

Season of Christmas

Crafting the Liturgy — Seasonal Planning Page

The season of Christmas is a joyful season and often a favorite for many. The Good News of Christ's birth reminds us of new beginnings, the precious love of God, and the gift of salvation that came to us in an innocent and helpless infant. This baby is God come down to take on human flesh and blood! What better news is there than to know that God loved the world he created so much, that he sent his Son to redeem the creation and restore humanity to a right relationship?

SUGGESTIONS FOR THE SEASON

The following are some ideas for helping to make the season distinct and memorable. Congregations are free to adapt these suggestions, or follow the local customs of the congregation.

Liturgical Color

The color for the season of Christmas is white or gold.

Alternate Worship Texts

Consider using the alternate prayers and texts for worship in the short season of Christmas, especially if you used a well-known setting during Advent. A bit of variety in the liturgy can keep the worshiping community attentive and can even spark deeper thinking about worship.

The Worship Space

Decorate the worship space in a festive way that reflects the celebratory nature of the season. The use of symbols of Christ, along with gold and white colors, can create a regal-looking space that points to the King of kings. Lots of light, including candlelight, reminds worshipers of the Light of the World who dispels all darkness.

The Gathering

The use of the Kyrie and Gloria are recommended for Christmas. As an alternate for the Hymn of Praise, use the beloved hymn "Angels from the Realms of Glory" (LBW 50, LSB 367, ELW 275, REC 126, SOLA 126) throughout the Christmas season.

The Word

Consider using the hymn "Thy Word" (CCLI #14301) during the Christmas season to emphasize the wisdom of God that comes among us in the Word who became flesh.

For inspiration in this Christmas season, check out Martin Luther's Christmas Book. This small book is a collection of the Reformer's thoughts on the shepherds, angels, the manger scene and more. (ISBN# 0806635770)

Consider preaching a short series on the scripture lessons from Isaiah:

- Isaiah 9:2-7 — Israel is brought from darkness to light.
- Isaiah 52:7-10 — Israel has been redeemed.
- Isaiah 63:7-14 — Israel has received her Savior.

The Offertory

Use the praise song "Christmas Offering" by Paul Baloche (CCLI# 7005509) for the offertory during Christmas. Even if your congregation doesn't know the song, it could be played by the musician during the offering. A downloadable copy of the music can be purchased for \$3.99 at www.sheetmusicplus.com/search?Ntt=christmas+offering

REMINDERS FOR THE SEASON

- ✦ Make sure you have the candles you need for candlelight services.
- ✦ Choose the special music you will use for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, and begin preparing for those services.
- ✦ Have musicians begin prelude music at least 15 minutes before Christmas Eve worship begins in order to help the congregation center themselves for the Holy Night.
- ✦ If you do the chorale reading for the Nativity of Our Lord (found on the Christmas page of SOWeR), make sure you have lectors signed up to read and give them the readings early so they can practice together.
- ✦ Consider using the Service of Lessons and Carols (found on the Seasonal Christmas Page of SOWeR) if the pastor takes a Sunday off after Christmas. It is a moving service that is appropriate for laity to lead.
- ✦ Consider hosting an intergenerational New Year's Eve party at your church. Have a short prayer service for the new year.
- ✦ Invite older adults to present the children's messages during Christmas. It is a wonderful way to connect the young with those who are older and wiser in their faith.

COMMEMORATIONS

Dec. 29: David (c. 1040 – c. 970 BC). King David was from the tribe of Judah, a descendant of Ruth and one of the 12 sons of Jesse who lived in Bethlehem. Jesus is a descendant of David.

Jan. 2: J. K. Wilhelm Loehe (February 21, 1808 – January 2, 1872) — Pastor

LESSER FESTIVALS

Dec. 27: St. John, Apostle and Evangelist (c. 6 AD – c. 101 AD) — John was the brother of James and one of the "Sons of Thunder," a son of Zebedee the fisherman. The Gospel of John, the epistles of John and the Book of Revelation have all been attributed to him in Church tradition. While other apostles were martyred, it is thought that John lived to an old age, perhaps on the island of Patmos where Revelation was penned.

The readings for that day are:

Revelation 1:1-6
Psalm 116:10-17
1 John 1:1 - 2:2
John 21:20-25

Christmas Eve

December 24, 2026

Nativity of Our Lord (Year B)

The birth of Jesus, the Son of God, was a moment in time that changed humanity forever. Through this One, God came to dwell among us as Immanuel, to walk the paths that humans walk and to share in the human experience. This Jesus is fully human and yet no ordinary man; he is the priest foretold by the prophets, the Savior of the nations — love incarnate, sent to rescue us from sin, death, and the devil.



THIS WEEK'S SCRIPTURE TEXTS

First Reading: Isaiah 7:10-14

God Sent a Sign

The Word of the Lord came to King Ahaz, encouraging him to be bold and to ask for a sign from the Lord. Ahaz, in his stubbornness, refused to ask God for a sign, claiming that would be “putting God to the test.” Ahaz discounted the reassurance that the Lord was offering him and continued deeper in his sin by rejecting God’s offer. That sign was nothing less than Immanuel, “God with us.”

Psalm 110:1-4

A Priest Forever

In this psalm we hear the promise of God to bless the kingly line of David. As Christians, we hear it as the union of king and priest in the person of Jesus Christ. Not only was Jesus a descendant of King David, he was also David’s Lord and was anticipated by David.

Second Reading: 1 John 4:7-16

God Loved Us First

St. John makes it clear that we love only because God has loved us first. God sent Jesus to be the Savior of our lives and the one who grants us forgiveness. The love of God is what empowers us to love like Jesus, sacrificially and unconditionally.

Gospel Reading: Luke 2:1-14 (15-20)

Joseph and Mary Travel to Bethlehem

Even though Mary’s time to deliver her child was very near, she and Joseph had to report to Bethlehem to register for the census. While the couple was in the city of David, Mary gave birth to her firstborn son, Jesus. Some shepherds received the news via angels, and they went to visit the newborn king where he lay in a manger.

Suggestions for the Day:

- Liturgical Color: White
- Use the Nicene Creed.
- Light all four candles on the Advent wreath as well as the Christ candle.
- Place the baby Jesus in the creche in the nativity scene.
- Hand out individual tapers for the service of light and the singing of “Silent Night” at the end of the worship service.
- We live in a culture that promotes “self love” in order to be able to love others. St. John explains the truth of how we are able to love at all: God first loved us. It is only through the love of the Creator who sent us his one and only Son, that we have any hope of loving others.

SUGGESTED HYMNS FOR WORSHIP

Hymn Titles:

	LBW	WOV	LSB	ELW	REC	Sola
Bells Are Calling	---	---	---	---	122	122
O Little Town of Bethlehem	41	---	361	279	115	115
The First Noel	56	---	---	300	121	121
What Child is This	40	---	370	296	113	113
Hark! The Herald Angels Sing	60	---	380	270	106	106
A Birth, It Is a Glorious Thing	---	---	---	---	---	web
Away in a Manger	67	---	64	227	110	110
All My Heart This Night Rejoices Once Again	46	---	118	273	118	118
Silent Night	65	---	363	281	107	107
A Stable Lamp Is Lighted	74	---	---	---	---	---

The hymn suggestions above can be found in: LBW= Lutheran Book of Worship, WOV= With One Voice, ELW= Evangelical Lutheran Worship (Augsburg Fortress); LSB= The Lutheran Service Book (Concordia Publishing), REC= The ReClaim Hymnal for Church and Home (ReClaim Resources), and *** means you can find it on SOWeR at “Hymns and Music.”

CONTEMPORARY SONGS

Praise Song Titles

Manger Throne
(CCLI #7226106)
It’s Christmas
(CCLI #7050425)
Sing We the Song of Emmanuel
(CCLI #7078042)
Mary, Did You Know?
(CCLI #839225)
O Come, All You Unfaithful
(CCLI #7160115)

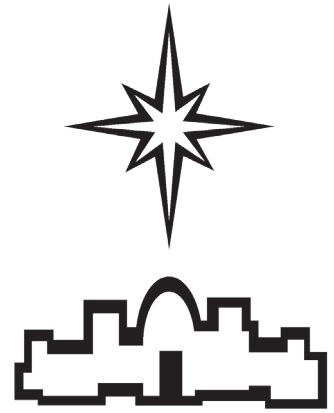
The contemporary song suggestions above are noted by their CCLI number. To print these songs, a congregation must have a CCLI license.

Christmas Day

December 25, 2026

Nativity of Our Lord (Year B)

When Jesus came into the world, a new King began to reign over Zion as well as the whole world. This King was different from any of the kings of Israel and Judah who came before him. His was the way of peace, and his life ushered in a new reality for all who believe, a reality that is marked by grace and mercy rather than adherence to the law that cannot save. In the King of kings is true freedom and salvation.



THIS WEEK'S SCRIPTURE TEXTS

First Reading: Isaiah 52:7-10

Bearer of Good News

The prophet Isaiah declared that the one who would bring the good news was the one who would say, "Your God reigns." This message was a call for singing joyfully as salvation was coming from the Lord. He would bring comfort to the people as he returned to Zion.

Psalm 2

Today I Have Begotten You

This royal psalm was a warning to the kings of the earth that a new king was coming — the Son who was begotten of the Father. All who took refuge in him would be blessed. His inheritance was everything on earth, and it was advised that all would serve him.

Second Reading: Hebrews 1:1-6 (7-12)

God Speaks Through His Son

The author of Hebrews asserted that never, not once, did God say to an angel that which he has said to his only begotten Son: "You are my Son!" This one was the exact imprint of the Father and therefore showed the world who God truly is: a God of radiance and majesty. The Son is seated at God's right hand, but he did not take that special place until he made purification for sin.

Gospel Reading: John 1:1-14 (15-18)

The Word of God

The Word of God that was in the beginning with God, through whom all things were made, came to dwell among humanity. In the Word is life, and he is the light of all people. The religious leaders surrounding John the Baptist wanted to know if John himself was "the one." John denied this, saying he was simply the voice crying in the wilderness — the one pointing to the light, but not the light himself.

Suggestions for the Day:

- Liturgical Color: White
- Use the Nicene Creed.
- Light all four candles on the Advent wreath as well as the Christ candle.
- Read the Incarnational Gospel as a chorale reading emphasizing the Word of God that existed in the beginning and through whom all things were made. (See the Christmas Day page on SOWeR for a copy.)
- It's easy to lift up our voices in praise of Jesus at Christmastime. But what about when the fanfare is over? When the gift wrap has been tossed in the trash and everything has been put away until next year's celebration? May we proclaim his glory every day of the year!

SUGGESTED HYMNS FOR WORSHIP

Hymn Titles:

	LBW	WOV	LSB	ELW	REC	Sola
At the Start There Was the Logos	---	---	---	---	---	web
A Birth, It Is a Glorious Thing	---	---	---	---	---	web
O Come, All Ye Faithful	45	---	395	308	129	129
Joy to the World!	39	---	387	267	123	123
Of the Father's Love Begotten	42	---	384	295	120	120
Good Christian Friends, Rejoice	55	---	475	385	158	158
Go Tell it on the Mountain	70	---	388	290	---	web
Once in Royal David's City	---	643	376	269	---	---
God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen	---	---	---	---	---	web
I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day	---	---	---	---	111	111

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CONTEMPORARY SONGS

Praise Song Titles

Mary, Did You Know
(CCLI# 839225)
Light of the World
(CCLI# 934807)
Word of God, Speak
(CCLI# 3912788)
The Spirit of Christmas
(CCLI# 2522784)
Noel
(CCLI# 7050419)

The contemporary song suggestions above are noted by their CCLI number. To print these songs, a congregation must have a CCLI license.

Christmas 1

December 27, 2026

First Sunday after Christmas (Year B)

St. Paul reminds us that Jesus was born under the law of Moses and his parents did their religious duty to fulfill the covenant law when they took him to the Temple after his birth. This law, however, is not what saves humanity from sin and death; instead it is the lifesaving sacrifice that is prefigured here in the Temple ritual. Salvation came to the house of Israel, and it was witnessed by two elderly saints.



THIS WEEK'S SCRIPTURE TEXTS

First Reading: Isaiah 61:10-62:3

Anointed to Bring Good News

The Spirit of the Lord anointed the prophet to bring good news to Israel, especially to the poor and brokenhearted: That which had laid in ruins for so long would be restored. The ashes would be replaced by a beautiful headdress and shame replaced with salvation. What was dead and lifeless would be a fertile garden.

Psalm 111

God's Wondrous Works

The psalmist sang of the greatness of the Lord, who remembered his people with mercy and an everlasting covenant. This one who was trustworthy and true would grant an abundant inheritance to his people. The beginning of wisdom is awe and wonder of the Lord God.

Second Reading: Galatians 4:4-7

The Fullness of God's Time

St. Paul wrote to the Galatians, reminding them that in God's perfect time he sent his Son to redeem all those who were under the law. This adoption made believers, then and now, daughters and sons. We are heirs of God through Christ, our Lord.

Gospel Reading: Luke 2:22-40

Presentation of Jesus in the Temple

According to the law of Moses, the infant Jesus had to be presented in the Temple for circumcision on the eighth day of his life. A sacrifice was to be offered there as a thanksgiving for the child. While at the Temple, Mary and Joseph met Simeon, an old man who had waited for the Lord's Messiah to appear, and an old prophetess, Anna, who had prayed and fasted daily, waiting for the redemption of Israel.

Suggestions for the Day:

- Liturgical Color: White
- Use the Nicene Creed.
- Light the Christ Candle.
- Consider using an alternative liturgy, "Service of Lessons and Carols for Christmas," which can be found on the Christmas Seasonal Page of SOWER. This is particularly suitable for use when laity lead worship in the absence of a pastor.

The first hymn in the hymn list is an original by Pastor Mark Ryman. It is set to the tune of Sankey (you may know it as the hymn "Faith is the Victory"). The meter is 8686D. For a PDF of the score go to:

<https://hymnary.org/media/fetch/146523>

SUGGESTED HYMNS FOR WORSHIP

Hymn Titles:

	LBW	WOV	LSB	ELW	REC	Sola
When Jesus Had Been Born a King	---	---	---	---	---	web
Angels From the Realms of Glory	50	---	367	275	126	126
In His Temple Now Behold Him	184	---	519	417	---	---
Your Little Ones, Dear Lord, Are We	52	---	---	286	112	112
Now, Lord, Let Your Servant Go in Peace	---	624	---	200	---	---
What Child is This?	40	---	370	296	113	113
When Christmas Morn is Dawning	59	---	---	---	109	109
In the Bleak Midwinter	---	---	---	294	124	124
Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming	58	---	359	272	116	116
When Jesus Had Been Born a King	---	---	---	---	---	web

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CONTEMPORARY SONGS

Praise Song Titles

My Soul Magnifies the Lord
(CCLI# 5601671)
A Christmas Alleluia
(CCLI# 7050431)
Peace Has Come
(CCLI# 7030036)
We Have a Savior
(CCLI# 6336811)
He Shall Reign Forevermore
(CCLI# 7050416)

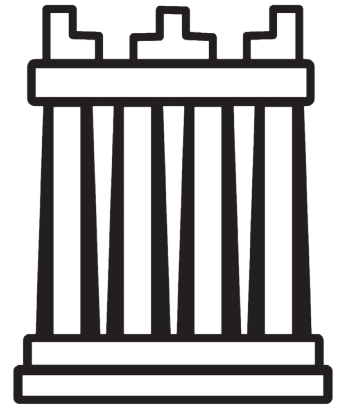
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Christmas 2

January 3, 2026

Second Sunday after Christmas (Year B)

Just days after celebrating the birth of Jesus, we hear the one story of his childhood. At the young age of twelve, Jesus was engrossed in conversation with teachers in the Temple. Solomon asked for discernment, Paul reminded the church that together we possess all the spiritual blessings under heaven, but in Jesus we see the fullness of wisdom. He was right where his parents should have expected him to be.



THIS WEEK'S SCRIPTURE TEXTS

First Reading: 1 Kings 3:4-15

The Gift of Wisdom

Solomon praised the Lord for allowing him, David's youngest son, to sit on the throne of Israel. His one request of the Lord was for wisdom and understanding so that he might govern God's people rightly. God granted him wisdom and more. Not only did Solomon receive a discerning mind, but also God gave him riches beyond his wildest imagination, all because of his humility.

Psalm 119:97-104

Teach Me Your Ways

In this acrostic hymn, the psalmist prayed to God for faithfulness to His holy Word. "Teach me," the psalmist said, "and I will act in purity according to your law."

Second Reading: Ephesians 1:3-14

In Christ We Are Inheritors

God has given his holy church every spiritual blessing. He chose us before the foundation of the world was put in place. He adopted all who believe in Christ and calls us his children. Through Christ we have been given the gift of salvation.

Gospel Reading: Luke 2:40-52

In My Father's House

The favor of the Lord was upon young Jesus, declared St. Luke. At the annual Passover festival, Jesus got caught up talking with the rabbis in the Temple. On their return to Nazareth from Jerusalem, his parents noticed he was missing from their group. They returned to find him conversing with the teachers in the Temple. Frightened by his absence, Jesus responded to his parents, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"

Suggestions for the Day:

- Liturgical Color: White
- Use the Nicene Creed.
- Light the Christ Candle.
- The psalmist asked the Lord to teach him his ways. How can we know God's ways if we never open his holy Word and pour over it? Is it possible or are we left with what others think is God's will, rather than what is really God's will?
- It's hard for us to imagine losing a child and not realizing it for days! Why didn't Jesus worry about being left at the Temple alone? How does his response to his parents when they return for him help to answer that question?

SUGGESTED HYMNS FOR WORSHIP

Hymn Titles:	LBW	WOV	LSB	ELW	REC	Sola
Children of the Heavenly Father	474	---	725	781	201	201
Give to God Our Immortal Praise	520	---	---	848	12	12
Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken	358	---	648	647	3	3
Joy to the World	39	---	387	267	123	123
Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word	230	---	655	517	71	71
Another Year is Dawning	---	---	---	---	---	web
Be Thou My Vision	---	776	---	793	230	230
Let All Together Praise Our God	47	---	389	287	---	---
O Bread of Life from Heaven	222	---	---	480	84	84
Father, We Thank You	---	704	652	478	---	---

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CONTEMPORARY SONGS

Praise Song Titles:

Wisdom
(CCLI# 2880567)
The Way of Wisdom
(CCLI# 761001)
No One But You
(CCLI# 7135000)
Isn't He (This Jesus)
(CCLI# 7100876)
He Knows My Name
(CCLI# 2151368)

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