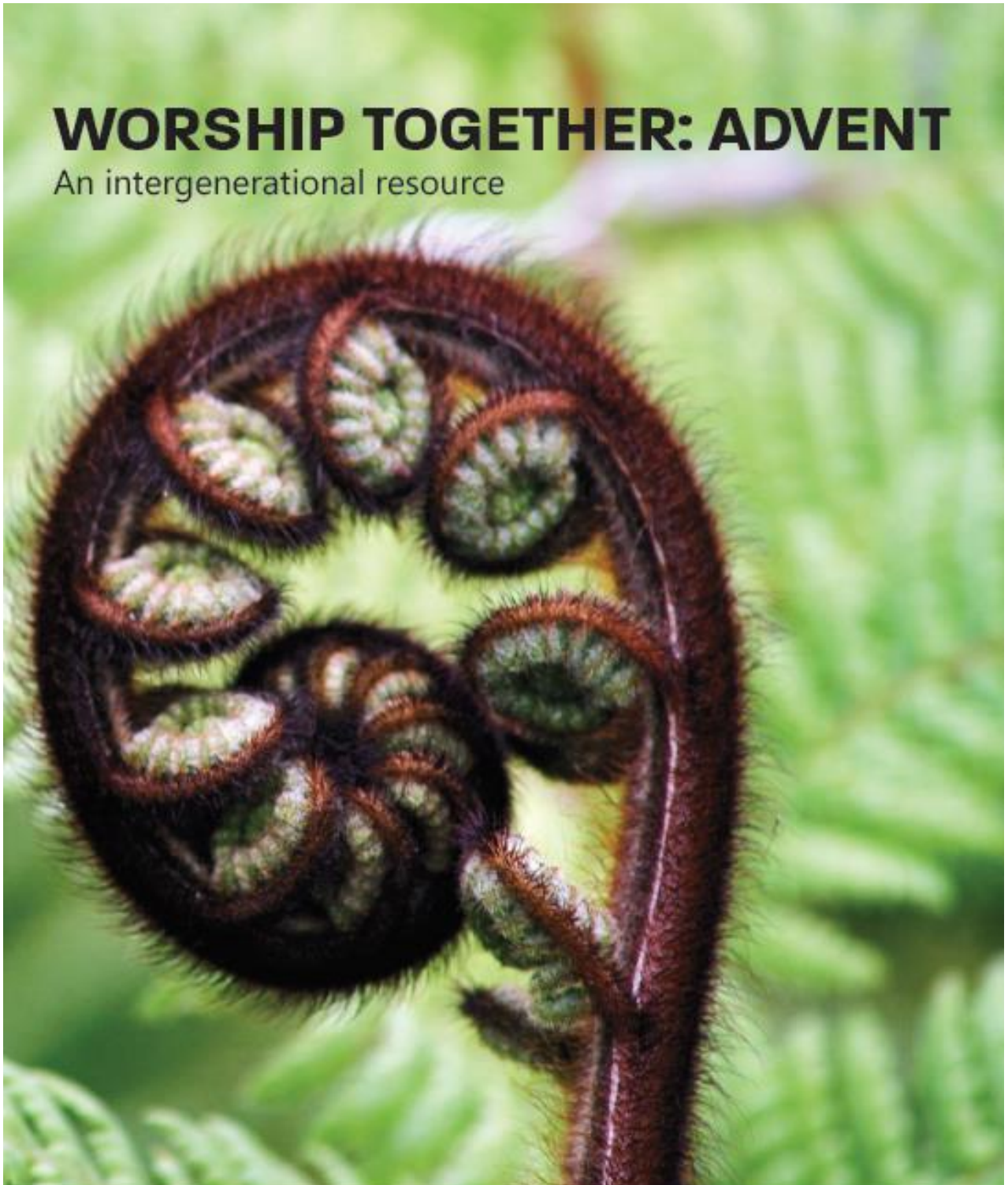


WORSHIP TOGETHER: ADVENT

An intergenerational resource



Introduction

Advent is a time of waiting and watching. In this resource we have created opportunities for all God's people to wait and watch together. Some of us, like Simeon and Anna have been waiting for decades, and we're very good at it. Our children and young people can learn something from that kind of faithfulness. Some of us, like Simeon and Anna, have been waiting for decades and we're tired. Our children and young people can help us rediscover the excitement and anticipation that comes with keeping an eye out for God. Our hope is that this resource might help your congregation give and receive gifts with one another, as we watch for the coming of God's great gift to the world.

Creating this resource

This resource was created by a group of talented intergenerational worship practitioners. Over a day we mapped out the characters with whom we wanted to journey through Advent. We chose to merge the Koru with the Advent wreath, to suggest a pathway to the centre where we can meet Christ. A pathway that is winding and one where we can't always distinguish the ending from the beginning. We gathered around our Koru-wreath-pathway. We used Lectio Divina to attend to each passage and hear what God was saying to us. We asked: 'what could it look like to pray this with the whole church?', 'how could we sing this?', 'how might we hear God speak?'

This resource is a collaboration between Kids Friendly and the Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership. Find out more about our contributors at the end of the resource. We hope that this is the beginning of a series of resources to encourage and facilitate intergenerational worship in our churches. © 2016 PCANZ

Resource contributors: Jane Davis Rae: Jane is a member of Highgate Presbyterian Church, Dunedin and served for a time as their children's ministry leader; Christine Harrex: Christine lives in the small rural Otago town of Lawrence Waitahuna with her parish minister husband Andrew and their four children; Brendon McRae: Brendon is the minister of Flagstaff Community Church in Dunedin; Cheryl Harray: Cheryl is the Kids Friendly Advisor for Otago Southland and Hilltop Family Church leader; Malcolm Gordon: Malcolm is the Worship, Music and Arts Enabler for the Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership, songwriter and creative liturgist.

Using this resource

This resource is a gift to stimulate your imagination and provide fresh multisensory ideas for approaching the four Sundays of Advent. There are a variety of ways you can use it:

- Do everything that is suggested! Craft it into a whole service by interspersing it with your own music, notices etc. A good total length for an intergenerational service is 45-60 minutes. Finish with morning tea together!
- Pick and mix from this resource to complement the themes and favourite traditions you do each year.
- Take just one idea (especially if you are new to intergenerational worship) and give it a go!

Encourage ALL ages to contribute: Where a leader or narrator or actor is suggested, think about who you could ask in advance to do that part. Have a range of voices and ages involved each week, children, teens and adults of different ages.



Creating the Koru wreath: The very simplest one illustrated (using river stones and candles) can be put together in 5 minutes! Think about your space and where to put it so people can see and interact with it. You could also make a living wreath with ferns and plants, or driftwood, fabric, large stones, bricks... Create something that fits on a low table or create a Koru wreath labyrinth to walk around. Let your 'creatives' loose!

PowerPoint slides: for all the responsive parts to this resource are available to download from www.kidsfriendly.org.nz

Bible reading visuals: For weeks 2 to 4 you may like to use images to go with the Bible reading. A readymade source of photo images as PowerPoints and accompanying story planners can be found at www.freebibleimages.org See each week for the particular reference.

Music: Some suggestions are given at the end of the resource, recognising that each church has its own repertoire of songs and may also want to sing some Christmas carols during this season.

A Theology of Intergenerational Worship (or, 'A Good Reason to Try')

One of the defining features of Jesus' ministry was his way of being at the table. He continued to make waves by having the 'wrong' people present. He would be invited to a Pharisee's table, but with Jesus you also got rough-edged fishermen, dubious tax collectors, and the women of ill-repute who followed him everywhere. While we can easily see the *wrongness* of the situation, let's not forget to pay attention to the holy *rightness*. Mother Teresa said the problems of the world were rooted in the fact that we have forgotten we belong to one another. Jesus wasn't coming to offend *us* by bringing *them* into the room. He was coming to show us that where we see difference and division, he sees kinship.

Worshipping with people who are different to us is a missional and prophetic act. It aligns us with the witness of Jesus that nothing that can come between us is as significant as the love and life of God that holds us together. Paul writes to the Colossians these words:

So spacious is he, so roomy, that everything of God finds its proper place in him without crowding. Not only that, but all the broken and dislocated pieces of the universe - people and things, animals and atoms - get properly fixed and fit together in vibrant harmonies, all because of his death, his blood that poured down from the Cross.

(Colossians 1:19-20 MSG)

We have broken up our worshipping communities along the lines of age, learning ability and life stage. We have thought that the demands of faith formation require it. That grown up needs grown up church. That kids need 'kids church' and teenagers need something different again. That each ethnicity needs their own language exclusively (and that we don't). While these motives have been well intentioned, the result has been the fragmentation of the one community that is meant to be bigger and more robust than all that. In our eagerness to 'meet the needs' of those coming, and those we would like to see coming (note that 'meet the needs' is a phrase right out of Consumerism 101, not the gospels) we have broken up our faith community, hoping to better grow people in their love of God. But any worship that leads us to God will also, always lead us to our neighbour. And as the story of the Good Samaritan reminds us, the question, 'and who is my neighbour' will not always give us the answers we want or expect. In worship we find that the child with ADHD is our neighbour. In worship we are invited to consider the truth that God is dwelling uniquely in the young person with Down's Syndrome. As we sing and pray together, we are ushered into a family where the labels, 'stranger,' 'immigrant' and 'little ratbag' are laid aside and replaced with the language of

whanau, family. In worship we are invited to a table, not with people of our class or colour, but with other broken fragments of melody which are fit together into vibrant harmonies.

So can our worship move toward being more intergenerational? More intercultural? We tend to imagine mission as being something that takes place outside the church building. But this kind of worship is thoroughly missional. It follows Jesus who leads us saying, 'Let's go over to the other side' (Mark 4:35) and makes peace with the messiness and the majesty of doing life with those who are different to us. Maybe the first barrier we can cross over is the one between our children, teenagers and our older folk. This resource is designed to help you do that.

Rev Malcolm Gordon
Worship, Music and Arts Enabler
Knox Centre for Ministry and Leadership



Advent 1

Sunday 27th November

Simeon and Anna

Luke 2:21-40

ADVENT WREATH/KORU LITURGY



Leader: Living God as your people here in Aotearoa, we gather in this time of expectation. With Simeon and Anna and the saints through the ages we wait and we hope, for the unfurling of your promise.

(Light the first Advent candle)

All: We hear God call to us: Kia Kaha/be strong.

Leader: And so we look forward in hope for the coming Christ Child.

All: Emmanuel God with us.

Amen

INTRODUCTION TO THE BIBLE READING

Leader: This Advent we wait and watch for God.

All: For God is coming and God has something to say.

READING: Luke 2:21-40

(This is dramatized as below. Arrange two older members of the congregation to play the parts of Simeon and Anna. Perhaps have them discreetly put on some pieces of costume once they are sitting among the congregation. They call out their lines from their seats until instructed to move in the script. Big voices or microphones will be needed.)

Narrator: Eight days later Jesus' parents did for him what the Law of Moses commands. And they named him Jesus, just as the angel had told Mary when he promised she would have a baby.

The time came for Mary and Joseph to do what the Law of Moses says a mother is supposed to do after her baby is born.

Simeon: Is it time yet?

Narrator: Not yet.

They took Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem and presented him to the Lord, just as the Law of the Lord says, "Each first-born baby boy belongs to the Lord." The Law of the Lord also says that parents have to offer a sacrifice, giving at least a pair of doves or two young pigeons. So that is what Mary and Joseph did.

Simeon: How about now?

Narrator: Nearly.

At this time a man named Simeon was living in Jerusalem.

Simeon: *(Standing up)* Oh this is my moment!

Narrator: Not quite. *(Simeon sits down, sighing patiently)*

Simeon was a good man. He loved God and was waiting for God to save the people of Israel. God's Spirit came to him and told him that he would not die until he had seen Christ the Lord.

(Simeon stands up slowly, the Narrator shakes her/his head. Simeon sits down again, smiling apologetically.)

When Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the temple to do what the Law of Moses says should be done for a new baby, the Spirit told Simeon to go into the temple. Simeon took the baby Jesus in his arms and praised God,

Simeon: *(Simeon leaps to his feet and proclaims enthusiastically.)*

"Lord, I am your servant, and now I can die in peace,
because you have kept your promise to me.
With my own eyes I have seen
what you have done to save your people,
and foreign nations will also see this.
Your mighty power is a light for all nations,
and it will bring honour to your people Israel."

(Simeon beams at everyone, very pleased with himself.)

Narrator:

Jesus' parents were surprised at what Simeon had said. Then he blessed them and told Mary:

Simeon: This child of yours will cause many people in Israel to fall and others to stand. The child will be like a warning sign. Many people will reject him, and you,

Mary, will suffer as though you had been stabbed by a dagger. But all this will show what people are really thinking.

Anna: *(Calling out, as she is hard of hearing.)* Will it be my turn soon?

Narrator: We're almost there, I promise!

The prophet Anna was also there in the temple. She was the daughter of Phanuel from the tribe of Asher, and she was very old. In her youth she had been married for seven years, but her husband died.

Anna: *(Muttering to herself.)* I've been waiting a lot longer than young Simeon there!

Narrator: *(Hurriedly)* And then she lived for eighty-four more years as a widow. Night and day she served God in the temple by praying and often going without eating. At that time Anna came in and praised God. *(Beckoning Anna)*

Anna: *(Jumping up)* Listen here everyone! Let's praise God! This is what I've been waiting for for the last 100 years, this is what we've *all* been waiting for. This is what all creation has been longing to see. This baby is God's hope and promise for everyone. He's going to bring freedom to God's people, and beyond! *(To the Narrator)* Shall I keep going?

Narrator: *(Giving her the thumbs up)* That's just perfect *(Sighing with relief)* I'll take it from here.

After Joseph and Mary had done everything that the Law of the Lord commands, they returned home to Nazareth in Galilee. The child Jesus grew. He became strong and wise, and God blessed him.

REFLECTION



This is a painting by artist Fyfe Blair. It's of Simeon and Anna. The colours he's used all mean something. Blue is the colour of heaven and the Kingdom of God. Red is the colour of humanity and resurrection. They are surrounded by colours as well. White symbolises purity, yellow the presence of God, and there are hints of green which speak of hope.

Some of you might want to have a go at creating your own picture of Simeon and Anna. We have crayons and paper here at the front for anyone (young or old) who'd like to have a go.

(Have a song to allow time for people to get organised.)

Reflective questions

(led by the minister)

For the rest of us. The artist sees Simeon and Anna as quiet, humble characters, almost in the background of this story. So he has left their faces undefined. Yet in this moment of the story they take centre stage.

I wonder how they managed to wait and hope for so long, and yet be so certain when Jesus appeared?

Both Anna and Simeon are in tune with the Holy Spirit, hoping for the sort of world God is hoping for. This is why the artist has painted them wearing blue, the colour of heaven and God's kingdom.

I wonder if what I am hoping for, and what you are hoping for, line up with what God is hoping for? Are our hopes dressed in blue?

Simeon is holding one hand up in a symbol of peace, and a symbol of sorrow in the other (a cross).

**I wonder what is something in your life that is 'just ok', but could be better? I wonder what does hope look like in that situation?
I also wonder what is not ok in your life, and you need God's peace to balance the sorrow?**

Anna and Simeon are surrounded by yellow and white and touches of green, colours that speak of purity, divinity and hope.

Can you imagine being surrounded by these things?

Everyone else was waiting for a very different kind of Messiah; a conquering messiah, a fully grown messiah. Yet Anna and Simeon see Jesus, a peasant baby and they celebrate God's arrival in their midst. It seems hope starts small and fragile.

I wonder how hope might be happening in your life? Remember, you may need to look closely, and use your imagination!

PRAYING WITH OUR HANDS



God has spoken to our heads and our hearts.
Now let us respond in prayer with hopeful hands.

(Invite people to hold their hands as if they were cradling a baby during this prayer.)

Leader: Oh God of Hope, we are so used to thinking of you holding us in your hands, but Simeon and Anna held you in theirs. We remember that you and your hope came to us small and fragile.

All: Help us to hold hope gently.

Space/Silence

Leader: We confess we want everything to happen straight away, but you are building a world to last forever, and are prepared to take the time to do it right.

All: Help us to be patient and let hope grow.

Space/Silence

Leader: There are many who are fragile and weak, many who can be cut down by unkindness and injustice. Yet your hope is planted in these very lives.

All: Help us to guard the hopeless that hope might appear.

Space/Silence

Leader: In our waiting and our watching, hold onto us God as we hold onto hope.

Amen.

Advent 2

Sunday 4th December
John the Baptist
Matthew 3:1-12

ADVENT WREATH/KORU LITURGY



Leader: Living God, as your people here in Aotearoa we gather in this time of expectation. With Simeon and Anna we wait and we hope.

(Light the first Advent candle)

Leader: With John the Baptist and the saints through the ages we empty ourselves for the unfurling of your promise.

(Light the second Advent candle)

All: We hear God call to us: Kia Kaha/be strong.

Leader: And so we empty ourselves to prepare for the coming Christ Child.

All: Emanuel God with us.

Amen

INTRODUCTION TO THE BIBLE READING

Leader: This Advent we wait and watch for God.

All: For God is coming and God has something to say.

READING: Matthew 3:1-12



Download free Bible story images to use in your PowerPoint:
<http://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/john-baptist/>

EXPLORE

You can hide the items around the sanctuary so when you ask for them people bring them up and add them to the bowl. Or you can simply have them up the front already. You'll need:

- *A large glass mixing bowl*
- *A jug of water*
- *Some fluff or hair (preferably from a camel, but a soft toy or sheepskin will do)*
- *Plastic insects*
- *Honey*
- *Jelly snakes*
- *An apple*
- *A parsnip or carrot*
- *A tomahawk*
- *Some grain*
- *A ladle*

This story is so full of strange images and weird ideas. Let's see if we can make any sense of them. The people were going out to the river to be baptised. So let's start with some water (*pour water into big bowl*). Then there was John the Baptist, who wore camel's air (*sprinkle in some fluff*), and ate bugs and honey (*pour in some plastic bugs and honey*). People came out to be baptised. But when the religious rulers came out, John got angry because they thought they were better than everyone else. He called them snakes (*add jelly snakes to the bowl*). Then he told them to grow fruit (*add an apple*) or he was going to chop the root (*add a parsnip*) of the tree with an axe (*add a tomahawk*). Then he said that some people had lives like wheat, the good grain, and other people had lives like the husks that were only good to be thrown away (*add grain*).

So who's thirsty? (*Give a glass to each person who brought up an item.*)

What a mess! This is a bit like the people's lives John was trying to helping. Our lives can get jumbled and messy. They can get full of too many good things, until the good things turn bad, or too many bad things, until the good things seem completely lost or ruined. We can get so busy, so burdened, that we can't see our way out. The water gets murky. It makes us sick. What can we do?

What would John the Baptist do with water like this? What would you do? Tip it out?

Yes but tipping it out means the bowl will be empty. And there are jelly snakes in that bowl. I LOVE jelly snakes. And there is honey, I LOVE honey. And if I empty the bowl, then I won't have *anything*. Surely this murky muck is better than nothing.

John the Baptist would say its not. He would tell us that emptiness is a great place to start, because it means God can fill us up. He would encourage us not to hold onto things that make us busy, or sad, or sick. Repentance is making a space for God to come and give us life. That means we have to make some room, and that means some things have to go.

ACT OF REPENTANCE/EMPTYING

We're going to listen to/sing a song now (*Suggestion: Psalm 51, 'Create in me a clean heart'*). As we do, you are welcome to come and ladle out some of this murky muck and pour it into this big black bin. We're going to do this as an act of repentance, as a way of saying to God, 'We want less of this gunk and more of you in our lives.'

(Play song while people come up and ladle out "gunk". At end of song pour the remainder out)

Now we are empty. Some of us might not like the idea of being empty. It might make us feel vulnerable or exposed. We might have worked hard to be full or keep busy. But God is asking us to slow down and let go. Some of our ancestors in the faith said that if we have full hands we can never receive from God. But if we have empty hands, we can receive God's abundance.

Part of the Advent journey is making sure we have room to receive Jesus, somewhere he can stay when he arrives. The waiting continues. We are making space for God. We are preparing the way. John the Baptist would be proud.

PRAYING WITH OUR HANDS



God has spoken to our heads and our hearts.
Now let us respond in prayer with empty hands.

(Invite people to pray with their hands held in a cupped shape)

Leader: O God who fills...

All: We come to you with open hands.

Leader: We hear the words of John the Baptist
who came to prepare the way.

We let go of those things... that distract and

block us, that get in the way or hold us down, that snag us or trip us up.

Space/Silence

Leader: O God who fills and empties

All: Let us not confuse emptiness with nothingness, or being alone with loneliness.

Leader: For though we rid ourselves of the clamour and distractions,
we do not rid ourselves of you.

In all this subtraction we are *adding* room for you.

Space/Silence

Leader: O God who fills and empties and fills again.

All: Let us share our emptiness and so be comforted and grounded.

Leader: And when our hands are filled and the goodness of your life and love
runs over the brim,

remind us to share our fullness also.

For you are with us always.

Space/Silence

Leader: O God grant us courage to linger in this empty space and grace to
treasure it as we wait.

Amen.

Advent 3

Sunday 11th December

Joseph

Matthew 1:18-24

ADVENT WREATH/KORU LITURGY

Leader: Living God as your people here in Aotearoa we gather in this time of expectation.



With Simeon and Anna we wait and we hope.

(Light the first Advent candle)

With John the Baptist we empty ourselves for the unfurling of your promise.

(Light the second Advent candle)

With Joseph and the saints through the ages we receive the unexpected for the unfurling of your promise.

(Light the third Advent candle)

All: We hear God call to us: Kia Kaha/Be strong.

Leader: And so we watching closely for the coming Christ Child.

All: Emmanuel God with us.

Special Delivery

(Have someone dressed as a postie or delivery person, enter carrying a large box and place it up the front of the sanctuary. Sign for the box.)

What's this? Was anyone expecting a delivery here at church this morning? How strange! Who wants to help me open it?

(Open the box on a tarpaulin. It's full of dirt.)

Aw yuck! What would we want with a pile of dirt here! And we're all in our good clothes. Is this a joke?! Oh well, I feel sorry for whoever is on the cleaning roster this week. *(Leave it at that until referred to again later in the drama with Joseph.)*

INTRODUCTION TO THE BIBLE READING

Leader: This Advent we wait and watch for God.

All: For God is coming and God has something to say.

READING: Matthew 1:18-24



Download free Bible story images to use in your PowerPoint:
<http://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/joseph-angel/>

Interview with Joseph

(Joseph is a very quiet man, reluctant to talk about himself and more comfortable letting his deeds do the talking.)

Interviewer: We're delighted to have Joseph with us here in church this morning. It's great you could make it along, I realise this must be a very busy time of year for you.

Joseph: No trouble.

Interviewer: So we've heard this amazing story about you and your fiancée Mary, and we understand that congratulations are in order. When are you getting married?

Joseph: It's already happened.

Interviewer: Gosh, that was quick. I heard you were engaged, but I didn't know things were moving that quickly. What, no big party?

Joseph: Well, no. Things didn't quite work out as I thought they would.

Interviewer: Ah, is this the mysterious pregnancy you're talking about?

Joseph: I suppose so.

Interviewer: Because it's certainly caused quite a stir in local circles. The synagogue prayer chain has been buzzing with it, purely out of pastoral concern I'm sure.

Joseph: Yeah, people are pretty quick to jump to their own conclusions.

Interviewer: Well you must admit, it doesn't look good. It's quite a scandal. And the question I have is, why wouldn't you cut and run? Because now you look like a bit of a fool.

Joseph: Maybe I am. But I believe Mary. I was going to call it off, but something happened, and I decided I wouldn't leave her on her own. A life is precious, no matter where it comes from.

Interviewer: So *what* happened?

Joseph: Ah, I don't need to talk about that.

Interviewer: But you must help me understand why you'd *choose* to marry a girl when she's pregnant to someone else!

Joseph: Don't get me wrong. It's not the script I'd have written if I was in charge. But I'm not in charge. I didn't get the choice between Mary with a baby, or Mary without one. I just got the choice between looking after her and loving her, or leaving her to fend for herself. It's not the life I thought I'd have, but now that I'm in it, I wouldn't change it.

Interviewer: Really? Because some people think your reputation has been ruined by falling in with this Mary girl. They say you're both tarnished now.

Joseph: Well, things aren't always what they look like from a distance. (*Getting up and moving over to the box of dirt, picking it up and tipping it out on the tarpaulin.*) Like this dirt. Has anyone actually had a good look at it? Sure it's not what you were expecting. It's not what you wanted. But sometimes you aren't expecting or wanting something because you don't really know what you need. The wee one Mary has in her, he's going to be something special. Rumour has it he's going to save the world. He hasn't arrived the way I thought he might. But I am so glad he *is* arriving, and I'll do what I can to help it happen.

Interviewer: Thanks, this has been.....weird. (*Walks off shaking head.*)

Digging in the Dirt

(*Joseph crouches down near the dirt*)

Joseph: Sometimes it feels like life has dumped a big pile of manure on your church carpet. But there might be treasures hidden in that dirt. Who wants to help me see if there's anything hidden in here?

(*Invite people to search through the dirt. There are lots of different seeds hidden in the dirt. Explain what each seed can become if it's looked after properly.*)

PRAYING WITH OUR HANDS



Leader: God has spoken to our heads and our hearts. Now let us respond in prayer with treasuring hands.

(Invite people to clasp their hands like they are holding something small and precious in them. You could ask a child to be the leader of this prayer.)

Leader: God of Holy surprises,
we pray with our minds on Joseph,
who was so brave in taking life as it came to
him, not as he wished it, but finding the gift of
God in what seemed like scandal and shame.

**All: Help us to be brave like Joseph.
Help us to hear your voice and do what is courageous and right.
Help us to learn what you call precious, to search it out and save it.**

Leader: In dust and in dirt, help us dig for the seed of your life and love
Surprise us God, keep us on our toes.
It's like a holy game of hide and seek, and we can't wait to play with you.

All: Ready or not, here we come!

Amen.

(Leave some small plastic planting pots around the edge of the tarpaulin. Invite people to come and take some dirt and a seed as a reminder to look for God in the unexpected and unpleasant things that come our way.)



Possible song suggestion

'Hidden Treasure' by Malcolm Gordon

<https://soundcloud.com/malcolm-gordon-3/hidden-treasure>

Advent 4

Sunday 18th December
Mary and Elizabeth
Luke 1:39-45

ADVENT WREATH/KORU LITURGY:



Leader: Living God as your people here in Aotearoa we gather in this time of expectation.

With Simeon and Anna we wait and we hope.

(Light the first Advent candle)

With John the Baptist we empty ourselves for the unfurling of your promise.

(Light the second Advent candle)

With Joseph we receive the unexpected.

(Light the third Advent candle)

With Mary and Elizabeth and the saints through the ages we believe together for the unfurling of your promise.

(Light the fourth Advent candle)

All: We hear God call to us: Kia Kaha/be strong.

Leader: And so we gather together to prepare for the coming Christ Child.

All: Emmanuel God with us.

POST-IT AFFIRMATION

(Put some affirming words on the screen or in the bulletin like, 'kind', 'generous', 'brave', 'patient', 'humble', 'wise', 'thoughtful' etc. Have some post-it notes, or plain sticky labels available. Invite people to think about people they know in the church community and write an affirming word that describes them on a label. Then invite them to stick that word on the person's back so they can't read it. Encourage people to do 4 or 5 each. Have leaders keep an eye out for those who don't have many/any stickers and ensure all are affirmed.)

INTRODUCTION TO THE BIBLE READING

Leader: This Advent we wait and watch for God.

All: For God is coming and God has something to say.

READING: Luke 1:39-45



Download free Bible story images to use in your PowerPoint:
<http://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/mary-elizabeth/>

REFLECTION

(We suggest using the free images to illustrate this story on PowerPoint
<http://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/mary-elizabeth/>)*

A writer names Henri Nouwen thinks the passage we just heard is one of the most beautiful stories in the whole Bible. You see, something wonderful is happening to Mary and Elizabeth. Mary is too young and too unmarried to be having a baby. But God has made it happen. And Elizabeth is too old to be having a baby, but God has made it happen. So it's wonderful, but it's also very strange. This is not the sort of thing that normally happens. Mary and Elizabeth are both waiting for their babies to arrive, but they are also trying to believe what is happening is for real. That this is really God's doing.

**(slide 6)* When Mary arrives, Elizabeth feels her baby leap in her womb. It helped Elizabeth know that this something strange and wonderful, was also something very real and believable. She felt the truth in her tummy, and then her head started to catch up.

**(slide 7)* Elizabeth bursts out with, 'Why am I so lucky that the mother of my Lord should come to me!?' Then she says, 'Blessed is the one who believes God will keep his promises to her.'

**(Slide 8)* And then Mary breaks into song, celebrating that what is happening in her is real. She begins to see how she, small, young Mary, is in the very centre of God's amazing plan to save the world. And it is Elizabeth who helps her see it.

**(slide 10)* I bet she had some doubts as she travelled on her own to visit Elizabeth. I bet she wondered if she'd made up the dream with the Angel in her head. But she can't escape it now, she can't explain it away. It's a truth that isn't just in *her* now, but Elizabeth has seen it and *felt* it as well. She is caught up in something bigger. This is God's doing.

*(slide 9) In a way this is what we are called to be for each other in the church. We get to offer space to one another as we wait for God's life to grow in each of us, and we get to celebrate it when we see it. At times we might have doubts, or questions that scare us. I wonder if you've ever found it hard to believe in what God says, or even in God at all! But we aren't alone.

Henri Nouwen writes that the church is 'where we keep the flame alive among us and take it seriously, so that it can grow and become stronger in us.' In this community we keep courage alive when the world tells us to be afraid. In this community we keep compassion and generosity alive when the world tells us to be selfish and look after ourselves at the expense of others. In this community we keep forgiveness alive when the world tells us getting even is better. We do this all together in the words we pray, the songs we sing, the stories God tells us and the friendships we share.

Think about it like this. If you look at your body, can you see it all? (*Invite people to try.*) If I'm looking at my front I can't see my back. If I try to look at my back, I can't see most of it anyway, and then I can't see my front at all! I can't see even my own face. That's true with my body, and I think it's just as true with our lives on the inside. Maybe there are things about us we need others to help us see. Things that we might not believe on our own, but other people can see and help us to take seriously. God's life is growing in you, you just might need a little help to see it.

Sticker Reveal

So, each of us have some stickers on our backs. These are words that speak of who you are as other people see you. Let's take some time to peel them off and have a look, and do our best to believe that what people see is true. Remember, there's lots of who we are that we can't see, and this morning we're getting a little bit of help.



Possible song suggestion: 'Hey Mary' by Sam and Malcolm Gordon:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PVoGcumJwnq>)

PRAYING WITH OUR HANDS



Leader: God has spoken to our heads and our hearts. Now let us respond in prayer with our hands.

(Invite people to hold the hands of those next to them, or hold their own hands together, whichever is most appropriate in your context.)

Leader: God of community.
We remember Mary and Elizabeth, and the way they helped each other believe.
We remember that you are a family of Father, Son and Holy Spirit who do life together (*or*

Parent, Child and Holy Spirit.)

All: We are surrounded by you.

Leader: And we are together.
May our togetherness look like the way you are together.
May we be gentle and encouraging.
May we be excited as we see the sparks of your Spirit in each other.

All: We are surrounded by you.

Leader: Help us to affirm the wonder of our sisters and brothers, because God's life is growing in us all.
Help us to receive kind and true words from others,
Remembering that we can't see everything and we need some help.
We are not alone on this journey.

All: We are surrounded by you.

Leader: And when we leave this place, may we look all the more keenly for the signs of your life in those we meet, for you are not bound by the walls of our church.
Wherever we meet you God, help us to celebrate.
For you love to surprise us God and we are learning to love being surprised.

All: We are surrounded by you.

Amen.

WRAP UP BENEDICTION:

(This interactive prayer is designed to help gather up the four weeks of Advent and tie them together. You will need people to appear as the characters from the previous weeks: (Simeon and Anna, John the Baptist, Joseph, Mary and Elizabeth. Make sure they are recognisable, or take the time to welcome them and introduce them. Have them stand around the sanctuary. Each has a ball of yellow or brown wool. During the final song, they throw the ball of wool to someone in the congregation, while holding the end. The congregation members throw it on while still holding on to it. With 4 or 5 balls of wool on the go, this should make a big web and an even bigger tangle. At the end of the song, invite everyone to take hold of the nearest strand if they haven't already.)

Leader: *(or those characters could say their line from where they are standing.)*

With **Mary and Elizabeth**, we find ourselves connected to a story much bigger than us, but a story in which we play a very important part.

With **Joseph**, we are surprised and unsettled, but we are learning to trust.

With **John the Baptist** we are letting things go and making room.

With **Anna and Simeon** we are waiting and watching.

All: And we do not wait alone, but together,
For the unfurling of God's promise.

(Option: conclude by saying the Grace together)

Amen.

FINAL ACT OF PREPARATION FOR CHRISTMAS DAY

Gather up the tangled wool. Invite people to help. Passing it overhead to the front will be easiest. Then take the wool and bundle it up, and place it in the manger. It will look like straw, and people can see that we have made a space for Jesus to come into our midst.



Song/hymn suggestions

Hymns:

O come O come Emmanuel
My soul doth magnify the Lord
Dear Lord and Father of mankind
May the mind of Christ my Saviour
Take my life and let it be consecrated Lord to thee

Contemporary songs:

Create in me a clean heart, O God (Keith Green)
My soul does magnify the Lord (Scripture in Song)
Here I am to worship (Tim Hughes)
Jesus, be the centre (Michael Frye)
This is my desire to honour you... Lord I give you my heart...
Glorified (Shaun Griffiths, Parachute Band)
Brother sister let me serve you (Richard Gillard), (week 4)
Our God is a great big God... and he holds us in his hands

Songs from 2010 on:

Beneath the Southern Cross (Malcolm Gordon)
Christ before me (Malcolm Gordon)
I am waiting for the dawning (Malcolm Gordon)
We belong (Catherine Burton, Tessa Macaulay, Zoe Henderson) (week 4)
In you we live and have our being (Sue Mephram)
Song for the Road (Natalie Yeoman), (week 4)
This I believe (Ben Fielding, Matt Crocker) (week 4)
Come as you are (David Crowder), (week 2)
Te Aroha (let love, faith and peace unite us, (week 4)

