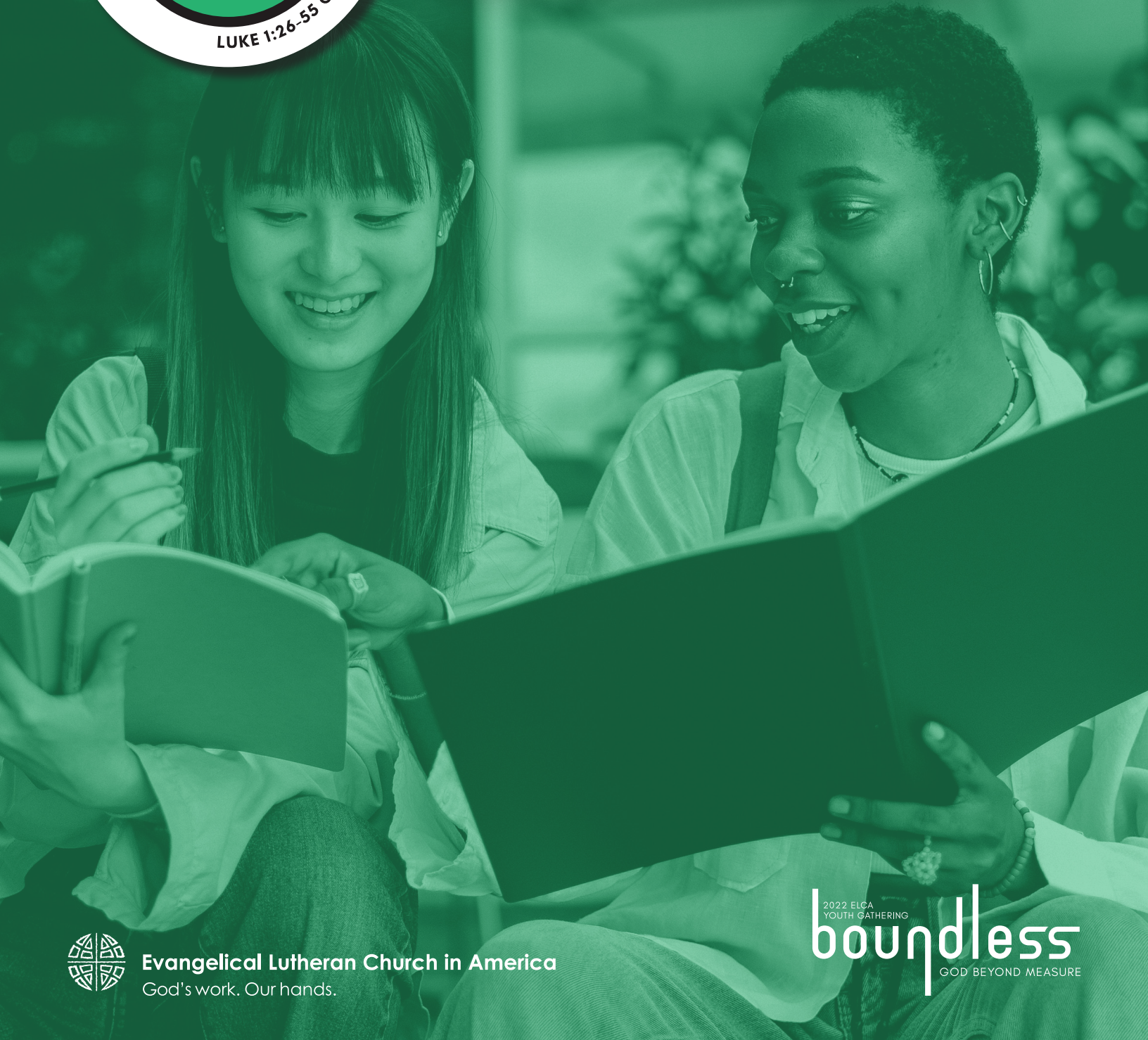




CURRICULUM SERIES INVITATION



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

2022 ELCA
YOUTH GATHERING
boundless
GOD BEYOND MEASURE

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INTRODUCTION

The theme for this curriculum is “boundless: God beyond measure.” Its primary Scripture verses are Ephesians 3:14-21 CEV:

¹⁴I kneel in prayer to the [Lord]. ¹⁵All beings in heaven and on earth receive their life from [God]. ¹⁶God is wonderful and glorious. I pray that [God’s] Spirit will make you become strong followers ¹⁷and that Christ will live in your hearts because of your faith. Stand firm and be deeply rooted in [God’s] love. ¹⁸I pray that you and all of God’s people will understand what is called wide or long or high or deep. ¹⁹I want you to know all about Christ’s love, although it is too wonderful to be measured. Then your lives will be filled with all that God is. ²⁰⁻²¹I pray that Christ Jesus and the church will forever bring praise to God. [God’s] power at work in us can do far more than we dare ask or imagine. Amen.

Grace is a foundational and distinctive piece of the Lutheran faith. This gift, undeserved by us but freely given by God, changes lives and perspectives as people realize that, because of what Christ has done, they are enough, and that they are called into the world to serve their neighbor and share the good news.

Three different sections of the curriculum are available for use. Within the framework of worship, large-group settings and small-group conversations, participants will dwell daily on one of three themes:

- boundless creation.
- boundless forgiveness.
- boundless invitation.

THE SCRIPT

This script is written for four leaders, but please recruit as many as you like. Engaging adults and high school students for several hours requires passion and energy consider recruiting participants who will lead this session in an engaging, high energy, and passionate way. **Please involve youth in these leadership roles!** If possible, leaders should memorize their lines and deliver them as a storyteller would.

We encourage leaders to rehearse the script ahead of your event, memorize their lines and deliver them as a storyteller would. Take the opportunity to practice the script in the space you will use for your event. Leaders may even want to mark up their scripts with stage directions and practice transitions in the space so that they don’t bump into each other and can get used to the setup (where microphones are located, which will be open at what time, etc.).

YOUTH TESTIMONY

The curriculum offers young people a chance to reflect on the daily themes. The script provides more information and instructions on crafting this time. We encourage you to identify these people well in advance so that they might begin formulating their testimony.

VOLUNTEERS

We suggest that you train your volunteers prior to or on the day of the event, assigning them to communion stations during the training. Volunteers needed are:

- Greeters.
- Leadership voices for the script below.
- Musicians.
- Media coordinator.
- Communion distributors (we suggest three per station for every 100 communicants).
- Small-group leaders (we suggest one for every eight participants).

SCHEDULE

The schedule of events is yours to decide, and the script allows space for you to set your own time markers. Following is an example of a one-day schedule:

9:00 am	Musicians and leadership teams arrive for rehearsal and training.
10:00 am	Space is ready for participants.
10:30 am	Doors open for music and activities.
11:00 am	Leaders welcome participants and introduce themselves.
11:30 am	Leaders introduce daily theme.
12:00 pm	Large group breaks for lunch and breakout groups.
1:30 pm	Participants return to the large-group session.
1:45 pm	Holy Communion.
2:45 pm	Sending: God blesses us and sends us in mission to the world.

MUSIC

Live music is encouraged for this event, especially music utilizing the gifts of your young people.

Script

*Team leaders and musicians arrive.
Set up stage, block out stage directions, train worship assistants.
Check sound.
Ready space for participants.*

DOORS OPEN

As groups begin to enter the large-group space, encourage them to sing along with your music. You could also have a few large-group activities ready for this time.

WELCOME

Voice 1: The Lord be with you!
Synod: And also with you!

Voice 1 (louder): The Lord be with you!
Synod: And also with you!

Voice 1 (louder still): The Lord be with you!
Synod: And also with you!

Use this prayer or one of your own.

Voice 1: Let us pray.
Good and gracious God, you made your boundless love known to us in Jesus. Thank you for calling us together in this holy place and time. Bless our day with the power and presence of your Holy Spirit, so that we might all be filled with your presence. And all of God's people say, "Amen."

Synod: Amen!

Voice 1: Hello! I am [name], from [congregation, town]. I am thrilled to be one of several people serving as your hosts today.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We encourage you to create a land acknowledgement based on your location. A good resource for understanding and creating land acknowledgements can be found at <https://nativegov.org/news/a-guide-to-indigenous-land-acknowledgment/>, or consider this sample text from Minneapolis:

"We acknowledge that we stand on the traditional lands of the Dakota people, lands that have been the ancestral home of indigenous and native peoples for generations. This land was taken on July 23rd, 1851 by the US government, part of land cession 289 that included most of the southwestern part of Minnesota. In affirming this land as the homeland of our indigenous neighbors, we recognize the legacies of violence and cultural genocide that occurred alongside the displacement of their communities, as well as the responsibility we all share to not let these truths be buried any longer.

Indigenous people from other Native nations also reside in Minnesota and have made innumerable contributions to this region.”



Why Land Acknowledgements Are Important

The Rev. Dr. Guy Erwin

SONG

INTRODUCTION OF THE DAY

Voice 2: Hey, Everybody. I am [name], from [congregation, town]. So what is this day all about? [Fill in as appropriate for your event.]

GREETINGS FROM BISHOP / SYNOD LEADER

Voice 2: One of the ways we become church together is through the [name] Synod. It is my honor to introduce to you the bishop of our synod, Bishop [name].

BISHOP / SYNOD LEADER:

The bishop gives a greeting that lasts no longer than 5 minutes.

Please emphasize the overall theme — “boundless: God beyond measure” — and the daily theme.

boundless THEME

Voice 3: Hello! I am [name], from [congregation, town]. Today we gather under the theme “boundless: God beyond measure.”

Let’s try our “boundless” litany together. We’ll show you how it’s done, then we’ll all do it together. OK, here we go:

Voice 4: God’s love is . . .

Synod (hand over heart): . . . boundless.

Voice 4: God’s creation is . . .

Synod (open arms wide): . . . boundless.

Voice 4: God’s forgiveness is . . .

Synod (cross wrists): . . . boundless.

Voice 4: God’s invitation is . . .

Synod (uncross wrists, cradle open palms outstretched): . . . boundless.

Voice 4: God’s promise is . . .

Synod: (trace cross on another’s hand or forehead): . . . boundless.

Voice 3: OK, now that we know the actions, let’s say it together.

Voice 4: God’s love is . . .

Synod (place hand over heart): . . . boundless.

Voice 4: God’s creation is . . .

Synod (open arms wide): . . . boundless.

Voice 4: God's forgiveness is . . .

Synod (cross wrists): . . . boundless.

Voice 4: God's invitation is . . .

Synod (uncross wrists, cradle open palms outstretched): . . . boundless.

Voice 4: God's promise is . . .

Synod: (trace cross on another's hand or forehead): . . . boundless.

You may wish to do this a few times over.

Voice 3: We have a boundless God, willing to exceed the borders of our own comfort to show us love. Sometimes we may feel unworthy of that love, but God is constant.

Voice 1: We are bound by so many things — by poverty and pandemic, by social media, by the expectations of our parents and others, by our own sin and self-doubt. Sometimes it can be overwhelming.

Voice 2: But God is bound by none of those things. God reaches out to each of us, surrounding us in a love that is infinite and immeasurable.

Voice 3: God's boundless love for us exceeds anything we could possibly dream or imagine. Just when we think we have God figured out, God is revealed to be so much more.

Voice 4: Just when we think we have God's love figured out, God loves us more.

Voice 1: Just when we think we have seen God's creation, God creates more.

Voice 2: Just when we think we have figured out God's forgiveness, God forgives us more.

Voice 3: Just when we think we have heard God's invitation, God invites us to more.

Voice 4: Just when we believe in God's promises, God promises us more.

Voice 1: God's love is more wonderful than we could ever experience or imagine. This week we see God's love working in each of us as we gather in this space, experiencing the boundless number of lives changed.

Voice 2: God's boundless power working in each of us can do far more than we could dare ask or imagine. Imagine the impact that God's boundless love will have for all of us when we return home.

Voice 3: Because Christ's love dwells in us, we stand firm, deeply rooted in a God beyond measure.

Voice 4: Hello! I am [name], from [congregation, town]. Know this: No matter where you are in life, you matter. You are enough, simply because you are God's unique creation. This synod needs you. This church needs you. You belong here. We are the church together.

Today we will explore the theme "boundless invitation" by reflecting on God's invitation in our large group and small groups.

I invite you to stand as you are able as we sing together.

SONG

SCRIPTURE STORY

Voice 1: One way we learn about our boundless God is through Scripture. The Bible is full of stories about invitation, some of which might come to mind now, but today we will focus on Luke 1:26-38.

Read or dramatize Luke 1:26-38.

SCRIPT

Voice 1: In our daily lives we measure — in art, cooking, construction, etc.

Voice 2: Measuring can help us understand the world in important ways.

Voice 3: It helps us make scientific discoveries such as new vaccines.

Voice 4: It helps us bake cakes . . .

Voice 2: build cities . . .

Voice 3: create art . . .

Voice 4: and explore the farthest reaches of the cosmos.

Voice 1: But how can we measure a thing such as invitation?

Voice 2: We could measure it by the seven thousand advertisements we see in a typical day, inviting us to buy or do something.

Voice 3: We could measure it by how many invitations we receive on social media — to follow, like or subscribe.

Voice 2: Or how many times we didn't get invited to a party.

Voice 1: But God's invitation is more than we could ever ask or imagine!

Voice 2: God invites us to live fully for God and to take part in the work God is doing in the world. God has invited us into a life of service, to live for those who are suffering.

Voice 3: God invited Mary to be part of this new thing, this unfolding story of our salvation. Bearing God into the world, she showed us what happens when God comes to dwell in us, with us: he gives us the courage and power to live, redeemed, healed, forgiven and free.

Voice 4: Not everyone feels invited to this work of bearing God into the world. Too often we tell others that they aren't invited.

Voice 2: As a teenage girl in a society that prized age and masculinity, Mary would not have been the first person invited to anything, yet God showed up in her life, inviting her to be part of the good news that was about to be known to the world. In Mary we see what is possible with a boundless invitation.

Voice 3: The Holy Spirit extends God’s invitation to us all, a boundless invitation to live as free and forgiven people. In Jesus, God showed us what it’s like to invite all kinds of people to the party.

Voice 1: In our church we confess, “I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of the saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.” In this third article of the Apostles’ Creed, the Holy Spirit invites us into a community greater than we can comprehend, collecting all people from all time. That’s one awesome party!

Voice 3: But too often we forget to invite people. Often people are left out because of where they come from, or the color of their skin, or how much money they have in a bank account.

Voice 4: This is why we need the Holy Spirit to remind us that we have been empowered and freed to extend this invitation to all kinds of people. By the Holy Spirit working through us, the church, we ordinary folks are equipped to do extraordinary things.

Voice 3: The Spirit calls each of us to experience life in community together, to practice reconciliation and forgiveness, and to raise up the broken parts of our world.

Voice 1: Mary accepts the invitation to be part of God’s unfolding vision for the world. In the later part of the annunciation story, she sings a song envisioning God’s reign, a time when those wielding oppressive authority might be overturned and those who have suffered will at long last be lifted up.

Voice 2: In Mary, God invites each of us to be part of God’s kingdom, to sing our own songs of healing, forgiveness, love and justice.

Voice 3: In Mary, God invites us to transform the world with our own brave songs.

Voice 4: In Mary, we see a woman responding to God’s call, ready and willing: “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.”

Voice 2: Let us all be as bold as Mary in responding to the boundless invitation of God!

Voice 1: I am pleased to welcome to the stage [name of youth] from [congregation, town] to share with us their own brave story of feeling called to live in the world.

INVITATION TESTIMONY: “I AM CALLED TO . . .”

Depending on time, select one or more youth to share a story of their faith, using the prompt “I am called to . . .” In our Scripture, Mary responds to God’s call (invitation) in her life to bear God into the world. Ask the youth to craft a story or testimony about how they feel called to respond to God’s invitation. For people this age, the exercise may smack of “what do you want to be when you grow up,” so help them to see parts of their story that are already in motion. Strive for diversity (social, ethnic, geographic) as you pick the youths.

- *How did you hear God’s call in your life? What is God inviting you to do?*
- *What unique gifts has God given you? How do you use those abilities to participate in God’s unfolding work of showing the world love?*

- *How do you care for your neighbors?*
- *How do you, like Mary with her song, tell others about what God has done in your life?*
- *Were there parts of your story that forced you to be brave like Mary?*
- *What is God bearing into the world through your call, actions or heart?*

As youth work to prepare for this moment, they may choose to read aloud or to speak from memory. They should check with you about the direction they are going to make sure that it harmonizes with the theme for the day. This moment is important because the youths will see peers from their synod talking publicly about their faith. Affirm the gifts that God will bring to this moment of witness!

SONG

TRANSITION TO SMALL GROUP

Voice 1: Thank you, [name of youth], for sharing with us your story of how you encountered God’s boundlessness in your life.

Voice 4: We’re going to explore this further in small groups.

Explain the process for breaking the larger group into small units.

Every participant will be part of a small group — youth and adults alike. Find your small-group space and take time to introduce yourself. We have some suggested icebreakers for you. After getting acquainted with one another, begin the small-group discussion and the activities provided.

Voice 1: Small-group leaders are dismissed and should go to their designated meeting space. The rest of us are going to sing and will be dismissed by rows.

SONG

PRAYER AND DISMISSAL

Voice 3: Let us pray: boundless God, [insert rest of prayer].

Voice 3: I need everyone in the last three rows to raise hands. Now wave goodbye to everyone, head out, grab your lunch and move to your small-group space.

SMALL-GROUP TIME

Refer to the appendix.

SMALL-GROUP WRAP-UP AND RETURN TO LARGE-GROUP SPACE

Worship

+ GATHERING +

God calls us together as the people of God.

GATHERING MUSIC

CALL TO WORSHIP

A worship leader invites the assembly to gather.

Leader: God's love is . . .

Assembly: *(place hand over heart): . . . boundless.*

Leader: God's creation is . . .

Assembly: *(open arms wide): . . . boundless.*

Leader: God's forgiveness is . . .

Assembly: *(cross wrists): . . . boundless.*

Leader: God's invitation is . . .

Assembly: *(uncross wrists, cradle open palms outstretched): . . . boundless.*

Leader: God's promise is . . .

Assembly: *(trace cross on another's hand or forehead): . . . boundless.*

THANKSGIVING FOR BAPTISM

The presiding minister invites the assembly to give thanks (you may divide this text between different voices).

Blessed be the holy Trinity, + one God,
the fountain of living water,
the rock who gave us birth,
our light and our salvation.

Amen.

People of God, in the baptismal waters, we travel with Christ from death to life. Our past, our sin, our failure, our doubt and our shame are washed away.

You, O God, wash us clean.

Our fear, our confusion, our self-righteousness, our despair — all are washed away by grace.

You, O God, wash us clean.

Our pride, our hypocrisy and other people's opinions of us no longer have the power to define us.

You, O God, give us new life.

The Spirit lives and moves through us now, a great and joyful mystery, so that we might bring love and mercy into the world as the body of Christ.

You, O God, give us new life.

Rejoice that God has claimed us in this boundless grace, not by our own doing or believing but by God's boundless mercy.

You, O God, give us new life.

As we begin worship, we give thanks to God for the gracious gift of baptism that joins us together in Christ by the Spirit's power. Joined to Christ in the waters of baptism, we are clothed with God's mercy and forgiveness.

We praise you for the gift of new life in Jesus Christ. To you be given honor and praise through Jesus Christ our Lord in the unity of the Holy Spirit, now and forever.

Amen.

SONG

GREETING

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

And also with you.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

God of invitation, we give you thanks for gathering us here today. Guide our conversation and inspire in us a sense of wonder as you invite us into your story. We bring before you our questions and imaginings, our thoughts and dreams, in hope that you will continue to reveal to us the boundlessness of your love and invitation. **Amen.**

(From the "Getting Ready Materials.")

+ WORD +

God speaks to us in Scripture, preaching and song.

GOSPEL

The text below is from the New Revised Standard Version, but feel free to use a translation or version of the story that feels right for your gathering.

Luke 1:26-38

²⁶In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." ²⁹But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³²He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." ³⁴Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" ³⁵The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. ³⁶And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. ³⁷For nothing will be impossible with God." ³⁸Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

SERMON

SONG

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Below are suggested prayer petitions, but prayers should be crafted to address what is going on in your assembly. Feel free to use, adapt or add to these prayers.

God of boundless invitation, we thank you for inviting us all to make this world a better place. Help us discover our own unique ways of responding to that invitation and call in our lives. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of boundless invitation, help us to invite all kinds of people to the party! Help us stand up for the lost and lonely, lift up the downtrodden and bring down the haughty. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of boundless invitation, you invite us to care for others and the planet you have made. Help us invite others to care for your boundless creation. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of boundless invitation, help us answer your call in our lives. Give us the courage and strength for difficult tasks so that we might bear God into the world as Mary did. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of boundless invitation, we thank you for inviting us to be part of your holy people. Help us share with the whole world your invitation to live as free and forgiven people, through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

PEACE

The peace of Christ be with you always.
And also with you.

OFFERING

See appendix for instructions on making these elements. As you receive your offerings, collect the strips of cloth that participants created during their small-group time.

OFFERING PRAYER

God of boundless riches, we give you thanks that each of us is fearfully and wonderfully made. Help us to use our gifts and abilities to serve you and spread the good news of your boundless love for all. Help us to share what we have with others so that they might come to know how deeply you care for your whole creation. **Amen.**

+ MEAL +

God feeds us with the presence of Jesus Christ.

GREAT THANKSGIVING

The presiding minister invites us to give thanks.

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**
Lift up your hearts. **We lift them to the Lord.**
Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. **It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

It is indeed right, our duty and our joy,
that we should, at all times and in all places,
give thanks and praise to you, almighty and merciful God,
through our savior, Jesus Christ.

And so, with all the choirs of angels,
with the church on earth and the hosts of heaven,
we praise your name and join their unending hymn:

To be spoken or sung.

**Holy, holy, holy Lord,
God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

THANKSGIVING AT THE TABLE

Holy One, the beginning and the end, the giver of life:
Blessed are you for the birth of creation.
Blessed are you in the darkness and in the light.
Blessed are you for your promise to your people.
Blessed are you in the prophets' hopes and dreams.
Blessed are you for Mary's openness to your will.
Blessed are you for your son, Jesus,
the word made flesh.

On the night he would be betrayed,
our Lord Jesus took bread,
gave thanks, broke the bread
and gave it to his disciples, saying:
"Take and eat;
this is my body, given for you.
Do this for the remembrance of me."

Again, after supper,
he took the cup, gave thanks
and urged all to drink, saying:
"This cup is the new covenant in my blood,
shed for you and for all people
for the forgiveness of sin.
Do this for the remembrance of me."

Let us proclaim the mystery of faith:
**Christ has died.
Christ is risen.
Christ will come again.**

With this bread and cup
we remember your word dwelling among us,
full of grace and truth.
We remember our new birth in his death and resurrection.
We look with hope for his coming.

Come, Lord Jesus.

Holy God, we long for your Spirit.
Come among us.
Bless this meal.
May your word take flesh in us.
Awaken your people.
Fill us with your light.
Bring the gift of peace on earth.

Come, Holy Spirit.

All praise and glory are yours,
holy one of Israel,
word of God incarnate,
power of the most high,
one God, now and forever.

Amen.

LORD'S PRAYER

We invite the assembly to pray in the version and language in their hearts.

OR

Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, we pray now the words that Jesus taught us in whatever way feels most comfortable to us.

OPTION A: Our Father in heaven

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come,
your will be done, on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power
and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.**

OPTION B: Our Father, who art in heaven

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come,
thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread
and forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those who trespass against us,
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom
and the power and the glory,
forever and ever. Amen.**

INVITATION TO COMMUNION

Come to the boundless banquet, for all is now ready.

COMMUNION

Information about receiving communion today.

SONGS DURING DISTRIBUTION

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

God of boundless abundance, with this bread of life and cup of salvation you have united us with Christ, making us one with all your people. Now send us forth in the power of your Spirit, that we might boldly proclaim your redeeming love to the world and continue forever in the risen life of Jesus Christ, our Lord.
Amen.

+ SENDING +

God blesses us and sends us in mission to the world.

BLESSING

I want you to know all about Christ's love,
though it is too wonderful to be measured.
boundless is the love,
boundless is the creator,
boundless is the forgiveness,
boundless is the invitation,
boundless is the promise.
May your lives be filled with all (+) that God is. **Amen.**

Let's stand and sing our final song.

SONG

DISMISSAL

Go in peace in God's boundless love.
Thanks be to God.

MUSIC

Appendix: Small Group Time

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Strips of cloth.
- Fabric pens.
- Collection of images (or stack of magazines).

ACTIVITY ONE: Introductions

Small-group Leader: While we eat, let's share our names, our hometowns and a high point in our lives.

ACTIVITY TWO: Visual Faith Activity Instructions

Small-group Leader: Before you is a collection of images. You are invited to browse them as a way of reflecting on our daily theme, selecting one or two that are meaningful to you or that speak to you about the day's theme. After selecting your images, share them with the group.

- What aspect of this image most grabs your attention?
- How does today's focus story relate to this image?
- Where might God be in this image? What would God be doing?

ACTIVITY THREE: An Offering

Small-group Leader: Take a marker and a piece of cloth. The cloth represents your unique self. With the marker, create your own response to the daily themes:

- I am made . . .
- I am free to . . .
- I am called to . . .

In worship today, we will present these responses as our offering, testifying to the way we live and know God's boundless love.