



Past / Present / Future:
Looking for God at the turn of the year

- 1) What are you grateful for in this season of your year?***
- 2) What is a burden or sorrow that you carried (and perhaps still carry) from this season?***
- 3) How would you describe God's presence with you in this season?***

In this service of reflection on 2018 and preparation for the new year, we abandoned our typical neat rows of chairs and order of service for an interactive and conversational approach. You really had to be here...but this script can give you a taste and invite you into your own reflections and preparations.

Opening Song: The Doxology aka *Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow*

Introduction and Explanations:

Luke: *We sing that song often around here, so that we might skip right by those deep, rich words. Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.*

Joe: *Praise the Mothering and Fathering God, the Creator, Source of Life that exists before us, after us, beyond us.*

Luke: *Praise God the Son, the One full of God, Immanuel, God Among us, God With Us.*

Joe: *Praise the Holy Ghost, more commonly known as the Spirit. The Breath of God, the energy of life, animating force, God's unceasing presence, within us.*

Luke: *God beyond us, God with us, God within us. We cannot go where God is not.*

Joe: *That's a great thing to focus on as we stand in this time-between-times of the last Sunday of 2018, ready to plunge headlong into a new year of uncertain hopes and fears.*

Luke: *Welcome to Wildwood Mennonite Church. As you can see, this is not going to be the typical church service where you all sit facing the front for an hour and some guy tells you what he thinks about God.*

Joe: *Well, maybe just a little? :)*

Luke: *This service is a chance for you to explore your own world to see where God has been, will be, and is now showing up.*

Joe: *We will be your guides on this exploration, but the work is up to you. You'll get out what you put in and only go as deep as you want to go.*

Luke: *For those of you who are visitors, welcome. We do this kind of thing from time to time here at Wildwood. It usually goes pretty well, but if we fail to explain things or make incorrect assumptions, don't hesitate to ask your neighbour what's going on.*

Joe: *Chances are they won't know either, but at least you won't be the only one. :)*

Luke: *Seriously, this is an informal service, start to finish, so if you need to ask questions or switch groups or opt out of something, go for it.*

Joe: *As we've said, this service is primarily an opportunity to take a focused look at where God has been in the year past. And as God is everywhere, beyond us, beside us, and within us, God will be everywhere that we bother to look.*

Luke: *If you seek, you will find. Our seeking today will be guided by these three questions on the screen and on your handouts.*

- 1) What are you grateful for in this season of your year?*
- 2) What is a burden or sorrow that you carried (and perhaps still carry) from this season?*
- 3) How would you describe God's presence with you in this season?*

We will go through those questions four times, one for each season of the year.

Joe: *How you consider those questions will be guided by four different activities in different areas of this space. You can decide which of these you would like to participate in, and generally you'll stay in that one activity for the whole time so there won't be any moving between groups.*

Luke: *One activity option is sharing circles. We have chairs set up in the sanctuary, in circles of eight. You'll go around the circle one at a time, sharing briefly your response to these questions for each season. So a little bit of talking, and a lot of listening to each other.*

Joe: A second option is storytime. We have story books to go with each season, and we'll gather on the blanket at the front of the sanctuary to hear the stories and maybe taste a few treats from each season. This option will be of primary interest to kids and their parents, but really it's open to anyone who wants to join us.

Luke: A third option is for creativity. There are some tables here with a few art supplies: drawing, colouring, collage, etc. It will be up to you to decide if you want to do your creating quietly or in conversation with other artists, though it probably won't be too quiet with the conversations happening all around.

Joe: The final option is coffee time. Grab a friend or three, grab a coffee, and head over to that side of the room to sit and chat informally. I'd suggest that you allow the questions for each season to guide your conversation at least a little, but that's up to you. As we've said, God is everywhere, so I trust that God will show up even if you're talking about your favourite hockey teams or swapping recipes. But again, you'll get out of this whatever you put in, so perhaps try to go a bit deeper than you would some other time.

Luke: So, sharing circles here, storytime over there, art tables here, coffee and conversation over there. Pick one that you'd like to be part of for the next forty-five minutes or so.

Joe: We'll break up the activities into specific sections for each season: winter, spring, summer and fall. Luke and I will give an introduction to each season and we'll sing a song together for each season as well, so please take your song books with you. Go ahead and move, grab a beverage if you like for any of the activities, and we'll begin with the season of Winter in a few minutes.

“God In the Past:”

Winter 2018

Luke: Winter of 2018. January was cold, February was colder. But there wasn't much snow last winter, March was unseasonably warm and though April started with a brutal cold snap, winter was pretty much done by mid-month.

Joe: February saw the Winter Olympics in PyeongChang, South Korea, while Taylor Swift released a new album and Black Panther drew rave reviews and massive box office receipts. In the news, Saskatchewan got a new premier when Brad Wall retired in January, and Saskatoon welcomed new police chief Troy Cooper. In February, many of us followed the hotly debated trial of Gerald Stanley over the shooting of Colten Boushie. And about 3000 people showed up to view the relic forearm of St. Francis Xavier when it visited Saskatoon in January.

Luke: At WMC, we enjoyed several wintery Unplugged Weekends, going curling, learning about the Enneagram, and a Shekinah “evening at camp” fundraiser event. Easter was early this year,

April 1st, and the Good Friday Blues service and the brutally cold Easter sunrise service were highlights for all who participated.

And with great hope and optimism we commissioned a search team to look for a half-time co-pastor for our church.

There were good times, and there were hard times. Let's sing together as we look back over the winter months:

Song: HWB 614 "In the Bulb There is a Flower"

Reflection Time: Winter 2018

- 1) What are you grateful for in this season of your year?*
- 2) What is a burden or sorrow that you carried (and perhaps still carry) from this season?*
- 3) How would you describe God's presence with you in this season?*

Luke: *Let's pause for a moment of silence to hold all of these things in gratitude before God. Join me in prayer...*

Spring 2018:

Joe: *Spring arrived in Saskatchewan in mid-April, and it was a warm one as the thermometer hit the 20s already by the end of April. May and June seemed pretty wet to me, but you'd have to ask one of our farmers to be sure...*

Luke: *April was the month of the Humboldt Broncos bus crash, and those injured and killed were on the hearts and minds of people around the country and the world for months afterwards. We were also horrified by the news of a van striking pedestrians on a busy street in Toronto. The Liberal government of Canada spent billions on the purchase of the TransMountain Pipeline project, pleasing approximately no one.*

Joe: *Some of us listened to new music from Cardi B, Janelle Monae, Shawn Mendes and Kanye West, while a slightly older generation enjoyed concerts with the Steve Miller Band, Peter Frampton, Santana, and the ghost of Rod Stewart when they visited Saskatoon. There was a massive debate online about "Laurel vs Yanny" And, oh yeah, Megan and Harry got married, and there was some kind of political crisis in the States.*

Luke: *Here at Wildwood, we spent some of our Sunday mornings talking about Breaking the Shame Cycle, and one Sunday a dance party broke out. Seriously. You had to be here!*

Our Pastoral Search Team conducted lots of meetings to determine the kind of pastor we were looking to add to our team. We also said our farewells to longtime member Lila Sirois, and some of us marked other passings in our circles of family and friends.

There were good times, and there were hard times. Again let's sing together as we reflect:

Song: HWB 89 "For the Beauty of the Earth"

Reflection Time: Spring 2018

- 1) What are you grateful for in this season of your year?*
- 2) What is a burden or sorrow that you carried (and perhaps still carry) from this season?*
- 3) How would you describe God's presence with you in this season?*

Luke: *Let's pause for a moment of silence to hold all of these things in gratitude before God. Join me in prayer...*

Summer 2018:

Joe: *Ah yes, Summer...seems so short, and so long ago. July was hot, but it was a dry heat. The gardeners were kept busy watering as there were only about 2-and-a-half days of rain over an 8-week stretch. Of course that dry spell ended on Aug 26, the Sunday when our "God in the Garden" worship service got rained on and moved inside...*

Luke: *In the news, the world held its breath during the amazingly successful rescue attempt of twelve young soccer players and their coach trapped in an underwater cave in Thailand. Canadian news heads spent the summer talking about legalized marijuana, and there was some kind of political crisis in the States.*

Luke: *Early in the summer, the Saskatchewan Rush captured their 3rd lacrosse championship in 4 years, while the Riders got off to a slow start before turning things around with a late-summer push for the playoffs. Lots of us found time to enjoy the outdoors near and far, and Saskatoon enjoyed the usual array of summer festivals.*

Joe: *At WMC this summer, we learned a lot about ourselves and each other through the lens of the Enneagram personality typing system. There was another dance party, and many of us spent an evening at Wanuskewin considering a drama brought by Ted & Co Theatreworks, "Discovery: A Comic Lament." We raised money to install 30 solar panels on the roof of the church, coming next month! We celebrated the faith of Hailey Funk and Jadyn Lennea by dunking Hailey in the river and baptizing Jadyn here in the church. And Luke and Steph got married!*

There were hard times, and there good times. Again let's sing together a song of growth and loss and faithfulness.

Song: StS 116 - "I Saw a Tree By the Riverside"

Reflection Time: Summer 2018

- 1) What are you grateful for in this season of your year?*

- 2) *What is a burden or sorrow that you carried (and perhaps still carry) from this season?*
- 3) *How would you describe God's presence with you in this season?*

Luke: *Let's pause for a moment of silence to hold all of these things in gratitude before God. Join me in prayer...*

Fall 2018

Joe: *And finally, the season of Fall. The weather in early fall was cold and damp and disheartening, dipping below zero that first week of September already and bringing snowflakes on the first official day of Fall. Gaylord and Lois Mierau invited the church to join them for "supper in the field" at their farm when they were ready to harvest the Canadian Foodgrains Bank crops that they grew, but that harvest and meal was delayed and postponed and delayed again waiting for the weather to cooperate... For all I know, that crop is still standing?? :) Next year, I guess!*

Luke: *But October rebounded into a lovely, lovely autumn month, and the kiddos didn't even need to wear snowsuits under their Halloween costumes this year.*

In the news, the world grew increasingly aware of the humanitarian crisis of the war in Yemen by Saudi Arabia, alongside the murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi. Canada signed a new-ish Free Trade Agreement with the United States and Mexico, and continued to argue among ourselves about carbon taxes and pipelines and falling oil prices.

Joe: *October 17 was a real high point of the fall for some people, though the details remain hazy. And there was some kind of political crisis in the States.*

In pop culture, everybody was talking about Lady Gaga in "A Star Is Born," and all the cool kids were doing something called "The Floss"? Or maybe playing Fortnite. Don't ask me, I don't know what any of those words mean. :)

Luke: *Here in church, we were challenged and encouraged by guest speakers Cindy Wallace and Heather Driedger, as well as Theatre of the Beat's drama #ChurchToo and the Palestine/Israel Land Exercise by MCC Saskatchewan. We were very excited to meet Emily Summach, the candidate brought to us by the Pastoral Search Team. And we were very disappointed when she declined our offer to serve as pastor among us. The search continues.*

As always, the Fall brought us good times along with hard times. Let's sing again together, a song of gratitude for God's faithfulness.

Song: HWB 94 "Come Ye Thankful People Come"

Reflection Time: Fall 2018

- 1) *What are you grateful for in this season of your year?*
- 2) *What is a burden or sorrow that you carried (and perhaps still carry) from this season?*

3) *How would you describe God's presence with you in this season?*

Luke: *Let's pause for a moment of silence to hold all of these things in gratitude before God. Join me in prayer...*

"God in the Present"

Joe: *Let's gather together in the sanctuary for the rest of our time together. Come from wherever you are and grab a chair. You can organize yourselves into rows if you want, but it doesn't have to be particularly organized, just facing the front of the room as that's where we'll be speaking from for the rest of the service.*



Joe: *As the calendar turns from one year to the next, we usually turn the page pretty quickly. We look back, and then we do a 180 to looking ahead at what the new year will bring. It's good to reflect on the past, and it's good to look to the future. But let's not forget to pay attention to the present as well. That's where we live, that's who we are, shaped by the past and shaping the future, but alive and real in the moment. So I'm going to invite us to pause together for a few minutes of guided meditation.*

Go ahead and move your body into a position in which you can remain comfortable and relatively still for about five minutes. When you're ready, you can close your eyes or allow your gaze to soften, so that you won't be distracted by the things around you.

Bring your attention to the sounds and sensations of your breathing. Just breathe normally, and feel the air moving in your nose and out your mouth, feel your torso rise and fall, your lungs full and then empty and then full again.

No matter where you've come from, no matter where you're going, this is where you are right now.

And in this moment, you are loved. That's it, that's what you are right now, you are loved. That's the core of Christianity, that each of us are loved infinitely, that the God who created us and all that is, is by nature, "love."

You are beloved, that's the deepest, most true part of who you are. Because that love is the deepest, most true part of all that exists.

Now that can be really hard to understand. And it can be hard to accept, given what we know about our world, given what we know about ourselves.

But just for a minute, set aside your objections. Because you're in a place full of people who love you, who wish you well, who want what's best for you, who will do what they can to help you when you need it.

Now, that's not perfect and it's probably not permanent. We don't fully know each other, some of us are mere acquaintances or even strangers. So maybe the love in this room is relatively shallow, maybe a warm sentiment. And no doubt, we are human, so we will fail each other, we will struggle with miscommunication, we will judge each other, we will walk away from each other.

But that's in the future, and even if this moment is shallow and fleeting, it's not nothing.

You are loved. You are actively being loved by real people, in this real place, in this real moment. You can call that whatever you like; I call it the love of God. You are loved. You are loved. You are loved.

(long pause)

And you also have love to give. Again, it's probably not permanent, your love will rise and fall. And it's definitely not perfect, you will struggle to sustain love amidst all your faults and weaknesses. But that's in the future. In this moment, you are love and you have love to give.

Hear it in your breathing--Breathe in, receiving love. Breathe out, extending love. You are loved, you give love. You are loved, you give love.

(long pause)

Take a few more moments to focus on your breath... and then bring your awareness back to the room, and open your eyes when you are ready.

As you open your eyes, look around at the people that have been giving and receiving love with you. Huh, loving was a lot easier with our eyes closed! But still, even though it's harder in person, and the feeling of love will no doubt fall and fail in the future, that love in the moment, that remains underneath us, the ground on which we walk as we enter the new year.

“God in the Future”

Joe: With that, we shift our focus towards the future. Our offering song asks the question: could the world be about to turn? If we embrace the love of God, the true depth and breadth of love that includes justice and mercy and healing, what kind of a world might be possible? And what is our place in it?

Offering and Song: StS 124 “My Soul Cries Out”

Announcements

Benediction

May God bless you and keep you

May the very face of God shine upon you and be gracious to you

May God’s presence embrace you and give you peace.

