

Advent B - THEME 1

Leader's Guide



PREVIEW ONLY - NOT FOR COMMERCE

BEHOLD THE SIGNS



A Faith Inkubators System Theme www.faithink.com Art by Dr. He Qi www.HeQiGallery.com

Wise Men Sleeping by He Qi

- What do you see in this painting?
- Where are you in this painting?
- How does the painting relate to the theme verse?

Behold the Signs



"Heaven and earth will pass away but my words will not pass away." – Mark 13:31

USING THIS LEADER'S GUIDE

The following pages are provided to help you optimize the planning and implementation of your Faith Inkubators Advent B experience. They follow the same basic format as our companion PowerPoint presentation slides. The majority of these pages do not need to be copied for your small groups—they are here to simply aid you and your team in preparation. Each Advent theme includes:

- **WEEK #1 Main Presentation Notes & PowerPoint Instructions (Pages 1 - 9)**
The Opening, Presentation, FAITH5 Small Group Time and Closing are explained in detail for your leadership team.
- **WEEK #2 Celebration Notes & PowerPoint Instructions (Pages 10 - 13)**
A treasure trove of creative options and supplemental art projects are included for your leadership team's planning of your time together.
- **SKITS (Pages 14-16)** Your choice of two skits and a puppet show are provided to supplement the theme. The puppet show may also be used as a regular skit with actors. Copy these for readers and leaders of the presentations.
- **QUIZBOWL (Page 17)** Print and use this sheet during small group time or send it home as a fun way to review the theme and connect church to home.

FOCUS FOR ADVENT B

Signs are important. They give us information. They show us the way. They tell us where we are. They tell us how far we have to go. During this Advent season, we will discover signs of hope, power, humility, warning, and expectation leading us to prepare to receive God.

Our key verse promises us that God's Word stands forever. It anchors us as we watch for signs of Christ's presence and prepare our hearts to welcome him this season.

Objective

To engage all ages actively in the call to watch and prepare so they, too, may see signs of Jesus coming into the world and find Christ in their lives this Advent season.





THEME 1: Week 1

Main Presentation

Notes & Powerpoint Instructions

Open the Main PowerPoint Presentation and follow along as you read these next several pages of ideas and instructions for each slide in the PowerPoint.

Advent is not
a matter of
passive waiting.
It is a time of
alert, watchful
anticipation,
looking for the
signs of God's
dramatic rescue
mission in Jesus
Christ.

– N.T. Wright

I. OPENING

Set the pace for the event with an enthusiastic opening that says, "Something great is going to happen." Use this time to introduce the theme in a fun and memorable way. Each heading below is included as a slide on the PowerPoint presentation. Delete slides not used each week and **save each new presentation in the original folder** to assure that all of your music files will play automatically.

A. Gathering Music

Ten minutes before starting time, set the mood with two or three singable, familiar songs relating to the "Behold the Signs" theme. **Tip:** Invite a variety of ages to help lead music. Adults and children together role-modeling joy and enthusiasm will get things started in a powerful and positive way. Consider adding a QR code to the bulletin or screen linking to a themed playlist people can listen to on the drive in.

Five minutes before starting time, play the theme song from the PowerPoint. Invite guests to get up, move around the room and dance or greet one another with a hug, a handshake or a high five.

B. Welcome & Introductions

At the stroke of the hour, invite all to chant the countdown ("10, 9, 8, 7..."). Thank everyone for coming, welcome visitors, and make key announcements.

C. Story Time (with Cartoon Slides)

Label three boxes "Gold, Frankincense, Myrrh." Find or create a cardboard telescope. Enlist a dozen people of various ages to play the Wise Men, servants, and an angel. For a little extra fun, create camel masks and costumes and load them up with the gifts. Ask your pastor to play half of the camel!

Light a candle, pull up a rocking chair, ring some chimes or choose another method to create a transition. Ask the little children to share some signs they see that Jesus is coming. Next, share the story from pages 3 and 4 in your own words, or with your actors, costumes and the slides on our PowerPoint. When you get to the end of the story, ask the smallest children to tell you what happened next.

D. Quiz Bowl Game

Invite teams to ring a bell or shout out answers during this quick, fun, fast moving preview of the theme using the PowerPoint slides.

E. Theme Introduction

The “Behold the Signs” theme is introduced with 5 slides. These include title slides, the Bible verse, a cartoon, and an overview. These slides are set on timers with quiet background music. Preview these before starting to become familiar with the timing.

F. Opening Prayer

Invite guests to inhale, exhale, quiet their minds and bodies, and listen for their heartbeat. If possible, lower lights to signal this quiet meditation. With all eyes closed, ask God to be present in the short time you have to give you clear minds and attentive hearts. Thank God for gathering this intergenerational family. Then lead the opening prayer using the PowerPoint slides.

G. Theme Scripture Verse

Introduce the theme verse and invite all to read it together. For a fun and effective memorization tool, choose, learn and teach some of the key words using ASL (see handspeak.com).

H. Theme Song

Teach the theme song using the music and lyrics embedded on the PowerPoint slide. A full piano score is in your theme folder if you wish to play along or use it with live singers and a band.

II. THEME PRESENTATION

Choose from among the following resources in this section (A-E) to flesh out the theme. View this as a menu. Don't try to do them all! Invite teams to choose, lead, and facilitate different sections. Keep in mind there are two weeks for introducing this theme. Some of the material may be used during Week 2 or in worship to involve the whole congregation in Advent B. *Note: Delete the slides you don't intend to use from the PowerPoint presentation.*

A. Life Line (Personal Faith Story)

This is not something that can be written for you. It must be drawn from the true living curriculum of faith—your people's life experiences. Invite a guest with a significant story related to the theme Scripture. It's a story from their own life in which they perceived a sign or signs to portend an imminent event—perhaps a story from when they were pregnant (or their wife was pregnant), describing the various stages of development which signaled the nine-month mark. Maybe they had a dream predicting a future event. Whatever the story, be sure to tie it into the signs foretelling the coming Messiah. Another suggestion: Have a panel of three of your congregation's elders answer questions about their predictions for the future and the signs they see in the world right now. *Note: Add your guest's name to the Life Line PowerPoint slide template.*

B. Skit or Puppet Sketch

Invite a team to reinforce the theme by performing one of the three skits (pages 14-16) as a short play, puppet sketch or reader's theater. The puppet skit can also be used as a regular skit without puppets. **Note:** Delete the slide for the skits you don't intend to use from the PowerPoint presentation.

C. Images and Analogies

God never leaves us in the dark. He scatters signs of His presence all across our path—a promise in scripture, a star in the night, a quiet moment of peace. Our job is simply to keep our eyes open.

– Max Lucado



You see, but you
do not observe.
The distinction is
clear.

– Sherlock Holmes
(Arthur Conan Doyle)

Choose one or two of the following or share one of your own teaching points to reinforce the theme. Delete any PowerPoint slides you choose not to use.

1. Theme Photo & He Qi Painting

Take a look at today's cover photo and the original painting by Dr. He Qi. What do you see? Where are you in this image? How does it relate to the theme?

2. Bespectacled Prophet

Write the word "Advent" on a huge piece of foam board or newsprint. Ask the group what the word means. As you speak, arrange for an actor dressed as John the Baptist to enter and interrupt. Suggested wardrobe: a camel hair tunic (burlap works well for this), leather belt, sandals, and Coke-bottle spectacles. Have John approach squinting and shouting, "Where is he? Are you him? Is it you?" Have John walk around the room, squinting into faces "searching" for Jesus. "A baby, I tell ya! I'm looking for a baby named Jesus. Have you seen him?" After a minute or so, John approaches your Advent sign, stumbles and smashes it into two pieces, "ad" and "vent." Talk to John about the meaning of the word (ad = toward, venir = to come), about the four Sundays before Christmas, and about this Jesus who's coming. Ask John why he is dressed the way he is, where he comes from, why he's looking for Jesus, etc.

3. Ignoring the Signs

Make at least five signs out of foam or poster board. Each should be shaped and colored like a different road sign. Base them on real signs like yield, curve ahead, one way, stop, railroad crossing, etc. Go to www.trafficsign.us for more ideas. Ask the group to imagine they are driving a car. Hold each of your five signs up in turn and ask them to call out the meaning of each sign. Ask "What should you, as drivers, do when you see this sign?", "What happens if a driver ignores each of these signs?" Ask the questions for each sign. Make another sign in the shape of a star and hold it up, asking the same questions. Remind the group of the story of the wise men that King Herod sent to find Jesus at his birth so Herod could kill him. (Matthew 2:7-12) If time allows, make another sign in the shape of an angel, and retell the story of the shepherds watching their flocks. (Luke 2:8-14) Ask the group the same questions. Finally, ask the group if they've seen signs lately that remind them Jesus is coming. Ask "What happens when people ignore these signs?" Write the answers on newsprint or a board.

4. Translate the Signs

Use the PowerPoint presentation slide for all to guess the theme, "Behold the Signs." Or create a pictogram. For the first part of the word "behold," make a picture of a bee. For the second part of the word, make a picture of a "hole" in the ground. Add the "d" to finish the word. For "Signs" start with the letter "S." For the middle part of the word, make a picture of an "eye." End the word with "ns." Invite the group to guess the meaning. Create a sign with "the" to add in the middle of the other two sign pieces.

5. Waiting for Presence

Invite children first to brainstorm a list of things for which they wait. Write the list on newsprint or a whiteboard where all can see. Ask how it feels to wait and what it feels like once the "waiting" is over. Now invite teens, then young adults, then older adults to add to the list. Record answers from different age groups with different colored markers. How are the lists different? How are they similar? Advent is about waiting. We wait for the birth of Jesus. Or do we? If we are honest, we would say what we really wait for is the arrival of family, decorating the tree, making cookies, and opening presents! Ask why waiting often centers on everything but the arrival of the Christ child. How can each person and family work to change the focus? Create a group covenant on how your waiting will include Christ this Advent.

6. Make a Path

If you knew a famous person was coming to your town, what would you do to make a good impression? In ancient times, when kings and queens traveled through their

domains, people would often fix the roads to make traveling through their towns easy. Even today, when diplomats and presidents visit one another's country, the routes they travel are scoured for obstacles and dangers. Often, such convoys are led to their destinations along the most picturesque routes in order to give the visitor a favorable impression. John the Baptist quoted the prophet Isaiah when he announced the coming visit of the most important guest in all history, Jesus Christ. Ask guests how they prepare the way of the Lord in their lives and homes.

D. Coming 2 Terms

Use the game show format on the PowerPoint to explore and understand the five key terms of the week.

E. Bible Time

You have properly opened minds. Now it is time to open the book. If you are doing parts of this theme for congregational worship, consider an "open Bible" talk led by your pastor or a lay person to connect the theme verse with people's lives. Use one or more of the following:

1. Highlight the Verses

Invite everyone to highlight Mark 13:31 in Bibles. Write "Behold the Signs" in the margins. Assign the following additional verses from our weekly devotions to small groups and ask them to relate it to one of their highs and lows this week.

Week 1

Mark 13:24-25

Mark 13:26-27

Mark 13:28-31

Luke 23:42

Mark 13:33-37

Week 2

Mark 1:1-3

Mark 1:4

Mark 1:5

Mark 1:6-7

Mark 1:8

2. Signs, Signs

There are signs for the changing seasons. What are they? There are signs for an impending storm. What are they? There are also signs from the Old Testament telling about the arrival, life, and death of God's Messiah, Jesus. What are these signs? Assign different groups to read and highlight one of the following verses: Isaiah 7:14, Isaiah 9:6-7, Isaiah 35:5-6, Psalm 41:9, Psalm 22:16, Psalm 68:18 or Micah 5:2. Ask each group to share how the Scripture relates to Jesus' coming.

3. Company is Coming

Brainstorm a list of everything that needs to be done in a home to prepare for a special guest. Are you doing any of these preparations for Christmas? For Christ? God prepared Israel for a long time for the coming of Jesus. Open Bibles to Isaiah 40:1-5 and read it together. Isaiah lived long before the time of Jesus. The prophet spoke of a messenger who would come before the Messiah. This messenger was to prepare the way for Jesus. The messenger—John the Baptist—was sent to preach baptism, repentance, and forgiveness of sins in preparation for Christ's coming. We go out of our way to prepare for the arrival of company whether they are friends or family. What can each person and family do to better prepare for the coming of Jesus?

4. Baby Signs

Invite groups to brainstorm lists of signs that show a baby is on the way. Signs guide, protect, and help us prepare. Now reflect on this statement by Robert A. Raines: "God speaks to us in God's own special sign language—a baby." God's baby-sign is about beginnings, birth, hope, the future. God spoke loudly to us through the actions of the "baby-sign"—Jesus. Before Jesus, God's signs included the prophets, John the Baptist, and nature itself. (Mark 13:24-27) What do baby signs, the verse



from Mark, and the Advent signs have in common? How are they different?

Where love is,
God is.

– Leo Tolstoy

III. FAITH5 SMALL GROUP TIME

Dismiss into small groups providing handouts and coloring pages for each guest. Handouts are based on the FAITH5 methods of conversations, care and learning. Model this each week at church and challenge guests to practice these steps every night in every home using the FAITH5 Take Home Bookmarks found in your Theme folder. Learn more at faithink.com/faith5.

IV. CLOSING

Gather for final reflections, prayers, Holy Communion (optional) and a blessing.

A. Theme Song and Offering

Play, sing and sign the theme song, “Heaven and Earth.” As people gather, collect an offering for a special cause. Tell children their artwork can be part of the offering.

B. Reflection

Share the summary slide, then invite reflections from each group:

- One **new** thing our group learned about this theme
- One thing our group already **knew** that is worth repeating
- One thing our group would like to **know** more about

C. PTA Prayers (Praise, Thank, and Ask)

Invite each Small Group to provide at least one “PTA” (Praise God, Thank Jesus, Ask the Holy Spirit) prayer based on the Highs and Lows shared in their small group.

D. Holy Communion (Optional)

Pour the wine or juice, break the bread, and share Holy Communion (also called the Lord's Supper). Consider doing this in small groups if your tradition allows.

E. Theme Verse

Review the theme Bible verse and American Sign Language one last time to help guests embed the Scripture in their long-term memory. Visit handspeak.com to learn signing for key words or have a guest who knows ASL teach it.

F. Prayer Journey

Invite guests to sit, relax, breathe deeply, stretch and close eyes. Soft music embedded in the PowerPoint slide will play as you read the following meditation dramatically.

Imagine you are in a time machine, traveling back to Bible days. You float down over an arid land. As you descend you see a grove of trees surrounding a small pool of water. People are gathered here in the shade, listening with rapt attention to a man. You float to the ground among them and sit down. The air in the shade is cool, quite different from the crushing heat out in the sun. It's as though the trees and water conspire together to keep the people comfortable as they listen. Even the children listen closely as they dangle their feet in the water, so powerful is this teacher. You look around at the people in the shade. Some are obviously rich, with gold rings and expensive, colorful robes. They smell of wonderful, sweet and flowery spices and oils, and their sandals are new. Even their servants look good. There are other poorer people in the crowd. Their hair is dirty and unkempt, their feet bare and dusty. Their clothes are tattered. The poor children play barefoot in the dirt. There are people from many different tribes and nations — soldiers and farmers, merchants and wanderers, their faces and clothing marking lives very different from one another. They come from everywhere, and they each absorb

the teaching of the man like a dry sponge absorbs water. As they listen, you look into their faces. You notice something astonishing that you missed at first, a subtle change—a metamorphosis—taking place. Slow, almost imperceptible changes are happening to the people. The faces of the rich people seem to relax, losing tension, settling into a posture of repose. The faces of the poor seem to brighten, gain focus, the eyes glinting with hope and purpose. Their backs straighten. The people from all the nations are filling with the Word of God, taking in Jesus' teaching as it transforms their lives, making them into new people. You float up and away, returning your gaze to the same scene you saw as you descended. The people gathered around Jesus in the shade look different. You yourself feel different. Something has changed.

IDEA: Invite parents of small children to hold them and rock to the background music or walk about during this meditation time.

G. Blessing and Dismissal

Turn to your neighbor and bless one another, following your own tradition — with a hug, a hand on the shoulder, or the sign of the cross — while repeating the thematic blessing found on the PowerPoint slide:

"May your eyes be open to the signs of Christ's coming."



Help. Thanks. Wow.

– Anne Lamott

FAITH5 Home Huddle Challenge:

Be sure to print and send the FAITH5 bookmarks home with guests. Challenge everyone to huddle up with loved ones or via tech each night this week and practice FAITH5. It's the best tool we know to connect church with home, and people to each other and to God.





THEME 1: WEEK 2

Celebration Notes & PowerPoint Instructions

Open up the Celebration PowerPoint Presentation and follow along as you read these next several pages of ideas and instructions for Week #2 of the theme.

I. OPENING

A. Gathering Music Set the mood of joy and vitality with familiar, singable songs or play the soft music embedded in slide 1. At the stroke of the hour, get everyone on their feet to greet one another while playing *"Heaven and Earth"* from slide 2.

B. Welcome, Introductions, and Theme Reviews Begin the countdown "10,9,8,7..." and re-introduce the theme. Make announcements, introduce guests and review the "Behold the Signs" theme. Invite guests to read along quietly with the slides.

C. Theme Song Sing and sign the song, *"Heaven and Earth"* using the music on slide 10 or with a live band.

II. SMALL GROUP PREP TIME

Give Small Groups the time, space, and resources to do FAITH5 together, then complete a Theme Art project chosen from the Theme Arts section (pages 11-13) and prepare to present them to the entire group. Type titles on the provided blank PowerPoint slides.

III. CELEBRATION SHOW & TELL

On with the show! Invite Small Groups up one by one to share their chosen art project. To keep the pace, invite one group "on deck" prior to each act so they are ready to jump up and present.

IV. CLOSING

A. Theme Song Sing and sign *"Heaven and Earth"* as you gather. Consider taking an offering as guests return from Small Group time.

B. PTA Prayers (Praise, Thank, Ask) Praise God, thank Jesus and ask the Holy Spirit to be with all as they go out to live the theme this week. Consider inviting each group to share one PTA prayer from their highs and lows.

C. Holy Communion (Optional)

Pour the wine or juice, break the bread, and share Holy Communion (also called the Lord's Supper). Consider doing this in small groups if your tradition allows.

D. Wrap-up Reflection Thank guests for participating, then reflect on the theme using the theme verse and quotation slides provided. Music will play in the background as these slides advance themselves.

E. Blessing and Dismissal Invite everyone to turn to their neighbor and bless one another, following your own tradition — with a hug, a hand on the shoulder, or the sign of the cross — with the words: "May your eyes be open to the signs of Christ's coming." Close with the dismissal printed on the slide.

Theme Arts

This section is designed to be used in groups during FAITH5 Small Group Time on Week #2. It is set up to work with the Celebration PowerPoint Presentation slides. Groups will interpret the theme using these arts and present their creations to the large group as “show and tell” offerings. We suggest using one of these options:

- Print and distribute these pages to each small group. Let them choose one theme art project to create and present. Involve everyone in the group in both the creation and presentation.
- Set up and use these as stations in a rotation model.
- Choose one of the following options for all small groups to create either separately or as one large group project.

For added impact, present some of these arts in worship as children’s sermons, during the offering as an “offering that didn’t fit in the plate,” or during coffee hour.

Acrostic

Make up a phrase out of the first letters from the words “Behold the Signs” from the lesson. Display this on newsprint, poster board, or PowerPoint and present it to the group. Use the acrostics below as an example to get started:

B-elieve! E-ntertain H-eaven’s O-racle L-ooming D-elightfully

T-rust H-ope E-ternally

S-EEK I-nfinitely G-od’s N-ew S-ign

Art Gallery

Use the PowerPoint slides provided, plus scans of your own original art, to celebrate the theme in images. For added impact, invite a group to create a banner, poster or wall hanging with the theme verse and the words “Behold the Signs.” Raise this new piece of art into the air on fishing line as you introduce the theme. Color copies of the cover art and place them strategically around the building. Surround the words with people preparing for the “cultural” Christmas. Build a PowerPoint presentation inserting digital photos of the artwork done in small groups and add music. Offer this presentation on your church website.

Quick Skit “BEHOLD THE SIGNS”

(Note: Some congregations may prefer to skip this activity)

CHARACTERS: Actor #1, Actor #2, Actor #3, Extras (carrying signs)

PROPS: A handful of everyday signs (STOP, OPEN, a weather forecast graphic, a “Sale Ends Today” sign), one plain cross

Extras walk through the space carrying ordinary signs, holding them up one at a time as they pass

ACTOR #1: (checking a phone) Storm’s coming this weekend. Better bring in the patio furniture.

ACTOR #2: (looking at a flyer) Sale ends today — last chance to save 30%.

ACTOR #3: (glancing at a clock) Ten minutes till the bus. We need to go now.



ADVENT B1

Honest differences
are often a healthy
sign of progress.

– Mahatma Gandhi



ACTOR #1: We read signs like these every single day.

ACTOR #2: We know exactly what they mean. We know exactly what to do.

ACTOR #3: (holding up the cross) So what about this one?

(Pause. Actors #1 and #2 look at the cross, then at each other.)

ACTOR #1: That's... a bigger sign.

ACTOR #2: The biggest one.

ACTOR #3: Jesus told his disciples to watch for the signs of his coming — and then he told them something surprising. Read Mark 13:31 with me:

ALL: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away."

ACTOR #1: Storms come and go. Sales end. Buses leave without us.

ACTOR #2: But this sign, this promise, doesn't expire.

ACTOR #3: So keep watching. Behold the signs. And get ready.

(Extras raise their signs high one final time as Actors #1–3 exit.)

Cartoon

Create an original cartoon based on the verse of the week, the theme or one aspect of the signs that point to Jesus' coming, or enlarge and color or paint one of the cartoons in this theme and use it during the unveiling time. Consider leaving the "punch line" out until the unveiling moment. Print the cartoon in the bulletin or parish paper and stage a "Punch Line in the Plate" contest among worshippers. As an alternative, add your own punch line to the cartoon template provided in the PowerPoint slide.

Interpretive Movement

Create and choreograph an interpretive dance based on a favorite hymn or song relating to preparing and waiting. Consider "Prepare the Royal Highway" (It can be found in any hymnal.) or "People Look East." Invite a small choral group or your church choir to sing while the movement is being shared. Consider incorporating this performance art in worship.

Interviews

Interview members of your congregation on how they prepare for the holidays or Christmas. Ask them if they would prepare differently if Christ had nothing to do with Christmas. Ask members how they celebrate Christ's birth.

Parable

Invite a small group to read the following parable aloud, act it out, and comment on it. Consider inviting a group to write and share an original parable on the theme: Once there was a little boy who misspelled all of his Christmas cards. Instead of writing, "Merry Christmas," the little boy wrote "Merry Christ miss" on the cards. His mother pointed out his mistake, but he kept on writing "miss" instead of "mas." That morning while running errands, the boy and his mother wandered through the town square. There was a display of Frosty the Snowman, one of Santa, and a huge sign reading "Happy Holidays." That afternoon he watched a Christmas special where the children were dressed as Druids, Hanukkah lights, and elves. That evening they went to a school concert where they sang "I'll Be Home For Christmas," "Deck the Halls" and "Rudolf the Red Nosed Reindeer." When they returned home that night, his mother went into the dining room and looked at the boy's "Merry Christ miss" cards. She wondered if he had been so far off after all.

Photo/Slide Shows

Create a looping digital slideshow of images of the signs you see every day — display it on the sanctuary screen, a lobby TV, or as a self-advancing PowerPoint

No matter how
old a mother is
she watches her
middle-aged
children for signs of
improvement.

– *Florida Scott Maxwell*

loop. Contrast these with photos of impending storms, a sunset, and finally a cross. Use pictures to illustrate the signs we see in our life. For a multimedia dimension, add appropriate songs or other meditative music along with these images.

Prayer Journey

Write a guided meditation on the “Behold the Signs” theme or use the guided meditation provided in the Closing Blessing section. Lower lights and warm the group up with a stretching and breathing exercise. Light a candle. Add the senses (smell, taste, touch, etc.) to your prayer experience. Speak quietly, clearly and slowly. Include the theme verse at the core of the journey. Leave room for the Scripture to sink in and the Holy Spirit to speak.

Puppets

Use the puppet sketch provided or write your own original short sketch on the theme. Use puppets and props you already have on hand, or design, create, and collect new ones for the occasion.

Rap, Chant, Cheer

Turn the verse of the week or the lesson theme into a rap, chant or cheer. If you get stuck, try this one:

Leader: Give me a B! Give me an E! H-O-L-D!
Group 1: BE!
Group 2: HOLD!
ALL: BEHOLD THE SIGNS!
Group 1: BE!
Group 2: HOLD!
ALL: BEHOLD THE SIGNS! (repeat from above)

Servant Event

Sponsor a billboard with the services for your church or offer to write a public service announcement for your local paper, community website, or social media talking about the Advent theme at your church. Many newspapers look for local public interest stories about which to write.

Theme Song with Movement

Ask a musician, small group or a member of your music team to perform and teach the theme song “Heaven and Earth” or to create their own original song based on the verse of the week. After you’ve learned the song, add movement or American Sign Language to make the song come alive. Arrange to perform this song as a “Generations In Faith Together Choir” during worship. Send postcards to friends and neighbors inviting them to the debut.

Video

Create a three-minute video on the theme “Behold the Signs” (a smartphone works fine). Involve every member of the small group either in front or behind the camera. For a contrasting piece, start with clips of signs we see every day. (e.g. Stop signs, speed limit signs, etc.) Switch to video of thunder clouds, sunsets, a cross, and a star. For an interview piece, ask people of different ages the following questions: “Why is it important to pay attention to signs in our society?” and “What happens if you don’t?” Find movie clips that help people process the Scripture for this theme and show them.

Earth’s crammed
with heaven,
And every common
bush afire with God;
But only those who
see, take off their
shoes
The rest sit round
it and pluck
blackberries.

– Elizabeth Barrett Browning



Can't You Read THE SIGNS?

Skit 1

CHARACTERS: 5 Wild-eyed, Messy-haired Criers, 5 Villagers, 1 Two-person Camel
Note: Don't be afraid to give major lines to smaller persons. Villager and Crier lines may be distributed among more (or fewer) actors to fit your group.

PROPS: Well, buckets, rope, trumpet, 5 signs reading "The end is near!" "Yom Yahweh" "Get Ready!" etc.

SETTING: Villagers are drawing water from a well. Camel is drinking from a bucket with rear end facing the crowd. Criers enter with signs.

SETTING: (Singing as they enter) "These are the days of Elijah, declaring the word of the Lord..." (or another familiar song about Christ's coming)

VILLAGER 1: Excuse us. Excuse us.

CRIS: The signs! The signs! Everywhere the si—yai-yai- yians!

VILLAGER 1: Excuse us. What are you talking about?

CRIS 1: The signs! They are all around!

VILLAGER 2: All around what?

CRIS 2: All around us.

(Villagers look up at the Criers' signs.)

VILLAGER 3: Those signs?

CRIS 3: Not these signs! The other signs. (Villagers look around.)

VILLAGER 4: We don't see any signs.

CRIS 4: (Slapping Camel's behind) The end is near!

(Villagers stare at the camel's behind)

VILLAGER 5: (Looking at Criers, then back to camel's behind.) The end? Yes. It is. But what's that got to do with anything?

CRIS 5: Can't you read the signs?

(Villagers all stare at Criers, then back to camel's behind, looking up and down, shaking their heads.)

VILLAGER 1: I can't.

VILLAGER 2: Me neither.

VILLAGER 3-5: They must be in a different language.

CRIS 1: The signs are all around us! (Long pause) You don't have the slightest idea what I'm talking about, do you?

VILLAGERS: (Villagers freeze in thought for a long pause, then unfreeze) Nope.

CRIS 1: The end is near! The moon is going to turn to blood! The sky will be darkened! And then it's going to come! Get ready!

CRIS: Get ready!

VILLAGERS: What's going to come?

CRIS 2: The stars will fall from heaven and the powers of heaven will be shaken. And then will appear the sign! Get ready!

CRIS: Get ready!

VILLAGERS: What sign?

CRIS 3: They will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory!

VILLAGERS: The Son of what?

CRIS 4: And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call (blow trumpet) and they will gather his chosen ones from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. And then it will come!

VILLAGERS: What will come?

CRIS 5: (Lifting up the "Yom Yahweh" sign) Yom Yahweh!

CRIS: Yom Yahweh!

VILLAGERS: Yom what way?

CRIS: Yom Yahweh!

CRIS 1: It's the day of the Lord!

CRIS: The day of the Lord!

VILLAGERS: The day of the Lord?

CRIS: The day of the Lord!

CRIS 1: The great and powerful, awesome day of the Lord!

CRIS 2: Come like a thief in the night!

CRIS 3: Come when you least expect it!

CRIS 4: But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels.

CRIS 5: Not even the Son!

CRIS 1: Only the Father.

CRIS: And he's not talking.

VILLAGER 1: Where did you hear all of that?

CRIS 2: It's in the Bible.

CRIS: Matthew 24:29-36! Matthew 24:29-36!

(Lights flicker and dim. All characters freeze in place. Crier 1 reads Matthew 24:29-36 from pulpit.)

CRIS 1: And that's the Gospel truth! The Good News!

VILLAGERS: That's the Good News?

VILLAGER 1: If that's the Good News, I'd hate to hear the bad news.

VILLAGER 2: It sounds scary to me!

VILLAGER 3: Me, too.

VILLAGER 4: Me, three.

VILLAGER 5: How can that be good news?

CRIS 1: Huh? It's Good News because it says that Jesus is coming!

CRIS 2: Jesus is coming to claim his own!

CRIS 3: And you belong to Jesus, right?

VILLAGERS: Right... Yeah... etc.

CRIS 4: So, he's going to gather you to be with God.

VILLAGER 1: But the whole world will pass away. That's scary.

CRIS 5: You don't have to be frightened. Jesus is coming but he's coming for you! The whole world will pass away, but Jesus' words will not pass away. They'll last forever, just like all those he takes to heaven with him.

(Criers 2-5 pick up signs and exit. Villagers 2-5 follow. Camel, Villager 1 and Crier 1 remain.)

CRIS 1: Yup. The signs are pretty clear. (Slapping Camel's behind) The end is near.

VILLAGER 1: (Scratching head. Looking at Camel's behind.) Yup.

(Long pause.)

CRIS 1: You don't have the slightest idea what I'm talking about, do you?

VILLAGER 1: (Long pause) Nope.

CRIS 1: (Putting arm over Villager's shoulder and exiting.) The end is near. And it's a glorious end, indeed. Glorious! Glorious! A glorious end.

CAMEL: (Looking at its own behind, then up) Gee, thanks.

Wise Men

RETURN

Skit 2

CHARACTERS: 3 Wisemen, Runner, Reader, John the Baptist, Crowd (Note: Don't be afraid to give major lines to smaller persons. The lines may be distributed among more [or fewer] actors to fit your size group.)

PROPS: Robes, 3 throne-like chairs, globe, telescope, thick glasses, costumes

SETTING: Somewhere in the Middle East

WISEMAN 1: (Looking into a telescope from throne) I never saw anything like it before, and I've never seen anything like it since.

WISEMAN 2: (Spinning the globe from throne) I told you, it was worth the trip.

WISEMAN 3: (Looking at crowd with thick glasses) I never saw anything like it before, and I've never seen anything like it since.

WISEMAN 1: (Looking away from the telescope) That's my line.

WISEMAN 3: (Looking toward Wiseman 1) Huh? Who said that?

WISEMAN 1: (Stepping down) I did.

WISEMAN 3: Oh, sorry.

WISEMAN 1: (Looking out into crowd) How long ago was it, anyway?

WISEMAN 2: (Spinning the globe) Oh, I guess it's been thirty years or so. Take away a day or two.

WISEMAN 3: (Counting fingers) Thirty years, six months, four days, nine hours and fifty minutes. But who's counting?

WISEMAN 1: (Pointing to heavens) The star appeared in the sky.

WISEMAN 2: (Stopping the globe) We knew a great king had been born.

WISEMAN 3: Technically, it wasn't really a star. It was actually the convergence of three planets. But, who's keeping track?

WISEMAN 1: We gathered our caravan and journeyed across the rocky desert

to follow the star in the west.

WISEMAN 3: Uh, east. The star was in the east. Technically.

WISEMAN 2: We gathered our most precious gifts to bring to the newborn king. Gold, Frankenstein and mirth.

WISEMAN 3: That would be frankincense and myrrh. Not Frankenstein. Not mirth. Myrrh. It's an expensive ointment.

WISEMAN 1: And we—three kings of Orient—traveled toward the star. (Music for "We Three Kings" begins.)

WISEMAN 3: Technically, we aren't kings. More like wealthy astrologers. Scientists, to be exact. Only the wealthy can afford the luxury of studying the stars.

WISEMAN 1: I wonder... What ever happened to the child king, anyway? Did he ascend to a throne? Is he the ruler of the Jews? Or did some cruel fate do him in?

WISEMAN 3: Hey! I've got an idea. Let's journey there again and see what happened to the lad!

WISEMAN 1-2: Naw. Dumb idea.

WISEMAN 1: (Pausing in thought) Say! Why don't we journey to that land again and see what has happened to the lad!

WISEMAN 2: Splendid idea! Splendid! Gather your things! (Wisemen gather up pouches, hold imaginary camel reins, and begin a journey through the audience)

WISEMAN 3: It was my idea first.

WISEMAN 1-2: We three kings of Orient are...

WISEMEN 1-2: Let's all sing!

HYMN: "We Three Kings Of Orient Are" verses 1-2 by John Henry Hopkins, Jr. (Wisemen travel up and down the aisles during song. Wiseman 3 stumbles and drops his glasses, gropes around, finds them, then walks over people, pews and chairs to catch up to the others.)

WISEMAN 3: Excuse me. Coming through. Wiseman here. Man of wisdom.

WISEMAN 1: Ah! At last we have arrived!

WISEMAN 2: Yes, we traveled to this very land, many years ago.

WISEMAN 1: I think we stopped in the palace of the regional governor to pay our respects. His name was Pilate.

WISEMAN 3: Herod. The ruler's name was Herod. You're getting your rulers mixed up.

WISEMAN 1: "Where is he who is born king of the Jews?" we asked.

WISEMAN 2: For we have seen his sign in the west and have come to worship him.

WISEMAN 3: East. (Pointing) That would be east.

WISEMAN 1: Herod said he didn't know the whereabouts of the royal child, but if we found him, we were to let him know so he, too, could come and worship.

WISEMAN 3: Yeah. Like that was going to happen!

WISEMAN 2: We came to the place beneath the star where the child lay and found them, Mary, Joseph and the baby wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

WISEMAN 3: Actually, according to the Biblical account he was out of the manger by then and into a house. And only Mary was present when we got there, but who's paying attention?

WISEMAN 1: We offered our gifts. Gold, frankincense and myrrh.

WISEMAN 2: And we worshiped him—the Christ child. Warned in a dream that Herod wanted to kill the lad, we went home by another way.

WISEMAN 1: Ah, that was so long ago.

WISEMAN 2: Thirty years.

WISEMAN 3: Thirty years, six months, seven days, four hours and thirty nine minutes. But who's counting?

WISEMAN 1: I wonder if anyone around here knows what happened to the child?

WISEMAN 3: My guess is that he grew up.

WISEMAN 1: Hark! What is that?

WISEMAN 2: What could it be?

RUNNER: It's John! The Baptist is down by the river! Come and see!

WISEMAN 3: Maybe he could point us toward the child king!

Straight Road For JESUS

Puppet Play of the Week

CHARACTERS: Narrator, Puppets 1-3

PROPS: Puppet stage or curtain

NARRATOR: (Stands in front and to the side of the curtain, looks behind the curtain but speaks to the audience) Where are my puppet friends?

P1: (Pops up) I'm here! Are you looking for me?

P2: (Pops up) Hi everyone! I'm here too!

P3: (Pops up) Hey! Don't start without me!

NARRATOR: Are you ready for a Bible story?

P1: (Jumping up and down) Oh good, a story!

P2,3: We love stories!

NARRATOR: Many years before Jesus was born, the Prophet Isaiah wrote, "A voice shouting: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert, a highway for our God'"

P1: Shouting? My Mom said to never shout in the house! But she probably wouldn't care if I shouted in the desert.

P2: (Looking at P1) Is there any one to shout to in the desert?

P3: Shouting in a desert! That guy must have been crazy!

NARRATOR: Let me continue the story. The guy, who was shouting in the desert, was named John. Everyone called him John the Baptist because he spent most of his time baptizing people at the Jordan River. He was the one God asked to get the road or highway ready for Jesus' coming.

P1: Road ready? Big job for one guy!

P2: Did he have a bulldozer?

P3: I'm glad no one asked me to get a road ready.

NARRATOR: John the Baptist was getting the road ready for Jesus to come in a different way than you are thinking. He

was asked by God to get people's hearts ready. The straight road would be in their hearts.

P1: A road in your heart?

P2: Tell us more!

P3: (Looking at the other puppets) We might want one of those straight roads in our hearts!

NARRATOR: John was a man who lived in the desert. He was so busy worshiping and talking to God that he didn't take time to earn money for food and clothing like other people. He dressed in animal skins that he found since he didn't want to take time for regular clothes. He ate what was easily available, which was locusts and wild honey. People thought he was very strange! Crowds of people came to the desert to see and hear him.

P1: Locusts! Ugh! Aren't they insects?



P2: Don't tell Mom. She makes us eat anything cheap and nutritious.

P3: You said he was busy talking to God. What was that about?

NARRATOR: God had a very special job for John the Baptist. He wanted him to tell the people to turn away from their sins and be baptized so that their hearts would be ready to accept Jesus when he came.

P1: I get it now! A heart free from sin is like a straight road ready to welcome Jesus!

P2: Could we have one of those straight roads in our hearts, even if we don't eat locusts or wild honey?

P3: The kind with no sin?

NARRATOR: The good news is, everyone can ask for God's forgiveness and have a straight road for Jesus in their heart! It is the most important thing to do to be ready for Christmas.

P1: We'd better get going. (Goes down)

P2: Yes! We've got some praying to do! (Goes down)

P3: I'm going to have a very straight road for Jesus in time for Christmas! (Goes down)

NARRATOR: Thanks puppets! (To audience) Let's pray too.

PRAYER: Lord, only you can make the road in our hearts straight by taking our sin away. Fill each of us with the true joy of Jesus in our hearts, in our lives.

quiz bowl



ADVENT B1

Answers in Bold

Question 1: For the church, Advent is seen primarily as the: **A) beginning of the church year**, B) end of the church year, C) beginning of the shopping season, D) anniversary of St. Venti who drove the teenagers from the church during the middle ages

Question 2: What do the signs around you best say about Christ's coming? A) He is coming on a miniature sleigh with eight tiny reindeer, B) He is coming with a corn cob pipe and a button nose and two eyes made out of coal, C) He is coming to max out my credit cards, **D) The world has mostly forgotten the reason for the season**

Question 3: What is the church celebrating during the season of Advent? **A) Christ's first coming**, B) Christ's second coming, C) both A & B, D) anticipated end of the year giving

Question 4: John the Baptist: A) wore animal skins, B) ate bugs, C) was a relative of Jesus and a prophet called to prepare Christ's way, **D) all of the above**

Question 5: John appeared in the wilderness: A) preaching a baptism of fire, **B) preaching a baptism of repentance**, C) preaching a baptism of the Holy Spirit, D) preaching the virtues of a vegan lifestyle

Question 6: John was a voice crying: A) "Prepare the way of the Lord," B) "Make his paths straight," **C) A & B**, D) "Only 29 shopping days until Christmas"

Question 7: The crowds went out to see John in order to: A) see the show, B) be baptized in anticipation of the Messiah's coming, C) confess their sins and prepare their hearts, **D) B & C and probably more than a little A**

Question 8: John the Baptist was unusual because he: A) was a baptist, B) wore leather and camel hair, C) told the truth, **D) all of the above**

Question 9: John said one who came after him would baptize with: A) the Holy Spirit and Truth, **B) the Holy Spirit and Fire**, C) fire and brimstone, D) mocha frappuccino

Question 10: The verse of the week tells us, "Heaven and earth will pass away but my Word...": A) "will not return to me empty," B) "is truth," **C) "will not pass away."** D) "will not offend anyone if preached in the proper tone at the proper time."