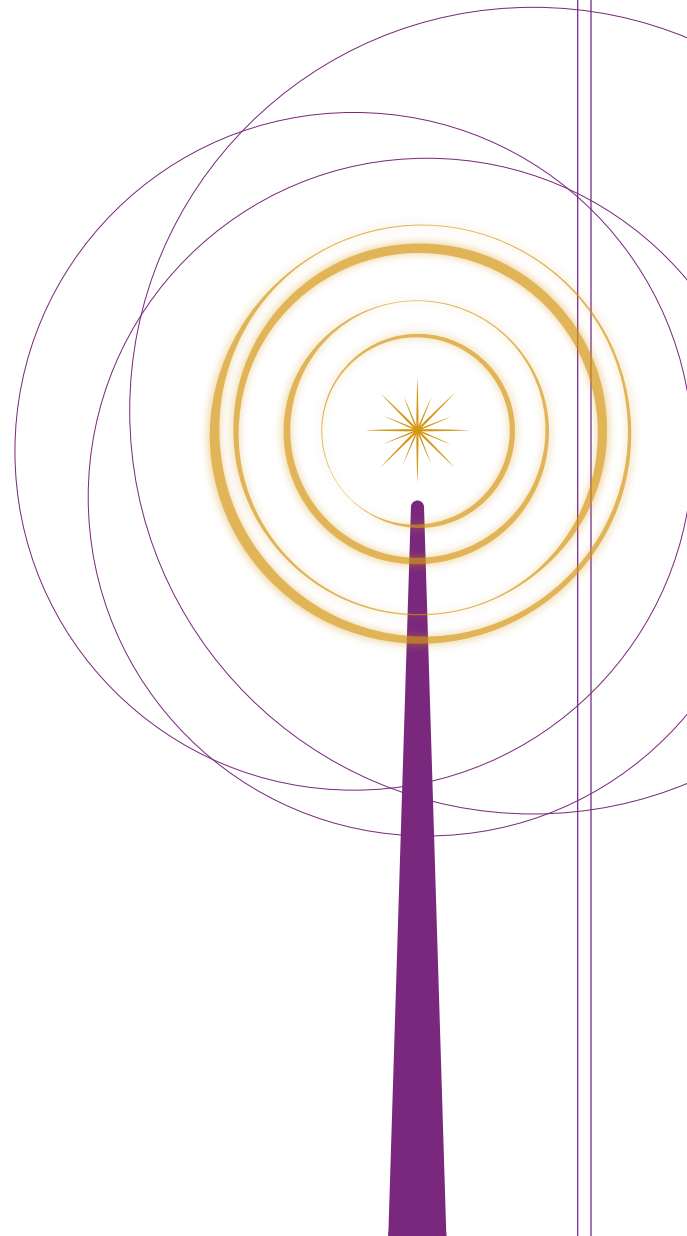


To the Manger: Sermon Outlines

Dear Pastor,

Preaching is one of the most significant pieces of the Sunday Worship Service. As we prepared resources for this Advent series, we realized that many pastors are not looking for sermons to be written out for them. Sometimes you are looking for a resource to help give a new perspective or to help spark some creativity or even to supplement what you are already doing. This resource is to simply provide you with some ideas about how to approach your sermons for the "To the Manger" advent series. This sermon series will invite you to examine the characters surrounding the Birth narrative of Jesus Christ. We will use an exegetical approach to the scriptures, provide you with an exegetical main idea, some supporting points and a few applications. As the preacher, use this resource as needed and change things as needed.

If you are using the monologues, the assumption was that the monologue would be earlier in the service, followed by the lighting of the advent candle. However, you might find you would prefer to put this after your sermon or at another point in the service. You might also find that with the addition of these elements you may wish to do a slightly shorter sermon. Again, please do what works best for your context.



Week 1: To the Manger: Mary – Hope in the Midst of Challenge

Scripture	Luke 1:26-38; 46-55
Exegetical Idea	Mary sings with hope and faith, obediently trusting God's plan

Introduction

In this sermon series, we are looking at those who came "to the manger."

One of the figures in this story that we know best is Mary, whose story begins before the major with a visit from an angel telling her the role she will have in God's plan.

She responds in obedience, singing a song. Mary's song, known as the Magnificat, is a song of praise that expresses Mary's faith and understanding of God. Themes found in the hymn are of God's mercy, justice and faithfulness.

Ultimately, Mary holds on to hope, even when she could not fully understand what would happen.

Background context

Luke 1:26-38

Explore the cultural implications of the angels' announcement for Mary

Explore Mary's willingness to faithfully obey God's plan

- What would this mean for Mary in her community?
- How would her life change?
- What would happen to someone in her position?

Ideas to explore:

Praising God in the midst of change - Luke 1:46-48

Mary's offers deep personal praise coming from her soul and spirit

Mary knows her ordinary and humble status and recognizes God's unmerited favour

Mary sees her blessing will go beyond her to future generations because of God's work

Application:

Reflect on our own attitudes of praise towards God

Reflect on our own attitudes when God does something out of the ordinary

Reflect on our own attitudes of God's unmerited favour towards us

Consider how God's work in our lives is to be a blessing beyond ourselves to future generations.

God's Mighty Works and Mercy - Luke 1:49-50

Describe God's greatness, holiness and unending mercy

Application:

What are the great things God has done in your life?

Do our lives reflect an understanding and acknowledgment of God's greatness, holiness and mercy?

God's Reversal - Luke 1:51-53

God acts with justice and power

Reversal – God brings down the proud and raises the humble

Reversal – God provides for the hungry and needy, rich are left empty

Application:

What are the ways God has acted justly and powerfully in your life?

Are we aligned with God's values of humility and justice?

God's Faithfulness - Luke 1:54-55

God keeps his promises – referencing Abrahamic covenant

God keeps his word

Application:

Can you take God at His word?

How have you seen God's faithfulness in your life?

Options for Reflection and Application

Share about a time in your life that you felt led by God to do something that felt risky or didn't make much sense. How did you find hope in the midst of that? How did you experience God's mercy in the midst of that?

Look to your own church. How does this story apply to circumstances your own church is facing where hope is needed? Is your church struggling financially, or seeking a time of challenge? How does Mary's story apply to you?

What about in the world around us? Consider situations where hope is needed:

- Areas of warfare
- Political tensions
- Recent news stories

What does Mary teach us about having hope in the midst of these struggles?

Conclusion

This season of advent, we make our way to the manger. Like Mary, how will we find hope in the story of Christ's birth where we need hope in our own lives?

Week 2: To the Manger – Joseph/Peace

Scripture	Matthew 1:18-25
Exegetical Idea	Finding peace in God's plan and promises

Introduction

This series invite us to join the figures in Scripture at the manger, as we come “to the manger” ourselves.

The passage of Matthew 1:18-25 gives us a glimpse into the character of Joseph and his role in the birth narrative of Jesus. This text highlight's themes of righteous decision-making and faithful obedience. This week as we light the candle of peace, it highlights the ways the peace of Christ can come through obedience.

Background Context

Joseph's Dilemma – Matthew 1:18-19

Explore the cultural pressure Joseph was experiencing

Explore how Joseph's plan for Mary demonstrates his righteousness and compassion

Application:

How do you handle difficult and unexpected situations?

How do we balance between righteousness and compassion?

How can trust in God bring peace in situations that seem unexplainable?

- Joseph's Decision – Matthew 1:20-25

Explore the message Joseph received

Prophetic fulfillment of Isaiah 7:14

Significance of Immanuel – God with us

Explore the cultural relevance of Joseph's immediate decision to obey

- What would this mean for Joseph?
- What would he give up?
- What challenges might he face?

Application

What is the significance of Immanuel – God with us to our daily lives

How do you experience and recognize God's presence in your life

- Joseph's Response – Matthew 1:24-25

Explore Joseph's role in protecting Mary and Jesus

Explore Joseph's role in providing for Mary and Jesus

Explore how Joseph fulfills God's plans

Application:

Reflect on your willingness to obey God's commands without hesitation.

Consider how you fulfill your responsibilities and commitments in light of God's guidance.

Reflection and Application

Where do you need peace in your life?

Where do we need peace in our community?

Where do we need peace in our world?

As you look for peace that passes understanding, how does coming "to the manger" speak to us? What does Joseph's example tell us?

Consider sharing examples in your own life of times that you found peace in a circumstance that was difficult to find peace.

Conclusion

The story of Joseph in Matthew 1:18-25 is a powerful example of righteous decision-making and faithful obedience. Joseph's response to God's call serves as an inspiration for us to trust and follow God's plan, even when it is difficult or unexpected.

Week 3: To the Manger: Shepherds/Joy

Scripture	Luke 2:8-20
Exegetical Idea	Humility is the precursor to Praise

Introduction

After Jesus was born, there was one group that rushed “to the manger” - the shepherds! The shepherds in Luke 2:8-20 is a narrative that demonstrates the humble beginnings of the Messiah’s revelation to the world. In this passage we see the themes of divine revelation, immediate obedience, and joyful proclamation.

- The Setting and the Shepherds - Luke 2:8

Explore cultural relevance of the Shepherds

Shepherds were very much a “low brow” job in the ancient world. They often live outside of the community, protecting the sheep from robbers as well as predators. This often meant that shepherds were themselves ceremonially unclean. But their job was important – sheep were used as part of the sacrifices in the Temple, so people depended on shepherds. Today, their job equivalent culturally might be that of a sanitation worker – much appreciated, but a job that was often “dirty” and avoided by many!

Yet, lowly and humble in society, yet God chose them as the first recipients of the news of Jesus' birth.

Night watch – is there a parallel with Christ (Light of the world) coming at during the night watch.

Application

God often chooses the humble and lowly to reveal His glory.

Reflect on how God can use you, regardless of your status or occupation.

- The Angelic Announcement - Luke 2:9-14

Explore cultural relevance of divine encounters – Fear, a common reaction to divine encounters.

Message of Joy - the angel's message was one of great joy for all people – the birth of a Savior, Christ the Lord.

Heavenly Host - the appearance of the multitude of angels praising God underscores the cosmic significance of Jesus' birth.

Application

Does God's message in your life bring fear or joy?

How do you respond to God's revelations and messages of hope?

- The Shepherds' Immediate Response - Luke 2:15-16

The shepherds did not delay; they went quickly to find Mary, Joseph, and the baby.

Their immediate response demonstrates their faith in the angel's message and their obedience to God's revelation.

Application

Reflect on your readiness to respond to God's call and direction in your life.

What are some practical steps to cultivate a heart of obedience and faith?

- The Encounter and Their Testimony - Luke 2:17-20

Witnessing the Messiah - the shepherds' encounter with Jesus confirmed the angel's message.

Spreading the Good News - they couldn't contain their joy and amazement, sharing the news with others, and all who heard were amazed.

Praise and Glory - the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had seen and heard.

Application

Are you willing to share your experiences of God's work in your life with others?

How can you incorporate praise and glory of God into your daily routine?

Reflection and Application

The Christmas season is said to be a joyful season. What does joy mean for us?

How is joy different than happiness?

Some of us may struggle to feel joy in this season – we may be grieving or struggling.

Yet, what does it mean to embrace the joy of Christ?

(Note: please be sure in this sermon to acknowledge this point – those who struggle over Christmas often feel overlooked in the season – acknowledging that some may struggle with joy is thoughtful and important)

Sometimes being a Christian is made to seem like a burden. Give examples of ways that Christians are seen as people who are anything but joyful. Examples

- Puritans wearing all black and being somber
- Not being “allowed” to take part in things that others see as fun or exciting
- The movie “Footloose” - the Christians were dour!
- Did you have examples from your own life?

Why do Christians struggle to live in joy? How can we embrace joy in our lives and see the good news that brings us joy?

Conclusion

There is joy at the manger, even in times when joy is hard to find. The shepherds' story in Luke 2:8-20 is an example of God's grace reaching the humble, the importance of immediate obedience, and the power of joyful proclamation. Where will you find joy “At the Manger” this season?

Week 4: To the Manger – The Magi/Love

Scripture	Matthew 2:1-12
Exegetical Idea	The inclusion of the Magi speaks to God's love for the whole world

Introduction

The magi would have met Jesus some time after the birth of Jesus, and likely long after his sleeping in the manger. While they likely weren't "at the manger" physically, we often see them in nativity scenes as reminders that they came to worship the newborn king. This passage in Matthew 2:1-12 highlights the themes of divine guidance, the pursuit of truth, and the recognition of Christ's kingship. It speaks to God's ultimate plan to bring salvation to all those who seek Him.

- The Arrival of the Magi - Matthew 2:1-2

Explore who were the Magi? Wise men or astrologers from the east, likely Persia or Babylon, who were knowledgeable in astronomy and ancient prophecies.

Stars were commonly believed in the ancient world to foretell significant events.

Some trace a connection to the time of exile, when God's people were in Babylon, as how these persian men would have learned that the Israelites were expecting a king.

They were seeking the King, and their journey signifies a genuine pursuit of truth and a desire to worship the true King.

The star they followed was a divine sign guiding them to the newborn King, showing God's initiative in revelation. God used a sign familiar to them to show His truth.

Application

Reflect on your own pursuit of truth and willingness to seek God.

Consider how God might be guiding you today and how you can respond.

What signs might God send you?

Sermon Illustration: Do you know a story of someone who God called using something completely unexpected or unusual? What about examples from Scripture? Consider God speaking through a donkey in the Old Testament! Sometimes God uses surprising things to speak to us!

- Herod's Disturbance and Deception - Matthew 2:3-8

Herod's reaction - fear and disturbance at the news of a new king threaten his rule and security. Deceptive Intentions - to use the Magi to find Jesus and pretend to acknowledge his kingship

Application

How does self-interest and fear distort our responses to God's work?

- The Magi's Journey and Worship - Matthew 2:9-11

Divine Guidance - the star continues to lead the Magi directly to Jesus, highlighting God's faithfulness.

Their response to Jesus - the Magi's immediate worship and presentation of gifts signify their recognition of Jesus' kingship, divinity, and sacrificial death.

Application

Reflect on your own acts of worship and how you honor Jesus.

Consider how you acknowledge Jesus' kingship in your daily life.

- The Magi's Obedience and Departure - Matthew 2:12

God's intervention through a dream to protect Jesus and the Magi from Herod's deceit.

Obedience and Change - the Magi's obedience to God's warning and their decision to return home by another route signify a transformation and a new direction in their lives.

Application

Reflect on how you respond to God's guidance and warnings.

Consider how encountering Jesus has changes the trajectory of your life.

Reflection and Application

Why would God make such an effort to call the magi "to the manger?"

What does this tell us about God's plan? We see now the fullness of God's story from that was set out to Abraham: For ALL The nations to be blessed! Jesus would be for EVERYONE!

If God sends a star to lead the wisemen, what does this tell us about God's love?

Who are you praying for to know Christ? This story reminds us that God is always at work to bring people know him. John 3:16 is a promise that we can hold on to!

Conclusion

The story of the Magi is a reminder of the universal call to seek and worship Jesus. It challenges us to pursue truth, recognize Jesus' kingship, and respond with obedience and worship. And it reminds us that God's love is for the whole world, who are all invited "to the manger."

BONUS! After Christmas – After the Manger (can be used the week or two after Christmas)

Scripture	Luke 2:25-38
Exegetical Idea	Recognizing God's faithful plan for salvation

Introduction

In Luke 2:25-38, we encounter two individuals, Simeon and Anna, who recognize and proclaim Jesus as the Messiah. Their stories highlight themes of faithful waiting, divine revelation, and joyful proclamation. This story reminds us that after the manger, God continues to call people to God's self.

- Simeon's Expectation and Revelation - Luke 2:25-27

Explore Simeon's character as a man of faith and dedication to God

His anticipation of the Messiah, a reflection of the hope of Israel.

Holy Spirit's presence and guidance in Simeon's life, leading him to the temple at the right time.

Application

Reflect on your own expectations and hope in God's promises.

Consider how you can be more attuned to the Holy Spirit's guidance in your life.

- Simeon's Recognition and Prophecy - Luke 2:28-35

Simeon's joyful praise for seeing the fulfillment of God's promise.

Simeon's recognition of Jesus as the Savior for all people, both Jews and Gentiles.

Simeon's prophecy about Jesus' impact on Israel and the pain Mary will experience.

Application

Reflect on the significance of Jesus as the Savior for all people.

Consider how you can share the good news of Jesus with others.

- Anna's Devotion and Proclamation - Luke 2:36-38

Anna's dedication to worship, prayer, and fasting in the temple.

Anna's presence at the temple at the moment of Jesus' presentation, guided by divine timing.

Anna's immediate response to share the news of the Messiah with those awaiting redemption.

Application

Reflect on your own dedication to worship, prayer, and fasting.

Consider how you can actively share the hope of redemption found in Jesus.

Conclusion

The stories of Simeon and Anna in Luke 2:25-38 are powerful testimonies of faithful waiting, divine revelation, and joyful proclamation. Their recognition of Jesus as the Messiah inspires us to trust in God's promises, be guided by the Holy Spirit, and share the good news of salvation.