

## Interactive lesson



*picture screencaptured from  
Google Maps*

What do you think when you see a sign like this?

<Let them respond>

When would you look for this kind of sign?

<Let them respond>

Does just seeing the sign fulfill your need? If not, what do you need to do? <Let them respond>

What do you consider a sign from God?

<Let them respond>

What signs have you ever seen from God?

<Let them respond; e.g., wedding hall flooded>

Does just seeing a sign from God fulfill your needs, or do you need to act on the sign somehow?

<Let them respond>

Have you ever realized belatedly that you missed a sign from God? If so, what was it? <Let them respond>

God does give us many signs, through a variety of means. Some are more blatant than others, but all point to something better for our lives than other directions we might go. Let us remember to look for those signs and to trust God's love in all that we do, that we may be better prepared for encounters with the Holy.

## Gospel lesson

Hear how Joseph prepared for the coming of our Lord:



*picture screencaptured from  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LspA-t\\_DZbw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LspA-t_DZbw); credit: LUMO*

### Matthew 1:18-25

NRSV

<sup>18</sup> Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.

<sup>19</sup> Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly.

<sup>20</sup> But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

<sup>21</sup> She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

<sup>22</sup> All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

<sup>23</sup> "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us."

<sup>24</sup> When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife,

<sup>25</sup> but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.

*The word of God for the people of God*

<Hymn “What Child Is This”

UMH #219>

## Message: Give You a Sign



Foreground picture from <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/an-advent-song-of-ascents/second-sunday-of-advent-year-a-lectionary-planning-notes/second-sunday-of-advent-year-a-graphics>

Please pray with me?

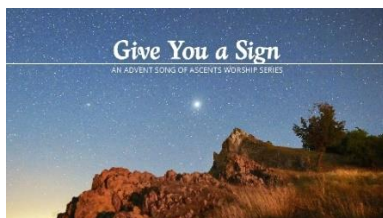
Gracious Lord who constantly signals us,  
as we take time now to further consider today's scriptures, please

- speak Your words through my mouth,
- open our ears to hear Your message, and
- abide in our hearts,

That we may heed Your signs and live in Your grace.

Amen.

Today concludes the series “An Advent Song of Ascents” with “Give You a Sign.”



picture from <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/an-advent-song-of-ascents/fourth-sunday-of-advent-year-a-lectionary-planning-notes/fourth-sunday-of-advent-year-a-graphics>

“This is odd, isn’t it? The last Sunday of Advent, yet there is a whole week until Christmas.

May this extra time allow us a little breathing space to listen to Isaiah and to Matthew before we rush off to the exuberance and extravagance of Christmas.”

Are you ready for Christmas? I am not; I still have so much left to do! I think we all know about running around so much we ignore signs about what to do.



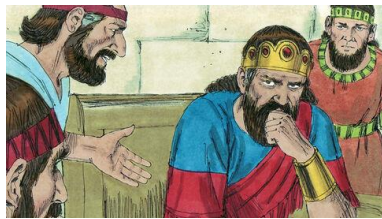
*picture screen captured from*  
<https://www.pexels.com/photo/car-dashboard-with-tachometer-and-fuel-gauge-6075494/>

My gas gauge was below a quarter of a tank, but I did not want to stop for gas because I was running behind and had places to be. I had to run to the store, get to Georgetown to set up before the service, then after that service scoot down to South Otselic for the next service, then scurry to get to Smyrna for taking Keven’s mother to the concert in Norwich in which he was playing.

I was ignoring warning signs and might have wound up stuck on a roadside, out of gas, and missing the concert by taking the chance of keeping going instead of tending to what was needed. Fortunately, I was able to leave my car in Smyrna and carpool with Keven. I got gas after the concert, when I finally

brought my car from Smyrna into Sherburne (while nearly running on fumes alone).

All through the Bible we hear about how God gives people signs, that they - and we - can know God's intent. Yet we put up blocks, saying something else is more important, until God moves them aside.



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/illustrations/jehoshaphat-victory/>

God told Ahaz to pick a sign, to make known to Ahaz that he should rely on God alone to protect the kingdom rather than allying with Assyrians. Ahaz instead threw up the adage about not putting the Lord to the test. How odd to tell God no!

Ahaz wanted to ally with the Assyrians. He was using the law to justify his actions, and in doing so was missing God's grace. God understood that and provided a sign anyway - and in the following verses, gave a warning about relying on the Assyrians instead of on God. God will proclaim Her actions, whether we heed God's signs or not.

The psalmist cried out for God's help, remembering that God led the people before. Turning to God is good, but did you notice the terms? Only after God once again saved them, would they be ever faithful. I think God prefers that we trust in God first, that we

can recognize the signs God gives and receive God's blessings as coming from God.



*picture from MMMS collection  
with text overlaid*

You see, it is not a question of whether or not God will bless us. God is blessing us all the time! It is rather a question of how we respond to those blessings, whether we use them for better life (as God enables and wants for us to have).

In his letter to the Romans, Paul opened talking about how Jesus Christ was “promised beforehand through [God’s] prophets in the holy scriptures.” He then spends the next fifteen chapters explaining the glory and grace that the Messiah is for the world.

That he has to explain it at such length is an indicator that even if they knew about the signs, the people did not understand the blessings God foretold in those signs, how they came to fruition, or what it meant for living life better in God’s grace.



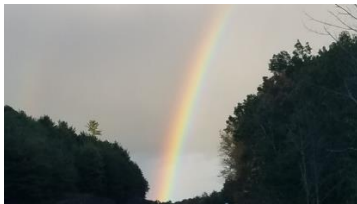
*picture screencaptured from  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LspA-tDZbw>; credit: LUMO*

Joseph certainly did not take the sign that Mary was pregnant as a blessing from God at first. An angel

had to explain it to him. Afterward, understanding what God wanted, Joseph still had a choice of whether or not to accept Mary as his wife. Because he had faith in God, he accepted the pregnant woman, had a devoted wife who gave him a bunch more children, and is celebrated for supporting the Son of God.

Joseph's life likely would have been much emptier if he had not accepted the responsibility for helping to raise Jesus. When at a critical point, he heeded the sign from God because he was faithful and righteous.

*picture from MMMS collection*



How often do we neglect signs from God because we put social customs or our ego in the way? Or think that it is too much effort at the time, like not getting gas until you run out and are stuck at the roadside? Our lives are so much better when we pay attention to the signs God gives us and live by God's grace!

This week, knowing that God gave us a sign, I want you to look for signs of the Holy Spirit in your life. What is God telling you to do?

- † Reach out more, perhaps calling someone who needs to hear they are not really alone at this time of year?
- † Be more diligent at work, get a new job, or just

take a break?

- † Donate to a cause? Perhaps with money, or perhaps with your time and energy in volunteering?
- † Form a new friendship, even if unlikely, or renew old relationships?

There are so many, many ways we can share God's love in this world. Look for the signs God gives of how God wants to work through you. Be an agent of the Holy Spirit in this world. God will bless you in ways you cannot yet fathom if you just trust in Jesus.

Let us now respond with:

**The Apostles' Creed, Traditional Version** UMH #881

I believe in God, the Father Almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth;

And in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord;  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, dead, and buried;  
He descended into hell.

The third day he rose from the dead;  
he ascended into heaven,  
and sitteth at the right hand of God  
the Father Almighty;  
from thence he shall come to judge  
the quick and the dead.



I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic\* church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. Amen.

\*universal

### <Doxology>

### <Offertory / Pastoral Prayer>

Let us pray:

Holy God of hope and promise: when the children were in deep despair, you promised them a sign, the indication of a Savior coming into their midst.

As we bring you our tithes and offerings this day, so many of us are discouraged, trying to find our way.

We need your sign, we need your Son, not as simply a reminder of history but as a new direction, a revolution of love that starts in our hearts, a resurrection of compassion that looks beyond self and the accumulation of more and more things that don't satisfy.

We need what only a Savior can give us.

Guide us by your signs on this day and as we begin the journey to Bethlehem once again.

(above prayer from <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org>)

- Lord, please help {these members of the body of Christ whom we lift up} with Your healing touch and comfort:
  - **Leah Mealing** - sister taken off life support last Wed
  - **Brett Gilbert** - recent illness
  - -

- -
- -
- -
- -
- Thanks for
  - -
  - -
- Hold those who cannot be with us in Your loving embrace until we see them again.
  - Family far off
  - Travelers
- Lord, please help all people who struggle, especially those to whom we remain oblivious.
- Send Your Spirit to address world/social problems
  - end bigotry, dismantle racism, reform systems persist
  - bring world peace
- Guide our Leaders – local, state, federal, international, and especially of Your church.

All these things we lift up in Your holy name,  
praying as You taught us to pray: *<Lord's Prayer>*

*<Hymn "Hark the Herald Angels Sing" UMH #240>*

<Benediction>



background picture from  
<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/an-advent-song-of-ascents/fourth-sunday-of-advent-year-a-lectionary-planning-notes/fourth-sunday-of-advent-year-a-graphics>

The angels came to the shepherds as a sign.  
As we leave this building with their song in our  
hearts to continue on our faith journeys,  
As we encounter others who are seeking a sign,  
Let us sing of the kingdom of God among us  
and of our Christ coming again in glory  
That the whole world may prepare!  
Amen.