PREACHING & TEACHING

Advent Sermon Series

A four-week Advent series on Hope, Peace, Joy and Love, with each week given a text, a claim, a tension and a close. Built so the four sermons argue with each other rather than repeating one idea in four coats of paint, and planned as a unit so week four is already decided when you write week one.

4 weeks, 22 min each · 5 segments

Five parts: one planning movement, then four weeks. Each week is a frame, not a finished sermon.

BEFORE YOU RECORD

- Plan all four before preaching one. The commonest failure in an Advent series is that weeks one to three are interchangeable and week four has to carry everything. Decide the destination first.
- If you are publishing these as episodes, release week one in the last week of November. Search interest in Advent material peaks in mid-November, which is before most churches have started thinking about it.
- The candle name is not the sermon. Hope, Peace, Joy and Love are four enormous words and a sermon that tries to define one of them will say nothing. Each week below narrows to a single claim instead.

01. Plan the four before you write one

prep, not preached

[not spoken - the half hour that decides whether the series holds together]

Write the four one-sentence claims first, side by side, and check that they move. If you can swap week two and week three without anything breaking, they are not a series, they are four sermons on adjacent topics.

The shape below moves from waiting to arrival: hope is what you do in the dark, peace is what breaks into it, joy is the response, love is the cost. Replace it with your own arc if you have one, but have one.

[your four claims, one sentence each, written before you draft anything]

02. Week one: Hope

22 min

[hope in the dark - resist making this optimistic]

Text: Isaiah 9:2, or Isaiah 64:1 if your congregation can take the harder one. Both are written by people who are not being rescued yet.

The claim: hope is not optimism. Optimism is a forecast about how things will probably turn out. Hope is what you do while the forecast is bad.

The tension: four hundred years of silence between the last prophet and the first Christmas. Whole generations waited and died without seeing it. Do not skip past that to get to the manger.

[your material for week one, using the nine movements from the sermon outline page]

Close by naming what the congregation is waiting for. Not in general. This year, this town, this church.

03. Week two: Peace

22 min

[peace as interruption, not calm]

Text: Luke 2:8-14, the announcement to the shepherds. Or Micah 5:2 if you want the smallness of Bethlehem to carry the weight.

The claim: the peace announced at Christmas is not the absence of trouble. It arrives under an occupying army, to men working a night shift, and the first thing the messenger has to say is do not be afraid, because the arrival itself was terrifying.

The tension: we sell peace at Christmas as quiet. Soft light, still night. For most people December is the least peaceful month of the year, and a sermon that promises calm will simply not be believed.

[your material for week two]

04. Week three: Joy

22 min

[the hardest of the four to preach honestly]

Text: Luke 1:46-55, the Magnificat. A teenager, unmarried and pregnant in a culture that could have killed her for it, singing about thrones being pulled down.

The claim: joy in scripture is almost never a mood. Mary's song is political, specific and delivered from inside a situation that had not resolved. Joy is what she does with a fact, not how she feels about her circumstances.

The tension: this is the Sunday closest to the point where people are exhausted and pretending. Say that out loud. A congregation told to be joyful in mid-December will hear it as one more obligation.

[your material for week three]

05. Week four: Love

22 min

[this is where the series lands - it should feel like arrival, not summary]

Text: John 1:14, or Matthew 1:18-25 if you want Joseph rather than the abstraction. Joseph is underused and he is the one who had to decide.

The claim: love in this story costs somebody something before it helps anybody. Mary's reputation, Joseph's plans, and eventually rather more than that.

The tension: by the fourth Sunday the room is half visitors who have not heard weeks one to three. Write this one so it stands alone, and carry the arc in a single sentence

rather than a recap.

[your material for week four]

Close the series, not just the sermon. Go back to the thing you named the congregation was waiting for in week one, and say what has changed about the waiting.

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