Worship Service Theme: Christ the King | Service
(Typically one week before Advent)

Helpful elements:
White and/or gold table covering

Prelude hymn: O Worship the King

Welcome: Welcome! It's so good to be together to celebrate faith and community today. My name is ____ and I'll be leading our worship time today.

The Sunday before Advent is traditionally celebrated as Christ the King Sunday, a day to focus on love for and devotion to God above all else.

This celebration was first added to the church liturgy in 1925 by the Roman Catholic Church, in particular as a response to the plight of Mexican Christians who were being told by their government that only their government was due ultimate allegiance. The Church in Mexico remained faithful, holding public parades throughout the land and proclaiming "*¡Christo Rey!*," meaning "Christ is King!"[1]

The colors for today, representing Christ's kingship, are white and gold. Please pray with me as we open our time together.

Opening Prayer: Great and loving God, we ask your Holy Spirit to bless our time together and to refresh us with your presence. In the midst of a world full of trouble and strife, we thank you for watching over us, guiding us, and as we confess our sins, for forgiving us. Enable us to enter your presence joyfully and reverently, and let us depart today with the assurance that our sins are forgiven. Fill us, O God, with the peace which passes understanding. Amen.

Opening Hymn: Doxology

Statement of Faith: Let us affirm our statement of faith by reciting Psalm 23, "The Lord is my shepherd," together:

[1] https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/christ-the-king-sunday-2017-preaching-notes

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[1] The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
[2] He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.
[3] He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
[4] Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.
[5] Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.
[6] Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Suggested Hymns:
Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee
Amazing Grace

First reading: Ezekiel 34:11f
For thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so I will seek out my sheep. And I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered. … I will feed them with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land … I will seek the lost, I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak. … I am the Lord; I have spoken."

This is the word of the Lord; thanks be to God.

Suggested Hymns:
Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us
Jesus Loves Me

Second reading: Matthew 25:34-40. In this section, Jesus tells a story about what it means to be part of the kingdom of God.
[34] "Then the King will say to those on his right…, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. [35] For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, [36] I was naked and you clothed me,

I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ **37** Then the righteous will answer the King, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? **38** And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you?**39** And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ **40** And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you did it to me.’”

This is the word of the Lord; thanks be to God.

Suggested Hymns:
Softy and Tenderly
Leaning on the Everlasting Arms

Interactive Homily: Let’s talk a bit more about God’s kingship in our lives as we celebrate Christ the King Sunday.

- As mentioned earlier, the Catholic church added the Christ the King celebration in 1925, particularly because in Mexico, the government was telling Mexican Christians that only the government was due ultimate allegiance. The Church in Mexico pushed back, holding public parades proclaiming “*¡Christo Rey!*,” meaning “Christ is King!”[2]
- Typically, what are many kings (or governments) like in this world? How do they act?
    - Powerful. Can be wealthy, tyrannical, feared, boastful, arrogant.
    - Often have authority over life and death.
    - This kind of power can corrupt.
- Who do you think kings and queens (or other rulers) usually hang out with? What kinds of people are often nearest to rulers?
    - Other powerful and privileged people.
- By contrast, let’s look at how the Bible describes God as King.
    - As we read in Ezekiel 11: “I the Lord will seek out my sheep. I will rescue them … feed them … seek them … bring them back … bind their wounds … strengthen them.”
    - What does a good shepherd do?
        - The shepherd’s life is devoted to caring for the sheep; not the other way around!

[2] https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/christ-the-king-sunday-2017-preaching-notes

- Now let's look at the life of Jesus, who was called King of the Jews even at his death. Who did Jesus spend most of his time with? Who did Jesus care for?
    - The weak, marginalized, outcast, diseased, poor, abandoned people.
    - Is that typically how we would think of a King?
        - No; in fact, it's one of the reasons the rulers in charge hated Jesus, because Jesus spent time with the "wrong" people.
- God's kingdom is completely upside-down to the kingdoms we often see here on Earth! Instead of power, what is God's kingdom based on? (How did Jesus act?)
    - Love, service, sacrifice, justice
- So, as people of faith who are subjects of this King, how should we act?
    - Matthew 25: "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, **36** I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me…. As you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you did it to me."
    - Humility, self-sacrifice, caring for the lowly and needy.

… Let's take a moment to silently pray and give thanks for our Servant King, and to consider how we might serve others in Jesus' name.

(Silent Prayer) … Lord, hear our prayers. Now let us pray the Lord's prayer together:
Lord's Prayer: 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, the power, and the glory forever, Amen.

Suggested Hymns:
Be Thou My Vision
This is My Father's World

Third Reading: Quotes on Service
Love and compassion are necessities, not luxuries. Without them, humanity cannot survive. –Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama

Helping out is not some special skill. It is not the domain of rare individuals. It is not confined to a single part or time of our lives. We simply heed the call of that natural caring impulse and follow where it leads. –authors Ram Dass and Paul Gorman

Service is the rent each of us pays for living—the very purpose of life. –Marian Wright Edelman, American activist for children's rights

A man once stood before God, his heart breaking from the pain and injustice in the world. "Dear God," he cried out, "look at all the suffering, the anguish and distress in your world. Why don't you send help?" God responded, "I did send help. I sent you." – Rabbi David J. Wolpe

Suggested Hymns:
Jesus Calls Us
Crown Him with Many Crowns

Fourth Reading: Story from *A Tree Full of Angels,* by Macrina Wiederkehr, professor of comparative religions
[As I traveled in India,] one special moment of beauty stands out in my mind [that] I experienced in a bus station. … I witnessed a little girl helping her brother get a drink at the water fountain. Attempting to lift her little brother to the proper height turned out to be impossible. I was just at the point of giving them some help when quick as lightning the little girl darted over to a shoeshine man, pointed to a footstool the man wasn't using, dragged it to the water fountain, and very gently lifted up her thirsty brother. It all happened so fast and it was so simple, yet it turned out the be a moment of beauty that became a prayer for me. So much to be learned from such a little moment. Perhaps what touched me most was her readiness to seek out a way to take care of the need without waiting to be rescued. It was a moment of beauty: a small child with a single heart.

Suggested Hymns:
He's Got the Whole World in His Hands
Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus

Closing Blessing: (Strike bell as you say the word “Lord”)
The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you, and be gracious unto you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and grant you peace. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Closing Hymn: Doxology (Reprise)

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