

PREPARE YE

A SERIES OF SPECIAL
SERVICES FOR *Advent*



WEEK 1: *Ponder*



WEEK 2: *Pray*



WEEK 3: *Praise*



WEEK 4: *Proclaim*

WORSHIP KIT



P R E P A R E Y E



A SERIES OF SPECIAL
SERVICES FOR *Advent*

**Prepare ye the way of the Lord,
make straight in the desert a
highway for our God.**

—Isaiah 40:3

W O R S H I P K I T

P R E P A R E Y E

A SERIES OF SPECIAL
SERVICES FOR *Advent*

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P R E P A R E Y E

A SERIES OF SPECIAL SERVICES FOR *Advent*

About the Series

In this worship series for traditional worship for Advent, we contemplate the many ways we prepare ourselves for the coming of the Christ Child on Christmas, taking cues from the psalms of old and from those whom God chose to play a part in the story of our Lord's birth. As we draw near to the manger bed of our Savior from sin and death, our hearts prepare him room for his everlasting love.

Week 1: Ponder (Psalm 48:9): We consider ways in which we can ponder the meaning of the birth of our Savior through the reading of Scripture and through reflection. Mary serves as a model for us in this pondering in the Annunciation.

Week 2: Pray (Psalm 69:13): We think about ways in which we can take more time during this season to communicate to our God through prayer as we wait for Christ. Zechariah, who went to the temple to pray, serves as an example for us of how hard that waiting in prayer can be.

Week 3: Praise (Psalm 30:4): We celebrate the upcoming arrival of our Savior through songs and shouts of praise as we prepare for him. Elizabeth, in her greeting of Mary, provides a benchmark for rejoicing with others over the good news of salvation in Jesus, even as we wait.

Week 4: Proclaim (Psalm 145:6): We contemplate how we can prepare ourselves and others for the arrival of Jesus through our proclaiming. John the Baptist stands as the forerunner of all future proclaimers of Christ and gives us the courage to use our own voices to proclaim our

devotion to the One who is born to save.

Each service features a sermon, a children's message and prayers, along with newsletter/bulletin notices about the series.

The kit includes everything you need for each service as well as a CD-ROM (Mac/PC) with the text of the entire kit in .rtf (rich text format), newsletter/bulletin notices, hymns, visual media recommendations, contemporary music song suggestions and PowerPoint documents of all the services with images and text (along with a copyright release) for use on screens.

Ordering Information

Pre-printed bulletins, blank bulletins, and several other resources are available. Call Creative Communications for the Parish at 1-800-325-9414, or visit us on the web at www.creativecommunications.com for current pricing and availability.

Printed bulletins Order Codes:

- Service 1 (Ponder) **PY1A**
- Service 2 (Pray) **PY1B**
- Service 3 (Praise) **PY1C**
- Service 4 (Proclaim) **PY1D**

Blank 8 1/2" x 11" bulletins Order Codes:

- Service 1 (Ponder) **PY1E**
- Service 2 (Pray) **PY1F**
- Service 3 (Praise) **PY1G**
- Service 4 (Proclaim) **PY1H**

Blank 8 1/2" x 14" bulletins Order Codes:

- Service 1 (Ponder) **PY1J**
- Service 2 (Pray) **PY1K**
- Service 3 (Praise) **PY1L**
- Service 4 (Proclaim) **PY1M**

Promotional posters (set of 3) 11" x 17". **PY1PR**

Bulletin insert. 5 3/8" x 8 3/8" **PY1BL**

Bookmark. 2 1/2" x 7". **PY1BK**

Signature collection **PY1SK**

Complete collection **PY1CK**

P R E P A R E Y E

A SERIES OF SPECIAL
SERVICES FOR *Advent*

Week 1: Ponder

Newsletter Notice

Join us for our Advent worship series, Prepare Ye. Each week we will contemplate the many ways we prepare ourselves for the coming of the Christ Child on Christmas. In our worship for the first week in Advent we will consider ways in which we can ponder the meaning of the birth of our Savior through the reading of Scripture and through reflection. Mary serves as a model for us in this pondering in the Annunciation.

Bulletin Notice

Welcome to our Advent worship series, Prepare Ye. Each week in this series we will contemplate the many ways we prepare ourselves for the coming of the Christ Child on Christmas. In our worship for today we will consider ways in which we can ponder the meaning of the birth of our Savior through the reading of Scripture and through reflection. Mary serves as a model for us in this pondering in the Annunciation.

PREPARE YE

A SERIES OF SPECIAL SERVICES FOR *Advent*

Week 2: Pray

Newsletter Notice

Join us for our Advent worship series, Prepare Ye. Each week we will contemplate the many ways we prepare ourselves for the coming of the Christ Child on Christmas. In our worship for the second week in Advent we will think about ways in which we can take more time during this season to communicate to our God through prayer as we wait for Christ. Zechariah, who went to the temple to pray, serves as an example for us of how hard that waiting in prayer can be.

Bulletin Notice

Welcome to our Advent worship series, Prepare Ye. Each week we will contemplate the many ways we prepare ourselves for the coming of the Christ Child on Christmas. In our worship for today we will think about ways in which we can take more time during this season to communicate to our God through prayer as we wait for Christ. Zechariah, who went to the temple to pray, serves as an example for us of how hard that waiting in prayer can be.

P R E P A R E Y E

A SERIES OF SPECIAL SERVICES FOR *Advent*

Week 3: Praise

Newsletter Notice

Join us for our Advent worship series, Prepare Ye. Each week we will contemplate the many ways we prepare ourselves for the coming of the Christ Child on Christmas. In our worship for the third week in Advent we will celebrate the upcoming arrival of our Savior through songs and shouts of praise as we prepare for him. Elizabeth, in her greeting of Mary, provides a benchmark for rejoicing with others over the good news of salvation in Jesus, even as we wait.

Bulletin Notice

Welcome to our Advent worship series, Prepare Ye. Each week we will contemplate the many ways we prepare ourselves for the coming of the Christ Child on Christmas. In our worship for today we celebrate the upcoming arrival of our Savior through songs and shouts of praise as we prepare for him. Elizabeth, in her greeting of Mary, provides a benchmark for rejoicing with others over the good news of salvation in Jesus, even as we wait.

PREPARE YE

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Week 4: Proclaim

Newsletter Notice

Join us for our Advent worship series, Prepare Ye. Each week we will contemplate the many ways we prepare ourselves for the coming of the Christ Child on Christmas. In our worship for the fourth week in Advent we will contemplate how we can prepare ourselves and others for the arrival of Jesus through our proclaiming. John the Baptist stands as the forerunner of all future proclaimers of Christ and gives us the courage to use our own voices to proclaim our devotion to the One who is born to save.

Bulletin Notice

Welcome to our Advent worship series, Prepare Ye. Each week we will contemplate the many ways we prepare ourselves for the coming of the Christ Child on Christmas. In our worship for today we will contemplate how we can prepare ourselves and others for the arrival of Jesus through our proclaiming. John the Baptist stands as the forerunner of all future proclaimers of Christ and gives us the courage to use our own voices to proclaim our devotion to the One who is born to save.

P R E P A R E Y E

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Week 1: Ponder

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P R E P A R E Y E

A SERIES OF SPECIAL
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Week 1: Ponder

Order of Service

We ponder your steadfast love, O God, in the midst of your temple. Psalm 48:9

Invocation and Call to Worship

- P** The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.
- C** Amen.
- P** Prepare the way of the Lord! Make straight in the desert a highway for our God!
- C** Be strong and courageous, be careful to live according to everything Moses commanded.
- P** Do not let God's Word depart from your mouth.
- C** But meditate on it day and night.
- P** Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.

C Singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts because nothing is impossible with our God!

Hymn The Advent of Our King (St. Thomas SM)

The advent of our King our prayers must now employ,
And we must hymns of welcome sing in strains of holy joy.

The everlasting Son incarnate deigns to be,
Himself a servant's form puts on to set his servants free.

O Zion's daughter, rise to meet your lowly King,
Nor let your faithless heart despise the peace he comes to bring.

As judge, on clouds of light, he soon will come again
And his true members all unite with him in heav'n to reign.

Before the dawning day let sin's dark deeds be gone,
The sinful self be put away, the new self now put on.

All glory to the Son, who comes to set us free,
With Father, Spirit, ever one through all eternity.

Confession and Absolution

P Almighty God, because nothing is impossible with you, we come into your presence confessing our sin, confident of your mercy and forgiveness. For lack of reverence; for calculating minds; for going along with the majority—

C O Christ, forgive us.

P For selfishness that dares not face truth; laziness content with half-truth; for artificial life and worship—

C O Christ, forgive us.

P For self-indulgence; for being pompous and puffed up with self-importance—

C O Christ, forgive us.

P For cynicism about our fellow Christians; for cruel indifference; for being satisfied with things as they are and failing to trust that with you nothing is impossible—

C O Christ, forgive us.

P For token concern for the poor, the lonely and the loveless people; for confusing faith with good feelings—

C O Christ, forgive us.

P For everything in us that hides your divine power—

C Lord, have mercy! Christ, have mercy! Lord, have mercy!

P Hear the good news! Because of his death and resurrection, Jesus is our Savior. The Lord God has given to him the throne of his father David. Jesus reigns over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end. Therefore, you are fully and forever forgiven in Jesus' name.

C Nothing is impossible with our God!

Prayer of the Day

Children's Message

Old Testament Reading..... Joshua 1:7-9

Epistle Reading..... Colossians 3:15-17

Gospel Reading..... Luke 1:26-38

Hymn The Angel Gabriel from Heaven Came (Gabriel's Message 10 10 11 7 3)

The angel Gabriel from heaven came,
With wings as drifted snow, with eyes as flame:
"All hail to thee, O lowly maiden Mary,
Most highly favored lady." Gloria!

"For know a blessed mother thou shalt be,
All generations laud and honor thee;
Thy son shall be Emmanuel, by seers foretold,
Most highly favored lady." Gloria!

Then gentle Mary meekly bowed her head;
"To me be as it pleaseth God," she said.
"My soul shall laud and magnify God's holy name."
Most highly favored lady. Gloria!

Of her, Emmanuel, the Christ, was born
In Bethlehem all on a Christmas morn,
And Christian folk throughout the world will ever say:
“Most highly favored lady.” Gloria!

Sermon

Offering

Prayers

P Heavenly Father, we have a lot in common with Mary. When we consider the enormity of the promises you have made accompanying the birth of Jesus, we also ask, “How will this be?” To which you answer back in your Word,

C **Nothing is impossible with our God.**

P Father, every promise you have made about Jesus and our redemption purchased through his shed blood and empty tomb will happen. Indeed, your great and glorious promises are always “Yes and Amen.” And so we confess,

C **Nothing is impossible with our God.**

P Jesus, on your Second Advent, you will finish making all things new—changing this sinful and dying world into the New Jerusalem. This promise is so overwhelming that you remind us,

C **Nothing is impossible with our God.**

P Father, heal the pain in our families. Restore unity. Release compassion and kindness. And let the love of Jesus pervade and permeate our homes. We believe that,

C **Nothing is impossible with our God.**

P Father, through your Holy Spirit, empower us to think of others more often than ourselves; not to keep a record of wrongs; and no longer rehearse the ways others have hurt us, and the ways we’ve hurt them. Remind us again that,

C **Nothing is impossible with our God.**

P And so we say with Mary, we are your servants, Lord. Let it be to us according to your Word.

C **We pray in Jesus’ glorious and grace-filled name. Amen.**

Lord's Prayer

Benediction

P Prepare the way of the Lord! Make straight in the desert a highway for our God!

C Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.

P So that whatever we do, in word or deed.

C We do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus.

P Giving thanks to God the Father through him because

C Nothing is impossible with our God!

HymnFrom Heaven Above to Earth I Come (Vom Himmel Hoch LM)

“From heav’n above to earth I come to bear good news to ev’ry home;
Glad tidings of great joy I bring, whereof I now will say and sing:

“To you this night is born a child of Mary, chosen virgin mild;
This little child, of lowly birth, shall be the joy of all the earth.

“This is the Christ, our God and Lord, who in all need shall aid afford;
He will himself your Savior be from all your sins to set you free.

“He will on you the gifts bestow prepared by God for all below,
That in his kingdom, bright and fair, you may with us his glory share.

“My heart for very joy doth leap, my lips no more can silence keep;
I, too, must sing with joyful tongue that sweetest ancient cradle-song.”

P R E P A R E Y E

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Week 1: Ponder

Complete Script for Worship Leaders

- If desired, an **Environmental Projection** is shown on a screen or on the walls of your worship space to set the tone for the service before the service begins or throughout the service at various points:

<https://www.istockphoto.com/photo/man-sitting-watching-sunset-gm944915072-258101577>

- This **Theme Verse** can be read by the pastor alone or in unison with the congregation at the start of the service, or can be read silently by the congregation before the service begins:

We ponder your steadfast love, O God, in the midst of your temple. Psalm 48:9

- The **Invocation and Call to Worship** are spoken responsively by the pastor and the congregation:

Ⓟ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Ⓒ **Amen.**

Ⓟ Prepare the way of the Lord! Make straight in the desert a highway for our God!

Ⓒ **Be strong and courageous, be careful to live according to everything Moses commanded.**

Ⓟ Do not let God's Word depart from your mouth.

Ⓒ **But meditate on it day and night.**

Ⓟ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.

Ⓒ **Singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts because nothing is impossible with our God!**

- The **Hymn** is sung by the congregation to the tune St. Thomas SM:

The advent of our King our prayers must now employ,
And we must hymns of welcome sing in strains of holy joy.

The everlasting Son incarnate deigns to be,
Himself a servant's form puts on to set his servants free.

O Zion's daughter, rise to meet your lowly King,
Nor let your faithless heart despise the peace he comes to bring.

As judge, on clouds of light, he soon will come again
And his true members all unite with him in heav'n to reign.

Before the dawning day let sin's dark deeds be gone,
The sinful self be put away, the new self now put on.

All glory to the Son, who comes to set us free,
With Father, Spirit, ever one through all eternity.

- The **Confession and Absolution** is spoken responsively by the pastor and the congregation:

Ⓟ Almighty God, because nothing is impossible with you, we come into your presence

confessing our sin, confident of your mercy and forgiveness. For lack of reverence; for calculating minds; for going along with the majority—

C O Christ, forgive us.

P For selfishness that dares not face truth; laziness content with half-truth; for artificial life and worship—

C O Christ, forgive us.

P For self-indulgence; for being pompous and puffed up with self-importance—

C O Christ, forgive us.

P For cynicism about our fellow Christians; for cruel indifference; for being satisfied with things as they are and failing to trust that with you nothing is impossible—

C O Christ, forgive us.

P For token concern for the poor, the lonely and the loveless people; for confusing faith with good feelings—

C O Christ, forgive us.

P For everything in us that hides your divine power—

C Lord, have mercy! Christ, have mercy! Lord, have mercy!

P Hear the good news! Because of his death and resurrection, Jesus is our Savior. The Lord God has given to him the throne of his father David. Jesus reigns over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end. Therefore, you are fully and forever forgiven in Jesus' name.

C Nothing is impossible with our God!

• **The Prayer of the Day** is read by the pastor:

P Pour your grace into our hearts, O Lord, that we who have known the incarnation of your Son Jesus Christ, announced by the angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary, may by his cross and resurrection be convinced anew that absolutely nothing is impossible with you; for you live and reign with the Father and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

- The **Children’s Message** is delivered by the pastor or other worship leader:

Nothing is impossible with our God. —Luke 1:37

- Ⓟ What do you think is impossible? It’s impossible to raise just one eyebrow. It’s impossible to lick your elbow. It’s impossible to sneeze with your eyes open. It’s impossible to get an elephant into your car.

Sometimes impossible things are possible. One example is a bumblebee. When compared with other flying bugs, a bumblebee is heavy with small wings. It should be impossible for a bumblebee to fly because its wings are too small to carry all of its weight. But we all see bumblebees buzzing in our backyards.

Our gospel lesson tells us, “Nothing is impossible with our God” (Luke 1:37). If God wants to do it, he will do it! That’s what the angel Gabriel tells Mary. Gabriel tells Mary that she is going to have a son—but this isn’t any ordinary kind of son. “He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David” (Luke 1:32).

Wow! Jesus is not only Mary’s son. Jesus is God’s Son! Jesus is David’s son. Jesus is the King who will sit on his throne forevermore!

This sounds impossible! For three days it sounded really impossible! Some mean people killed Jesus and a friend buried him in a tomb. Three days later, though, Jesus was alive—never to die again. The impossible—a dead man coming back to life—became possible!

Jesus is alive to forgive you, love you, be with you, and one day take you to heaven. Does that sound impossible? Remember the bumblebee. Better yet, remember Gabriel’s promise to Mary. “Nothing is impossible with our God” (Luke 1:37).

- The **Old Testament Reading**, Joshua 1:7-9, is spoken by the pastor or other worship leader:

- Ⓟ Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.

- The **Epistle Reading**, Colossians 3:15-17, is spoken by the pastor or other worship leader:

Ⓟ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

- The **Gospel Reading**, Luke 1:26-38, is spoken by the pastor or other worship leader:

Ⓟ In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

- A **Hymn** is sung by the congregation to the tune Gabriel's Message 10 10 11 7 3:

The angel Gabriel from heaven came,
With wings as drifted snow, with eyes as flame:
"All hail to thee, O lowly maiden Mary,
Most highly favored lady." Gloria!

"For know a blessed mother thou shalt be,
All generations laud and honor thee;
Thy son shall be Emmanuel, by seers foretold,
Most highly favored lady." Gloria!

Then gentle Mary meekly bowed her head;
“To me be as it pleaseth God,” she said.
“My soul shall laud and magnify God’s holy name.”
Most highly favored lady. Gloria!

Of her, Emmanuel, the Christ, was born
In Bethlehem all on a Christmas morn,
And Christian folk throughout the world will ever say:
“Most highly favored lady.” Gloria!

- If desired, this **Mini Movie** (purchased by you from Worship House Media: worshiphousemedia.com) is presented on a screen at this time to highlight the theme of the service:

<https://www.worshiphousemedia.com/countdowns/19695/new-god-billboard-sayings>

- The **Sermon**, *Open the Door*, is delivered by the pastor:

Family. When I say the word *family*, what comes to mind? How about Norman Rockwell? Norman Rockwell lived from 1894–1978 and became famous for his paintings in a magazine called the *Saturday Evening Post*.

In perhaps Rockwell’s most iconic *Post* painting, the father of a family is at the head of a dinner table, carving the roast. The mother is wearing her unsoiled apron, beaming over the meal in matronly elegance. The children gather dutifully around the table—obedient-looking and rosy-cheeked. Rockwell’s message? This family’s life is absolutely perfect!

When you think about your family, what comes to mind? How about this? Dad is snoring on the couch while the TV is blasting away. Mom is a limp dishrag, maxed out after another meal. The younger children are fighting again. The adolescent son is locked in his room with the walls shaking to some alien music. And the older daughter? She’s been on the phone so long that it will soon be stuck to her ear.

Family, according to Norman Rockwell, has no hassles, no headaches and is never in hot water. But a real family faces painful and perplexing predicaments. Loved ones die. Children make bad decisions. Parents get divorced. There is never enough money. And who is going to the nursing home this week to visit Grandma?

I bet Mary, Mary the mother of Jesus—because she appears in the Bible—had a Norman Rockwell family, right? Wrong. Dead wrong.

“In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth,

to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary" (Luke 1:26–27). Earlier, in Luke 1, the angel Gabriel speaks to Zechariah in the Holy Place, only a few steps away from the Holy of Holies and the very presence of almighty God.

Now Gabriel travels to see Mary—far away from the temple in Jerusalem. Mary lives in Nazareth in Galilee, an insignificant town. Remember what Nathanael said? "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46). The divinely chosen Zechariah responds to Gabriel with doubt and hesitation. "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years" (Luke 1:18). How will Mary respond to Gabriel? Unlike Zechariah, the qualified and credentialed priest, Mary has no such religious training or status. What will Mary do when confronted by Gabriel, who promises that nothing is impossible with our God?

"The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus'" (Luke 1:30–31). To accent the impossible, Luke accents Mary's virginity three times (Luke 1:27a, 27b, 34). Virgin specifies Mary as a young girl of marriageable age—about thirteen years old. Virgin also describes Mary in the more narrow sexual sense.

"Mary said to the angel, 'How will this be, since I am a virgin?' And the angel answered her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you'" (Luke 1:34–35). If Mary's pregnancy isn't impossible enough, the explanation is even more impossible! Through the Holy Spirit? Really? Come on!

Can you imagine thirteen-year-old Mary going to her twenty-something fiancé Joseph? Joseph starts talking about floor plans and wall colors and Mary interrupts, "Joseph, sit down. We need to talk. Joseph, honey, I'm pregnant." So long Norman Rockwell. Houston, we have a problem!

What are our options when family life becomes family strife? When everything looks impossible? Close the door. That's our first option when trouble knocks at our door.

When Gabriel appears in Nazareth, Mary and Joseph are engaged. There is a huge difference between our modern rules of engagement and first-century Jewish rules of engagement. Though only engaged, according to Matthew 1:19, Joseph was Mary's husband. This same verse uses the word divorce to describe ending the couple's engagement. Though they were not yet married, Joseph and Mary were in a binding contract that only death and divorce could terminate.

Upon hearing that Mary is pregnant, Joseph plans to divorce her. After all, Joseph wasn't that gullible. It's clear to Joseph that Mary wasn't the woman he thought she was. Mary was carrying another man's child. Joseph doesn't want to talk about it or work through it. What

does Joseph do? Initially, his plan is to close the door.

When family conflict comes our way, we also sometimes close the door. Let's say a neat-freak wife needs a certain amount of law and order in her home, but her carefree husband doesn't get it. His wife says, "Look at this mess! Nobody ever picks up anything around here!" The husband responds, "You need more energy! Are you still taking those vitamins we spent so much money on?" This couple exchanges clichés and facts, but they don't directly address the problem. They close the door.

When mission impossible shows up in families, another option is to slam the door. We drop verbal bombs. We rant and rave. We have tempers and we throw tantrums. We fight like cats and dogs—just like the Hatfields and the McCoys. Discussion is over. Defensive lines are drawn. It's "in your face," "no way Jose" and "it ain't gonna happen." Slam the door.

Another way of handling family hurt is to lock the door—we totally withdraw. "This is so broken, and I'm so done!" The issue is so sensitive, so intense and so explosive, that we lock the door and throw away the key. Is there a better way?

Yes, there is. Open the door. But to open the door we need help—God's help. Gabriel tells Mary, "Nothing is impossible with our God" (Luke 1:37). Empowered by this promise, Mary says, "I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38).

Martin Luther teaches us to say, "I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him." Using my "own reason or strength," I close doors. I slam doors. I lock doors. Luther continues. "But the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel." God gives the Holy Spirit through his Word—this Word. "Nothing is impossible with our God."

It all finally looked absolutely impossible. Judas Iscariot betrayed him. Christ's disciples abandoned him. Peter denied him. The Jews disowned him. Pilate sentenced him. Herod mocked him. Soldiers scourged him and then they crucified him.

Luke writes in Acts 2:24, "God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him." What looked like it was completely impossible, God made possible by raising Jesus from the dead!

No wonder Gabriel promised Mary, "Jesus will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:32–33).

God delivers this Word to us so we look at our spouses and children and do what? Open the door.

In the last book in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, in the book titled *The Last Battle*, C. S. Lewis describes his characters facing the mother of all battles. Then they come to a door. Some

claimed that behind the door was a life-threatening monster. However, once through the door, “They stood on green grass, the deep blue sky overhead, and the air blew gently on their faces like that of a day in early summer.” They continued to go “further and further in” making wonderful discoveries. What is my point?

Open your foreboding door. Just like Mary, open your heart, open your ears and open your life to God’s Word. The family situation isn’t as threatening as it looks. In fact, when you open the door, maybe not at first, but soon enough you will find yourself standing on green grass, the deep blue sky overhead, and the air blowing gently on your face like that of a day in early summer.

Why is that? God’s Word! “Nothing is impossible with our God.” Amen.

- The **Offering** is collected at this time. If desired, this **Motion Background** (purchased by you from Worship House Media: worshiphousemedia.com) is presented at this time for reflection on the theme of the service:

<https://www.worshiphousemedia.com/motion-backgrounds/46210/worlds-edge>

- The **Prayers** are spoken responsively by the pastor and the congregation:
 - Ⓟ Heavenly Father, we have a lot in common with Mary. When we consider the enormity of the promises you have made accompanying the birth of Jesus, we also ask, “How will this be?” To which you answer back in your Word,
 - Ⓞ **Nothing is impossible with our God.**
 - Ⓟ Father, every promise you have made about Jesus and our redemption purchased through his shed blood and empty tomb will happen. Indeed, your great and glorious promises are always “Yes and Amen.” And so we confess,
 - Ⓞ **Nothing is impossible with our God.**
 - Ⓟ Jesus, on your Second Advent, you will finish making all things new—changing this sinful and dying world into the New Jerusalem. This promise is so overwhelming that you remind us,
 - Ⓞ **Nothing is impossible with our God.**
 - Ⓟ Father, heal the pain in our families. Restore unity. Release compassion and kindness. And let the love of Jesus pervade and permeate our homes. We believe that,
 - Ⓞ **Nothing is impossible with our God.**

P Father, through your Holy Spirit, empower us to think of others more often than ourselves; not to keep a record of wrongs; and no longer rehearse the ways others have hurt us, and the ways we've hurt them. Remind us again that,

C **Nothing is impossible with our God.**

P And so we say with Mary, we are your servants, Lord. Let it be to us according to your Word.

C **We pray in Jesus' glorious and grace-filled name. Amen.**

- The **Lord's Prayer** is spoken in unison.
- The **Benediction** is spoken responsively by the pastor:

P Prepare the way of the Lord! Make straight in the desert a highway for our God!

C **Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.**

P So that whatever we do, in word or deed.

C **We do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus.**

P Giving thanks to God the Father through him because

C **Nothing is impossible with our God!**

- The **Closing Hymn** is sung by the congregation to the tune Vom Himmel Hoch LM:

From heav'n above to earth I come to bear good news to ev'ry home;
Glad tidings of great joy I bring, whereof I now will say and sing:

“To you this night is born a child of Mary, chosen virgin mild;
This little child, of lowly birth, shall be the joy of all the earth.

“This is the Christ, our God and Lord, who in all need shall aid afford;
He will himself your Savior be from all your sins to set you free.

“He will on you the gifts bestow prepared by God for all below,
That in his kingdom, bright and fair, you may with us his glory share.

“My heart for very joy doth leap, my lips no more can silence keep;
I, too, must sing with joyful tongue that sweetest ancient cradle-song.”

P R E P A R E Y E

A SERIES OF SPECIAL
SERVICES FOR *Advent*

Week 1: Ponder

Scripture Readings

- The **Old Testament Reading**, Joshua 1:7-9, is spoken by the pastor or other worship leader:
 - ▣ Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.

- The **Epistle Reading**, Colossians 3:15-17, is spoken by the pastor or other worship leader:

Ⓟ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

- The **Gospel Reading**, Luke 1:26-38, is spoken by the pastor or other worship leader:

Ⓟ In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." And Mary said to the angel, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?" And the angel answered her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God. And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." And Mary said, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

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Week 1: Ponder

Children's Message

- The **Children's Message** is delivered by the pastor or other worship leader:

Nothing is impossible with our God. —Luke 1:37

- ☐ What do you think is impossible? It's impossible to raise just one eyebrow. It's impossible to lick your elbow. It's impossible to sneeze with your eyes open. It's impossible to get an elephant into your car.

Sometimes impossible things are possible. One example is a bumblebee. When compared with other flying bugs, a bumblebee is heavy with small wings. It should be impossible for a bumblebee to fly because its wings are too small to carry all of its weight. But we all see bumblebees buzzing in our backyards.

Our gospel lesson tells us, "Nothing is impossible with our God" (Luke 1:37). If God wants to do it, he will do it! That's what the angel Gabriel tells Mary. Gabriel tells Mary that she is going to have a son—but this isn't any ordinary kind of son. "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father

David” (Luke 1:32).

Wow! Jesus is not only Mary’s son. Jesus is God’s Son! Jesus is David’s son. Jesus is the King who will sit on his throne forevermore!

This sounds impossible! For three days it sounded really impossible! Some mean people killed Jesus and a friend buried him in a tomb. Three days later, though, Jesus was alive—never to die again. The impossible—a dead man coming back to life—became possible!

Jesus is alive to forgive you, love you, be with you, and one day take you to heaven. Does that sound impossible? Remember the bumblebee. Better yet, remember Gabriel’s promise to Mary. “Nothing is impossible with our God” (Luke 1:37).

P R E P A R E Y E

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Week 1: Ponder

Sermon

- The **Sermon**, *Open the Door*, is delivered by the pastor:

Family. When I say the word *family*, what comes to mind? How about Norman Rockwell? Norman Rockwell lived from 1894–1978 and became famous for his paintings in a magazine called the *Saturday Evening Post*.

In perhaps Rockwell's most iconic *Post* painting, the father of a family is at the head of a dinner table, carving the roast. The mother is wearing her unsoiled apron, beaming over the meal in matronly elegance. The children gather dutifully around the table—obedient-looking and rosy-cheeked. Rockwell's message? This family's life is absolutely perfect!

When you think about your family, what comes to mind? How about this? Dad is snoring on the couch while the TV is blasting away. Mom is a limp dishrag, maxed out after another meal. The younger children are fighting again. The adolescent son is locked in his room with the walls shaking to some alien music. And the older daughter? She's been on the phone so long that it will soon be stuck to her ear.

Family, according to Norman Rockwell, has no hassles, no headaches and is never in hot water. But a real family faces painful and perplexing predicaments. Loved ones die. Children make bad decisions. Parents get divorced. There is never enough money. And who is going to the nursing home this week to visit Grandma?

I bet Mary, Mary the mother of Jesus—because she appears in the Bible—had a Norman Rockwell family, right? Wrong. Dead wrong.

“In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin’s name was Mary” (Luke 1:26–27). Earlier, in Luke 1, the angel Gabriel speaks to Zechariah in the Holy Place, only a few steps away from the Holy of Holies and the very presence of almighty God.

Now Gabriel travels to see Mary—far away from the temple in Jerusalem. Mary lives in Nazareth in Galilee, an insignificant town. Remember what Nathanael said? “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46). The divinely chosen Zechariah responds to Gabriel with doubt and hesitation. “How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years” (Luke 1:18). How will Mary respond to Gabriel? Unlike Zechariah, the qualified and credentialed priest, Mary has no such religious training or status. What will Mary do when confronted by Gabriel, who promises that nothing is impossible with our God?

“The angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus’” (Luke 1:30–31). To accent the impossible, Luke accents Mary’s virginity three times (Luke 1:27a, 27b, 34). Virgin specifies Mary as a young girl of marriageable age—about thirteen years old. Virgin also describes Mary in the more narrow sexual sense.

“Mary said to the angel, ‘How will this be, since I am a virgin?’ And the angel answered her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you’” (Luke 1:34–35). If Mary’s pregnancy isn’t impossible enough, the explanation is even more impossible! Through the Holy Spirit? Really? Come on!

Can you imagine thirteen-year-old Mary going to her twenty-something fiancé Joseph? Joseph starts talking about floor plans and wall colors and Mary interrupts, “Joseph, sit down. We need to talk. Joseph, honey, I’m pregnant.” So long Norman Rockwell. Houston, we have a problem!

What are our options when family life becomes family strife? When everything looks impossible? Close the door. That’s our first option when trouble knocks at our door.

When Gabriel appears in Nazareth, Mary and Joseph are engaged. There is a huge difference between our modern rules of engagement and first-century Jewish rules of engagement.

Though only engaged, according to Matthew 1:19, Joseph was Mary's husband. This same verse uses the word divorce to describe ending the couple's engagement. Though they were not yet married, Joseph and Mary were in a binding contract that only death and divorce could terminate.

Upon hearing that Mary is pregnant, Joseph plans to divorce her. After all, Joseph wasn't that gullible. It's clear to Joseph that Mary wasn't the woman he thought she was. Mary was carrying another man's child. Joseph doesn't want to talk about it or work through it. What does Joseph do? Initially, his plan is to close the door.

When family conflict comes our way, we also sometimes close the door. Let's say a neat-freak wife needs a certain amount of law and order in her home, but her carefree husband doesn't get it. His wife says, "Look at this mess! Nobody ever picks up anything around here!" The husband responds, "You need more energy! Are you still taking those vitamins we spent so much money on?" This couple exchanges clichés and facts, but they don't directly address the problem. They close the door.

When mission impossible shows up in families, another option is to slam the door. We drop verbal bombs. We rant and rave. We have tempers and we throw tantrums. We fight like cats and dogs—just like the Hatfields and the McCoys. Discussion is over. Defensive lines are drawn. It's "in your face," "no way Jose" and "it ain't gonna happen." Slam the door.

Another way of handling family hurt is to lock the door—we totally withdraw. "This is so broken, and I'm so done!" The issue is so sensitive, so intense and so explosive, that we lock the door and throw away the key. Is there a better way?

Yes, there is. Open the door. But to open the door we need help—God's help. Gabriel tells Mary, "Nothing is impossible with our God" (Luke 1:37). Empowered by this promise, Mary says, "I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38).

Martin Luther teaches us to say, "I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him." Using my "own reason or strength," I close doors. I slam doors. I lock doors. Luther continues. "But the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel." God gives the Holy Spirit through his Word—this Word. "Nothing is impossible with our God."

It all finally looked absolutely impossible. Judas Iscariot betrayed him. Christ's disciples abandoned him. Peter denied him. The Jews disowned him. Pilate sentenced him. Herod mocked him. Soldiers scourged him and then they crucified him.

Luke writes in Acts 2:24, "God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him." What looked like it was completely impossible, God made possible by raising Jesus from the dead!

No wonder Gabriel promised Mary, “Jesus will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:32–33).

God delivers this Word to us so we look at our spouses and children and do what? Open the door.

In the last book in The Chronicles of Narnia, in the book titled *The Last Battle*, C. S. Lewis describes his characters facing the mother of all battles. Then they come to a door. Some claimed that behind the door was a life-threatening monster. However, once through the door, “They stood on green grass, the deep blue sky overhead, and the air blew gently on their faces like that of a day in early summer.” They continued to go “further and further in” making wonderful discoveries. What is my point?

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