

Lectionary Sermons for Children

Advent –Christmas – Epiphany - Transfiguration- Year A 2013-2014

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Isaiah 2:1-5 Advent 1 A December 1

Do you remember a dream you had? Those stories that flash through your mind while you are asleep? Sometimes we remember them when we awake. Some are mixed up, maybe even scary. Others are about things we enjoy.

There are two kinds of dreams. Asleep dreams are those that come when we are sleeping. We also have awake dreams. They come into our minds while we are awake. These are often called “day dreams.” Isaiah, a man who lived long ago and loved God very much tells us about an awake dream that he had.

He dreamed of a time when all people would love God like he did and obey God. He knew some people disobeyed God and they had made life more difficult for everyone. He dreamed about a time when everything would be different. In his mind he imagined that there would be no more war and that people would not only love God, they would care about each other.

Isaiah’s dream came true when Jesus was born. When we know about Jesus, we want to treat other people fairly. When we learn about Jesus we know that God loves us so much.

This month, as we get ready to welcome Jesus, we remember Isaiah’s awake dream. We will light a new candle on our Advent Wreath each Sunday. While we wait we can say with Isaiah, “Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!”

Matthew 3:1-12 Advent 2 A December 8

I had a teacher when I was in elementary school who was as stern as John the Baptist. When she spoke, every child in her class trembled. She was one of those teachers who had eyes in the back of her head. Sometimes she could even see the mischief we were just beginning to think about doing!

We were a little afraid of her but, at the same time, we were drawn to her. She spoke with more authority than the principal but she was always fair. We could tell that she really cared about every person in her class.

She kept telling us that she was going to get us ready for something better than her class. The next year, she said, would be even better. We would learn more, even be excited about learning. But we had to be ready and she was determined to get us ready.

That teacher reminds me of John the Baptist. He came to help make people ready for Jesus. He was stern. He seemed to know every bad thing they had done. They trembled when he preached, yet they kept coming to hear him. He could not be Jesus any more than my teacher could teach the next grade but he was determined to get the people ready.

Today is the second Sunday in Advent. It is time to get ready for the coming of Jesus. He is not here yet. Christmas cannot be rushed. But we can start getting ready. We can pay more attention to how we treat others and, especially, how we treat God's commands.

I did not always like my stern teacher that year but I am glad she helped me get ready. Sometimes I do not like what God asks me to do to get ready for Christmas. But, when I obey him, I am always glad that he helped me get ready.

Isaiah 35:1-10 Advent 3 A December 15

Have you ever known anyone who was blind or who could not speak? Most ministers would have a very hard time if we could not speak. We like to talk and the thing we most like to talk about is what God has done for us. The world has never been the same since he sent his Son Jesus.

A long time before Jesus came, the prophet Isaiah wrote about what he imagined life would be like when God sent Jesus. He imagined a world in which the people who were blind would be given their sight. He foresaw a world in which those who could not speak suddenly were given a voice. He looked forward to a time when people who could not walk could leap around like a deer. Have you ever seen how a deer can leap high with what seems to be no effort?!

When our mission team traveled to Haiti, a country where everyone is very poor, we met a young man who could not speak. He helped us build houses every day. He could make noises and make motions to help us understand what he wanted us to know. But he could not speak. He became one of our very special friends. However, the one thing we wanted to give him, we could not give—the ability for him to speak.

The prophet Isaiah told the people who follow God to get ready. God will do something new. It will be so wonderful that it will be like a person who can't talk suddenly having a voice and a person who can't see suddenly having new eyes. It will be as wonderful as finding a spring of water in a dry desert.

God's gift of Jesus is just that wonderful. Our friend in Haiti still cannot talk but he has something even better. He knows Jesus and Jesus has changed his life. He can help build houses for his neighbors. He can worship with new friends who come to

help build houses for the people. And he can praise God even though he cannot say words.

This Sunday is a new day to get ready for the wonderful things that God will do. Christmas is coming so get ready.

Matthew 1:18-25 (21-22) Advent 4 A December 22

Getting ready for a new baby is so exciting. Little babies are so cute. Their skin is so soft and warm and cuddly. I am sure your parents were just that excited about you. They looked forward to you being born. They were thrilled to hold you and cuddle you. They bragged about you to all their friends. Then you grew up to be a two year old! They hardly knew what had hit them.

We all start life the same way. We begin as babies who can do nothing for ourselves. Then we grow up—through the terrible twos and the awkward years of growth spurts and teenage changes and finally become adults. Parents have special hopes for their children. We imagine our children becoming famous scientists or preachers or president or wonderful singers. We can only imagine what each of you will become. God has made you so special.

But, as special as you are, you cannot be as special as Jesus. Jesus was born just like you and me but he was more than a little baby when he was born; he was God's Son. The Bible tells us that he was to be called Emmanuel which means "God with us."

We call him Jesus but that name means almost the same thing. It means "The Lord is salvation." In other words, when you know Jesus, you know the presence of God. When you know Jesus, you want to give special praise to God.

You see that we have lighted all four candles around our Advent Wreath. That means we are getting closer and closer to Christmas. We have waited for this day just like your parents waited for you to be born. Now we know that we will not have to wait much longer. Very soon we will be reminded again that God is with us. The Lord is our salvation.

Christmas – Epiphany – Transfiguration - Year A 2013-1014

Matthew 2:13-23 December 29 – Christmas 1 A

We have just celebrated Jesus' birth. Everything about that is so beautiful. Maybe you were in a Christmas pageant as a shepherd or angel. Baby Jesus may have been a doll or perhaps a tiny newborn baby. Either way we knew how beautiful and how helpless Jesus was in that stable in Bethlehem.

But Matthew's gospel reminds us how dangerous events were for this little baby whom we know as Lord Jesus. King Herod was afraid of anyone who might threaten his rule as king. We know that Jesus was no threat to Herod's rule over Israel but scared or evil adults can do some terrible things. Since he did not know which baby the Wise Men had found, Herod issued an order for all the boy babies under age two to be killed.

Unfortunately there are still some evil or scared adults in our world who hurt children. I am very sad when I read this part of Matthew's story and very sad when I hear of someone mistreating children today. Fortunately parents will do everything they can to protect their children. That is just what Mary and Joseph did for Jesus.

God warned them in a dream that Herod wanted to hurt Jesus so they packed up a few things and fled one night. They went to another country where Herod could not hurt Jesus and stayed there until the king died. They were immigrants who had gone to another land to make life better for their children just like many of the immigrant families in our land today. All parents like that give thanks to God for giving them a place where they can protect their children.

A few years later, after that evil king had died, they came back to their home country but they moved as far away from the king's palace as they could. They made a home in the little town of Nazareth where Jesus grew up.

Sometimes life was very scary for Jesus' parents. But, because they loved Jesus, they did everything they could to protect him and to care for him. Most of all they depended on God to help them care for Jesus. God still helps parents take care of their children today because God loves children so much—just like God loves you.

Jeremiah 31:7-14 – January 5 – Christmas 2 A

Adults worry about a lot of things, especially things that are too big for them to change. Sometimes we adults worry so much that we forget that we are not the ones who hold the world in our hands; God is. God's hands hold the world and sometimes God even makes good things happen when adults can only see sad things.

At times like that we need children like you. You don't worry about things you can't change. You just shift the responsibility on those who can change them. Let's say you want an iPod so you can listen to music like your older brother or sister. Since you don't have enough money, what do you do? (Pause) That's right; you ask your parents to buy it. And you don't just ask them once; you ask them over and over. Often, even after they have told you they do not have enough money, they get you what you want. They especially get you what you need.

What we adults need to learn from children like you is to trust God the same way you trust your parents or your teachers or your grandparents. That is what the prophet Jeremiah was telling his people. They were sad and worried. The army from another country had defeated their army, torn down their temple, and destroyed their capital city. That was bad enough but then the army had taken most of the people captive and moved them to a foreign land. They were so sad and worried that they would never get back home.

"Quit crying," Jeremiah told the people. "Things look bad now but God is in control. The army of Babylon may be too strong for you but it is not too strong for God. You just wait and pray and trust in God and God will soon lead us back to our land."

One day, before long, God will get us back home and we will be so excited that the young women will dance and all the men, young and old, will sing praises to God.” And that is exactly what happened.

My special request to you today is to help us adults learn how to trust God like you do. You remind your parents, especially when they are worrying about something, to trust God because God loves us so much and wants what is best for us. Will you do that for me?

Matthew 2:1-12 – January 12 – Epiphany

You probably thought that Christmas was over and that we would not talk about baby Jesus again until next fall. But today I want to tell you a familiar story once more. It is the story about the Wise Men coming to Bethlehem and giving gifts to Jesus. You remember that story, don't you? Do you remember what gifts they brought? (Pause for responses.)

These men had been travelling for weeks, perhaps months, looking for the young child they believed would one day be king of the Jews. They were following a bright star, eager to find the child who would be under it.

Have you ever heard someone say that there is a pot of gold under the end of the rainbow? I remember being told that I could find a pot of gold right under the end of a rainbow. But I found out that the end of the rainbow kept moving. When I finally got to what I thought was the end, the rainbow disappeared. I never did find that pot of gold.

The Wise Men may have felt like that. The farther they traveled, the farther the star seemed to move. But this was not like the rainbow. The star did not disappear. In fact, it stopped right over a place in the little town of Bethlehem. And there the Wise Men found Jesus.

They believed he would be king of the Jews but they must have wanted him for their king too because they gave him wonderful gifts. They were not Jews; they were Gentiles. But they wanted a king who could bring them closer to God. So the Wise Men were the very first Gentiles to see Jesus and know that he would be a special king.

Every year people all over the world remember that. We call the day Epiphany, 12 days after Christmas. Epiphany means that God appeared to Gentiles, just like you and me. He would be our king too.

John 1:29-42 January 19 – Epiphany 2 A

Have you ever gotten something or had something happen to you that was so special that you could hardly wait to tell others about it? I remember the Christmas I got a Schwinn bicycle. I was so excited that I could hardly wait to ride it to our neighbor's house to show the children who lived there. I felt the same way when I found the young woman who later became my wife. I wanted to tell everyone how special she was.

Something like that is what happened to Andrew. He was a fisherman who had heard John the Baptist preach and could not hear him enough. Then one day John pointed him to Jesus. After spending a little time with Jesus, Andrew was so excited that he could hardly contain himself.

As soon as he left Jesus, he set out to find his brother Simon Peter. When he found his brother, he blurted out, “We have found the Messiah.” He knew that Jesus

was the savior the Jews had been waiting for so many years. God had anointed Jesus, had chosen Jesus, to save his people.

What Andrew did has been done over and over since that time. People who have come to know Jesus have told others how special he is, how he can bring them into the very presence of God the Father. "Come and see for yourself," they may tell their friends. Then they bring them to church with them so they can learn about Jesus in Sunday School and worship or in Mission Friends or Children in Action.

The gospel stories do not tell us very much about Andrew. They tell much more about his brother Peter. But Peter might never have come to know Jesus if Andrew had not told him. Peter would never have had the joy of walking beside Jesus and learning from him except that his brother was so excited to tell him, "Come and see."

What Andrew did, you can do. You do not have to be a preacher or Sunday School teacher or deacon to help others know Jesus. You do not have to be the person who is seen as a great leader. All you have to do is tell others to come and see for themselves, to see how Jesus changes people's lives and helps them be so close to God. That good news is always worth telling.

1 Corinthians 1:10-18 – January 26 – Epiphany 3 A

Most of you have seen a service of baptism. You have seen a person being baptized in the baptism pool in our church. We baptize believers in the church because it is more convenient and so more people can be a part of this special time of worship. But some people are baptized in a lake or a stream. John the Baptist baptized people in the Jordan River. That is where he baptized Jesus.

Churches do baptisms differently. In Baptist churches, we immerse a new believer. The person is dipped completely under the water. In some churches, the person being baptized has water sprinkled on his or her head or a little water poured over the person's head.

However a person is baptized, the meaning is almost the same. We say in our church that a person is "placed into Christ." Can you see the picture of a person dipped completely under the water as a symbol of being placed in Christ? Other churches may say that the new believer "puts on Christ" when that person is sprinkled. Either way baptism shows that we become new persons in Christ. Our lives are changed through faith in Christ Jesus.

That is true of every person who is a part of Christ's church. However, we are still human beings in this world and sometimes sin gets the best of us. The Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Corinth when he heard that the people were quarreling about some things so much that they had forgotten how to get along together. That can still happen in churches today and it is just as bad today as it was when Paul wrote.

When we are baptized in Christ, we belong to the same family of faith. When we are baptized into Christ, we are all called to the same purpose. That purpose is to live as Jesus taught us to live and to treat others kindly. We may disagree about some things but we do not have to be mad with one another. We may disagree but we should not forget that we are all one family in Christ.

When a church forgets that, the people need to be reminded of their baptism. They were placed in the water as a sign that they are now in Christ. Believers live for Christ, not for ourselves. Believers are not divided because we all trust in Jesus.

Micah 6:1-8- February 2 – Epiphany 4 A

Some of you probably get an allowance every week. Your parents give you a certain amount of money that you can spend for things you want. (If children begin to tell the amount they get, gently tell them to stop because they may make you want to ask for a loan!) You may also have some chores around the house and your parents tell you that you do not get your allowance unless you do all your chores.

What do you think would happen if you were sick and could not do the chores that your parents had assigned to you? Would they just skip your allowance that week? Probably not. The fact is that they do not give you an allowance because you earn it. They give you an allowance because they love you and want to teach you how to handle money.

If they paid you what you earned, they might have to cut back on the food they buy for you or the clothes or the video games or the times they take you to the doctor. It costs a lot to feed and clothe and care for each of you. I doubt that any of you could ever work enough to pay your parents for what they do for you.

Yet they still give you food and clothes and medical care and an allowance on top of that. They do all those things because they love you. You cannot ever earn their love; they just love you because of who you are. They love you because you are a part of the family.

They love you no matter what but that does not mean they expect nothing from you. They expect you to do your chores because you are a part of the family. They expect you to treat them and your brother or sister like you love them. They expect you to treat others kindly. They expect you to follow God's commands.

If you stop doing your chores or act mean toward your brother or sister, your parents will not stop loving you. They will just try harder to remind you how you should act. They may punish you to teach you the consequences if you do wrong but they will not stop loving you.

That is the way God looks at all of us who are his children. God loves us because we are a part of God's family. God loves us for who we are. At the same time God expects us to act like we are part of the family.

The prophet Micah says that we can never make God love us by what we give God but we can please God by how we treat others. Micah's words are clear. God "has shown all you people what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." That is how we can please God.

Matthew 5:13-20 - February 9 – Epiphany 5 A

Jesus tells those who follow him that we are the light of the world. The people who heard Jesus say that knew exactly what he meant. They did not have electricity. The only light they had after the sun went down was the light of a lamp or a torch. Neither of those were much light but they could cut through the darkness like a knife through soft butter. Just a little light could be seen from far away.

I grew up in the country. We had plenty of lights but there were no street lights that shined all night. At night we would turn on lights in the house and lights in the barn. But when you walked from the barn to the house, you walked through darkness. Yet I

never got lost along that way. I could not see the house but I could see the porch light and I walked straight toward that light.

The light was a guide; it marked the way. If I looked to my right, I could see nothing but darkness unless the moon was out. If I looked toward my left, I saw only more darkness. When I looked straight ahead, I could see that little porch light taking on all the darkness night could give—and winning. The darkness could never keep me from seeing the light. It was right there showing me the way home.

If someone had covered that light or painted it black, I would not have been able to see home and I may have lost my way. But lights are not made to be covered; they are made to shine in the darkness.

Jesus told those who follow him that we are to be light like that. It would be foolish for us to say we follow Jesus, then not act like we do. It would be foolish for us to say we follow Jesus, then mistreat others. It would be foolish for us to say we follow Jesus, then not come to church to worship him.

Not only would that be foolish, it would keep other people from finding their way to God. You see, when we follow Jesus faithfully, when we treat others kindly and worship God regularly, we are like a light that shines in the darkness so others can see the way to come to God.

Matthew 5:21-37 - February 16 – Epiphany 6 A

When I began elementary school, I loved everything about school. I liked the bus ride to school. I learned my way through the cafeteria line so well that I felt a little smug getting my lunch. I was thrilled that I could say the alphabet faster than anyone else in the class. And I loved my teacher—except one day

. It was not the teacher's fault that I did not like her very much that day; it was my fault. But I did not like her very much when she punished me. She made me stand on one foot right in front of the class. I was not by myself. There was another little boy beside me but that did nothing to keep my heart from breaking. I had let my teacher down. I had done something wrong that I did not even know was wrong.

Two big bulldozers were parked at the edge of the school grounds where a new playground was being constructed. One of my classmates on the bus convinced me that it would be alright for us to go climb on the big tractors. The teacher would not mind, he said. They looked so exciting. We could pretend we were driving them and moving big piles of dirt.

A little later when we got to our classroom, school had already begun. We were late! Not only that, I had mud—red clay—all over my shoes and the knees of my pants. There was no way I could hide what we had done.

I learned several things very quickly that day. I learned that I should never have gone to that construction site and climbed on those bulldozers. I learned how humiliating it is to stand on one foot in front of your classmates. It seemed like I had to stand there an hour! And I learned that I needed to be more careful how I picked my friends. It is a lot safer to follow some leaders than others. That boy was one I should not have followed.

I still treated him nicely. After all he did not make me follow. But I never followed his lead again. I think something like that is what Jesus was talking about when he told

the people, “And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to go into hell.”

Be careful how you live. If a friend makes you do wrong, you need to find another friend. My teacher expected better behavior from me. So does Jesus.

Leviticus 19:1-2, 9-18 - February 23 – Epiphany 7 A

Some of the things God expects of us are hard. God said we should love our enemies and forgive those who have harmed us. That is hard to do. God said we should give some of what we worked so hard to earn—that we should give some to the poor and the immigrants. They may have worked hard; they may have worked very little. God makes no distinction. God just tells us we should share with them. We may want to share with those we think deserve our help but there are some people we had rather not help. Sometimes what God expects is hard.

God said we should treat everyone fairly, whether they are rich or poor. Poor people may like us when we do that but many rich people will not. God said that we should not play tricks on people who are handicapped like putting a rock in the path of a person who is blind or yelling mean things at a person who cannot hear. Sometimes things that seem like harmless pranks can hurt others very much.

It is not just against our laws to steal from someone. It is against God’s law. And stealing is not just taking money from someone. We steal when we do not pay a person what he is worth. We steal a person’s reputation when we say untrue and unkind things about them. It is not easy to follow all of God’s commands. Some are harder than others but even the easy ones can trip us up occasionally.

God gives us a lot of commands but God sums them up in a way we can easily remember. God reminds us that we are a part of his family and we need to act like we are. “You shall be holy,” God says, “for I the LORD your God am holy.” God does not expect family members to go around treating others unfairly. God expects us to live so people will know we are God’s children.

Then God says something to make keeping the commands even clearer. “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” God tells us. You would not do anything to hurt yourself. Do not do anything to hurt others. You would want people to share with you if you were hungry. You should share with them some of what God has given you. That is what it means to love your neighbor as yourself. God expect no less from you and me.

Isaiah 49:8-16a – March 2 – Epiphany 8 A

I remember getting lost once when I was a little boy. I was terrified and alone. I wondered if my Dad had gone somewhere and forgotten me. I never want to feel that way again. Fortunately, since I have grown up, I don’t get lost. Sometimes I am not sure how to get to the place I want to go and sometimes I am not sure where I am but I am a MAN and I am never lost!

But since I have been lost once, I can imagine how the Hebrew people felt while they were captives in Babylon. Babylon was a foreign land across a big desert from Israel. The people wondered if they would ever get home. Isaiah was a prophet during that time and he encouraged the people when they thought God had gone somewhere and forgotten them.

My lost story turned out alright. I was looking for my car on the wrong block because I had forgotten to cross the street. Just about the time I thought I would be lost forever, I saw my Dad rushing across the street looking for me. I was ready to shout for joy because I was as good as home.

That is what Isaiah told his people. You are as good as home because God has promised to lead us back. We do not have to wonder if God has forgotten us. We do not have to wonder if we will ever get home. God has promised so it is as good as done.

That desert may look so big that you think you can never cross it but God has said, "I will turn all my mountains into a road, and my highways shall be raised up." When I got lost and felt so alone, I cried. That must have been what the Hebrew people did too. They were crying because they felt so alone and they missed their home.

God understood their sadness but Isaiah reminded them that their sadness would soon end. God could never forget them. They were God's children. God would come for them wherever they were. They did not even have to wait for that day to rejoice. It was already time to sing for joy. The whole earth would rejoice. There would be so much happiness it would be like heaven and earth and the mountains all singing at once. "Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth. . . .For the LORD has comforted his people, and will have compassion on his suffering ones."

Matthew 17:1-9 - March 2 - Transfiguration Sunday Year A

Have you ever noticed how adults like to talk about the past, about the "good old days?" They talk about things that make little sense to you: listening to music on something called a record player—and without any ear buds or about growing up when people rode in cars without car seats and seat belts,. They tell you that they did not have video games like you have or cell phones. And when they talk about going to visit their grandparents when they were your age, they get all misty-eyed.

You won't get away from that around me. I like to tell stories about times past too. It is fun to remember pleasant things and exciting things from our past. Sometimes adults just want to hold on to the past. But you do not have to be old to do that. Some of you remember how much you wanted to hold on to your special blanket or special toy. You thought you had to have that when you went to bed and you let your parents know how upset you were when you did not have it when you wanted it.

Or you may want to be told again about how you came to be a part of your family. You could listen to your mom or dad tell that story a thousand times and never get tired of it. It is not a story you remember exactly but you were there and you want to hear it, to hear your parents tell you how special you are and how much they love you. Every time you hear the story, you get a warm feeling inside so you want to hold on to it.

That is the way three of Jesus' disciples felt when they went with him up a tall mountain to pray. Being with Jesus and praying made them feel so close to God. They felt all warm inside. Then Jesus seemed to change right in front of their eyes. There was something even more holy about how he looked. He just seemed to glow with the presence of God.

I imagine they blinked their eyes when they saw two of their favorite people from the scripture standing with Jesus, people who had died many years before. They were not sure if it was a dream or real but there were Moses and Elijah standing right beside

Jesus. While they were looking with their mouths open in wonder, they heard a voice that sounded like the voice of God telling them that Jesus was his beloved Son.

They were so excited that they wanted to hold on to that feeling forever. Peter, one of the disciples, blurted out, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." Everything seemed so special, so holy and a little scary. Jesus told them not to be afraid and not to build something just to hold on to the past.

You see, God is so holy, so special, that we can never capture God to stay with us. We can never hold on to God like you held on to your special blanket. We just give God thanks for every time God appears to us, then pray and wait for God to choose to do that again. Next time God's appearance may be completely different but it will be just as special every time God shows himself to us. We do not have to hold on to the past to be touched by God's presence. The best way to see God's presence is by looking ahead in p