

## A Lectionary for Advent and Christmas

The great virtue of the church year and the pericope system of preaching is that it takes us through a more-or-less chronological review of Christ's life and ministry every year.

Advent, the first season of the church year, has traditionally been celebrated under three headings: Jesus came, Jesus comes, and Jesus will come. But the most important points to cover during this season are the original Advent messages, the three angelic visits to Zechariah, Mary, and Joseph, as well as the messianic prophecies that pointed to John the Baptist and Jesus. In some congregations, these topics are covered in midweek Advent services. If they are not, they should be covered on the Sundays of Advent so these important gospels do not get lost in the shuffle.

In the following lectionary, readings are provided for three Advent services. All of the Advent gospels are located in just two chapters, Luke 1 and Matthew 1. In this series each week of Advent reports one of the three angelic visits. The superscript letters in the lectionary readings indicate points at which the EHV Study Bible has notes on the text.

Pastors are welcome to develop their own series based on this lectionary. You can share them on our website if you wish to.

Double-check the margins when pasting the readings directly from this message into bulletins or onto screens since sometimes margins are not pasted correctly, depending on which form of special paste is selected.

### The First Advent Service

The Old Testament Prophecy: Isaiah 40:1-10

A prophecy of John's birth and a description of Jesus' work

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.

<sup>2</sup>Speak to the heart of Jerusalem and call out to her.

Her warfare<sup>a</sup> really is over.

Her guilt is fully paid for.

Yes, she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins.<sup>b</sup>

<sup>3</sup>A voice is calling out:

In the wilderness prepare the way for the LORD.<sup>c</sup>

In the wasteland make a level<sup>d</sup> highway for our God.

<sup>4</sup>Every valley will be raised up,  
and every mountain and hill will be made low.

The rugged ground will become level,  
and the rough places will become a plain.

<sup>5</sup>Then the glory of the LORD will be revealed,  
and all flesh together will see it.<sup>e</sup>

Yes, the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

<sup>6</sup>A voice was saying, "Cry out!"

And I said, "What shall I cry out?"

All flesh is grass,  
and all its beauty<sup>f</sup> is like a wildflower in the countryside.

<sup>7</sup>Grass withers, flowers fade,  
when the breath<sup>g</sup> of the LORD blows on them.

Yes, the people are grass.

<sup>8</sup>Grass withers, flowers fade,  
but the Word of our God endures forever.<sup>h</sup>

<sup>9</sup>Get up on a high mountain,  
O Zion, you herald of good news.  
Lift up your voice with strength,  
O Jerusalem, you herald of good news.<sup>i</sup>  
Lift it up! Do not be afraid!

Say to the cities of Judah,  
“Here is your God!”

<sup>10</sup>Look, God the LORD will come with strength,  
and his arm is ruling for him.

Look, his reward is with him.

The result of his work is in front of him.

<sup>11</sup>Like a shepherd he will care for his flock.  
With his arm he will gather the lambs.

The Psalm: A musical version of Psalm 24:7-10, *The King of Glory Comes*, may be used.

<sup>7</sup>Lift up your heads, you gates.  
Lift yourselves up, you ancient doors,  
and the King of Glory will come in.

<sup>8</sup>Who is this King of Glory?  
The LORD strong and mighty,  
the LORD mighty in battle.

<sup>9</sup>Lift up your heads, you gates.  
Lift up, you ancient doors,  
and the King of Glory will come in.

<sup>10</sup>Who is he, this King of Glory?  
The LORD of Armies<sup>f</sup>—he is the King of Glory.<sup>g</sup>

The First Advent Gospel: Luke 1:5-25. The first angelic visit, Gabriel Announces the Birth of the Forerunner.

<sup>5</sup>In the days of Herod, king of Judea,<sup>c</sup> there was a certain priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah. His wife was from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth.

<sup>6</sup>They were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and righteous decrees of the Lord. <sup>7</sup>They did not have a child because Elizabeth was unable to bear children, and they were both well along in years. <sup>8</sup>On one occasion, while Zechariah was serving as priest before God and his division was on duty, <sup>9</sup>he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense.<sup>d</sup> <sup>10</sup>The whole crowd of people were praying outside the temple during the hour of the incense offering.

<sup>11</sup>An angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense. <sup>12</sup>When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and overcome by fear. <sup>13</sup>But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, because your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear a son for you, and you are to name him John.”<sup>e</sup> <sup>14</sup>You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, <sup>15</sup>because he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to drink wine or beer.<sup>f</sup> He will be filled with the Holy Spirit,

even from his mother's womb. <sup>16</sup>He will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God. <sup>17</sup>He will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,<sup>g</sup> and to turn the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to prepare a people who are ready for the Lord."

<sup>18</sup>Zechariah said to the angel, "How can I be sure of this, because I am an old man, and my wife is well along in years?"

<sup>19</sup>The angel answered him, "I am Gabriel.<sup>h</sup> I stand in the presence of God<sup>i</sup> and was sent to speak to you in order to tell you this good news. <sup>20</sup>Now listen, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day when these things happen, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled at the proper time."

<sup>21</sup>Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering what was taking him so long in the temple. <sup>22</sup>When he did come out, he was unable to speak to them. Then they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple. He kept making signs to them and remained unable to speak.

<sup>23</sup>When the days of his priestly service were completed,<sup>j</sup> he went back to his home.

<sup>24</sup>After those days his wife Elizabeth conceived. She kept herself in seclusion for five months, saying, <sup>25</sup>"The Lord has done this for me in the days when he looked with favor on me and took away my disgrace<sup>k</sup> among the people."

## The Second Advent Service

The Old Testament Prophecy from Isaiah 7:11-16, the virgin birth

<sup>10</sup>The LORD spoke to Ahaz again. He said, <sup>11</sup>"Ask for a sign from the LORD your God. Ask for it either in the depths below<sup>j</sup> or in the heights above."

<sup>12</sup>But Ahaz responded, "I will not ask. I will not test the LORD."<sup>k</sup>

<sup>13</sup>So Isaiah said:

Listen now, you house of David. Is it not enough for you to test the patience of men? Will you test the patience of my God<sup>l</sup> as well? <sup>14</sup>Therefore the Lord himself will give a sign for all of you.<sup>m</sup> Look! The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and name him

Immanuel.<sup>n</sup> <sup>15</sup>He will eat curds and honey by the time he knows how to refuse evil and choose good, <sup>16</sup>because even before the child knows how to refuse evil and choose good, the land whose two kings you dread will be forsaken.<sup>o</sup>

The Psalm: Luke 1:46-55: A musical version of Mary's Song, the Magnificat, may be used.

<sup>46</sup>My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,

<sup>47</sup>and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior,<sup>t</sup>

<sup>48</sup>because he has looked with favor on the humble state of his servant.

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed,

<sup>49</sup>because the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.

<sup>50</sup>His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.

<sup>51</sup>He has shown strength with his arm.

He has scattered those who were proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

<sup>52</sup>He has brought down rulers from their thrones.

He has lifted up the lowly.

<sup>53</sup>He has filled the hungry with good things, but the rich he has sent away empty.

<sup>54</sup>He has come to the aid of his servant Israel, remembering his mercy,

<sup>55</sup>as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and his offspring<sup>u</sup> forever.

The Second Advent Gospel: Luke 1:26-38: The second angelic visit, Gabriel announces the birth of the Savior

<sup>26</sup>In the sixth month,<sup>1</sup> the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee named Nazareth,<sup>27</sup> to a virgin pledged in marriage to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary.<sup>28</sup> The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women."<sup>m</sup>

<sup>29</sup>But she was greatly troubled by the statement and was wondering what kind of greeting this could be.<sup>30</sup> The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, because you have found favor with God.<sup>31</sup> Listen, you will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus."<sup>n</sup>  
<sup>32</sup>He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High.<sup>o</sup> The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David.<sup>33</sup> He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will never end."

<sup>34</sup>Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"<sup>p</sup>

<sup>35</sup>The angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.<sup>q</sup> So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.

<sup>36</sup>Listen, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age even though she was called barren, and this is her sixth month.<sup>37</sup> For nothing will be impossible for God."

<sup>38</sup>Then Mary said, "See, I am the Lord's servant. May it happen to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.

A verse or verses of one of the Advent hymns that you are trying to teach this year may be sung between the two Gospel readings for week two.

### The Third Advent Gospel: Luke 1:39-45, 56, Mary Visits Elizabeth

<sup>39</sup>In those days Mary got up and hurried to the hill country, to a town of Judah.<sup>r</sup> <sup>40</sup>She entered the home of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.<sup>41</sup> Just as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.<sup>42</sup> She called out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!<sup>43</sup> But why am I so favored that the mother of my Lord should come to me?<sup>44</sup> In fact, just now, as soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy!<sup>s</sup> <sup>45</sup>Blessed is she who believed, because the promises spoken to her from the Lord will be fulfilled!" ...

<sup>56</sup>Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months<sup>w</sup> and then returned to her home.

## The Third Advent Service

### The Old Testament Reading: Malachi 3:1-4, The Two Messengers

Look! I am sending my messenger!<sup>a</sup> He will prepare the way before me.<sup>b</sup> Then suddenly the Lord, whom you are seeking, will come to his temple!<sup>c</sup> The Messenger of the Covenant,<sup>d</sup> in whom you delight, will surely come, says the LORD of Armies.

<sup>2</sup>But who can endure the day when he comes? Who will remain standing when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire, like launderers' bleach!<sup>e</sup> <sup>3</sup>He will be seated like a refiner and a purifier of silver. He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and like silver.<sup>f</sup> They will belong to the LORD and bring him an offering in righteousness.

<sup>4</sup>Judah and Jerusalem's offerings will be pleasing to the LORD as they were in the days of old, in years long ago.

The Psalm: Luke 1:68-79. A musical version of the Song of Zechariah may be used.

<sup>67</sup>His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied:

<sup>68</sup>Blessed is the Lord, the God of Israel,

because he has visited us and prepared redemption<sup>z</sup> for his people.

<sup>69</sup>He has raised up a horn<sup>aa</sup> of salvation for us in the house of his servant David,  
<sup>70</sup>just as he said long ago through the mouth of his holy prophets.  
<sup>71</sup>He raised up salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us,  
<sup>72</sup>in order to show mercy to our fathers by remembering his holy covenant,<sup>bb</sup>  
<sup>73</sup>the oath which he swore to Abraham our father,  
<sup>74</sup>to grant deliverance to us from the hand of our enemies,  
so that we are able to serve him without fear,  
<sup>75</sup>in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.  
<sup>76</sup>And you, child, will be called a prophet of the Most High,  
because you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,  
<sup>77</sup>to give his people the knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins,  
<sup>78</sup>because of God's tender mercies,  
by which the Rising Sun<sup>cc</sup> from on high will visit us,  
<sup>79</sup>to shine on those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,  
to guide our feet into the way of peace.

#### The Fourth Advent Gospel: Luke 1:57-66: the birth of John the Baptist

When the time came for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son. <sup>58</sup>Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they were rejoicing with her. <sup>59</sup>On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child. They wanted to call him Zechariah after the name of the father. <sup>60</sup>But his mother answered, "No. He will be called John."

<sup>61</sup>They said to her, "There is no one among your relatives who is called by this name." <sup>62</sup>They made signs to his father, to see what he wanted to name him.<sup>x</sup>

<sup>63</sup>He asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And they were all amazed.

<sup>64</sup>Immediately Zechariah's mouth was opened, his tongue was loosed, and he began to speak, praising God. <sup>65</sup>Fear came on all who lived around them. In the entire hill country of Judea people were talking about all these things.<sup>y</sup> <sup>66</sup>And everyone who heard this took it to heart, saying, "What then will this child be?" Clearly, the hand of the Lord was with him.

A verse or verses of one of the Advent hymns that you are trying to teach may be sung between the two Gospel readings for week three.

#### The Fifth Advent Gospel: Matthew 1:18-25, the third angelic visit, the announcement to Joseph

It appears that Mary visited Elizabeth immediately after the announcement to her by Gabriel and that she returned to Nazareth three months later, and that the visit to Joseph was the final preparation for Christmas.

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ took place. His mother, Mary, was pledged in marriage<sup>i</sup> to Joseph. Before they came together,<sup>j</sup> she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup>Joseph, her husband, was a righteous man and did not want to disgrace her. So he decided to divorce her privately.<sup>k</sup> <sup>20</sup>But as he was considering these things, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife,<sup>l</sup> because the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup>She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus,<sup>m</sup> because he will save his people from their sins."

<sup>22</sup>All this happened to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: <sup>n</sup> <sup>23</sup>"Look, the virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son. And they will name him Immanuel,"<sup>o</sup> which means, "God with us."<sup>p</sup>

<sup>24</sup>When Joseph woke up from his sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded

him. He took Mary home as his wife,<sup>25</sup> but he was not intimate with her<sup>9</sup> until she gave birth to her firstborn son.<sup>f</sup> And he named him Jesus.

The sermons for first year's Advent series could be based on the three angelic visits. The sermons for the second year could be based on the Old Testament readings. The sermons for the third series could be based on the psalms. There are many other appropriate texts that could be used.

The following readings from Luke 2, which complete the Advent/Christmas cycle of stories, will be used during the Christmas services and the Sundays after Christmas

### *Jesus Is Born*

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.<sup>a</sup> <sup>2</sup>This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governing Syria.<sup>b</sup> <sup>3</sup>And everyone went to register, each to his own town. <sup>4</sup>And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the town of Nazareth, into Judea, to the town of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was from the house and family line of David. <sup>5</sup>He went to be registered with Mary, his wife,<sup>c</sup> who was pledged to him in marriage and was expecting a child.

<sup>6</sup>And so it was that while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. <sup>7</sup>And she gave birth to her firstborn son, wrapped him in swaddling cloths,<sup>d</sup> and laid him in a manger,<sup>e</sup> because there was no room for them in the inn.<sup>f</sup>

<sup>8</sup>There were in the same country shepherds staying out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock at night.<sup>g</sup> <sup>9</sup>An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord<sup>h</sup> shone around them, and they were terrified! <sup>10</sup>But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. For behold, I bring you good news of great joy, which will be for all people: <sup>11</sup>Today in the town of David, a Savior was born for you. He is Christ<sup>i</sup> the Lord.<sup>j</sup> <sup>12</sup>And this will be a sign for you: You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." <sup>13</sup>Suddenly, there was with the angel a multitude from the heavenly army, praising God and saying, <sup>14</sup>"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward mankind."<sup>k</sup>

<sup>15</sup>When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Now let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." <sup>16</sup>So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. <sup>17</sup>When they had seen him, they told others the message they had been told about this child. <sup>18</sup>And all who heard it were amazed by what the shepherds said to them. <sup>19</sup>But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. <sup>20</sup>And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.<sup>l</sup>

### *The Presentation in the Temple*

<sup>21</sup>After eight days passed, when the child was circumcised, he was named Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

<sup>22</sup>When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses,<sup>m</sup> they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. <sup>23</sup>(As it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male<sup>n</sup> will be called holy to the Lord.")<sup>o</sup> <sup>24</sup>And they came to offer a sacrifice according to what was said in the law of the Lord, "A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."<sup>p</sup>

<sup>25</sup>Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. This man was righteous and devout, waiting for the comfort of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. <sup>26</sup>It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. <sup>27</sup>Moved by the Spirit he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what was customary according to the law, <sup>28</sup>Simeon took him into his arms and praised God. He said,

<sup>29</sup>Lord, you now dismiss your servant in peace, according to your word,

<sup>30</sup>because my eyes have seen your salvation,

<sup>31</sup>which you have prepared before the face of all people,

<sup>32</sup>a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.

<sup>33</sup>Joseph<sup>q</sup> and the child's<sup>r</sup> mother were amazed at the things that were spoken about him. <sup>34</sup>Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Listen carefully, this child is appointed for the falling and rising of many in Israel and for a sign that is spoken against, <sup>35</sup>so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."<sup>s</sup>

<sup>36</sup>Anna, a prophetess,<sup>t</sup> was there. She was a daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old. She had lived with her husband for seven years after her marriage,<sup>u</sup> <sup>37</sup>and then she was a widow of eighty-four years. She did not leave the temple complex, since she was worshipping with fasting and prayers night and day. <sup>38</sup>Standing nearby at that very hour, she gave thanks to the Lord. She kept speaking about the child to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.<sup>v</sup>

<sup>39</sup>When they had accomplished everything according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town, Nazareth.<sup>w</sup> <sup>40</sup>The child grew and became strong.<sup>x</sup> He was filled with wisdom, and God's favor was on him.

#### *The Boy Jesus in the Temple Courts*

<sup>41</sup>Every year his parents traveled to Jerusalem for the Passover Festival. <sup>42</sup>When he was twelve years old, they went up according to the custom of the Festival. <sup>43</sup>When the days had ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it. <sup>44</sup>Since they thought he was in their group, they went a day's journey. Then they began to look for him among their relatives and friends. <sup>45</sup>When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him.

<sup>46</sup>After three days<sup>y</sup> they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. <sup>47</sup>And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. <sup>48</sup>When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us this way? See, your father and I have been anxiously looking for you."

<sup>49</sup>He said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be taking care of my Father's business?"<sup>z</sup> <sup>50</sup>They did not understand what he was telling them.

<sup>51</sup>He went down with them and came to Nazareth. He was always obedient to them.<sup>z</sup> And his mother treasured up all these things in her heart. <sup>52</sup>Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and with people.

The texts in this lectionary contain all the information we have about Jesus' birth and childhood.