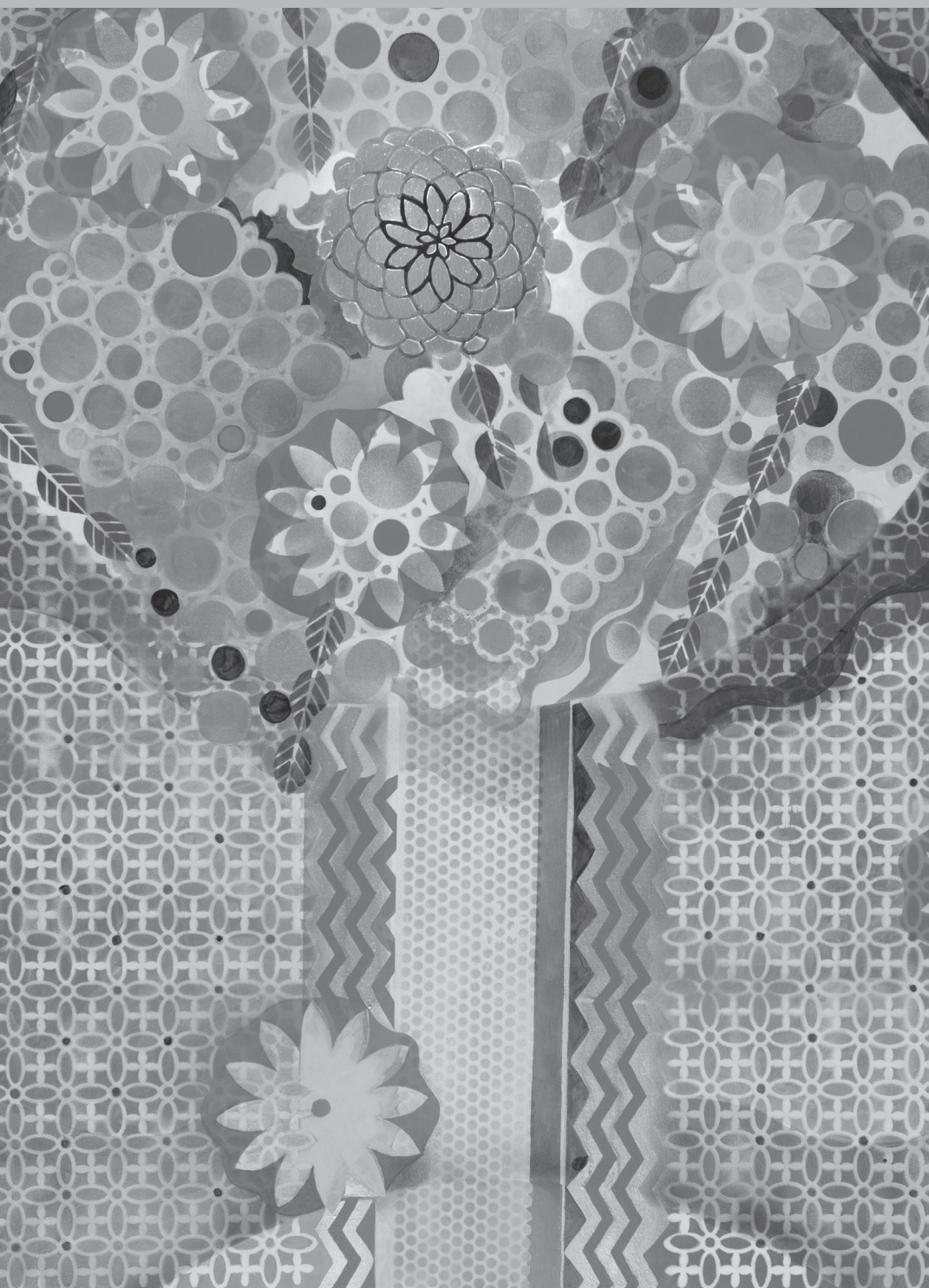


# SUNDAYS AND SEASONS

YEAR C 2019





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## Introduction

### Welcome to the 2019 edition

Did you know that *Sundays and Seasons* has been a trusted worship planning resource for almost a quarter of a century? Maybe you have been relying on *Sundays and Seasons* since its inception. Perhaps you are encountering it for the first time. You are welcome here! As it has from the beginning, the Sundays and Seasons family of resources continues to support week-by-week planning for Lutherans with content and ideas shaped by the Revised Common Lectionary, the church year, and the assembly gathered around word and sacrament. Worship leaders from around this church have shared how much they depend on it for their planning. One user notes, “I depend on all the pieces to help me plan worship that relates to the day’s texts, is Lutheran in its theology and writing, and introduces me to the hymns that will inspire and encourage faith . . . I depend on the writing, the prayers, the connections. I would be lost without this resource.”

Sundays and Seasons has expanded beyond a single print volume into a family of resources that includes a robust online planning tool, [sundaysandseasons.com](http://sundaysandseasons.com) (see a list of the whole family on page 2 of this volume). For the past five years, we have also published *Sundays and Seasons: Preaching*, an annual print resource that encourages and provides help for lectionary preaching, taking into account all the readings for the day, in addition to the rest of the service and the day itself in the church year. For each day, someone writing from the perspective of a scholar addresses the question, “What would I want my pastor to know about these readings, this day, in approaching the sermon writing task?” And a practicing preacher—a different one for each day—provides ideas for ways to craft a sermon that compellingly confronts the worshiping assembly with law and gospel in the vital Lutheran tradition.

### With the whole church

This resource would not exist without the creative talents of many people across the church. Pastors, musicians, deacons, members of worship committees and altar guilds, seminary professors, and visual artists contribute their wisdom and ideas. They work full-time, part-time, or are volunteers in their churches. They serve large and small congregations and campus ministries in rural areas, small towns, cities, and suburbs in the United States, Canada, and abroad. They come from various cultural contexts, and with different approaches to worship

in word and sacrament. Over the past two decades, literally hundreds of people have contributed to *Sundays and Seasons*. Here’s this year’s group.

### Visual art

**Gertrud Mueller Nelson** (interior art) grew up in St. Paul, Minnesota. She is an illustrator, author, speaker, and designer. Montessori, the domestic church, and Jung’s psychology are often subjects of her lectures and writing. She has written and/or illustrated thirteen books, including the best seller *To Dance with God* (Paulist Press, 1986). Best of all, she is the Oma of three grandchildren. Gertrud lives in San Diego. **Christina Saj** (cover art) has had a longtime fascination with spiritual objects and universal symbols. Using their formal and structural elements as a departure point, she creates paintings in which the symbols can be recognized and reinvented so they may reflect the character of the time in which they were created. Christina lives and works in Cedar Grove, New Jersey. [www.christinasaj.com](http://www.christinasaj.com).

### Annual and seasonal materials

**Dennis Bushkofsky** (Perfect Love Casts Out Fear, Evening Prayer for Lent) is pastor of United Lutheran Church in Oak Park, Illinois, and edits the annual devotional book *Bread for the Day*. **Anne Edison-Albright** (preparing for Lent, preparing for the Three Days, preparing for Easter) is a pastor at Luther College in Decorah, Iowa. **Ryan K. Hostler** (Lessons and Carols for Christmas) is an ELCA deacon and serves as the minister of music and worship at Our Savior, Vero Beach, Florida. His simple but profound calling is nurturing the song of the church. **Kurt Lammi** (resources for Memorial Day) is the pastor at St. Paul Lutheran Church on Dog Leg Road in Dayton, Ohio. His writing has also appeared in *Living Lutheran* and *Christ in Our Home*. **Liv Larson Andrews** (seasonal worship texts for Easter) is the pastor of Salem Lutheran Church in the West Central neighborhood of Spokane, Washington. **Paul Lutter** (preparing for Summer, preparing for Autumn, preparing for November) is senior pastor of Grace Lutheran Church, Mora, Minnesota. **Craig Mueller** (seasonal worship texts for Summer) is pastor of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Chicago and is interested in the intersection of liturgy, preaching, virtuality, and outreach to the millennial generation. **Jonathan Niketh** (praying with the saints in Advent, seasonal worship texts for Autumn) has served as pastor of First Lutheran

Church in Lynn, Massachusetts, since 2008 and is chair of the New England Synod's worship and music committee. **Elaine Ramshaw** (seasonal worship texts for November) teaches pastoral care online for several different seminaries, meets with individuals for spiritual wayfinding, works at an art cinema, and gives out comic books at Halloween. **Gail Ramshaw** (lectionary doublets), a Lutheran laywoman, studies and crafts liturgical language from her home outside of Washington, D.C. **John Roberts** (scripts for the Vigil of Easter) recently retired after 41 years in pastoral ministry in California, Pennsylvania, Michigan, and metro Chicago. He has a lifelong interest in the arts and has brought those who are gifted in the arts to worship and the liturgy. **Kyle Schiefelbein-Guerrero** (preparing for Advent, preparing for Christmas, preparing for the time after Epiphany) is director of digital learning and lecturer at Graduate Theological Union, senior adjunct faculty member at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, and a member of St. Mark's Lutheran Church in San Francisco. **Bradley E. Schmeling** (seasonal worship texts for Lent) is the senior pastor at Gloria Dei Lutheran Church, St. Paul, Minnesota. **Julia Seymour** (midweek services of reflection and healing in Lent) is pastor of Lutheran Church of Hope in Anchorage, Alaska. **Troy Troftgruben** (preaching the Gospel of Luke) is associate professor of New Testament at Wartburg Seminary (Dubuque, Iowa), an ordained pastor (ELCA), and a lifelong fan of both biblical volumes by "the beloved physician," Luke.

### Prayers of intercession

**Jennifer Agee** is a freelance editor and writer who holds an M.A. from Wartburg Theological Seminary. **Melissa Bills** is associate pastor of First Lutheran in Decorah, Iowa. **Christina Garrett Klein** is a 2014 graduate of the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago and currently serves at Edgebrook Lutheran Church in Chicago. **Julie Kanarr** serves Christ Lutheran in Belfair, Washington. In addition to writing, she enjoys bicycling, camping, and sea kayaking. **Jennifer Manis** serves as the campus pastor for Lutheran Campus Ministry at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in Raleigh, North Carolina. She savors the Holy One's peace in laughter, coffee, and walks. Pastor **Lydia Posselt** serves Family of God Lutheran in Buckingham, Pennsylvania. In her free time, she enjoys writing, traveling, reading novels, spoiling her two cats, and watching too much Netflix. **Kyle Schiefelbein-Guerrero** (see seasonal materials) also contributed prayers of intercession for this volume. **Kevin Shock** gladly commits most of his time to God and dogs. He and his spouse, Lisa, live in Howard, Pennsylvania. **Michael Tassler** is pastor of Grace Lutheran in Colorado Springs, where, if you don't like the weather—can't imagine why—just wait 15 minutes!

### Ideas for the day

**Tim Brown** is the senior pastor of Good Shepherd Lutheran in Raleigh. He loves beer, writing, his wife and two boys, and brevity. **Lauren Dow Wegner** is associate pastor at Grace Lutheran Church and School in River Forest, Illinois. She loves motherhood, music, and memories. She is a Myers-Briggs ENFP. **Melody Eastman** is pastor of Grace Lutheran Church in Glen Ellyn, Illinois. Sunday evenings she can usually be found playing bodhrán (drum) at the pub with other traditional Irish musicians. **Heidi Heimgartner** serves as senior pastor of First Lutheran Church in Blooming Prairie, Minnesota. She is beyond grateful for her congregation, mentors, friends, and colleagues, who inspire her every day. Currently finishing his Ph.D. from the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, **Francisco Herrera** also writes devotional music, tweets at @PolyglotEvangel, blogs at www.franciscoherrera.com, and is the Convener of #decolonizeLutheranism. **Dan Hille** is pastor of Zion Lutheran in Southington, Connecticut. **Katie Johnson** is an ordained pastor in the Slovak Zion Synod. She enjoys worship, liturgical cookery, and reading works by the Reverend Mrs. Fleming Rutledge. **Rebecca Liberty** has served in congregations and campus ministries in the western United States and is now pastor of Redeemer Lutheran in Bangor, Maine. **Bekki Lohrmann** is one of the village pastors at Holden Village, a remote wilderness renewal center located in the Cascade Mountains of Washington State. **Joel Nau** is pastor of St. Paul Lutheran in Winterset, Iowa. **Katya Ouchakof** serves as copastor of Lake Edge Lutheran in Madison, Wisconsin. She enjoys canoeing, knitting, Star Wars, the Bible, and her family. **Clint A. Schneklath** is lead pastor at Good Shepherd Lutheran in Fayetteville, Arkansas. He is author of *Mediating Faith: Faith Formation in a Trans-media Era* (Fortress, 2014). **Keith Spencer** serves Trinity Lutheran in Pembroke Pines, Florida, as pastor, bread baker, and butterfly gardener. He is married to Piper and father to Christian, Thomas, and Luke. Photography is his passion. **Marissa Sotos** is pastor/mission developer at Tree of Life Lutheran in Minneapolis. She and her wife, Maggie, are probably too competitive about card games. **Will Storm** serves Memorial Drive Lutheran in Houston, Texas. In his free time, he enjoys the Sunday crossword with his wife, Erin, and walks with his dog, Moe. Rev. **Tuhina Verma Rasche** is the Networker for and an (un)intended disruptor with #decolonizeLutheranism. She is an Indian-American living life in the hyphen and has a complicated relationship with Jesus.

### Other weekly materials

**Sharolyn Browning** (Let the Children Come) is the pastor with Holy Cross in Austin, Texas, and is also a Godly Play trainer. She pinches herself daily to make sure this wonderful life is real. **Gail Ramshaw** (see seasonal materials) also contributed to the weekly materials.

## Music suggestions

**Cheryl Dieter** (psalmody, global) is business manager for the Association of Lutheran Church Musicians. **Venita MacGorman** (handbell, children's choir) recently retired from more than 35 years of directing church choirs. She directs a community handbell ensemble, the Oklahoma City Handbell Ensemble, and volunteers as a music teacher for Operation Headstart. She is a member of the Oklahoma Native American flute circle. **Justin Rimbo** (praise/contemporary) is an ELCA deacon currently serving at Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary. He lives in South Carolina with his wife and kids. **Hilary Ritchie** (praise/contemporary) is from St. Paul. She is the minister of worship and the arts at Hope Church in Richfield, Minnesota. **Shari Shull** (keyboard/instrumental) is a deacon in the ELCA and serves Agnus Dei Lutheran in Gig Harbor, Washington, as minister of music. **Scott Weidler** (hymns) is musician at St. Stephen's Anglican Church and First Lutheran Church, both in Toronto. For 21 years he was program director for Worship and Music of the ELCA.

## You make it happen

*Sundays and Seasons* continues to be a collaborative endeavor each year. In our editorial conversations here at Augsburg Fortress, we regularly evaluate the scope, format, and quality of the content provided in these pages. Your feedback, collected from you firsthand at events around this church, from postings in various forms of social media, from phone calls and emails to our sales and service representatives, and from surveys, helps us make decisions about how to adjust content so it is even more helpful, or, frankly, to leave it alone because it is doing its job. You, dear partners in ministry, make this resource happen. We welcome your ideas for future content, your suggestions for potential contributors (maybe you!), and your constructive feedback. Thank you for the trust you place in the changing roster of contributors who offer their time and talent to the whole church through *Sundays and Seasons*. Even more, thank you for the many and various ways in which you care for the Sunday assembly and its worship of the triune God.

—The editors





## December 2, 2018

### First Sunday of Advent

Advent is about the “coming days.” God’s people have always lived in great expectation, but that expectation finds specific, repeated enunciation in the texts appointed for these four weeks. The ancients anticipated a “righteous Branch to spring up for David.” The Thessalonians awaited “the coming of our Lord Jesus with all the saints.” Our Lord’s contemporaries hoped for the time “to stand before the Son of Man.” With them we eagerly await the coming days: another Christmas celebration, a second coming, and the advent of our Lord in word and supper.

### Prayer of the Day

Stir up your power, Lord Christ, and come. By your merciful protection alert us to the threatening dangers of our sins, and redeem us for your life of justice, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

### Gospel Acclamation

*Alleluia.* Stand up and <sup>1</sup> raise your heads—\* your redemption is <sup>1</sup> drawing near. *Alleluia.* (Luke 21:28)

### Readings and Psalm

#### Jeremiah 33:14-16

In the Old Testament, “righteousness” often has to do with being faithful in relationship. God acts righteously both in punishing Israel for its sin and in having mercy. In today’s reading, Jerusalem’s future name—“The Lord is our righteousness”—proclaims that the Lord is even now working salvation for Israel.

#### Psalm 25:1-10

To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul. (Ps. 25:1)

#### 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

Upon Timothy’s report from the congregation at Thessalonica, Paul is exuberant with gratitude for them. In this passage from his letter, Paul voices overflowing thanks, joy, and blessings for the people of this growing church.

#### Luke 21:25-36

God will fulfill God’s purposes and, already, hidden signs of that fulfillment abound. On that great day there will be dismay, perplexity, confusion, and terror, but God’s people shall be given strength to stand boldly and receive God’s promised redemption.

**Preface** Advent

**Color** Blue

### Prayers of Intercession

*The prayers are prepared locally for each occasion. The following examples may be adapted or used as appropriate.*

As we await the coming of Christ, we pray in hope for the church, the world, and all of creation.

*A brief silence.*

Equip your church, merciful God. Secure our roots in the soil of your eternal word. Ease our worries and remove our shame. Grow our faithfulness and let your steadfast love blossom among us. Lord, in your mercy,

**hear our prayer.**

Sustain your creation, holy God. Water the parched soil.

Restore depleted fields. Send farmers, forest rangers, and gardeners to care for fig trees and wheat fields, gardens and arbo-retums. Increase our love for the land. Lord, in your mercy,

**hear our prayer.**

Grow peace within us, abundant God. Raise up leaders in every community grounded in your justice and mercy. Increase their love for all people. Lord, in your mercy,

**hear our prayer.**

Feed the hungry, living God. Gather our harvest into a feast for our neighbors. Move us to nurture those who are bereaved and lonely. Empower those living with HIV/AIDS and all who are sick (*especially*). Lord, in your mercy,

**hear our prayer.**

Increase our joy, wondrous God. Plant thanksgiving in our hearts and multiply the good fruit of our outreach ministries and creation care programs (*especially*). Guide us in our service to local and global neighbors. Lord, in your mercy,

**hear our prayer.**

*Here other intercessions may be offered.*

In thanksgiving, we remember all who have died and now rest in your glory. Hold all who mourn in the comfort of your eternal light, and bring us to delight in the new life you promise. Lord, in your mercy,

**hear our prayer.**

Confident that the Holy Spirit intercedes for us, we bring to you these prayers and those unspoken, in the name of Christ, our Savior and Lord.

**Amen.**

## Images in the Readings

The four gospels repeatedly speak of the Jewish apocalyptic figure called the **Son of Man**, a mysterious human-like judge who, as part of the cosmic upheaval at the end of time, will appear in the sky to represent God to the people and the people to God. The figure probably developed from speculation about the vision in Daniel 7. Despite popular misunderstanding that contrasts Son of God with Son of Man, “Son of Man” does not mean that Jesus was the human son of Mary. Today’s readings describe the end of the world with the arrival of the Son of Man in both frightening and comforting language. Luke’s description of the apocalypse emphasizes people’s terror: the day will be like a trap. Yet the summer promises new life.

There are many biblical references to the **fig tree**. An image in ancient myth and literature for male fertility, the fig tree provided both food and shade for Israelites, and even clothing in the story of the fall. In Luke 21 the fig tree is a positive image for the arrival of God. What is now in bud will see its fruition.

It was common in the ancient Near East to depict a monarchy as a tree of life. The idea was that the virility of the king ensured the health and wealth of the nation. Also the Old Testament includes descriptions of David as the tree and the future messiah as a **branch**. For Christians, Christ is that branch, and through him we all share the life of God’s true tree.

## Ideas for the Day

- Advent is a season of waiting. On this first Sunday of Advent, hang clocks around the worship space with each showing a different time. Through bulletin notes, the sermon, or announcements, encourage the assembly to imagine this season as one where we practice waiting. We wait for Jesus, but we also practice waiting to prepare for those times in our lives when we have to wait—for births, deaths, diagnoses, job transitions, and more. Advent is a gift of the liturgical calendar that can teach us all how to wait well, no matter what time it is in our lives.
- During Advent the church waits for both the baby in the manger and also the Christ who will come at the end of time. Most people in the assembly are probably focused on the baby. Open the season more widely and use today’s texts to focus on both Christ’s future coming and the ways in which Christ appears continually in everyday situations—under our own sun, moon, and stars (Luke 21:25). Instead of waiting until Christmas to celebrate Christ’s arrival, point out the ways you see Christ arriving even now.
- The reading from 1 Thessalonians speaks of joy, and certainly the Advent and Christmas seasons are ones in which we practice unbridled joy. Hang a paper banner in your church’s gathering space and invite people to write or draw

what gives them joy in this season. Incorporate these offerings into your Christmas Eve service in preaching, prayers, a children’s time, or as notes in the worship folder.

- Both the reading from Jeremiah and today’s gospel mention trees. Place tall birch branches in large floor vases in your worship space to echo the themes that Advent brings: branches coming from lifeless stumps.
- Advent is a “housewarming” season, as opposed to Lent’s “housecleaning.” How can you make this distinction vivid for the assembly, especially with this gospel’s call to “be alert at all times”? What does it mean to be alert not only in our hearts but also in our homes and churches? What does “be alert at all times” mean for our outreach/evangelism and welcome/hospitality teams?

## Connections with the Liturgy

In the Lord’s Prayer, we ask God to “save us from the time of trial.” It is precisely the dangers and terrors of the eschatological end to which this petition refers. If your assembly is still praying the historic translation of the prayer about “temptation,” this Sunday is a good time to begin use of the 1975 translation, which more accurately conveys the meaning of the prayer ascribed to Jesus. Most Christians will indeed experience “a time of trial.”

## Let the Children Come

Advent draws us into a time of mystery and wonder. Jesus points to change coming to all creation, not just humankind. This season is not about remembering the Christmas story or nesting and getting ready for a new baby. Rather, it is a season of waiting in hopeful wonder for something big—sun, moon, and stars big. Children can get swept up in the cultural magnitude of Christmas and miss Advent altogether. What is stirring out in that great dark sky? As we begin this year with children, let us honor the mystery of the God we are still meeting.

## Assembly Song

Music Sourcebook for All Saints through Transfiguration (MSB2) includes a variety of musical options for Advent, Christmas, and the Time after Epiphany.

## Gathering

Come, thou long-expected Jesus ELW 254, LBW 30  
 Lo! He comes with clouds descending ELW 435, LBW 27  
 Wake, awake, for night is flying ELW 436, LLC 276, LBW 31

## Psalmody and Acclamations

Jennings, Carolyn. “Psalm 25:1-10” from PWC.  
 Mathis, William H. Refrain for “Psalm 25” from *After the Prelude: Year A*. U/cant, hb. CG CGB658 (digital version), CGB659 (printed version). Use with ELW psalm tone 6 or 7 (in C).

Schalk, Carl. “Antiphon for Psalm 25” from *Psalm Antiphons for a Time of Preparation*. CPH 98-4258. Use with ELW psalm tone 4 in DM (antiphon is in Dmin).

(GA) Van Wye, Steven. “Gospel Acclamation for Advent” from *Entrance Chant and Gospel Acclamation for Advent*. SATB, cant, assembly, kybd, gtr. GIA G-8708.

## Hymn of the Day

Creator of the stars of night ELW 245, LBW 323 *CONDITOR ALME SIDERUM*

Hark! A thrilling voice is sounding! ELW 246 *MERTON LBW 37 FREUEN WIR*

He came down ELW 253, TFF 37, LS 4 *HE CAME DOWN*

## Offering

Let all mortal flesh keep silence ELW 490, sts. 1-2; LBW 198, sts. 1-2

O Lord, how shall I meet you ELW 241, sts. 1, 3; LBW 23, sts. 1, 3

## Communion

My Lord, what a morning ELW 438, WOV 627, TFF 40

Wait for the Lord ELW 262

What feast of love ELW 487, WOV 701

## Sending

People, look east ELW 248, WOV 626, LS 11

Savior of the nations, come ELW 263, LBW 28

## Additional Assembly Songs

Caminamos hacia el sol LLC 275

Come, O Lord, and set us free SC 12

Freedom is coming TFF 46

- ☉ Maraschin, Jaci. “Come to Be Our Hope, O Jesus” from *Global Songs 2*. U. AFP 9780800656744.
- ☉ Shaha, Bart. “Come, Lord Jesus Christ” from *Sound the Bamba*. U. GIA G-6830.
- ☼ Bast, Andy/M. l’abbé Pellegrin/trans. Sister Mary of St. Philip. “O Come, Divine Messiah (Luke 1)” from *Theophilus: Songs from the Book of Luke*. pillarchurch1847.bandcamp.com.
- ☼ Collins, Chris/Justin Cofield/Aaron Ivey/Matt Carter. “A Day of Glory” from *A Day of Glory (Songs for Christmas)*. austinstoneworship.com.
- ☼ Ligertwood, Brooke. “Hosanna” from CCLI.
- ☼ Marshall, Eric J. “Come to Us, O Lord” from CCLI.
- ☼ Rend Collective. “Build Your Kingdom Here” from CCLI.
- ☼ Tomlin, Chris/Jesse Reeves/Martin Smith. “Waiting Here for You” from CCLI.

## Music for the Day

### Choral

- ♫ Harris, Jerry Weseley. “Creator of the Stars of Night.” SATB. GIA G-7344.
- P Highben, Zebulon. “The Lord Shall Come and Not Be Slow.” SATB. AFP 9781451402520.
- Pearson, Donald. “Advent Processional.” U/2 pt mxd, perc, assembly. MSM AE063.
- P ♫ Raney, Joel. “Lift Up Your Eyes: A Candle Lighting Ceremony for Advent.” 2 pt mxd, pno, opt 7 hb, assembly. HOP C5978.

### Children’s Choir

- ♫ Burkhardt, Michael. “Creator of the Stars of Night.” U/2 pt, hb, vla, org. MSM 50-0402.
- P Horman, John. “Psalm 80” from *ChildrenSing Psalms*. U/2 pt, kybd, opt assembly, tamb. AFP 9780800663872.
- P ♫ Kadidlo, Phil. “He Came Down/God Is So Good” from *ChildrenSing Around the World*. 2 pt, pno, perc. AFP 9781451491951.

### Keyboard / Instrumental

- ♫ Biery, James. “Hark! A Thrilling Voice Is Sounding” from *Fanfare, Variations, and Toccata on Hark! A Thrilling Voice Is Sounding*. Org. MSM 10-637.
- Organ, Anne Krentz. “Haf trones lampa färdig” from *Advent Reflections: For Piano and Solo Instrument*. Pno, inst. AFP 9780800657284.
- P Raabe, Nancy. “Helmsley” from *Day of Arising: A Tapestry of Musical Traditions*. Pno. AFP 9780800637460.
- P ♫ Warner, Richard. “Conditor alme siderum” from *Augsburg Organ Library: Advent*. Org. AFP 9780800658953.

### Handbell

- P Dobrinski, Cynthia. “Song of Hope.” 3-5 oct, L2. HOP 2716.
- P ♫ Moklebust, Cathy. “Creator of the Stars of Night.” 2-3 oct, wch, L1+. CG CGB268.
- ♫ Thompson, Karen. “Creator of the Stars of Night.” 5-6 oct, L3. FTT 20458.

## Monday, December 3

### Francis Xavier, missionary to Asia, died 1552

Francis Xavier (SAYV-yehr) was born in the Basque region of northern Spain. Francis’s native Basque language is unrelated to any other, and Francis admitted that learning languages was difficult for him. Despite this obstacle he became a missionary to India, Southeast Asia, Japan, and the Philippines. At each point he learned the local language and, like Martin Luther, wrote catechisms for the instruction of new converts. Another

obstacle Francis overcame to accomplish his mission work was a propensity to seasickness. All his travels to the Far East were by boat. Together with Ignatius Loyola and five others, Francis formed the Society of Jesus (Jesuits). Francis spoke out against the Spanish and Portuguese colonists when he discovered their oppression of the indigenous people to whom he was sent as a missionary.

## Tuesday, December 4

### John of Damascus, theologian and hymnwriter, died around 749

Born to a wealthy family in Damascus and well educated, John left a career in finance and government to become a monk in an abbey near Jerusalem. He wrote many hymns as well as theological works. Foremost among the latter is a work called *The Fount of Wisdom*, which touches on philosophy, heresy, and the orthodox faith. This summary of patristic theology remained influential for centuries.

## Thursday, December 6

### Nicholas, Bishop of Myra, died around 342

Though Nicholas is one of the church's most beloved saints, little is known about his life. In the fourth century he was a bishop in what is now Turkey. Legends that surround Nicholas tell of his love for God and neighbor, especially the poor. One famous story tells of Nicholas secretly giving bags of gold to the three daughters of a father who was going to sell them into prostitution because he could not provide dowries for them. Nicholas has become a symbol of anonymous gift giving.

## Friday, December 7

### Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, died 397

Ambrose was a governor of northern Italy and a catechumen when he was elected bishop of Milan. He was baptized, ordained, and consecrated a bishop within one week's time. While bishop he gave away his wealth and lived in simplicity. He was a famous preacher and is largely responsible for the conversion of Augustine. He is also well known for writing hymns. On one occasion, Ambrose led people in a hymn he wrote while the church in which they were secluded was threatened by attack from Gothic soldiers. The soldiers turned away, unwilling to attack a congregation that was singing a hymn. Ambrose is credited with authorship of three hymns in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, including "Savior of the Nations, Come" (ELW 263).



## Preparing for Easter

### Theology of the Cross in Easter

At a summer gathering of campus pastors and ELCA college chaplains, Dr. Mindy Makant, a religious studies professor at Lenoir-Rhyne University, urged the group to tell stories that point to the cross from the perspective of the resurrection. Theology of the cross calls a thing what it is and finds God in unlikely places. “So what?” Makant asked. “How does it become performative? How does it mediate God’s love to the world?” If theology is something we *do*, how do we embody theology of the cross? “How do we tell a truthful story with our lives?”

In Easter worship we can embody a witness to God’s loving activity in what Makant calls “the poignant gap” between Easter morning and Christ’s coming again—this in-between time in which we boldly affirm “Christ is risen, indeed! Alleluia!” and also live with the reality of loss, anxiety, and grief. We are both/and people. We both genuinely mourn, and we do not mourn as people without hope. “Hope,” says Makant, “is the future tense of faith. It is creative space, grounded in our knowledge of the resurrection—because we know that dead people stay dead . . . until they don’t. Our knowledge of the resurrection is based on the trustworthy character of God.”

People come to worship on Easter morning and throughout the Easter season aching not only to hear about but also to experience the love of God showing up in the midst of the reality of their lives. *Sub contraria specie*, which means “under the form of the opposite,” means God can be found not only in the unlikely places we think of first—the cross, the manger, at table with sinners, healing on the sabbath—but also right in the middle of whatever is really going on in your congregation, your community, in the nation, in the world. There are no godforsaken places or people.

### The Easter Season in Year C: Love Shows Up

While the lectionary texts for the Easter season contain familiar elements from year to year (the Gospel of John, Thomas on Easter 2, at least one Sunday about shepherds/sheep), the readings aren’t identical, and different themes and preaching emphases can emerge. In year C, the road to Emmaus passage is absent, but love is everywhere.

- *Easter Day: John 20:1-18*. “So [Mary] ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, ‘They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him.’” God’s love shows up in this and other details in the story, especially in Jesus’ interaction with Mary.
- *Easter 2: John 20:19-31*. The word *love* isn’t used in this passage, but God’s love shows up in Jesus’ particular concern and care for Thomas and in bringing a breath of peace to the grieving disciples.
- *Easter 3: John 21:1-19*. “When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?’ He said to him, ‘Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.’” Simon declares his love three times.
- *Easter 4: John 10:22-30*. Jesus knows the sheep, gives them eternal life, and promises that nothing will ever separate him from them.
- *Easter 5: John 13:31-35*. “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.”
- *Easter 6: John 14:23-29 or John 5:1-9*. “Jesus answered [Judas (not Iscariot)], ‘Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.’” Or, from the alternate gospel reading, a story of God’s love in action: Jesus healing at Siloam on the sabbath.
- *Easter 7: John 17:20-26*. “I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”
- *Day of Pentecost: John 14:8-17 [25-27]*. “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever.”

Taken together, these texts ask and answer a series of powerful questions. *How do we know God?* Embodied love (Jesus). *How can we be sure God is still with us, after the resurrection and before Christ comes again?* God sends the Spirit. Because God loved us, we also can love.

## Embodiment, the Senses, and the Gospel of John

At The Craft of Preaching conference hosted by Working Preacher and Luther Seminary, the Rev. Karoline Lewis offered expertise on proclaiming the gospel and John's gospel in particular: be attentive to the details in the text, and be true to the specificity of the author's voice and how the text wants to be preached because it comes particularly from John.

John is about the Word made flesh, so we're called to pay careful attention to sensory details in the texts and consider embodied approaches to worship. For example:

- We know about God's love because Jesus makes the disciples breakfast on the beach (Easter 3). What kind of food-related ministry can you lift up (preferably in very tangible, active, and delicious ways) on this day?
- On Easter 4, play with the sense of sound and with use of voices. How do we hear God's voice?
- On Easter 6, include an opportunity in worship for anointing for healing and prayer with laying on of hands. Bless and send anointing oil home with congregants.
- On either Easter 4 or Easter 6, "I heard the voice of Jesus say" (ELW 611) connects to hearing and experiencing the love of God.
- Examine the sharing of the peace as an embodied act of God's love, particularly as it relates (or does not relate, in contextual practice) to John 20:19-31, the Easter 2 gospel. For people with compromised immune systems or other concerns, this practice falls short of carrying the significance we hope to give it. Jesus embodies peace without physical touch. Offer, and model, touch and no-touch options for sharing the peace of Christ.
- Be attentive to details in the texts and use those details to inform choices for liturgical arts and music. How might Easter in year C look and sound different from previous Easter seasons? If "Love Shows Up" is the theme for the season, how does that look and sound in your context?
  - Take liturgical arts cues from what God's love looks like in each of the texts. Translating that into visual arts—without filling the worship space with an abundance of fish—may be tricky, but be guided by the recurring motifs of abiding, abundance, and mutual, eternal relationship.
  - For hymn choices, broad themes related to love or the Easter season may be less helpful/interesting than focusing on a specific detail from the text each Sunday and letting that detail guide the search. What is God *doing* in the text that shows love? How is love specifically being made known?

## Day of Pentecost

Consider that Pentecost Sunday is not the start of a new season but the culmination of the season of Easter. When read through the lens of love showing up, the readings are especially poignant as Jesus reassures the disciples, and us, that God's embodied love will continue to be with them even when he is not. Review past Pentecost traditions and practices in light of how you plan to shape the rest of your worship during the season. You may still want to throw a big Pentecost party but with a slightly differently thematic emphasis this year.

If your congregation sells red flowers for Pentecost, think about ways to turn that event into an embodied act of love—perhaps through sharing flowers with people who will be cheered by them, organizing volunteers to help people plant the flowers they've purchased, or a different ministry that might grow from the proceeds of the flower sale.

If you're hoping people will wear red on Pentecost Sunday, give them fair (and frequent) notice. When this becomes a "Hey, where's your red?" accusatory thing, it can be alienating, especially to newcomers. Leading up to the day, model talking about it in a way that emphasizes that it is optional and just for fun.

Congregations might sing in different languages on Pentecost as a way to embody the fullness of the Spirit. If this is new for you, have a soloist or choir sing in the new language and the assembly in the more familiar language. You might teach a simple refrain to the assembly that they can learn by ear.

## Seasonal Checklist

- If your assembly keeps the tradition of burying the alleluia in Lent, celebrate its return with lavish alleluias during the Easter season.
- Consider an ecumenical or joint ELCA congregation Ascension Day worship service.
- Light the paschal candle on each of the Sundays of Easter, including the Day of Pentecost.
- It is particularly appropriate during the Easter season to use thanksgiving for baptism as an alternative to confession and forgiveness.
- Engage the assembly in vocal expressions of resurrection joy by making unabashed use of the Easter call and response (Alleluia! Christ is risen. / Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia!) in the greeting, the peace, the invitation to communion, and the dismissal.

- Use “This is the feast” as the hymn of praise.
- Use the Nicene Creed.
- If your congregation doesn’t already use a full thanksgiving at the table, do so in Easter. Forms VII and X (ELW, pp. 67, 69) use fresh, poetic language that pulls together many of the images in the Easter readings. Form IV (pp. 111, 133) can be used from Ash Wednesday through the Day of Pentecost, creating an intentional unity through the whole Easter cycle. Form IX (p. 68) calls to mind the cosmic reach of the resurrection.
- If you will use a diversity of languages for the Day of Pentecost, make preparations in advance with musicians and readers.