

Advent 2004

Theme: God has broken into our lives by sending his Son Jesus on a journey.

First Weekend: To know how to prepare for Christ's coming into our lives. Preparation is an essential step in taking a trip. PROP: LUGGAGE around the advent candelabra.

Focus will be on the preparation for a journey. John the Baptist challenged the people, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord," so that the full impact of Christ's ministry could be demonstrated on earth.

SCRIPT:

The Christian Church celebrates Advent – the four weeks before Christmas – as a season of preparation, because when something great is about to happen, we should be prepared. Even in today's speed-driven world, trips (journeys) require careful and deliberate preparation. I was thinking about this when I get ready to take a trip. I take great care to pack the right things, and try hard not to leave out anything important.

And when it comes to Christmas, many of us go to great lengths to make holidays festive and wonderful, but as we join together in prayer today, our privilege is to get prepared on the INSIDE for the journey to the One who is God.

As we embark on the Jesus journey in this season of Advent, we would do well to empty our suitcases of unnecessary baggage (sin), so that we can make room for the presence of Jesus Christ. How do we make preparations to meet God? The first time Jesus came it was a total surprise. People weren't prepared. Next time I'd like to be ready, wouldn't you? What's in your suitcase?

Today Lord, we light this advent candle to demonstrate that we want to be ready, that we want to be prepared. LIGHT THE CANDLE.

PRAYER:

"Lord Jesus, you are Emmanuel, God with us. In the quietness of this time, we reflect on you alone. As we prepare for the Jesus journey, we first admit that we have hearts full of unwanted baggage. Suitcases full of the wrong stuff. There are sins that must go so we may be clean and ready. Each of us has unwanted baggage. Perhaps it was:

that lie you told;
the time you exploded in anger;
the day you were needed but didn't respond;
the business trip that took you So FAR aay from home;
that date;
that jealousy;
that habit;
That act of hypocrisy

As you identify your baggage, silently confess it to God as preparation for Christ's coming.

PAUSE for reflective time)

Lord, we give you who we are. We want to begin our Jesus journey with renewed energy. Thank you for the new seasons of life. Thank you for your life. Amen.

SONGS: O Come, O Come Emmanuel/Come Thou Long Expected Jesus

Second Weekend: To find God whatever it takes. To commit to making spiritual preparations for the journey of faith. PROP: Backpacker and gear, backpacks of various sizes and materials, ropes and boots.

The stories of the first Christmas have become so commonplace that we've lost the passion and emotion of the characters involved. Seldom have we considered the hardship that the wise men endured as they journeyed toward the Messiah. When we begin to that that our own spiritual journeys should be calm and comfortable, we must remember the wise men and their diligent expedition.

Christmastime gets us back in touch with many characters we may remember from childhood: Mary Joseph, a baby, shepherds, an angel and the wise men. You probably have some sort of visual picture in your head of what they all looked like. You may picture wise men as three men wearing beautifully designed headwear trimmed with metallic thread. You might imagine that they were quiet and discreet gentlemen just wandering around looking for some way to spend their days, and who arrived at the manger, cool calm and collected. (Use self created graphics stills of traditional wise men)

They arrived in Jerusalem shortly after Jesus' birth, determined to find the Christ child. King Herod caught wind of their determination, and felt extremely threatened. By a baby who could cause such a stir. Herod gathered together the chief priests and scribes, and asked them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him that according to prophecy, the baby was to be born in Bethlehem. Herod immediately began scheming to get rid of this child. So he commissioned the wise men, the Ivy League scholars to go and find the child so that he could worship too. But who was he kidding? He wanted to do away with the little king.

So the wise men set out, not on a Sunday stroll, but on a long and treacherous journey with only a star to guide them. Short on food, long on thirst, they crossed the seemingly endless miles across the desert. They were travel worn and weary; beards scruffy, fingernails dirty, shoes worn, hearts lonely for their loved ones back east. Then finally one night, they saw that the star had stopped. They found the place where the star hovered over, and they could hardly contain themselves. Overcome with emotion, they fell down to worship the child Jesus.

Today our own Advent journey takes a different turn. What would it take to go totally out of our way on an journey to God? How do you and I begin to focus all our energy and resources on being prepared to meet God?

LIGHT THE CANDLES

Will you stand and join me in the response displayed on the screen? I will begin.

LEADER: God, during this Advent we want to prepare ourselves for the journey, the diligent expedition.

PEOPLE: Help us, Lord to be ready.

LEADER: though you have created the world and are present and at work in it, the world doesn't acknowledge you. We, too often fail to notice your presence.

PEOPLE: Give us, Lord, eyes of faith so we may recognize you at work in the world around us.

LEADER: You came to your own people, but were rejected.

PEOPLE: We want you, Lord. Help us in this season of Advent to open ourselves to your coming.

LEADER: And when we want you, and believe you are who you claim to be, you make us to be our true selves. Our child of God selves.

PEOPLE: this is our need. Take our lives and make us ready for you. Amen

SONGS: Open the eyes of My Heart, O Come all Ye Faithful, What child is this?

Third Weekend: To begin to take steps to begin trusting God and others. We need intimate connections to trust a humble Savior. PROP: Modern-day stark urban manager scene (crate with cloth inside)

The season of Advent allows the unique opportunity to consider the upside down Kingdom. We climb the ladder of success, but god came down to us. We try to gain power, but God became vulnerable, gave up his power and became human. This is a God who desires intimacy above control. People are drawn to a Savior like that.

UNCOMMON LOVE:

Host: when God opened heaven and sent his beloved Son into our world. God used a completely surprising and paradoxical strategy. One that you and I wouldn't think was reasonable for the God of the universe.

VOCAL 1: He was born in a manger, not a mansion.

VOCAL2: while the religious looked for a Messiah in the synagogues.

VOCAL 3: God showed up in the streets.

HOST: Newborns should have clean, sanitary beds.

VOCAL 1: But Jesus took his first breath amid dung and disease.

VOCAL 2: Broken bottles.

VOCAL 3: Broken lives.

HOST: People like power. We work hard to climb the ladder of success and grasp for control.

VOCAL 1: God came down.

VOCAL 3: Gave up control.

VOCAL 2: Became vulnerable.

VOCAL 1: God in a baby.

HOST: Christmas is about God's remarkable display of uncommon power and uncommon love. Let us lay down our lives to serve the One who served us.

SONGS: Away in a manger,

HOST: in this final week of the Advent season, we recognize the uncommon gift of God's son, Jesus.

LIGHT THE CANDLES

PRAYER: Lord, the baby Jesus represents your best design of uncommon love. A gift to us that is more precious than anything else. Lord, we humble ourselves before you. You said we must come as little children: open vulnerable and trusting. Make our hearts childlike and loving, Lord. Lord we celebrate your presence here today and the joy it brings our hearts.

BENEDICTION: In the incarnation, God demonstrated uncommon power. God chose not a mansion, but a manger. To the world, this kind of power just doesn't make sense; it is foolish. But to those who grasp its beauty, their lives will be totally uncommon. Share the Christmas message this week. Amen.

Fourth Weekend: