

# Out of the Blue: The Sample

Preachers' Notes

Words for Worship

Pageant

Devotions

Midweek Worship

Lessons and Carols

Hymn

and more...



# OUT OF THE BLUE: SERIES SAMPLE

ADVENT 2025, YEAR C/A

Preachers' Notes (Sample) .....	1
Children's Message Starters (Sample).....	5
Words for Worship (Sample) .....	7
Advent Devotions (Sample) .....	10
Midweek Worship (Sample).....	12
Lessons and Carols for Christmas (Sample).....	16
Six Surprising Tales from Jesus' Family Tree (Sample).....	19

# PREACHERS' NOTES

**DAYS TO PREPARE, SECONDS TO COOK: NOVEMBER 16, 2025**

Justin Kosec

## ***Revised Common Lectionary texts***

Malachi 4:1-2a (complementary) or Isaiah 65:17-25 (semicontinuous)

Psalm 98 (complementary) or Isaiah 12:2-6 (semicontinuous)

2 Thessalonians 3:6-13

Luke 21:5-19

By the time we arrived, the oven was hot, and it was time to cook the pizza.

Some faculty and graduate students had built a clay oven in the school's garden. Every Friday in the summer, students, faculty, and staff were invited to bring a beverage of their choice; a volunteer rolled out the dough; and another supplied cheese. The garden gave us fresh tomatoes and peppers. As a guest, you arrived at a party where everything was ready. Just pop the top off your beverage, slop the toppings on your pizza, and watch a volunteer slide it into that blazing-hot oven. Every week, someone was thrilled at how quickly their pie came back from that oven—cheese bubbling and crust curling with char around the edges.

If you've cooked pizza in a hot brick oven before, you know it doesn't take long. A brick oven properly built will burn twice as hot as the oven in your home. Pizza cooks in fewer minutes than you have fingers; you have to watch it carefully. The staff member who managed the school's garden told me he kindled the fire in the oven by Thursday, at least a day before we gathered for this weekly party. He used wood chopped and dried some weeks before, and he carefully fed the oven with fresh wood as the temperature would slowly rise. He let the fire burn out after the party. Next Thursday, the process would begin again. Often, the oven retained some heat from the week before. He started early so the oven was ready to cook by the time the partygoers arrived.

Because of all this preparation, there are no spontaneous pizza parties with a wood-fired oven. This lack of spontaneous events is also the case in this week's scriptural texts. In the Hebrew prophecies, if you're surprised by God's judgment, it's because you failed to pay attention to anything God said beforehand. When the prophet Malachi writes about the coming day of God's judgment, which will arrive "burning like an oven" (Malachi 4:1), it is an oracle long in the works. The book begins by citing the ancient division between Esau and Jacob (Malachi 1:2-5). In this way, the prophet identifies that God's preferred future—an age when there is no wickedness in the world, when people share with one another and nobody robs from God—is what God wanted for a long time, from the days of Jacob and Esau. God's plan for future judgment has unfolded slowly, and by the

time the day arrives, the oven burns so hot it can consume every fragment of human evil in mere moments.

Perhaps you will not read Malachi this Sunday, but instead read the semicontinuous lectionary text from Isaiah. The message is similar in this very different book. When God's vision comes to fruition, problems that have bedeviled humanity for generations will simply vanish in a moment. In both selections from the Hebrew Bible, God's long-range planning leads to a period of furiously dramatic change for humankind.

Such long-term plotting that leads to overnight change is not unknown in our human experience. The 20<sup>th</sup> century hinged on dramatic transitional moments that followed years of careful preparation, from the invasion of Poland that ignited World War II in September 1939 to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. In the United States, the Civil Rights and LGBTQIA2S+ movements are marked by pivotal moments that followed years of campaigning and orchestration. More recently, the year 2025 began with a flurry of activity that was the consequence of years of political telegraphing and positioning: the seemingly sudden end of DEI programs, the move to extract transgender people from the military, and the dramatic realignment of generations-old international relationships. So we have seen change sweep suddenly across human society. I imagine you've seen similar change sweep across your local community or even your congregation, too.

Regardless of your or your congregation's opinions on the sweeping changes of, say, 2025, such periods of dramatic upheaval in human society often manifest as the struggle between different human ideologies: liberalism vs. conservatism; secularism vs. religiosity; communism vs. capitalism; pro-life vs. pro-choice. But when scripture describes divine plans—and when they blossom into something visible—it shows that God's plans go beyond human ideology to connect to the root of human experience: life vs. death. God creates life in the place of death, from blossoms in the desert to freedom in social systems of captivity, from new sprouts in dead stumps to hope in lives marked by despair, from trustworthiness for those who struggle with trust issues to neatly folded burial cloths in an empty tomb.

For all that, we certainly recognize that God's work does not eradicate death in our experience or in our lifetime. Death remains, sending shockwaves through entire human systems. What changes, ultimately, is the degree to which death matters. Though death remains, the promise of new life sweeps away the pressure of death. Because of this, humans can discover and rediscover the ways God sweeps away the power of death, and the persistence of death means each rediscovery may feel surprising and immediate. We know God can sweep away the powers of this world in a moment. God has promised to do this again and again, both from age to age and from moment to moment in our own lives. Every time the power of death or the systemic forces of this world reassert their dominance over our creaturely psyches, we are primed to discover anew the ease with which God sweeps away what seems ineradicable—and how clearly God's intention to do so has been telegraphed for ages.

This is just what we see in today's gospel text. Jesus wanders through the glorious temple grounds with his friends. He astonishes them by talking about the destruction of these buildings: a continental shift in their understanding about God, a total reorientation of where God could be found and how God would relate to God's people. His disciples worry about which day in the future this change will come. It sounds scary and destructive, like the blazing fire of the stoked furnace. But this dramatic shift in God's presence already arrived in the very same temple some thirty years before, when Mary and Joseph dedicated the infant Jesus. The genealogies of Jesus in Matthew and Luke painstakingly detail Jesus' birth as the culminating moment in an ages-long divine plan. In Luke 2, when Mary and Joseph bring Jesus to the temple for his dedication, Anna and Simeon testify as those who had long awaited the moment they would see God's promise fulfilled in that place. By the time the disciples behold the temple and quake at some dramatic future change, they stand in the presence of the one who has already permanently altered the cosmic order. Why do the disciples fail to recognize that they have already experienced the change they fear? How often do we fail to recognize the same?

At times, truly unexpected change can force its way into our lives, as happens in an accident or a natural disaster. Please note that this is not the kind of out-of-the-blue surprise in this week's texts. Instead we, like the disciples, are likely to perceive as dramatic those changes that have long been in the works. This week, the gospel gives you the opportunity to talk about the subjective experience of such changes in your own life and in the life of your congregation. When did your life change around you without your noticing? Like the disciples, you may have imagined those changes as a harbinger of future danger, even when the change had already arrived. Like the disciples, you may have experienced a seemingly destructive change that, in the end, brought a new recognition of the work of God in your life and in the lives of others. In my experience, many people's path to ministry is filled with these sorts of disruptions. What about the people you serve? How has the ground shifted under their feet these last few years? Do your people feel concerned about the pace of change, or have they adapted with surprising alacrity? If we are like the disciples, then we may feel so afraid of destruction that we fail to notice God already at work in our midst.

Certainly, it takes a hot fire to transmute dough into crust and burn away chaff in just seconds—but when we anticipate that change, salivating over it, we find ourselves ready to enjoy what God has stoked.

## Questions for reflection

- When have you felt most affected by a sudden change to your personal life? In retrospect, to what degree was that change in the works for some time before you noticed the change itself?
- We tend to notice and remember sudden negative changes in our lives. If you cannot recall a sudden positive change, how can the negative changes you have experienced help you imagine the goodness we experience when God fulfills Godly promises?
- What type of change would dramatically improve the lives of the people in your community? When considering this, make sure you broaden your scope beyond just the people of your congregation. What kinds of careful long-term plans do you need to set in motion to reach that breakthrough moment?

# CHILDREN’S MESSAGE STARTERS

KATHRYN POCALYKO AND EMILY TRUBEY-WELLER

## Introduction

Each Sunday, *Out of the Blue* explores God’s surprising yet anticipated actions in the Revised Common Lectionary texts. These Children’s Message Starters offer a kid-friendly lens for exploring God’s word in conversation with the week’s thematic focus and one of the Bible texts. They coordinate with the content of our Preachers’ Notes, ensuring a degree of continuity between what you preach to different generations.

Over the course of the Advent season, searching for God in their lives will help children build an important skill, one that many adults in your congregation might benefit from honing, too! You will help them recognize where God still shows up for them each day—true advents of God. This is an amazing skill to support them throughout their lives. And, of course, you should let them ring the bell before sharing. That’s just plain fun.

You need just one prop: a bell.

## NOVEMBER 23, 2025

### Love at the Last

#### Scripture focus

Luke 23:34

#### Summarize the story for children

*You may use these or similar words.* When Jesus was dying on the cross, it was not fair. People said things about him that were not true and got him killed. At this moment he could have felt really angry at the people who harmed him. He could have wanted bad things to happen to them because of the horrible things they did to him. (This is called “revenge.”) But Jesus was not angry and did not want revenge. Instead, he prayed to God, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”

#### Surprise in scripture

Forgiveness is always surprising! When someone hurts you, don’t you want to hurt them back? Isn’t it okay to be mean to people who are mean to you? That’s how we think the world works, but that’s not how Jesus acts at all. —*Ding!*—Jesus forgives.

## Surprise in our lives

*Give an example of how this kind of surprise occurs in our lives. You may use these or similar words.* It's really easy to find examples of revenge: one child pushes or hits another, so they push or hit back. One kid didn't like what another kid said at lunch, so she refuses to let her in on the game at recess. Someone didn't share with you, so you don't share with them. (Grown-ups do these things, too.) With Jesus' example, the child who was pushed might offer a calm word to the pusher. The child who heard mean words might invite the speaker of them to play anyway. You might share with someone even if you don't like them.

*Now it's time to ask the kids, inviting them to ring the bell before they share.* Where has God shown up and surprised you in your life this week? *Give some examples if they need prompting. Here are some ideas: Someone let someone else—not their friend—go ahead of them in line, for no reason. You forgive a sibling and not because your parents said you have to. A teacher let you off the hook for missing an assignment.*



# WORDS FOR WORSHIP

JUSTIN KOSEC WITH KATHRYN POCALYKO

## WORDS FOR WORSHIP

### Gathering Words

This is our Advent,  
the time when we remember  
God is urgently waiting  
to finally arrive.

God, we have been waiting for you, too.  
**Yet you often arrive before we notice:  
in the place we did not expect,  
in the word we did not hear.**

Right before you change a life,  
your angels always say,  
“Do not be afraid.”  
**You are here to change this place.  
We are not afraid.**

### Thanksgiving for Baptism

*This prayer may be used as an optional weekly or occasional alternative to the Confession and Forgiveness, as appropriate.*

God, you have given water  
your power to drown life  
and your gift to nurture it again.

We remember the rainwater that fell  
on Noah and his family,  
a flood that no creature  
could send back to the cloud.

We remember the water of the Red Sea  
that stepped aside  
to let your people walk to liberation,

and swept away  
the enemies of freedom.

And in Advent,  
we remember  
that your salvation sustains us  
like the water  
that gives rise to life.

In the waters of baptism,  
we have been submerged  
in this same powerful sign.

**God, pour out the water of life.  
Carry us in the current  
of your irresistible will.  
Pull us with the steady tide of your tenderness.  
When we struggle against you,  
sweep us into your mercy.  
We cannot control your salvation;  
your love flows everywhere,  
even over our heads.**

God, thank you for the water  
that breaks the grip of the world  
and erodes the edifice of sin.  
Thank you for the water  
that nurtures life  
as it begins again.  
**Amen.**

## **Offering Prayer**

Please pray with me.

**God, we cherished  
what we thought  
belonged only to us:  
our money  
and our time  
and our families  
and our freedom.**

Yet in a moment,  
we recognize  
that every truly good thing  
was a treasure  
we had taken  
from your open hand.  
We thought such treasures were ours  
to earn and to own.

**You grow what we give away.**

**So we give you these gifts  
as a sign of your love and faithfulness.**

### **Prayer after Communion**

Please pray with me.

**Jesus, the world looks different from your table.  
Here, there are no strangers,  
and grace is never a surprise.  
Life always thrives in the desert,  
and a promise never shades with doubt.**

**Soon as we rise from this table,  
our memories of this goodness fade.  
Bring us back every day  
to your promises:  
astonish us again.  
Amen.**

# OUT OF THE BLUE: ADVENT DEVOTIONS

## INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the *Out of the Blue: Advent Devotions* from Barn Geese Worship. The idea for this devotional resource grew from a specific seed. The scripture stories we have selected and the way we mark them in these devotions emerge from the tradition of the Jesse tree.

The Jesse tree is a medieval symbolic depiction of Jesus' ancestry. It's also a symbol of the Advent season, sometimes used for home devotions during the weeks leading to Christmas. When used at home, a Jesse tree tells the stories of Jesus' ancestors by using Bible stories and accompanying symbolic ornaments, one for each day of Advent. By Christmas, the Jesse tree is full of biblical imagery, and you've spent the season dwelling in stories of faith.

In the traditional Jesse tree used for home devotions, the Bible stories are taken from the genealogy of Jesus as described in Matthew 1. The stories we've curated for these devotions are also mostly drawn from Matthew 1, with a particular focus on the women in Jesus' lineage. It's unusual that women are listed as ancestors in scripture, so their inclusion stands out. These stories give us important clues about who Jesus will be. They testify to the consistency of God's promise within the messiness of human existence. Often, God's action seems to come out of the blue in these stories. You'll find the same biblical stories in the *Out of the Blue: Midweek Worship* and the *Out of the Blue: An Advent and Christmas Pageant*.

## BROKENNESS RECLAIMED: DECEMBER 7, 2025

Victoria Larson

### CONTENT NOTIFICATION

*This week's reading and remarks deal with David's sexual assault of Bathsheba, the murder of her spouse, and the death of an infant.*

### READ

2 Samuel 11:2-27a

The story of David and his family is told over the course of several chapters in 1 and 2 Samuel. David, youngest son of Jesse, is unexpectedly anointed as the second king of Israel to succeed Saul. As an illustrious youth, David defeats Goliath with nothing more than a sling and a stone, but as he ages and reigns, he finds navigating his newfound power much more difficult. In a striking abuse of his power, 2 Samuel 11 tells the story of how he took Bathsheba, another man's wife, to his bed and

then sent Uriah, her unwitting husband, to die on the front lines of battle. Bathsheba, impregnated by David, gives birth to a son, who dies just days later.

This is not the end of Bathsheba's story. Eventually she becomes the mother of the future King Solomon and several of David's other children. She also becomes a political force in the kingdom, a stark contrast to her seeming voicelessness in today's reading.

The flow of the story is dreadfully deliberate, as though the narrator wants us to mark all the opportunities David missed to make a different choice: He sees Bathsheba. He decides he wants her. He asks after her. He brings her to his palace. He lies with her. As Bathsheba's king, David's job is to protect her. Instead, he exploits her.

What did Bathsheba think? We can only imagine. Her feelings and preferences are not once referenced in the story. The narrator's exclusion of her voice echoes David's own refusal to acknowledge the fullness of her personhood. In fact, except for a servant's report, even Bathsheba's name is unspoken in this story.

Generations later, the author of Matthew once again refers to her only as "the wife of Uriah" as he includes her in Jesus' genealogy. In this context, the title doesn't seem to obscure Bathsheba as much as it reveals the truth of David's failure. Matthew refuses to bleach out the sin that colors the threads of Jesus' ancestral tapestry. Bathsheba encounters some of the worst actions of a corrupt ruler. Is it a coincidence that she is the foremother of Jesus, the sovereign who does not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but who empties himself instead (Philippians 2:6-8)?

### **CONSIDER**

God took a transgression that David and Bathsheba thought had ruined them beyond recovery and made it part of God's plan for salvation. When has God taken a catastrophe in your life and found a way to bless you?

### **PRAY**

God, sometimes we think we're too broken for you to redeem. Prove us wrong. Remind us of how you love to take brokenness and transform it into blessing. Remind us of how the lost sheep was the one that was found. When we lose hope in our own goodness, surprise us with your overflowing grace. Amen.

### **FIND**

Find something broken that you still care about. Examples include a piece of jewelry or tableware waiting for repair, a beloved stuffed animal with a rip, or a favorite sweater that's beginning to unravel. Place it near your Jesse tree.

# OUT OF THE BLUE: MIDWEEK WORSHIP

VICTORIA LARSON WITH LINNÉA CLARK

## INTRODUCTION

This service is rooted in a reimagining of the Jesse tree, one of the traditional symbols of the Advent season. The Jesse tree strives to represent the family tree of Jesus through iconography that became widely popular in the medieval period. In most renderings, it looks like this: Jesse, the father of David, lies prostrate. A single branch sprouts from his side, from which grow the portraits of other biblical patriarchs identified as Jesus' forebears on Joseph's side in the gospels of Luke and Matthew. Biblical women are notably absent, giving rise to several questions about how medieval artists thought babies happened.

The Jesse tree planted the seed (or grew the sapling) for the anchoring symbol of this worship resource. As the Barn Geese Worship writers discussed the idea, we began asking other questions: What if we considered Jesus' spiritual heirs in addition to his forebears? What if the Jesse tree could help us claim not only our past, but our present? What would it be like to explore Jesus' family tree knowing that we ourselves are part of it—that we, too, are growing from the branch of Jesse's tree?

## Saints of the season

Many of us perceive the custom of marking the feast days of saints as a distinctly Roman Catholic practice. But the Orthodox Church does it too, and so do Lutherans and the Anglican Communion. While these Protestants don't adore saints in the same manner as the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church (veneration), they look to saints as models of godly lives and inspiration for their own (commemoration). Additionally, Protestants usually don't wait for official Roman Catholic canonization before adding someone to the calendar of commemoration. That's the approach that our Midweek Worship service adopts.

## A Jesse tree in worship

Depending on your worship space and your available resources, you might consider anchoring this liturgy with a visual aid: a homemade Jesse tree that changes with each week's liturgy. This is the central image and devotional activity in our *Out of the Blue: Advent Devotions* as well. What you do in worship can be mirrored at home, and vice versa.

## WEEKLY SCRIPTURE, THEMES, AND BACKGROUND ESSAYS

### Week of November 30

*Scripture: Ruth 1:1-18*

#### THEME

After what seems like the end, God's justice offers a new beginning.

#### SAINTS

Ruth and Naomi, Sojourner Truth, Bree Newsome

#### FOR THE COMMUNITY JESSE TREE

Find something that you would take with you on a trip or that guides you in your travels. Examples include a map or atlas, favorite road snacks, a piece of camping equipment, travel games, or a spare tire.

#### BACKGROUND ESSAY

Imagine them: Ruth and Naomi, trudging along the road to Bethlehem. Centuries later, their descendent Joseph will follow the road to the same place with his wife, Mary. But while Mary and Joseph will travel in joyful expectation of new life and prophecies fulfilled, Naomi and Ruth travel with the burden of grief. Naomi has lost her husband and sons. Ruth has lost her husband and homeland, leaving behind her parents and traveling with her mother-in-law to a place she's never seen with little hope for her future. It seems like everything is over.

What God will do for the both of them is just around the corner. Ruth will meet Boaz, Naomi's kinsman. Boaz will see the virtue of these vulnerable women and choose to honor his legal obligations to them. Honoring legal obligations might not sound like a terribly romantic plotline for this love story, but it's positively swoon-worthy in this context. Boaz is the many-times-great-grandson of Judah and Tamar. What Judah failed to do for Tamar, his descendant will do in spades for a refugee widow from a foreign land. Ruth's persistence and loyalty to her loved ones will win justice and a future for her family.

On November 26 circa 1797, a woman whose persistence and loyalty to her loved ones would reshape American justice was born. Sojourner Truth was enslaved at her birth in upstate New York, where slavery was still the law of the land. In 1826, she took her infant daughter and walked her way into freedom. She had to leave her other children behind when she escaped. She later learned that her former enslaver sold Peter, her five-year-old son, who was then illegally resold to an enslaver in Alabama. With slavery newly illegal in New York, Truth filed a lawsuit to reclaim her son. She took the case all the way to the Supreme Court, becoming one of the first Black women to win a legal battle against a white man.

Sojourner Truth wasn't born with that name. She chose it on Pentecost Sunday of 1843, because out of the blue, she heard the Holy Spirit calling her to preach the truth. She told her friends, "The Spirit calls me, and I must go."<sup>1</sup> Like Ruth, she recognized that the only way she could find a new life was to leave the old one behind altogether. There was no redeeming the system that enslaved her. Instead, when addressing a gathering of equal-rights advocates in 1867, she said it was not enough to see the systems of slavery partly dismantled. "I want it root and branch destroyed," Truth said. "Then we will all be free indeed."<sup>2</sup>

When it comes to starting over again, sometimes no half-measures will do. A new beginning requires removing every vestige of what had come before.

Sojourner Truth's legacy continues to reshape American conversations around civil rights. Consider June 27, 2016, when activist Bree Newsome drew the world's attention by climbing a flagpole at the South Carolina statehouse and taking down the Confederate flag. Newsome was spurred into action by the Charleston massacre just two weeks earlier, when a white gunman walked into Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston and murdered nine people at Bible study. Newsome later reflected, "I realized that now is the time for true courage the morning after the Charleston massacre shook me to the core of my being. I couldn't sleep. I sat awake in the dead of night. All the ghosts of the past seemed to be rising."<sup>3</sup>

Newsome's act of civil disobedience was rooted in her Christian faith, the faith she shared with the Emanuel Nine. As police officers ordered her to come down from the statehouse flagpole, she said, "In the name of Jesus, this flag has to come down. You come against me with hatred and oppression and violence. I come against you in the name of God. This flag comes down today."<sup>4</sup> Newsome succeeded. Although the Confederate flag was hoisted again within forty-five minutes, it came down for good two weeks later after international outcry and a vote in the South Carolina House of Representatives.

After experiencing the shock and trauma of death, these three women realized that no new life could come from living in the old system. The trauma of great loss led them to break with the past in search of a more hopeful future. They took bold steps to keep the ghosts of the past from rising;

---

<sup>1</sup> Harry Searles, "Sojourner Truth," *American History Central*, August 13, 2019.  
<https://www.americanhistorycentral.com/entries/sojourner-truth/>

<sup>2</sup> Sojourner Truth, "Address to the First Annual Meeting of the American Equal Rights Association." New York City, May 9, 1867. ed. by Heidi Jacobs. Society for the Study of American Woman Writers.  
<https://www.lehigh.edu/~dek7/SSAWW/writTruthAddress.htm>

<sup>3</sup> Breanna Edwards, "Bree Newsome Opens Up About Taking Down Confederate Flag on SC Statehouse Grounds," *The Root*, June 30, 2015. <https://www.theroot.com/bree-newsome-opens-up-about-taking-down-confederate-fla-1790860347>

<sup>4</sup> Ana Marie Cox, "Bree Newsome Thinks Allies Should Be Protesting," *New York Times Magazine*, October 18, 2017.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/18/magazine/bree-newsome-thinks-allies-should-be-protesting.html>



and they drew strength from love, from faith, and from a vision of justice not only for themselves but for all those it was in their power to help.

By living toward this vision, they even became emblematic of what they sought to create. That's part of the surprise: when we strive for what is missing in this world, we discover that we have a part in generating the love, justice, and hope others need the most.

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Ruth followed Naomi; Sojourner Truth fought for Peter; Bree Newsome remembered the Emanuel Nine. For whom would you go to the ends of the earth?
- When has it felt like your life was over – perhaps in the wake of a job loss, a death, or a diagnosis? How did God lead you forward?
- What ghosts of the past haunt you or your community? What legacies need unpacking?
- Like Boaz, how does (or how could) your community help fight for the protection of vulnerable people, especially refugees, women, and people of color?

### FURTHER READING

- “Sojourner Truth.” *Library of Congress*.  
<https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/odyssey/educate/truth.html>
- Lottie Joiner. “Bree Newsome reflects on taking down South Carolina's Confederate flag 2 years ago.” *Vox*. Published June 27, 2017.  
<https://www.vox.com/identities/2017/6/27/15880052/bree-newsome-south-carolinas-confederate-flag>

# OUT OF THE BLUE:

## LESSONS AND CAROLS FOR CHRISTMAS

LINNÉA CLARK AND EMILY TRUBEY-WELLER

### INTRODUCTION

We've all been there: proudly putting the finishing touches on worship for Christmas Eve or Christmas Day, leaning back to admire our work... and feeling a familiar sinking feeling: only a few days after Christmas, Sunday is coming, and Sunday needs a worship service, too.

This service of lessons and carols for Christmas is here to help tired worship planners, pastors, and leaders offer a rich liturgy full of reflection on the surprising incarnation of Jesus without the need for extensive preparation or leadership. Seven sets of scripture readings, hymn suggestions, and reflection questions invite joyful celebration and thoughtful contemplation of the season. The hymns and reflection questions help worshipers interpret the readings without requiring the worship leader to preach. Consider posing these questions to worshipers for contemplation, providing them with materials to draw or journal in response, or even gathering oral responses in conversation.

### LITURGY

#### Gathering Words

How beautiful on the mountains  
are the feet of the messenger who announces peace,  
who brings good news,  
who announces salvation,  
who says to Zion, "Your God reigns."

**How beautiful in the valleys  
are the hearts, the minds, the voices  
of all who proclaim God's love.**

Listen! Your sentinels lift up their voices;  
together they shout for joy,  
for in plain sight they see  
the return of the Lord to Zion.

**In silence and song,  
in protest and prayer,**

**in love and laughter  
we proclaim what we know:  
God is here among us.**

Break forth; shout together for joy,  
you ruins of Jerusalem.

**God's comfort is among us.  
God's grounding is beneath us.  
God's joy surrounds us.**

All the ends of the earth shall see  
the salvation of our God.

**Everyone will know what God has done.  
This Christmas, love is born!**

## **Fifth Reading: Luke 2:8-20** *The Shepherds Receive Good News*

### **REFLECTION QUESTION**

When has your fear turned into wonder or even joy?

### **PRAYER**

Radiant God, you showered the shepherds with starlight and surprised them with a newborn ruler in a manger. Send your love to us on angel wings of wonder. When awe leaves us trembling, speak peace to our hearts. **Amen.**

### **CAROL**

Hymn suggestions: O Come, All Ye Faithful (text: John Francis Wad, music: ADESTE FIDELES, John Francis Wade); 'Twas in the Moon of Wintertime (text: Jean de Brébeuf, music: UNE JEUNE PUCELLE, French folk tune); Hark! The Herald Angels Sing (text: Charles Wesley, music: MENDELSSOHN, Felix Mendelssohn); Angels from the Realms of Glory (text: James Montgomery, tune: REGENT SQUARE, Henry Thomas Smart)

## Prayer of Dedication

God of all creation, the universe praises you for everything you have done. As we offer these simple gifts, transform them beyond anything we expect. Let them become hope for the hopeless, care for the forgotten, and peace for all who need safety. Send us with this bounty to care for a world in need. **Amen.**

*If you will celebrate communion today, include your congregation's usual preface, eucharistic prayer, and the Lord's Prayer here.*

# OUT OF THE BLUE: SIX SURPRISING TALES FROM JESUS' FAMILY TREE

AN ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS PAGEANT  
JUSTIN KOSEC AND EMILY TRUBEY-WELLER

## INTRODUCTION FOR PASTORS AND MINISTRY LEADERS

This is an Advent and Christmas pageant... of sorts. After all, most Christmas pageants feature more fluffy sheep than Hebrew Bible tricksters, mischief-makers, and wayward spies. Like Barn Geese Worship's *Out of the Blue: Advent Devotions* and *Midweek Worship*, this pageant is grounded in the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1 and in Luke's story of Jesus' birth. Because it contains so many Bible stories, this pageant has the potential to be more than a pageant. It could be anything from Sunday School curriculum for the entire Advent season to the core of an intergenerational Advent night to an opportunity for all the ministries of your congregation to come together in one project.

A tree that has been cut down will often sprout a plethora of new shoots from the stump. It doesn't look anything like the neat artistic images of the tree of Jesse with one elegant green shoot. It looks like a hot mess. So does Jesus' family tree. God can work with the messiness of Jesus' family tree. God can work with the messiness of ours, too.

### What do I need to pull this off?

*Participants:* If you present this pageant with the prerecorded option above, you will need a minimum of five people, because the same people could play different parts in every story. The largest number of characters in any one story is eight (Bathsheba's story), which could be played by five people. On the other hand, if each role is played by a different person, you will need about thirty-two people. This option may be more suited to a live-action performance.

*Technology:* If you choose the prerecorded performance option, you will need a way to record or photograph participants. Smartphones work just fine! You will also need a way to display the videos or photos. If your congregation doesn't have screens or speakers in the sanctuary, consider using a social hall or a classroom with a screen.

*Supplies for telling the stories:* Your needs will depend on how your participants want to tell their stories. Do you need puppets or art supplies, costumes or simple props? Think through the options in advance so that you can present your participants with an array of possibilities.

# OUT OF THE BLUE: SIX SURPRISING TALES FROM JESUS' FAMILY TREE

## AN ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS PAGEANT

### BEGINNING

NARRATOR.

A long, long time ago, there lived a couple who were preparing for the birth of a baby. Their names were Mary and Joseph. The baby was a big surprise, to say the least.

MARY.

Joseph, I'm pregnant.

JOSEPH.

What? When? How?

NARRATOR.

Through the words of angelic messengers, God assured the couple that the child born to them would be holy, and would be called Son of God, and they were to name him Jesus.

While they were preparing for the birth of the baby, an order came from the emperor that all the world must be counted. Every person in the empire was required to return to the hometown of their ancestors to be counted in this census.

So Mary and Joseph set out from their home in Nazareth to the home of Joseph's ancestors in Bethlehem.

The couple maybe didn't know each other very well yet.

MARY.

So, nice day.

JOSEPH.

Mmmhmmm.

MARY.

Also, you're kinda walking a bit fast, you know.

JOSEPH.

This is how fast I walk. I'm just walking. It kinda hurts for me to walk slower. You ever have that problem?

MARY.

Currently it hurts me to walk... like... *at all*.

JOSEPH, *slowing his pace*.

Oh.

I'm sorry.

MARY, *after a bit*.

It's kind of pretty out here in the countryside.

JOSEPH.

Mmmhmmm.

MARY.

Joseph, we have a long way to go. You are going to have to say something more than mmmhmmm.

JOSEPH.

Mmmhmmm?

MARY.

Why don't you tell me a story? Something about yourself. Or something about your family! I am looking forward to meeting some of them in Bethlehem.

JOSEPH.

Mmmhmmm... Actually, I've been meaning to talk to you about that.

MARY, *visibly relieved*.

Oh! You have?

JOSEPH.

We're going to have to find an inn.

MARY.

An inn?! Why?! I thought your whole family was from Bethlehem. Surely we could stay with your parents! Your cousin, maybe, that you mentioned, the one with the huge carpentry shop?

JOSEPH.

Yeah, no. My family's actually kind of a mess.

MARY.

But you're a descendant of King David. You brag about it all the time.

JOSEPH.

Well, yes. But we're all a mess. We've always been a mess. Even David. Especially David!

MARY.

Okay, now you have got to tell me more. How are you all a mess? Exactly what kind of mess are we talking about here?

## FAMILY STORY 1: ABRAHAM AND SARAH

JOSEPH.

Just think about Abraham and Sarah. You may remember the story.

### *Scripted Version*

NARRATOR.

There was once a woman named Sarai.

She had a husband named Abram.

When they were young, Sarai and Abram hoped to have kids.

SARAI.

Honey, I would love to have a big family someday.

ABRAM.

That would be nice.

NARRATOR.

Then they got old. But they still had no children.

SARAI.

Once I thought we would have a nice family. But we are running out of time...



ABRAM.

I'm sorry, honey, don't be sad. Aren't I enough?

SARAI.

Not really.

NARRATOR.

Abram worshiped a great God. The *greatest* God.

GOD.

Hey, Abram.

ABRAM.

Oh, hey, God.

GOD.

Why so glum?

ABRAM.

Well, Sarai and I are sad. We don't have any kids.

GOD.

Well, if you want a kid, I can give you a kid.

ABRAM.

Really? But we're old.

GOD.

Look at the stars.

NARRATOR.

Abram looked at the stars.

ABRAM.

That's a lot of stars.

GOD.

How about I give you a family that big?

ABRAM.

You can do that?

GOD.

Yeah. But I'll probably make you wait for it.

ABRAM.

That's okay! I can be patient.

NARRATOR.

God made Abram wait for it. They waited ten years.

SARAI.

Hey, Abram. I'm tired of waiting for a kid. I think God doesn't want me to have a baby.

ABRAM.

We have to be patient!

SARAI.

This is getting ridiculous. Go have a baby with my servant Hagar. Maybe I can adopt her.

NARRATOR.

Hagar got pregnant. But Sarai didn't like that very much.

SARAI.

Now I *know* this isn't fair.

NARRATOR.

Sarai was very angry. She hit Hagar and Hagar ran away. God found Hagar in the wilderness.

GOD.

Hey, Hagar.

HAGAR.

Hey, God.

GOD.

Why so glum?

HAGAR.

I got pregnant and then Sarai was very mean to me. And now I will die in the desert.

GOD.

Don't worry. I will take good care of you.

NARRATOR.

And God did.

Then Abram saw God again.

ABRAM.

Hey, God.

GOD.

Hey, Abram. Why so glum?

ABRAM.

Well, you promised we would have a big family but we're still waiting.

Hagar got pregnant. But now Sarai is angry.

GOD.

That's because you excluded her.

ABRAM.

What?

GOD.

Sarai thinks I made a promise only to you. But she is a part of the promise, too.

NARRATOR.

God made Abram wait a little while longer. So long that he was almost ready to die.

Then God made another promise to Abram.

GOD.

Hey, Abram.

ABRAM.

Hey, God.

GOD.

Why so glum?

ABRAM.

Well, you know.

GOD.

I know I have made you wait. But I will still keep my promise. I am changing your name to Abraham. That is a sign that the promise will come true. And Sarai's name will now be Sarah.

NARRATOR.

Abram had waited so long. Instead of a baby, God was giving Abram a new name! He thought it was so funny he fell over laughing.

GOD.

Trust me! Just wait one year and you will have a baby.

NARRATOR.

Shortly after, God showed up at Abraham's house. This time Sarah was there.

GOD.

Hey, Abraham.

ABRAHAM.

Oh, you're just in time for dinner. Want some food?

GOD.

Sure thing. I just came to tell you that you'll have that baby soon.

NARRATOR.

Sarah heard this. And just like Abraham, she started to laugh.

GOD.

Hey, why is she laughing?

ABRAHAM.

Uhhhh....

GOD.

Just wait one more year. And I promise by this time you will have a baby.

NARRATOR.

And that is what happened! Sarah became pregnant. And by that time next year they had a baby.

They named the baby Isaac, which means *laughter*. They named him that because Sarah laughed when she heard she was going to have a baby. But Abraham had also laughed. Isaac was their pride and joy.

## ***Narrated Version***

NARRATOR.

There was once a woman named Sarai. She had a husband named Abram.

When they were young, Sarai and Abram hoped to have kids. Sarai always imagined having a big family.

But they got old. And they still had no children.

Abram worshiped a great God. The *greatest* God.

God noticed that Abram was glum, and asked him why he was so sad.

Abram told God that he and Sarai were sad because they didn't have any kids.

God assured Abram that God could give them a kid even though they were old. In fact, God could give them a family as big as all the stars in the night sky. Abram would just have to wait for it.

Abram assured God he could be patient. God made them wait for ten years.

After all that time, Sarai began to think God didn't want her to have a baby. She told Abram to go have a baby with her servant Hagar. She thought maybe then she could adopt Hagar and her baby into the family.

So Hagar got pregnant. But Sarai didn't like that very much. It just didn't seem fair.

Sarai became very angry. She hit Hagar and Hagar ran away.

God found Hagar in the wilderness and asked her why she was glum.

Hagar told God that she was sad because she got pregnant, just like Sarai wanted, but then Sarai was very mean. Hagar thought she would die in the desert.

God promised to take good care of Hagar, and God did.

Then Abram saw God again, and again God asked Abram why he was so glum.

Abram told God they were still waiting on that promise of a big family. And that Sarai was angry because Hagar got pregnant.

God told Abram that's because Abram had excluded her from the promise. The promise wasn't just for Abram. It was for Sarai too.

God made Abram wait a little while longer. So long that he was almost ready to die.

Then God made another promise to Abram, and God changed his name to Abraham. It was a sign that the promise will come true. God also changed Sarai's name to Sarah, because she was part of the promise too.

Abram had waited so long. Instead of a baby, God was giving him a new name! He thought it was so funny he fell over laughing.

God told Abraham to wait just one more year and they would have a baby.

Shortly after, God showed up at Abraham's house. This time Sarah was there. God promised again that they would have the baby soon.

Sarah heard this. And just like Abraham, she started to laugh.

God promised they would have to wait just one more year, and by this time next year, they would have a baby.

And that is what happened! Sarah became pregnant. And by that time next year they had a baby. They named the baby Isaac, which means *laughter*. They named him that because Sarah laughed when she heard she was going to have a baby. But Abraham had also laughed. Isaac was their pride and joy.