes presented. Discuss the questions following each theme in small groups or pairs and share responses with the larger group. Then make a list of the conditions mentioned in small group discussions, as well as ways your congregation is responding.

As with Matthew’s Gospel, the author of Luke writes from a post-resurrection perspective. The birth story serves as an introduction to the Christ story as a whole from the theological perspective of Luke’s author. Luke’s birth story is set amid political power and oppressive taxation. Although they are poor, and the journey to Bethlehem is difficult, Joseph and Mary are obedient to the Roman government.

In Luke's birth story, the first to receive the news of Jesus' birth are shepherds. Shepherds represented those who were poor and despised in first-century Palestine. The angels proclaim "good news of great joy for all the people," which affirms the following themes present throughout Luke's Gospel:

1. God's love, revealed in Jesus, comes to us amid social, political, and personal struggles. The circumstances of Jesus' conception and birth are not as important as the reality of Jesus being born into the human condition.
 - Into what social or political conditions in your community can Christ be born anew?
 - How is your congregation or community responding to these conditions?
2. "No room" for the Messiah goes beyond a physical space. Jesus continues to be displaced by choices of individuals and institutions that reject his message and mission.
 - In what ways is Jesus "displaced" in your community?
 - How is your congregation or community responding to these conditions?
3. God chooses to "dwell with" those who are poor, outcast, and marginalized of society. God's grace is for all people, regardless of status or heritage.
 - Who are those who are outcast or marginalized in your community with whom God chooses to dwell?
 - How is your congregation or community responding to those who are outcast and marginalized?

*Additional lectionary texts: Isaiah 9:2-7, Psalm 96, Titus 2:11-14

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from hearing to doing
(35% of total lesson time)

Consider the conditions of your community and congregation responses to these conditions, listed from small group discussions.

- What conditions in your community receive the most time and energy from disciples in your congregation?
- What ministries could your congregation provide to those who are outcast and marginalized in your community?
- What barriers keep your congregation from sharing the hope of God's love made visible in your community?

4 SEND

Explores how the lesson might be lived
(10% of total lesson time)

Prayerfully consider your response to the following questions. Record responses in writing, share in groups of two or three, or share with the larger group.

- How has Christ Jesus been born anew in your life?
- To whom are you called to make God's love visible?

5 BLESS

Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope
(5% of total lesson time)

Select a verse or phrase from a favorite Christmas hymn or carol (see *Community of Christ Sings* 408-437) that best describes God's love made visible. Share with one another as a closing blessing.

LESSON 5 RESPONSE SHEET

CHRISTMAS DAY

25 December 2016

*Additional lectionary texts:
Isaiah 9:2–7, Psalm 96, Titus 2:11–14

Luke 2:1–20 NRSV

¹In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. ²This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. ⁵He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. ⁶While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

⁸In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹Then the angel of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹²This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." ¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, ¹⁴"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"

¹⁵When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." ¹⁶So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. ¹⁷When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; ¹⁸and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

The following themes are present in the birth story and throughout Luke's Gospel:

1. God's love, revealed in Jesus, comes to us amid social, political, and personal struggles. The circum-

stances of Jesus' conception and birth are not as important as the reality of Jesus being born into the human condition.

- Into what social or political conditions in your community can Christ be born anew?
 - How is your congregation or community responding to these conditions?
2. "No room" for the Messiah goes beyond a physical space. Jesus continues to be displaced by choices of individuals and institutions that reject his message and mission.
- In what ways is Jesus "displaced" in your community?
 - How is your congregation or community responding to these conditions?
3. God chooses to "dwell with" those who are poor, outcast, and marginalized of society. God's grace is for all people, regardless of status or heritage.
- Who are those who are outcast or marginalized in your community with whom God chooses to dwell?
 - How is your congregation or community responding to those who are outcast and marginalized?

Prayerfully consider your response to the following questions.

- How has Christ Jesus been born anew in your life?
- To whom are you called to make God's love visible?

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS DAY

LESSON 6
1 JANUARY 2017

Focus Scripture Passage: Matthew 2:13–23

Lesson Focus: Disciples seek God’s voice and respond in servant ministry.

Objectives

The learners will...

- consider the significance of the Epiphany.
- discuss the focus scripture passage and its invitation to disciples today.
- explore opportunities for individuals and congregations to promote and protect the well-being of all children.

Supplies

- Bible (NSRV)
- Copies of response sheet (optional)
- Pens or pencils
- *Community of Christ Sings*

Note to instructor: In preparation for this lesson, read “Exploring the Scripture” for Matthew 2:13–23 in *Sermon & Class Helps, Year A: New Testament*, p. 26.

1 GATHER

Activates background knowledge, prepares and motivates for lesson

(15% of total lesson time)

Today is the first Sunday after Christmas and the Sunday before the Epiphany, observed on 6 January. Epiphany means “manifestation” or “appearance” and relates specifically to God revealed in Christ. The day of Epiphany commemorates the visit of the magi (wise men) to Jesus as divine manifestation to the Gentiles (Donald K. McKim, *The Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*, Second Edition, p. 104).

Read Matthew 2:1–12 and respond to the following questions in writing, discuss in groups of two or three, or share with the larger group.

- What does it mean for you to seek Jesus today?
- In what new ways can you invite others to Christ?

Read or sing “Not in Grand Estate” CCS 444.

2 ENGAGE

Invites exploration and interaction

(35% of total lesson time)

Today’s focus scripture passage follows the story of the wise men in Matthew’s Gospel. Read Matthew 2:13–23 and discuss the following questions.

The author of Matthew’s Gospel proclaims Christ Jesus as the Messiah and fulfillment of the Old Testament. The author does this through connections of Jesus to Israel, particularly to Moses, and through prophecies quoted from the Old Testament.

Form three small groups or pairs and assign each group or pair one of the following paragraphs from today’s passage: verses 13–15, verses 16–18, verses 19–23. Discuss the following in small groups or pairs and share insights with the larger group.

- What connection do you find between Jesus and Moses, or Jesus and Israel, in these verses?

- What prophecy is quoted and how is it fulfilled?

Dreams are used five times in Matthew's birth story to communicate divine will. The wise men and Joseph promote God's purposes through their responses to the divine will.

- What is the invitation to disciples today about discerning God's will?

3 RESPOND

Takes the learners from hearing to doing
(35% of total lesson time)

There are moral and theological challenges in today's text. Why is only one family warned in a dream and only one child saved? Could not an all-powerful God have stopped Herod's designs in the first place? These are questions which naturally surface if the text is taken as historical and literal fact. While Herod was a cruel and paranoid ruler, it should be noted there is no historical evidence of children in Bethlehem being slaughtered. Matthew's intent is to communicate God's purposes fulfilled in Christ, despite human evil.

- What represents present-day "slaughter of the innocents" in the world and your community? (hand-guns, land mines, domestic abuse, preventable poverty-related diseases, child slavery and soldiering)
- What is the role of the church in response to these circumstances?
- What awareness or education would help your congregation or community respond to these circumstances?

4 SEND

Explores how the lesson might be lived
(10% of total lesson time)

The imagery of Rachel weeping for the children of Israel originated during the Babylonian captivity. In Matthew's passage, it is used to show further fulfilling of the Old Testament in Christ Jesus the Messiah. It can be understood as the maternal nature of God who weeps for all children who suffer. Disciples are called to protect and promote the well-being of all children.

Prayerfully consider your response to the following question, and make it part of your personal spiritual practice throughout the coming week.

- What is the light of hope you are called to bring to all children in your community?

5 BLESS

Time of prayer, praise, blessing, and hope
(5% of total lesson time)

Offer a closing prayer of blessing, or read the following as a prayer of blessing.

Show us the way, Christ Jesus, to offer the light of hope for all your precious children.

Come, shine through us today. Amen.

*Additional lectionary texts: Isaiah 63:7-9, Psalm 148, Hebrews 2:10-18

LESSON 6 RESPONSE SHEET

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS DAY

1 JANUARY 2017

*Additional lectionary texts:
Isaiah 63:7–9, Psalm 148, Hebrews 2:10–18

Matthew 2:13–23 NRSV

¹³Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child to destroy him." ¹⁴Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, ¹⁵and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, "Out of Egypt I have called my son."

¹⁶When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men. ¹⁷Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah: ¹⁸"A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more."

¹⁹When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, ²⁰"Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child's life are dead." ²¹Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. ²²But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee. ²³There he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, "He will be called a Nazorean."

There are moral and theological challenges in today's text. Why is only one family warned in a dream, and only one child saved? Could not an all-powerful God have stopped Herod's designs in the first place? These are questions which naturally surface if the text is taken as historical and literal fact. While Herod was a cruel and paranoid ruler, it should be noted there is no historical evidence of children in Bethlehem being slaughtered. Matthew's intent is to communicate God's purposes fulfilled in Christ, despite human evil.

- What represents present-day "slaughter of the innocents" in the world and your community? (hand-guns, land mines, domestic abuse, preventable poverty-related diseases, child slavery and soldiering)
- What is the role of the church in response to these circumstances?
- What awareness or education would help your congregation or community respond to these circumstances?

The imagery of Rachel weeping for the children of Israel originated during the Babylonian captivity. In Matthew's passage, it is used to show further fulfilling of the Old Testament in Christ Jesus the Messiah. It can be understood as the maternal nature of God who weeps for all children who suffer. Disciples are called to protect and promote the well-being of all children.

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