

## **Advent 2016 Visuals**

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### **Advent 1**

Photo setting: On the street in Bethlehem, October 2012

When we think of Christmastime approaching, we think of Bethlehem—as it was, not as it is now. Today’s Bethlehem streets bear little resemblance to images evoked by the carol when we sing, “O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee. . . .” Today’s streets of Bethlehem remind one of the clarion call of today’s Isaiah text, “O that you would rend the heavens and come down!”

This photo could be projected during the Isaiah reading and/or during the sermon, especially if the sermon announces the Messiah’s first and second coming!

Picture:

The open hands reach up to God in the longing expectation of this year’s theme; “Oh, that you would reveal your mystery, your hope.” There is a tentative mood to these hands. Are they the hands of a child or of a younger adult? Worship leaders could invite congregants to pray the call to worship with hands of young and old, and in between, stretched out to God in this position. The picture provides a strong visual image for the call to worship.

### **Advent 2**

Photo setting: The Jordan River, up near the Galilee region, October 2012

The Jordan River is where the message of God’s arrival went public. The river is slow-moving, a little muddy, and quite peaceful. This unassuming river sustains life in the region.

This photo could be projected during the reading of the words of John the Baptist and during the sermon that describes the kingdom Jesus was coming to bring.

Picture:

The hands clasping another’s forearm show no signs of strain. There is no tugging here, only the solidarity of relationship it takes to build bridges of peace in our relationships with each other. The comfort of the reciprocal relationship is palpable and echoes God’s words from Isaiah 40: “Comfort, comfort my people.”

The picture again provides a strong visual image and models a position for worshipers to take during the call to worship.

### **Advent 3**

Photo setting: This photo was taken just as you exit the Old City, at the end of the Via Dolorosa, the road Jesus is believed to have walked to the cross. Even this road has been turned into a commercial site, and it is amazingly easy to get sidetracked by the noisy vendors. Most people do not go to Jerusalem to go shopping, but somehow or other most end up doing it there. It reminds us that while consumerism is everywhere, abiding joy comes from discovering God's gift to us in Jesus Christ.

This photo could be projected during the Scripture reading or during the sermon, especially if the consumerism of the season is being addressed.

Picture:

The outstretched arms and hands are now graced by castanets to help us express God's joy, which erupts into our grief and despair to prepare us for celebration. Can we also our extend grief-worn hands and allow God to transform those hands into expressions of joyful celebration? Distributing some castanets to worshipers to use during the call to worship, as well as during the congregational singing, would highlight the joyful tone of this morning's worship.

### **Advent 4**

This photo was taken inside of one of the "homes" in Nazareth Village. Quite likely, Mary looked a lot like this woman. (Pictures of Mary with a halo and royal garb only appeared centuries after her life.) This woman has no halo, but what better persona to receive and proclaim the good news of the Magnificat than someone like her.

This photo could be projected during the Scripture reading of the Magnificat. If the sermon continues to focus on Mary, it could be used on the screen for the entire sermon.

Picture:

The loving arms and trusting embrace of the child in this picture portray love and security and give tactile expression to this week's theme of God's love being revealed. While it provides great visual accompaniment to the call to worship it can also adapt to speak to the mood of the prayer of confession.

### **Christmas 1**

If only these pictured ancient stones could speak. The stones are the ruins of the synagogue at Capernaum. A picture of ruins reminds us that when Jesus comes, he comes to change. Sometimes the old structures we have built our lives around crumble. But new things emerge. Imagine Simeon and Anna on this spot with the holy family and hear Simeon saying, "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel. . . ."

This photo could be projected for the Scripture reading and for a sermon that focuses on what Jesus will come to do in each person's life as well as in the world.

Picture:

The hand of God's blessing on a child is portrayed as a sign of God's salvation in this week's image. Children continue to reveal God to us when our eyes are opened to see and when they know themselves to be blessed, as Jesus was blessed by Simeon and Anna. Not only the call to worship, but also the confession of faith would be enhanced by engagement with this image.

### **Epiphany**

This photo was taken inside the Church of the Nativity. It is of a bronze picture of the magi coming to meet the Christ child. The fact that the magi are dressed in Persian clothing saved the church from destruction during the Persian invasion in AD 614. This picture, which proclaims the inclusivity of God's reign on earth as it is in heaven, is still viewed by hundreds of people every day. It can be viewed by the congregation during the Scripture reading or sermon today to help the congregation imagine how God is working far and wide in the world to usher in the kingdom—when those from all nations and all tribes will come.

Picture:

The embrace of these people with different skin tones emphasises God's saving mystery, that in Christ we are all one and are all called into relationship with one another, no matter the colour of our skin. By growing together in Christ, we proclaim God's salvation to the world. This image provides strong visual accompaniment for both the call to worship and the confession of faith.