

**- *Brushwood in Waiting* -**  
**Pastoral drama scripts**

**Symbolism:** Flame is a symbol capable of conveying the awesome *Unstoppable Purpose* of God. Set in motion by ritual, it becomes a symbol that invites congregational wonder and participation. Then, set before us in a seasonal appearance, flame invites new engagement with old scripture that, together, ignite our memory and imagination. More importantly, flame, Advent candles in particular, capably bear the double assignment of describing *God's Unstoppable Purpose* as one of warmth and danger, comfort and judgment.

**Reading:** The following monologues are animated by memorized, amplified readers. Costuming may be as simple as a designated "prophet's vest" (think John the Baptist) or as elaborate as a modern-day hippie or homeless person. The reader may change according to the voice in the text or remain the same throughout all six Sundays. Props may include a trashcan with surrounding refuse or nothing more than seasonal Advent candles. Other props may be added according to the weekly script. Consider making this the ritual action of Advent candle-lighting or "borrow flame" from the Advent candles in order to light recessed candles in the trashcan.

**Function:** These readings, called "pastoral dramas," take seriously the formative effect of scripture when we eavesdrop on ancient people who, just like us, long to see and participate in *God's Unstoppable Purpose*. Through careful memorization and rehearsal, the reader is able to attend to the spontaneous emotion of the congregation while remaining secure in the text. Make invitations early and rehearse as a worship team.

<b>Advent 1</b>	<i>Kindling</i>	Isaiah 64	God's unstoppable wonder
<b>Advent 2</b>	<i>Sparks</i>	Isaiah 40:1-9	God's unstoppable comfort
<b>Advent 3</b>	<i>Ashes</i>	Isaiah 61:1-11	God's unstoppable joy
<b>Advent 4</b>	<i>Warmth</i>	II Samuel 7:1-11	God's unstoppable presence
<b>Christmas</b>	<i>Intensity</i>	Isaiah 9:2-7	God's unstoppable rule
<b>Epiphany</b>	<i>Torch</i>	Luke 2:21-40	God's unstoppable message

---

**Advent 1 ~ Kindling**

---

Isaiah 64 God's unstoppable wonder

**Preset:** trashcan, taper candle lit from first Advent candle, coffee mug optional  
**Prophetic character:** Isaiah

Look, I just borrowed a little flame from what heaven left over. If you'd tear open the sky and come down, make everything quake like you used to, then your fire would kindle this brushwood and I'd have water for tea. We've got war down here, Lord, and, heaven knows, some nations need a reminder on the right way to tremble. That's how you used to do it. Now I'm borrowing fire from heaven. I only lit this so I could see in the dark! There was a time when you worked on our behalf in ways we could see but for ages no one has seen a God like that. So, where are you? I borrowed a little fire from heaven and now you won't remember me? While you were angry we were sinning and no one can agree which came first. All I know is we stopped looking because you were hidden, and

then everything got dark and dirty. This kind of living, even on a good day, is really quite filthy.

You know, stealing fire might be the only act of faithfulness I have left. With lips scarred from burning coal I am able to tell you this one hard truth: No one calls on your name any more. No one wants you in their hands. Have you just handed us over to this way of life? to fire in all the wrong places? As a prophet it is my duty to remind you of The Deal: You are the shaper, we are the form. We are the work of your hand. So may you have a high tolerance for dirt and a short memory for where the design went wrong. Your cities, once holy, have become a wilderness of poverty and injustice. Our places of worship have been burned by the wrong kind of fire. Still ablaze, may the church be your kiln so that as we pray you might soften us, reshape us, impress upon us those virtues that will stand the test of this burning season.

---

## Advent 2 ~ Sparks

---

Isaiah 40:1-9 God's unstoppable comfort

**Preset:** Trashcan, taper lit from second Advent candle, newspaper

**Prophetic character:** Isaiah

Kindling is comfort. Paper might carry the news for some but sometimes news is a shelter or a blanket or something that holds a spark long enough to light the whole log.

Sometimes God's news kindles; sometimes it's a wildfire. It seems I have more spark than usual because comfort has been spoken twice in today's headlines: "Comfort, comfort, O my people," says the Lord. As a prophet, it's my duty to remind God that two sparks of comfort are a proportionate response to the double dose of shame we got in the first place.

When things are bad, doubling makes it worse - double the shackles and twice the cold. Israel has received double for her sins and God punished them, God punished them, O my people. We cried then without knowing what to cry for.

So, from this punishing wilderness I cry again: Let's lay sidewalks the Lord can use, make straight through the neighborhood a highway for God. Every culvert shall be lifted up, and every low-income high rise shall have the heat brought up and the rent brought down. The uneven ground of politics shall level out and the rough places will become plain and easier to understand. This kind of project reveals the glory of God and all the people shall see it.

Every newspaper around says, "Cry out!" And I reply, "But what shall I cry?" I cry because people are like grass. Really, they last no longer than flowers. Hope withers and virtue fades at the turn of a season and God's cold breath. The grass withers and the flower fades but the word of our God will stand forever. I am a prophet and I am giving you the words for crying out loud.

Cry out loud from the mountain top, children of Zion, herald of good news. Paper might carry the news for some but for others it is shelter, a blanket, and the beginnings of comfort. So find the spark, fan the flame and do not fear. Holding a flame of comfort in each hand, open your arms wide and say to Judah, "Here is your God." Then may we gently gather in the warm bosom of God.

---

### Advent 3 ~ Ashes

---

Isaiah 61:1-4, 10-11 God's unstoppable joy

**Prop:** trashcan, taper lit from third Advent candle, soot on face of character, bright purple floral scarf to represent garland, tackier the better

**Prophetic character:** Isaiah

Three mighty flames are burning, one each from oppression, heartache and captivity. This soot is a sign of just how close we've been to those fires. Some people think of it as dirt but I see it as an anointing. The Spirit of God is on my face because I have been sent to bring good news to the oppressed, to comfort the trembling. I am sent to bind up the brokenhearted with strips of cloth. I, too, have been confined to a cave for there's no room in the inn for people like me. This dirt is an affiliation with people in humble conditions. You see, I not only know your captor, I am anointed to proclaim your freedom right into the jailer's ear. It is my duty as a prophet to declare the Year of the Jubilee. And so I do: The Year is upon us. I proclaim today the day of justice.

Today is the day to wash up and be free for a while. If you'll allow it, I will cleanse your face and decorate your neck with a garland. You are dull and dirty from mourning. Give me your forehead and I will polish it with gladness. Grieving has left you weak and tired so give me your shoulders and the mantle of worship will bring you joy.

Some people think of it as dirt but I've just been living that close to this trinity of flame. Take heart: sometimes a sapling grows best in places cleared by wildfire. Your place of worship has been destroyed, that's true. Your cities are truly in ruins. But you will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, to display his glory. Let us build up the ancient ruins, raise up our fallen worship, and rebuild the city. This, after all, is the devastation of many generations. For as the earth brings forth shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown to spring up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all nations.

---

## Advent 4 ~ Warmth

---

II Samuel 7:1-11, Luke 1:26-38 and 47-55 God's unstoppable presence

**Preset:** trashcan, taper lit from fourth Advent candle

**Prophetic character:** Nathan from II Samuel 7

God has not lived in a house since the day we were set free. God lived in a tent and preferred it that way; as a Hebrew prophet, so do I. Never once did God say, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?" You see, so long as people worship, God will never be homeless. Homelessness, in this oracle, is what happens when people are deprived of a future together.

When the Exiles made camp in the wilderness, the Ark felt at home in their worship. When Gabriel went to Mary, God made a home in her womb. Worship happens when fires are built and sacrifices are made. God is at home in the furnace of the terrified who, despite the danger, say things like, "Here I am. Let it be." These altars and offerings are precisely why God never asked for a house of cedar. Where there is a hearth, people gather and there, God is with them.

God took shepherds from a pasture and gave them a kingdom. God found foreigners who made constellations their common friends. But not before an angel met an unwed teenager and asked her to be the mother of God. These places – pastures and galaxies, wombs and caves – these are the places of gathering. The Lord is with you.

As a prophet, it is my job to confront and to comfort. Today, I bring these words of assurance: God has been with us all along, cut off enemies we'll never see. And the Lord will make our name large and appoint a place for us to be, our own place, a place to belong and belong to. Moreover, the Lord declares that God will make you a house and that house is a dynasty of being together. The Lord is with us.

---

## Christmas ~ Intensity

---

Isaiah 9:2-7 God's unstoppable rule

**Preset:** trashcan, taper lit from Christ candle

**Prophetic character:** Isaiah

As a prophet I can tell you this is the biggest fire God will ever build – four candles plus one. The people who walk in darkness will see this great light. Those who live in the land of the dead and dying, now walk among the living. The war is nearly over. In the grand mathematics of time God has multiplied the nation and increased its joy by four – hope, love, joy and peace. This is the kind of fire God builds when the fields are bountiful and the harvest is divided fairly. The rod of oppression is no harder to snap than a twig. Yes, oppression will make great kindling on the Day of Midian and the yoke of burden is a log worth burning till it's gone. This is sure to be God's biggest fire for the boots of every tramping warrior will be burning in it and war's blood-soaked garments shall be burned

as fuel. This kind of fire signals the end of war and, ultimately, the end of governments that sponsor it. For unto us a child was born, a son was given to us, and authority rests upon his shoulders. His name is Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God and Everlasting Father. He is the Prince of Peace and this fire is his purpose. His authority shall grow continually and peace will be irrepensible. He will establish and uphold his throne with justice from this time on and forevermore. Forevermore – by the zeal of the Lord it has become an eternal flame.

---

## Epiphany ~ Torch

---

Luke 2:21-40, Isaiah 62:1 God's unstoppable message

**Preset:** trashcan, taper lit from Christ candle

**Prophetic character:** Anna

Fire in the temple doesn't get any bigger than this. As a prophet with vision before and ahead, this I can safely say. I am the prophet, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher and I am old enough to know a spark from heaven when I see it. As a prophet, *Emmanuel* is the word I use to alarm the world of God's presence. For eight days, though God was with us, God lived without a name. Then, according to the law, the baby God was brought to the temple. Fire had come to the temple and only because of his virtue was Simeon able to handle it. Simeon handled the fire and the parents gave it a name.

Stoking the flame in his arms, Simeon prayed, "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." The parents were amazed to hear this spark was really a flame, and not only a fire but a burning torch of light and salvation. Simeon turned to the astonished mother and said, "This child is destined for the falling of ash and the rising of spark. He will bring an unwelcome flame that many oppose, so brilliant that he exposes the darkest thoughts. Unlike other flame, he will not be quenched by water but extinguished by the sword - a sword that will pierce your life too." I am the prophet Anna, the prophet Isaiah and John the Baptist. In one voice together we say, "The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom, and the favor of God was upon him." This is God's unstoppable purpose.