



SERMON PLANNING GUIDE

GUIDE DEVELOPED BY LISLE GWYNN GARRITY
ADVENT YEAR A

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Like biblical commentary, this guide seeks to offer you seeds of ideas, theme connections, questions for deeper study, and real-world intersections. For each text, we've included suggestions for how to connect the scripture to the theme, *What Can't Wait?*

These suggestions—a non-exhaustive list—offer a few ways of approaching and thinking about the texts in light of our theme.

We encourage you to use this guide as a starting point for your text study each week. You may wish to include our [Artist Statements](#) (included with the visuals in our Advent 2019 bundle) in your scripture research and reflections. Refer to our [What Can't Wait? Theme Infographic](#) for more information about the theme. Consider mapping out your ideas in our accompanying [Sermon Planning Grid](#).

About the *What Can't Wait?* Theme:

Advent is a season of waiting, but is idle waiting what God wants of us? In preparation for the coming Messiah, we wonder together—what things can't wait? What demands our immediate attention? What requires our work and preparation? What is it that God can't wait for? Is it our praise, reconciliation, and proclamation? Is it the end of suffering, isolation, and fear? This Advent, we invite you to join us in imagining, prioritizing, and preparing. As we wait, what can't?

Guiding Questions For Each Scripture Text:

- In light of this scripture, what *can't* wait? What *can*?
- Where is God at work to bring about hope, peace, love and joy?
Where are humans joining God in this work?

Key Scriptures & Weekly Themes:

Our theme and resources are inspired by the Revised Common Lectionary (Year A), with particular emphasis on the following texts each week. We developed sub-themes each week that also parallel the traditional Advent themes of hope, peace, joy, and love. You are welcome to use or adapt these weekly themes in your worship.¹

¹ Our weekly sub-themes emerged from our study of our focal scriptures. We are intrigued by the conversation they form with the traditional weekly Advent themes of hope, peace, joy, and love. In our resources, we are working from both our weekly sub-themes and the traditional Advent themes. You are welcome to choose one or the other or also work with both in mind.

Third Week of Advent

DELIGHT (JOY) CAN'T WAIT

KEY SCRIPTURES Isaiah 35:1-10, Luke 1:46b-55

THEME CONNECTIONS

Mary's Magnificat shows us deep and holy joy—joy that trusts God's promises of restoration, new beginnings, food for the hungry, and justice for the wronged. In Isaiah, creation sings with abundant joy, blooming open like a crocus. What does it look like to delight in God's goodness? How do we respond to God's work in the world with joy? How can we be singers of joy?

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- Isaiah 35:1-10 paints a vision of hope to those held captive in exile. This particular image of the desert blooming is not only hopeful, it is abundant and joyful. How does joy sustain those who are broken and trapped by fear?
- In her artist statement for the painting, "Desert Blooms," artist Lauren Wright Pittman describes the desert as a place "often associated with desolation, scarcity, and death, but it's really a place of surprising, subversive beauty—a place of meeting the divine." What does subversive joy look like in spaces that are scarce of hope or full of despair?
- Read Luke 1:5-66. Underline each instance in the text where fear or joy are present. Where in the interweaving birth stories of Jesus and John the Baptist are characters filled with surprising joy to overcome their fear?
- Why do you think Mary hurries to the Judean highlands to stay with Elizabeth for three months during her pregnancy? Does she leave to avoid public scrutiny? Is she in need of comfort and camaraderie from her elder relative who is also pregnant? Does she visit Elizabeth to see for herself what the angel promised (Luke 1:36-7)?

QUOTES & RESOURCES FOR INSPIRATION

"Like you and me, Mary knows what it means to plan your life one way and look up one day and find it heading in a totally different direction. She is the young teenage girl from the ghetto of Nazareth who conceives a child before marriage and becomes the unwitting subject of scandal. She is the pregnant woman who must explain to her husband the circumstances of her unplanned pregnancy. She is the wife whose husband wants a divorce. She is the young mother who with her husband must flee into exile with an infant shortly after his birth. She is an ordinary woman who experiences the call to shed the shallow, external spirituality of her youth to reveal a deeper layer of spirituality that comes from within. She is a woman struggling to understand a child who is single-minded about his or her purpose and deserts the family to pursue it. She is the family member who is made to suffer because of another member of the family's subversive activities. She is a mother standing by and witnessing her son's execution as a criminal. And beyond that, she is the woman who lives to experience the fulfillment of things spoken to her decades before and to see her suffering (and that of her son) vindicated with the coming of the Spirit."

—Weems, Renita J. *Showing Mary: How Women Can Share Prayers, Wisdom, and the Blessings of God*. NY, Boston: Warner Books, 2002. 44.

Third Week of Advent

DELIGHT (JOY) CAN'T WAIT (Continued)

QUOTES & RESOURCES FOR INSPIRATION

“My soul magnifies the Lord,’ Mary sings right there in Elizabeth’s living room, ‘and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.’ Elizabeth and Zechariah are the first to hear her song, but it is not just for them. It is also for her, Mary, and for the Mighty One who has done great things for her. It is for Gabriel, who first gave her the good news, and for all who will benefit from it—for the proud and powerful who will be relieved of their swelled heads, for the hungry who will be filled with good things, for the rich who will be sent away empty so that they have room in them for more than money can buy. Her song is for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—for Sarah, Rebecca, Leah, and Rachel—for every son and daughter of Israel who thought God had forgotten the promise to be with them forever, to love them forever, to give them fresh and endless life. It was all happening inside of Mary, and she was so sure of it that she was singing about it ahead of time—not in the future tense but in the past, as if the promise had already come true. Prophets almost never get their verb tenses straight, because part of their gift is being able to see the world as God sees it—not divided into things that are already over and things that have not happened yet, but as eternally unfolding mystery that surprises everyone—maybe even God.”

—Brown Taylor, Barbara. “Singing Ahead of Time.” *Home By Another Way*. Cambridge, Boston: Cowley Publications, 1999. 17-8.

Watch Rev. Kathryn Johnston preach from Isaiah 35 on the “holy way” vs. the “holier than thou way” at the 2018 NEXT Church National Gathering:

<https://nextchurch.net/2018-national-gathering-closing-worship/>

Listen to this podcast interview with Tal Ben-Shahar on how cultivating joy can strengthen our “psychological immune system” and foster emotional resilience. Tal Ben-Shahar is an American Israeli professor, author, and lecturer in the areas of positive and organizational psychology. “Experts on Expert: Tal Ben-Shahar, episode 131.” Podcast audio. *Armchair Expert with Dax Shepard*. 8/15/2019. <https://armchairexpertpod.com/pods/tal-ben-shahar>.



DESERT BLOOMS
BY LAUREN WRIGHT PITTMAN
INSPIRED BY ISAIAH 35:1-10



A DANCE
BY HANNAH GARRITY
INSPIRED BY LUKE 1:46B-55