

Worship Ideas for the Bleak Mid-winter!

Most of the dynamic religious holidays and worship opportunities seem to be in the fall and at Christmas and of course in the spring. But there is also much to celebrate in the “bleak mid-winter.” Depending on the part of the country that you live in, you have a unique view of winter. Winter scenes are strikingly different than those of other seasons of the year. Whether you are buried in snow or you are enduring the rainy season or even a dry brown landscape, winter offers marvelous perspectives of the Creator’s artistry. Following the celebration of the Advent, church services need not become blah, unfocused, or lacking in energy.

Winter provides a wonderful opportunity to focus on the preparation for spring. Bleak winter scenes can be breathtaking. Here are some ideas to warm winter worship.

1. Focus on death as the prelude to life for those who hope in Jesus.
2. Create a new focus for the front of the church. Rather than an arrangement of bright “tropical” flowers at the front of the pulpit, create a scene with dried scrubs, dead leaves, dirt, sand and rocks. Offer the challenge for some artistic decorator in your church. You might have the display go through a metamorphosis over several weeks. Allow the children to detect the changes from week to week. They may even contribute suggestions or items they find on their winter walks.
3. Stage a photo contest; announce it as “Winter Grace”—seeing signs of God’s love in a winter world. Mount and display the photos in church or give them pride of place in the foyer. Encourage families to submit an artistic grouping of photos and specimens from nature that the children have collected.
4. There are a number of wonderful metaphors from scripture that point to winter as the necessary step before renewed life. This might provide an opportunity for a sermon series that focuses on death and related issues. Rather than a mere focus on the state of the dead, take a look at different aspects of death and dying.
 - Have individuals who have suffered the loss of a loved one, but have recovered from their grief, share the story of their journey and how they have once again embraced hope.
 - This might be a good time to initiate a grief support group for those who haven’t recovered from loss.
 - Encourage your members to take time as families to discuss their feelings about death. Have them share their hopes and wishes for life as well as their wishes for the end of their life. Let this discussion move into the church family as well—maybe at prayer meeting.
 - This may be a time to talk about wills and how Christians should be responsible with the things God has blessed them with. Balance this with the idea of grace—God willing his best gifts even to those who do not honor or love Him.

- Organ donation is also a topic that churches should discuss. This last gift of grace needs to be talked about at church. Individuals in good health who talk about donating organs are much more likely to make the decision to donate in a time of tragedy. This is really a discussion about giving and saving life.
- Honor members of your congregation who work with people at the time of loss. This could include members in the medical field, emergency services, funeral industry, etc.

No one can deny the difficulty of dealing with death, but the extent to which we can speak about death when we are “living”, will enable us to better deal with the impact of death when it comes. We need not be morbid when speaking of death, although the first time we do, we tend to choke up. But next time we will find it easier.

5. For those who hope in Christ, death is not the end, but the sleep before the eternal beginning. Winter is prelude to Easter. This is the time to focus on the hope of the Second Coming and the Resurrection. The middle of winter is a wonderful time to imagine the spring.
6. For the children, a focus on the anticipated return of Jesus would be a wonderful topic for the winter. The planting of bulbs would allow them to witness the sprouting of new life that they’ve actually had a part in. Bulbs can be planted in glass containers so that the roots are in water. Keep them up front where everyone can see the progress and enjoy the forced blooms.
7. Wintertime, when the land seems colorless, warm up the church with the children’s art. Ask them to make a picture for God; display their work in the sanctuary. Tell them that church is where “everyone worships and where we all bring the best of our offerings.”
8. This is also a time of year when congregations of other faiths are not too busy. This might be a wonderful time to invite others for a Sabbath Festival, a Choral Festival, or an Interfaith Service of Peace. This could be an opportunity to invite clergy of other denominations or religions to share the essence of the best of their faith or perhaps even to do a pulpit exchange with a clergy person that you would feel comfortable with. What an opportunity for Adventists to proudly take the lead in creating community rather than segregating ourselves.

Winter is a time when life is getting ready to burst forth in the spring. Death in the natural world is the prelude to new and abundant life. Embrace this truth and declare it in your Worship.