SONGS OF THE SEASON

Week 1 Preaching Resources: Born to Deliver[1]

Scripture Passage	Isaiah 40:1-5
Focus Statement	In a world of darkness, we shout the Good News of a long expected Savior.
ME	Share a story of how the weight of this season is bringing you down and the news that doesn't seem to know that we are celebrating the birth of Jesus.
WE	It's tough to get ready for Jesus' birth when we all have to get ready for Christmas. Decorating, cooking, parties, shopping and wrapping can seem overwhelming. And when we turn on the news it is difficult to remember that Jesus was born to change the world.
GOD	Times were tough when Isaiah was speaking the word of God. At the beginning of the exile of the people of Israel, God speaks words of comfort and a reminder that we are not alone. Jesus' birth changes our world and changes us. 1. Isaiah's prophecy is to a people who are deeply hurting in a world of war, chaos, oppression and slavery. 2. Advent is a season of comfort and knowledge that Jesus is the Emmanuel who indeed brings comfort. 3. To live in a world with a Savior who was born to deliver means to shout that comfort and hope from the top of the mountains. (Isaiah 40:9)
YOU	Here's what this means for your life. Our lives are to be different and reflect the life of Jesus, especially in this season of Advent. While we live in a world of darkness, we celebrate the birth of the light of the world. Imagine the hope that we could provide to this community if we truly reflected on Jesus in the next four weeks. Changing the lives of others, giving to others as Jesus gave to us.
WE	Today and this season aren't just another year of Christmas. We live in a world that is changed because of Jesus' birth. We can make a difference and bring this hope and light to others. A word we speak, a gift we share, a person we sit and listen to and then bring the word of comfort. We've received the comfort (v. 1) and now we can tell others (v. 9). This week – commit to doing something that brings hope to your neighborhood.

[1] To find more information, please reference *Breakthrough: A GNJ guide to best practices for worship*, pg. 19

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Week 2 Preaching Resources: The Path to Peace[2]

Scripture Passage and Hymn	Isaiah 2:2-5; Blessed Be the God of Israel – UMH 209
Focus Statement	During the rush and pressures of the Christmas Season, it is easy to lose the meaning of Advent. Advent is about the coming of the Prince of Peace. Advent is about the coming of peace itself, everything has changed! This hymn reminds us, as followers of Christ, we are called to be "pilgrims along the paths of peace".
ME	Tell a story about a time when the "craziness" of the Christmas season got to you and kept you from following Jesus on the paths of peace.
WE	It's tough to get ready for Jesus' birth when we all have to get ready for Christmas. Decorating, cooking, parties, shopping and wrapping can seem overwhelming. And when we turn on the news it is difficult to remember that Jesus was born to change the world.
GOD	The Prophet Isaiah lived in a turbulent period of Jewish history. The empire of Assyria had conquered the Kingdom of Israel in 722-721 BCE and began subjugating the Kingdom of Judah in 701 BCE. Isaiah knew that soon even the "illusion of freedom" existing in Judah would end. Judah would soon fall and be decimated, but that would not be the end of the story. Isaiah believed as much in the hope of a peaceful future as he did the coming fire (Isaiah 1:31). In God's time there will be true and lasting peace. Isaiah believed all the people of the world would someday be drawn like a magnet to Jerusalem to learn the lessons of peace from the Word of God (The Torah) and the People of God.
YOU	In order for us to be the teachers of peace to the world, as Isaiah envisioned, we must first as the hymn "Blessed Be the God of Israel" reminds us, to walk the paths of peace for ourselves. Each one of us must learn from Jesus the ways of peace. Peace with our families, our community, our enemies, and peace with ourselves.
WE	We can't be peacemakers until we have made our peace with God. The lack of peace we feel between ourselves and God is at its core a lack of peace with ourselves. We want to control the world around us, however, we don't have the ability to order the universe. We are simply called to "walk in the light (the path) of the Lord" and teach others to do the same. What would it look like for us to accept the call to follow the steps of Jesus in making peace? How could we teach peace in our families and communities? How is God calling us to teach peace? If you are comfortable have a few members of the congregation share their hopes for the future of the church and community. (If you do this, plan it well before the service).

[2] To find more information, please reference *Breakthrough: A GNJ guide to best practices for worship*, pg. 19

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Week 3 Preaching Resources: Rejoice! Rejoice![3]

Scripture Passage	Isaiah 35
Focus Statement	On the verge of the collapse of Israel, the prophet cries out with words of joy. One day, we will all be free, Jesus comes to free the captive, provide healing for the broken and sorrow and sighing will fall away and we will sit in the presence of our God.
ME	Share a story where something unexpected led to a joyful reaction.
WE	In the midst of winter it is powerful to consider how God is bringing new life, there are some plants like amaryllis and Christmas cactuses that are now in bloom. The scripture point to new life in all of creation, where is there new life around you? Share ways you see restoration taking part in your church or community.
GOD	• In the midst of the desolation, after years of captivity the prophet paints a picture of all of creation being restored by God. Israel will no longer suffer for its past sins, the sighing and the sorrow are over, joy has come. • Isaiah has a vision of the restoration of all creation, he offers encouragement for the day and a picture of all that is possible through the power of God. God will transform, offer hope that result in joy. • In the most unexpected times and unpredictable ways God enters our lives and offers hope and restoration. God is here. This story is not finished, each of us has a choice how we will be a part of the change.
YOU	All of creation is rejoicing the promise of a savior. The promise of new life is something to celebrate. Too often the world does not see the joy-filled side of a Christian life. How can we not complain about the circumstances around us, but instead point to the transformative power of Jesus. Let that transformation take place in our hearts and minds. Share how are you finding ways to rejoice this Christmas season.
WE	While we know the promise that all of creation will be restored at the end of time, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus points to glimpses of perfect goodness today. If Christmas is to be good news for all how will you as a church be a part of God's restorative power? What can you do in these last days before the celebration of Christmas, what might you need to consider to keep the promise of joy alive in the new year.

[3] To find more information, please reference *Breakthrough: A GNJ guide to best practices for worship*, pg. 19

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Week 4 Preaching Resources: Lift Up Your Heads[4]

Scripture Passage and Hymn	Psalm 24; Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates - UMH 213
Focus Statement	As we prepare for the birth of Jesus, it is important to remember the journey this baby will travel during his life. His journey will take him through trials, tribulations, and ultimately to the cross. Every life has an arc, a journey to follow. Jesus' journey was filled with worship, praise, and love for God even on the cross. This Christmas season, what will we allow to shape our life's journey?
ME	Share a story about a time in your life (or the life of someone else) when the struggles of life made it difficult to worship and praise God. If you share your own story preach about a scar and not an open wound. If you share someone else's story make sure they know and give their permission.
WE	The holidays can be difficult for many of us; perhaps a close friend or family member recently died, or you are struggling to pay all your bills, or you are still recovering from a divorce or the end of a relationship. We don't need to wear a mask of happiness. We are welcomed and loved by a Savior that knows our pain and we are part of a community where we are free to be open and honest about our struggles.
GOD	The majority of the Book of Psalms was written and edited together during the Babylonian Exile/Captivity (597 BCE to 539 BCE). The Jewish leaders, held captive in Babylon, wanted to give hope to the other captives. These leaders wanted to help teach and shape the identity of a future people free to praise the God of Israel and rebuild the Kingdom of Israel. "Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates" is based on Psalm 24. Psalm 24 is a psalm (literally a song) of praise. It tells the people how to enter (process) into worship. Psalm 24 teaches that to enter the sanctuary to worship God, one's heart must be pure and one's hands must be clean. This song was sung by captives in Babylon and Jews under Roman occupation (including Jesus). It reminded them that no gates and no doors (truly nothing) could stop the righteous from praising their loving and faithful God!
YOU	"Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates", Psalm 24, and especially Jesus' life reminds us that the praise and worship of God is not only possible during difficult times but necessary. We were created to praise and glorify God. When we do praise God with open hearts we find, much like those gates, our burdens are lifted.
WE	Encourage members of your congregation to share their burdens with God and others. If possible, open up prayer time so people in need can come and share a personal prayer with someone who has the gift of prayer. You could as develop a prayer ritual your congregation could experience together (ex. Prayer slips that people can bring up and lay in a manger to prepare for Baby Jesus on Christmas Eve).

[4] To find more information, please reference *Breakthrough: A GNJ guide to best practices for worship*, pg. 19

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Week 5 Preaching Resources: Light of the World[5]

Scripture Passage	Luke 2:1-20, Isaiah 9:2, Genesis 1:1-3, John 8:12
Focus Statement	Jesus' light parts our darkness to live in him.
ME	Tell a story about what shopping during the Christmas season is like for you. Do you go crazy and shop for everything on Black Friday? Do you shop all over? Share a time when you found the perfect gift.
WE	Some of us have been waiting since Black Friday. The stores have been playing music since October 1. Decorations come out the day after Halloween. It's the age-old story of a season of what was foretold, has now come.
GOD	• Tonight starts at the beginning: In Genesis, God said, "Let there be light." Our world begins w/God's word. The story continues and we are left to our own devices • While God created and called light good, over and over again we turn to darkness. When led out of slavery – we chose the darkness of the golden calf. When in the Promised Land – we chose the darkness of the idols of Baal. • In our darkest, God still speaks a Word of light and hope. In Isaiah 9:2 - those sit in darkness, saw a great light • Tonight we celebrate the light of the World. It may seem like same old routine, the same old holiday traditions, but his birth, life, death, resurrection….the Good News that brought light into our dark world is a story that never gets old. And Jesus says to us, I am... John 8:12
YOU	Tonight is not about decorations, presents, parties you will go to after service. Tonight and tomorrow are about a Savior, born in a stable … who is the path that leads to light. As you stand here on Christmas Eve – it is dark outside. You have darkness in your life. You simply need to follow that light, the Light of the World.
WE	We could go tonight like any other Christmas. We could just go about our parties and traditions, nightly setups, family gatherings with business as usual. Or we could choose to live with the light…to walk in the light…and to be the light.

[5] To find more information, please reference *Breakthrough: A GNJ guide to best practices for worship*, pg. 19

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Week 6 Preaching Resources: Go Tell It[6]

Scripture Passage	Luke 2:8-20
Focus Statement	Christmas may be over and the holiday week may end in a few short days, yet our role in the world has just begun. Jesus prepares the way; now we are to follow the example of the shepherds to go and tell the entire world the Good News!
ME	Share a time in your life, when you had some good news that you couldn't wait to tell everyone you could about it. That long-awaited, exciting, life-altering news that you just can't keep to yourself and you have to tell people.
WE	We've all had exciting things in our lives that we just couldn't wait to tell everyone about. Most good news, you want to share with people…with the people you care about, and sometimes you just want to share it with anybody who'll listen. Today's story is all about some dirty shepherds that people didn't think much of, but they were invited to see the great miracle for themselves.
GOD	God had an angel tell shepherds to bear witness to the Messiah's birth. This was a peculiar choice because shepherds were lower-class, dirty and unreliable. They weren't even allowed to testify in court. But here they are being asked to share the Good News. Imagine the news of the long-awaited Savior, the King of Kings, being told first to a group of lowly shepherds to go a find Jesus lying in a lowly manger, a feeding trough in a dirty barn. If there were ever an example of big things coming from small places, this is it. God honors those who are humble, who are lowly, who are poor to share the Good News.
YOU	This is a story worth sharing, and no matter who you are, you need to share it. Not just the story of how Christ came into the world to save us; but how Christ came into your world, into your life and changed you. Or maybe you're waiting on that change to happen. Maybe you need a miraculous turn-around in some area of your life. Christ is waiting for you to accept Him, to accept the Good News, and allow Him to work in your life.
WE	So, now we have our marching orders. The Good News is here. The Messiah has come. There's certainly more to this story, and we've got plenty to tell. The world needs to hear it. Our neighbors need to hear it. Our families, our children need to hear it. They need to hear the story of Jesus, and they really need to hear our story of Jesus came into our worlds and changed our lives!

[6] To find more information, please reference *Breakthrough: A GNJ guide to best practices for worship*, pg. 19