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Introduction (Responsively)**BOW 258**

How shall we prepare this house for the coming of the King?

With branches of cedar, the tree of royalty.

How shall we prepare this house for the coming of the eternal Christ?

With garlands of pine and fir, whose leave are ever living, ever green.

How shall we prepare this house for the coming of our Savior?

With wreaths of holly and ivy, telling of his passion, death, and resurrection.

How shall we prepare our hearts for the coming of the Son of God?

By hearing again the words of the prophets, who foretold the saving work of God.

For God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved.

Glory to God in the highest!

BOW 259

Jeremiah 23:5-6

God Will Send a Righteous King

- ⁵ The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.
- ⁶ In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. And this is the name by which he will be called: "The Lord is our righteousness."

In ancient times the cedar was revered as the tree of royalty. It also signified immortality and was used for purification.

We place this cedar branch as a sign of Christ, who reigns as King for ever, and whose coming, in justice and righteousness, will purify our hearts.

<Hymn "Come Thou Long Expected Jesus" UMH #196 v.1>
Place pew boughs, pine cones, window candles.

Blessing of the Advent Wreath

BOW 261

Isaiah 9:2,6-7 The Prophet Declares a Child Will Be Born

- ² The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them light has shined.
- ⁶ For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
- ⁷ His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore.
- The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

Because the needles of pine and fir trees appear not to die each season, the ancients saw them as signs of things that last for ever.

Isaiah tells us that there will be no end to the reign of the Messiah.

Therefore, we hang wreaths of evergreens shaped in a circle, which itself had no end, to signify the eternal reign of Jesus, the Christ.

The Advent Wreath, also a circle of evergreens representing life without end, has one colored candle for each week of Advent encircling a central white Christ candle. Let us bless it now:

Christ came to bring us salvation and has promised to come again. Let us pray that we may always be ready to welcome him.

Come, Lord Jesus.

That the keeping of Advent may open our hearts to God's love,

Come, Lord Jesus.

That the light of Christ may penetrate the darkness of sin,

Come, Lord Jesus.

That this wreath may constantly remind us to prepare for the coming of Christ,

Come, Lord Jesus.

That the Christmas season may fill us with peace and joy as we strive to follow the example of Jesus,

Come, Lord Jesus.

Loving God, your Church joyfully awaits the coming of its Savior, who enlightens our hearts and dispels the darkness of ignorance and sin.

Pour forth your blessings upon us as we light the candles of this wreath.

May their light reflect the splendor of Christ, who is Lord, for ever and ever. Amen.

<Hymn "Emmanuel, Emmanuel" UMH #204 (no repeat)>

Place door wreaths, have Advent wreath in position.

Lighting of the Advent Wreath

BOW 262

Isaiah 60:2-3**1st Sunday of Advent**

- ² For darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you.
- ³ Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

We light this candle as a symbol of Christ our Hope.
May the light sent from God shine in the darkness to
show us the way of salvation.
O come, O come, Emmanuel.

<Hymn "Advent Song"

TFWS #2090 v.1>

Light the first purple candle on the Advent wreath.

Hanging of Banners

Isaiah 11:1,10,12 The King Will Gather the People

- ¹ A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.
- ¹⁰ On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a
signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire
of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious.
- ¹² He will raise a signal for the nations, and will
assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather the
dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the
earth.

Banners have long been used to draw people to follow their leaders. The colors of royalty are blue and purple, so we hang banners of those colors as we draw close to the birth of our God and King, Jesus.

<Hymn "Lift High the Cross"

UMH #159 v.1>

Place Advent banners on walls.

Garlands

BOW 259

Isaiah 53:1-6**The Fourth Servant Song**

- ¹ Who has believed what we have heard? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?
- ² For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.
- ³ He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account.
- ⁴ Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted.
- ⁵ But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed.
- ⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

For Christians, this passage from Isaiah reflects the sufferings of Jesus, who saved us from our sins by his death on the cross, and by his resurrection from the dead.

In ancient times, holly and ivy were considered signs of Christ's passion.

Their prickly leaves suggested the crown of thorns, the red berries the blood of the Savior, and the bitter bark the drink offered to Jesus on the cross. As we hang the holly and the ivy, let us rejoice in the coming of Jesus, our Savior.

~~<Song "The Holly and the Ivy" v.1>~~

~~OR~~ <Hymn "Hail to the Lord's Anointed" UMH #203 v.1>

Hang garlands on the railing/wherever.

Tree Lighting

BOW 259

John 1:1-5,9-14**The Mystery of the Incarnation**

- ¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
- ² He was in the beginning with God.
- ³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being
- ⁴ in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.
- ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.
- ⁹ The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.
- ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him.
- ¹¹ He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him.
- ¹² But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God,
- ¹³ who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.
- ¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

As we prepare for the coming of Jesus, the Light of the World, we light the Christmas tree.

During this Advent, wherever you see a lighted Christmas tree, let it call to mind the One who

brings light to our darkness, healing our brokenness,
and peace to all who receive him.

<Hymn "Light of the World"

TFWS #2204 v.1>

Light tree and window candles.

Blessing of the Chrismon Tree

BOW 260

Titus 3:4-7

- ⁴ But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared,
- ⁵ he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.
- ⁶ This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior,
- ⁷ so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Let us pray.

Holy Lord, we come with joy to celebrate the birth of your Son, who rescued us from the darkness of sin by making the cross a tree of life and light.

May our Christmas trees, arrayed in splendor, remind us of the life-giving cross of Christ, that we may always rejoice in the new life that shines in our hearts.

We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Chrismons are ancient symbols for Christ or some part of Christ's ministry made from white and/or gold materials. They are displayed on a tree with only white lights.

For those who experience sadness or other negative emotions at this time of year, we will be hosting a Blue Christmas service in South Otselic on December 21 at 6 pm. Between now and then, everyone is invited to put the name of someone they miss, their mood, or whatever circumstance brings them down on a paper ornament and hang it on the tree with blue lights.

<Hymn "Jesus Loves Me" UMH #191, 3 verses>
Decorate Chrismon Tree with chrismons.

Poinsettias/gifts

Matthew 2:9-11

⁹ ...they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was.

¹⁰ When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy.

¹¹ On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Like the magi, we seek to honor the baby Jesus with gifts. Some Church traditions had the special gifts brought up on Christmas Eve for dedication to God.

According to Mexican legend, a young girl was sad that she had nothing to offer the Christ child at the Christmas Eve service. She picked weeds from the roadside, and as she brought them forward they transformed into bright red blooms.

Now poinsettias serve as a reminder that even the most humble gift, if given in love, will be acceptable in Christ's eyes.

The tradition of giving one another gifts at Christmas stems from sharing the gift of love found in the baby Jesus with one another - God's children.

<Hymn "Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming" UMH #216 vv.1,3>

Bring in and place Poinsettia plants (and gift boxes if applicable).

Blessing of the Nativity Scene

BOW 280

Luke 2:1-7

- ¹ In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered.
- ² This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria.
- ³ All went to their own towns to be registered.
- ⁴ Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David.
- ⁵ He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child.
- ⁶ While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child.
- ⁷ And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

God of every nation and people, from the beginning of creation you have made manifest your love.

When our need for a Savior was great you sent your Son to be born of the virgin Mary.

To our lives he brings joy and peace, justice, mercy, and love.

Lord, bless all who look upon this manger.

May it remind us of the humble birth of Jesus, and raise up our thoughts to him, who is God-with-us and Savior of all, and who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

<Hymn "The Friendly Beasts" UMH #227 v.1>
*Arrange figures for the nativity (Christ child to be
added on Christmas Eve).*

<Doxology>

<Offertory / Pastoral Prayer>

Let us pray:

Gracious God, in this season of anticipation, we offer our gifts with hopeful hearts.

As we prepare for the fullness of your kingdom, may these offerings be a sign of our readiness and desire to live attentively.

Use them to bring justice, righteousness, and joy to our world.

Surprise us with your presence and help us to look up, to pay attention, and to embrace the hope you bring. (above prayer from <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org>)

- Lord, please help the people who struggle to celebrate, to decorate with joy in anticipation of what is to come for them:
 - Those dealing with losses overwhelming their hearts: help them to know hope, that they are not alone
 - Ukraine, the Mideast, and all who yet struggle with war in their homeland: bring world peace
 - Those to whom we are oblivious: Send Your Spirit to address world/social problems, to dismantle racist systems and to end bigotry
- Guide our Leaders – local, state, federal, international, and especially of Your church.
- Hold those who cannot be with us in Your loving embrace until we see them again.
 - Family far off, Travelers

- Lord, please help {these members of the body of Christ whom we lift up} with Your healing touch and comfort:

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- Thanks for

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All these things we pray as You taught us to pray,
<Lord's Prayer>

<Hymn "There's Something About That Name" UMH #171>

<Benediction>¹



background picture from MMMS collection

Beloved, go from this place blessed with a hope that takes root and grows, preparing us to notice, listen, and join in with God's kin-dom work among us. Amen.

¹ Written by Dr. Lisa Hancock, Discipleship Ministries, June 2024; posted on <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/come-let-us-adore-him/first-sunday-of-advent-year-c-lectionary-planning-notes/first-sunday-of-advent-year-c-liturgical-resources>.