

Receive the oil as a sign of Jesus' presence with you,
as a mark that you are his,
and as a commitment to live peaceably with all.

*[spoken by those anointing the congregation with oil:
May the restoring love of God,
the healing hope of Emmanuel,
and the joy and peace of the Holy Spirit be yours.]*

Leader: Shepherd of Israel, you have given us life

People: **when we called on your name.**

Leader: You have restored us, O God.

All: *In the light of your shining face,
we are saved.*

Offering

Second theme song: SS 10 *Come! Walk in the Light*

Benediction

Leader: Receive the child who comes to establish God's dwelling!

People: **God is with us!**

All: *In the mystery of God's dwelling in the child, there is joy!*

Postlude

O, the mystery of God's dwelling

December 29, 2013

*First Sunday after Christmas . . .
in our distress!*



Texts: Isaiah 63:7-9; Psalm 148; Hebrews 2:10-18; Matthew 2:13-23

Focus Statement

In God's mysterious ways, the assurance of salvation made perfect through the suffering of God's servant, the experience of evil does not undermine faith, and the violence we have known and perpetuated is overcome by God's emerging kingdom. So let us proclaim the mystery that fills the house of the Lord—*Christ is born!*

Song Suggestions

Theme songs

HWB 233 *Joyful Is the Dark*

SS 10 *Come! Walk in the Light*

Hymnal and supplements music

HWB 209 *Oh, How Joyfully*

HWB 405 *Where Cross the Crowded Ways* (omit verse 4)

HWB 558 *When the Storms of Life Are Raging*

SJ 102 *When from the Darkness*

SS 15 *Hope Is a Candle*

SS 27 *Sing a Different Song*

INVITING THE MYSTERY

Prelude

Silence

Prayer of invocation

Call to worship

Leader: Come before the one made perfect in suffering.

People: Let us awake to birth of our Savior,

Leader: the one who calls us brothers and sisters,

People: the one who helps in times of testing!

Leader: The pioneer of our salvation goes before us:

ALL: O, the mystery of God's dwelling in our distress!

First theme song: HWB 233 *Joyful Is the Dark*

ENGAGING THE MYSTERY

Dramatic reading: (see www.leaderonline.org)

Isaiah 63:7-9

Confession and enjoying the light of the Advent wreath

Leader: In both the exuberance of Christ's birth
and the human sorrow that accompanied it,
let us pause to consider God's presence in both joy and grief.
(*pause*)

Let us confess the violence we have experienced and spread,
that God may overcome it with grace.

(*pause*)

In our distress,
the Advent wreath reminds us of God's steadfast love.

People: In this light, we celebrate forgiveness.

In his love and pity, Jesus redeems us.

Children's time

Prior to the children's time, the dollhouse should be made to appear either very messy (paper wads and trash strewn about inside) or vandalized (furniture broken or tipped over). Show the children the dollhouse, discussing what "distress" means. Connect the feeling of distress with the feeling of being overwhelmed, of being faced with something so big one doesn't even know how or where to begin.

Ask children to think of a time when they've felt distressed. What made them feel better? How did they get through that situation? By asking someone for help? By thinking about something else for a while? By waiting and hoping it would get better on its own?

Invite children to close their eyes and imagine their way through the following questions, keeping their answers to themselves:

- *If this dollhouse belonged to God, I wonder who God would ask to help clean it up.*
- *I wonder if someone I know feels distressed today.*
- *I wonder how I could help show God's love to people who are distressed.*

Invite the children to open their eyes and say these words: "Jesus was born among people who were very distressed. Their country had been taken over by soldiers who treated them unfairly. Many were poor and angry and afraid. There are still people like that in our world, including in our own community. But just as God sent Baby Jesus as a sign of hope to a distressed world, God still offers hope by promising to be with us in times of distress. One of the best ways we can show God's love is by sharing that promise with the people we meet."

Close by singing *HWB* 585 "In Your Sickness."

Scripture reading

Silence

Sharing

Hymn

CELEBRATING THE MYSTERY

Sermon starter

Children dominate in the images of the texts for this Sunday. Matthew focuses on Herod's awful "slaughter of the innocents" and Jesus' close call escape to Egypt following Joseph's dream. What an unwelcome intrusion into the 12 days of Christmas! But the Bible and the church are unrelenting in confronting the realities of evil in our world.

In today's texts, the starkness of the massacre is softened by the text from Hebrews, in which Jesus, through his own suffering, brings "many children to glory" (Hebrews 2:10). With references to Psalm 22:23 and Isaiah 8:17-18 and 41:8-9, the writer of Hebrews speaks about the "offspring of Jacob," the "children whom God has given me," and the "descendants of Abraham." All these are the sanctified siblings of the crucified Jesus (v. 11). As Jesus shared our "flesh and blood" (v. 14) and was like us "in every respect" (v. 17), he was able through his voluntary death to "destroy the one who has the power of death . . . and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death" (vv. 14-15). Surely this is an antidote to the voice of lament in Ramah, Rachel weeping for her children, "because they are no more" (Matthew 2:18). Perhaps there is compensation for a grief that cannot be removed.

Psalm 148 reintroduces into the season's readings the theme of cosmic praise and cosmic redemption. All the angelic beings and the sun, moon, and stars of space (vv. 1-6), as well as all the features and creatures of the earthly environment (vv. 7-10), including all humanity from rulers to children (vv. 11-12), are enjoined to praise the Lord, who has "raised up a horn for his people." The horn as a metaphor for strength and power may refer to the horns of a bull as the most powerful of domesticated animals.

Offering

Second theme song: SS 10 *Come! Walk in the Light*

Benediction

Leader: Let us proclaim the mystery!

People: **Christ is born**

All: *that the house of the Lord may be filled!*

Postlude

O, the mystery of God's dwelling

January 5, 2014

Epiphany . . . in diversity!



Texts: Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14; Ephesians 3:1-12; Matthew 2:1-12

Focus Statement

In God's mysterious ways, outsiders become insiders, strangers become brothers and sisters, and enemies become friends. So let us welcome all who come to the dawning from on high, that the house of the Lord may be established—*there is light!*

Song Suggestions

Theme songs

HWB 233 *Joyful Is the Dark*

SS 10 *Come! Walk in the Light*

Hymnal and supplements music

HWB 111 *O Praise the Gracious Power*

HWB 212 *O Come, All Ye Faithful*

HWB 322 *For We Are Strangers No More*

HWB 646 *O Splendor of God's Glory Bright*

SJ 16 *Praise with Joy the World's Creator*

SJ 23 *Slowly Turning, Ever Turning*

INVITING THE MYSTERY

Prelude

Silence

Prayer of invocation