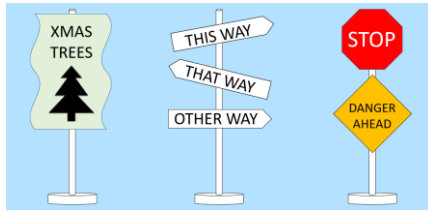


## Interactive lesson



*picture from personal creation*

What are signposts for (the post, not the sign)?

<Let them respond>

Do all signposts carry the same message?

<Let them respond>

Why might the message on a signpost get changed?

<Let them respond>

What makes signposts effective? <Let them respond>

Do they last forever? <Let them respond>

What happens when a post is down? <Let them respond>

As Christians, we have a message to carry, though we may each proclaim it uniquely. What is your message?

<Let them respond>

Would you say your message has changed over the years? If so, how? <Let them respond>

What makes you effective in sharing your message?

<Let them respond>

Have you ever felt like you have been knocked down or broken when trying to hold up your message?

<Let them respond>

What happened afterward? <Let them respond>

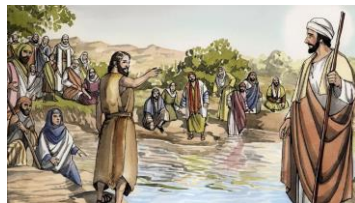
We are called to proclaim Christ, to stand as signposts for God, a signal to help others. Sometimes

we need to change our message for the season we are in, sometimes we need to point to a different path for the traveler's next destination, sometimes we pose a warning, and sometimes we can get hurt.

As long as we keep our base secure in the love and teachings of Jesus, we can trust God to restore us and to use us as effective signposts for God's kingdom.

## Gospel lesson

In this season of Advent, let us hear of someone who served as a signpost pointing to the impending arrival of our Savior:



picture from <https://www.freebibleimages.org/illustrations/qnpi-012-john-baptist/>

## Matthew 3:1-12

<sup>1</sup>In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming,

<sup>2</sup>"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

<sup>3</sup>This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'"

<sup>4</sup> Now John wore clothing of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey.

<sup>5</sup> Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan,

<sup>6</sup> and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

<sup>7</sup> But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

<sup>8</sup> Bear fruit worthy of repentance.

<sup>9</sup> Do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham.

<sup>10</sup> Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

<sup>11</sup> "I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

<sup>12</sup> His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat

into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

*The word of God for the people of God*

<Hymn "Wild and Lone the Prophet's Voice" TFWS #2089>

## Message: Stand as a Signal



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>

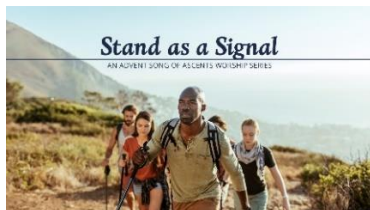
Please pray with me?

Almighty God who sent prophets to point the way,  
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 find our path to You and help others find theirs as well. Amen.

After Hanging of the Greens last week, we pick up the series "An Advent Song of Ascents" with week two, "Stand as a Signal."



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>

"It is the second Sunday of Advent, and we're

making a declaration.

Whether we are heeding the call of John the Baptist to “bear fruit worthy of repentance” or longing for the peaceable kingdom of Isaiah, we are taking our stand for the promise that Jesus offers for beloved community, a new way of living.

We are declaring and leaning into this kin-dom of heaven, living it now in all the ways we can.”

We had a really fun time putting on the show “It’s a Wonderful Life” at the Earlville Opera House (EOH) yesterday. I do not know how many of you have been to the EOH, but the theater is located on the second floor, above the noise of traffic below. This was normal for opera houses in their heyday.



picture from <https://www.google.com/maps/place/Earlville+Opera+House/>

People coming to performances at the EOH for the first time may not know where to go in order to get in. The original wide staircase is currently closed, so they have to go in through the gallery entrance, up the stairs or elevator, and come back around to the front of the building upstairs to get into the theater.

The EOH staff like this arrangement because it gives them a chance to promote gallery displays to the

theater goers. It is an easy sidetrack (before or after a show) to see some truly talented artistry.

Because getting to the theater is not straightforward, there are signs posted telling everyone where to find it. As with most signs, people generally ignore them unless they are looking for the information they provide. To promote EOH events and get people looking for those signs, social media and other advertising outlets are used.

It is not just a one-time shot or single location message drawing people in. It may take a long chain of messages: someone mentions a show, the person sees it online, they follow maps to get to Earlville, and then they follow signs to get in to the theater. If any one of those fails, the person may miss the show.



*picture from MMMS collection*

Now think about the coming of Jesus, so much better and more important than any show. The prophets proclaimed it, it was included in the scriptures, there were signs in the heavens about Jesus's birth, and John the Baptist adamantly warned people about Lord's coming. All of those were needed to help the Chosen people see God in their midst.

And how about us today, needing a personal

relationship with our Savior? Following after the prophets and Jesus Himself, the apostles proclaimed that the new branch had grown out of the stump of Jesse, it was included in the scriptures passed down through the ages, saints and martyrs performed miracles validating the claims of the Church, and we today need to continue sharing the Good News lest anyone miss out on the blessing God offers.

Just as in ancient times, the world is full of hurt and destruction; there are poor, needy, and oppressed people all over. There are many jaded cynics who cannot believe a relationship with God is even possible let alone necessary. Just as the root of Jesse was once considered a dead stump, some think religion in general is a dead relic of superstitions from bygone ages.

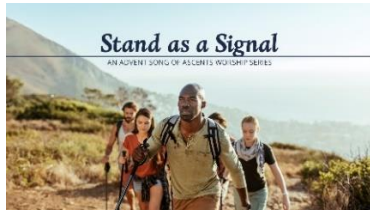


Picture cropped from  
<https://www.pexels.com/photo/new-tree-grow-up-on-stump-3081415/>;  
credit: Lucas Pezeta

Yet look at the shoot that came out of the stump of Jesse. The Creator of everything and source of all life renews us even when we think all is lost. Just as John the Baptist proclaimed so that people would prepare and Paul attested so that people would receive God's blessings, Jesus fulfilled the promise of the Scriptures, bringing new life and hope.

Still today people need to be told: our eternal God

continually restores, bringing a peaceful wholeness to all damaged by sin. Jesus brings hope, teaching a better way to live (in relationship with God), saving us from the fire that burns away the chaff of sin.



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>

And it is our turn to stand as signals, to point people's attention to the Lord. To do this, we must:

- † First seek Jesus ourselves, trying to understand through prayer and scriptural study.
- † Second, we need to proclaim Jesus's love and ways through our words and our actions.
- † Third, we need to invite others into relationship with Christ and with God's people – and what better time than when we are celebrating the Lord coming into our midst?
- † And with those, we need to support one another's faith, challenging and holding one another accountable in the love of Jesus.

### <Invitation

UMH p.7>

We know that Christ our Lord invites to His table all who love Him, who earnestly repent of their sin and seek to live in peace with one another. Therefore, let us confess our sin before God and one another.

<slide change>



*<Confession and Pardon**UMH p.8>*

Let us pray:

Merciful God, we confess that we have not loved you  
with our whole heart.

We have failed to be an obedient church.

We have not done your will, we have broken your law,  
we have rebelled against your love,  
we have not loved our neighbors,  
and we have not heard the cry of the needy.

Forgive us, we pray.

Free us for joyful obedience,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Hear the good news:

Christ died for us while we were yet sinners;  
that proves God's love toward us.

In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!

In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven!  
Glory to God. Amen.

*<Doxology>**<Offertory / Pastoral Prayer>*

Let us pray:

Our God, architect of this world and all others:  
we know you had a vision for all your creation  
to dwell together.

With the creatures of the air, earth, and sea, you  
long for us to live in respect and with one another.  
We give this morning, understanding that we have  
denied you that desire.

We ask you to help us use who we are and what we have

to heal this abused and broken world.

(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:
  - -
  - -
  - -
  - -
  - -
  - -
  - -
  - -
- 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 pray in Your holy name, Amen.

<THE GREAT THANKSGIVING Communion – UNCOVER elements>

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them up to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to you, Almighty God, creator of heaven and earth.

- † You formed us in your image and breathed into us the breath of life.
- † When we turned away, and our love failed, your love remained steadfast.
- † You delivered us from captivity, made covenant to be our sovereign God, and spoke to us through your prophets, who looked for that day  
when justice shall roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream,  
when nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.

<slide change>

And so, with your people on earth and all the company of heaven, we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,  
heaven and earth are full of your glory.

Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest.

Holy are you, and blessed is your Son Jesus Christ,  
whom you sent in the fullness of time to be a light  
to the nations.

† You scatter the proud in the imagination of their  
hearts and have mercy on those who fear you from  
generation to generation.

† You put down the mighty from their thrones and  
exalt those of low degree.

† You fill the hungry with good things, and the rich  
you send empty away.

Your own Son came among us as a servant, to be  
Emmanuel, your presence with us.

He humbled himself in obedience to your will and  
freely accepted death on a cross.

By the baptism of his suffering, death, and  
resurrection you gave birth to your Church,  
delivered us from slavery to sin and death, and made  
with us a new covenant by water and the Spirit.

*<hold hands out over bread/elements>*

On the night in which he gave himself up for us, he  
took bread, gave thanks to you, broke the bread,  
gave it to his disciples, and said:

“Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you.  
Do this in remembrance of me.”

*<hold hands out over juice/elements>*

When the supper was over he took the cup, gave thanks to you, gave it to his disciples, and said:

“Drink from this, all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant, poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

And so, in remembrance of these your mighty acts in Jesus Christ,

*<slide change>*

we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving  
as a holy and living sacrifice,  
in union with Christ's offering for us,  
as we proclaim the mystery of faith.  
Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again.

*<hold hands out over elements>*

Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here, and on on these gifts of bread and juice.

Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ,  
that we may be for the world the body of Christ,  
redeemed by his blood.

By your Spirit make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world,

until Christ comes in final victory, and we feast at his heavenly banquet.

Through your Son Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit in your holy Church, all honor and glory is yours, almighty God, now and forever.

Amen.

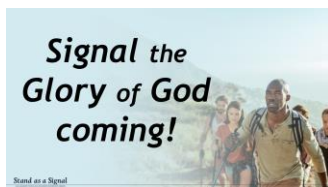
And now, with the confidence of the children of God, let us pray: *<Lord's Prayer>*

*<Breaking of the bread and lifting of the cup>*

*<Serving of the elements/music background>*

*<Hymn "Angels from the Realms of Glory" UMH #220>*

*<Benediction>*



background 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>

As we leave this building  
and continue on our faith journeys,  
As we encounter others who are seeking,  
Let us stand as signals and **sing**  
of the kingdom of God among us  
and of our Christ coming again in glory  
That the whole world may prepare!  
Amen.