

Sermon followed by Service

December 3, 2023

Isaiah 40:1-2

Do you see the light at the end of the tunnel? I hope so. These past few weeks, Jesus has been giving us pictures. Here's a favorite - **“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”**

Do you see the light at the end of the tunnel? How about the tunnel? Dark and crushing. Dark and oppressive. Dark and sucking the light and the life out of you. Do you see and feel yourself in the tunnel? This might sound strange - I hope so. I hope so, because if you're thinking that life is fine just the way it is, and that you are fine just the way you are, then our lesson won't mean much to you. And worse, the light at the end of the tunnel won't mean much to you.

Do you see the tunnel, the tunnel of trouble you're going through? I don't know your darkness as well as I'd like, but I have some idea. Breaking and broken bodies, cancers, depression, dementia. Families, friends, jobs that turn against you. A world of evil around us, darkening, crushing our spirits. A world of evil inside us, twisting and torturing our spirits. We feel the tunnel, don't we? Otherwise, why would we be here?

{Skipped in the Preaching }

In our lesson, the LORD through Isaiah shows us the light at the end of the tunnel. It's about 700 years before Jesus was born. The Northern Kingdom of Israel is gone. They refused to listen to God, so in 722 BC, God worked his promised judgment. The Assyrians came in, crushed Israel, and scattered into exile most of the survivors - the Ten Lost Tribes - never to return. Next it looks like it's Jerusalem's turn. Like Israel, Judah and Jerusalem would rather live the life of the world than listen to God. The "haves" squeezed the "have-nots." For many, the sex gods of the world were the way to live life. For most, the ways of the world seemed better than the ways of God. For most of Isaiah's ministry, in Judah and Jerusalem, king (even godly King Hezekiah) and country followed the ways of the world instead of listening to God. So in 701 BC, God brought back the Assyrians. They destroyed the main cities of Judah; they took tens of thousands into exile; they surrounded and laid siege to Jerusalem. It looked like what the Assyrians did to Samaria in the north, they would do to Jerusalem in the south. But, finally, Hezekiah turned to the LORD instead of looking to the world to save him. And God kept his promise; the LORD delivered. The angel of the LORD struck down 185,000 in the Assyrian camp, and the Assyrians went back home.

Was it light at the end of the tunnel? After what the Assyrians had been doing, when the Assyrians left, it might have felt that way. But in Judah and Jerusalem, king and country didn't learn their lesson. They continued to look to the ways of the world instead of following the ways of God. And so God promised another tunnel of trouble - the Babylonians would come. The people and power that king and country trusted more than God would either let them down or turn against them. Everything they loved more than God would be taken

away or destroyed. Their pride and joy would be turned to shame. Another tunnel of trouble was coming. Worse than the last.

Another tunnel of trouble was coming for Judah and Jerusalem. And what about today? Another tunnel of trouble is coming for us. Everything and everyone we trust more than God will either let us down or turn against us or both. Everything and everyone we love more than God will be taken away. Our pride and joy in the things of this world, our pride and joy in the things of self, will be turned to shame. Another tunnel of trouble is coming for the world out there. Another tunnel of trouble is coming for you and for me.

{Back to the Preaching }

That's not what we came to hear, is it? So listen to what our LORD has for us - light at the end of the tunnel.

“Comfort, comfort my people,’ says your God.” I have to stop there. When you're in a tunnel of trouble, does it ever feel like God has left you, turned his back on you, maybe even turned against you? Listen to the pronouns - **“Comfort, comfort my people,’ says your God.”** This is after Judah and Jerusalem left God to follow the world, after Judah and Jerusalem left God to satisfy self, after Judah and Jerusalem shut their ears to God to listen to themselves and the world around them. And yet what? Listen for the pronouns - **“Comfort, comfort my people,’ says your God.”**

When you're in a tunnel of trouble, and you're feeling like God has left you, listen for the pronouns in God's Word and Sacrament. In baptism, God says: “Kevin Paul Raddatz - go ahead, put your name in there - I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Why? So that with you covered with Jesus and

connected by the Spirit, God the Father can say to you: “You are my son, my daughter, whom I love; with you I am well-pleased.” When you’re in a tunnel of trouble, and you’re feeling like God has left you, listen for the pronouns in the Lord’s Supper: “**This is my blood of the covenant given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.**” What covenant is Jesus pointing you to? God’s promise: “**I will be your God, and you will be my people.**” “I will be your God to watch out for you, to take care of you, to bless you. You will be my people to love and hold close today and forever.”

When God says “my” and “your,” he’s not speaking as boss and master. He’s speaking as a loving Father, a loving husband. “**Speak tenderly;**” “**Speak to the heart.**” He’s not looking just to have you fall into line; he’s looking to win your heart, to comfort your heart.

And what does God say to comfort his people? “**Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD’s hand double for all her sins.**” When I read those words all on their own, they don’t do much to comfort me. Why? On their own, this is what they sound like to me: “I’m supposed to feel comforted because I’ve done my time, so my sins are paid for, in fact, God has made me pay double for all my sins.” To have a God who makes me pay double for my sins isn’t all that comforting. To have God say that “**my hard service has been completed,**” when I’m still in a tunnel of trouble - how is that comforting? How is that even true?

On their own, these words of comfort don’t sound at all comforting. But these words aren’t on their own. These words are an outline for the rest of the book of Isaiah. With these words God is

pointing ahead; pointing ahead to what he will promise; pointing ahead to what he will do to keep his promise; pointing ahead to the light at the end of the tunnel. We might wonder, “If he’s pointing ahead, then why does he talk like he’s pointing back, talking in the past tense?” Because that’s how sure God is about his promise; that’s how sure God is about what he will do; that’s how sure God is about the light at the end of the tunnel - it’s as good as done.

So what does God see as good as done? **“Your hard service is completed.”** It may not look or feel that way. But God sees the end of your troubles. You get to see the end of your troubles. God sees the end of your time on evil’s battlefield, beaten up and beaten down. He sees the end of your time on his potter’s wheel - thrown down and squeezed, pressured and re-formed. God sees the end. Your troubles won’t go on forever; their end is coming. God will deliver.

Why? God doesn’t see you as his enemy, you’re his people. God doesn’t see you as guilty; he sees you with your sin paid for. How? Not by your hard service, not by your troubles. Go to Isaiah 53. If Isaiah had put this on a web page instead of on a scroll, he might have had this underlined, in color, with a link, so that when we clicked on **“her sin has been paid for”** a picture of Jesus on the cross would pop up on our screen and we would go right to Isaiah 53: **“Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. ⁶ We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”** Our sin is paid for because Jesus has taken our sin and paid for it. What does that mean for us? You are forgiven, forgiven for life right with God, forgiven for life the way it’s supposed to be.

Life the way it's supposed to be, not the way we deserve it to be (that would be hell), but life the way God wants it to be. That's where Isaiah takes us next. When Isaiah says: "**she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins,**" "she" means Jerusalem, the city and people of God. With Jesus, that's you. When Isaiah says: "**received double for all her sins,**" he doesn't mean double punishment; he's talking about double blessing. Instead of making us pay for our sin, God gives us blessing, double blessing, the blessing that goes to the favorite child. Just as God sees the end of your trouble ... just as God sees your sin paid for ... so God sees you paid double for all your trouble. Double comfort for all the times the devil tore at you. Double comfort for all the times the world knocked you around. Double comfort for all the times God came down on you with his hand of judgment and discipline. God has for you double comfort, comfort here in this life, and comfort for you forever in heaven. Why? Jesus.

During this season of Advent, sometimes it can seem like the light at the end of the tunnel is Christmas. Isaiah gives us better than just Christmas; he takes us to the cross and to Easter. He doesn't just promise deliverance from our tunnel of troubles in this world, he promises a new life in heaven, life the way that it is supposed to be. So what do we say? "**Come, Lord Jesus.**" Amen.

THE SERVICE

IN OUR WORLD TODAY ... what do people see as “the light at the end of the tunnel”? What reason do people have that they will get to “the light at the end of the tunnel”?

IN OUR WORSHIP TODAY ... we see “the light at the end of the tunnel,” and we are given good reason, God’s reason, promising how and why we will get to the end of the tunnel.

INVOCATION

M: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

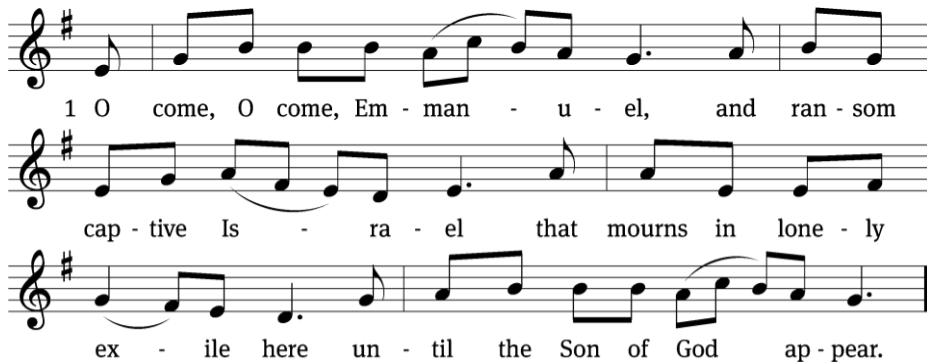
C: **Amen.**

CONFESSION OF SINS AND LIGHTING RITE

M: When God created the world, he made the crown of his creation - the human race - in his image (Genesis 1:26). Perfect people lived in a perfect world in a perfect relationship with God.

C: **But mankind rebelled against God, bringing sin into the world and death to all. God declared the wages of sin to be death (Romans 6:23). We too are guilty, and we confess our sinful thoughts, words, and actions.**

M: However, God - who is Love - did not want to be separated from his children forever. He promised a Savior who would bear the punishment for sin, defeat the devil, and break the bonds of death.



1 O come, O come, Em - man - u - el, and ran - som
cap - tive Is - ra - el that mourns in lone - ly
ex - ile here un - til the Son of God ap - pear.

M: When the time had fully come, God sent his Son. Jesus, our Savior, has paid the ransom for your debt; your sins are forgiven (Galatians 4:4,5). In view of God's mercy, today we light the hope candle. The Spirit declares through the psalmist, "Put your hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is unfailing love, and with him is full redemption" (Psalm 130:7).

C: **We wait for the Lord, and in his word we put our hope (Psalm 130:5).**

O, come, our Hope, who has de-clared "Sal - va - tion's won; do
not de-spair." Help us be-lieve that once for all
You bore God's wrath, re - deem - ing all. Re-joyce! Re-joyce!
Em-man - u - el Shall come to you, O Is - ra - el!

M: In the hope of God we go to the world - to our friends, relatives, acquaintances and neighbors. We regard no one from a worldly point of view. If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come. All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5: 16-18).

C: **God has committed to us the ministry of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. Jesus, who had no sin, became sin for us; in him we have become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:19-21).**

Refrain
Re - joyce! Re - joyce! Em - man - u - el
shall come to you, O Is - ra - el!

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Stir up your power, O Lord, and come. Protect us by your strength, and save us from the threatening dangers of our sins; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

FIRST READING

Isaiah 40:1–2

Comfort, comfort my people,
says your God.
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and proclaim to her
that her hard service has been completed,
that her sin has been paid for,
that she has received from the LORD's hand
double for all her sins.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

PSALM OF THE DAY

Psalms 130A

The musical score for Psalm 130A is presented in three systems. The first system is a single melodic line in G minor (one flat) on a treble clef staff, with lyrics 'Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD,'. The second system continues the melody with lyrics 'Lord, hear my voice.' and ends with a double bar line. The third system consists of two staves: a treble clef staff with a chordal accompaniment and a bass clef staff with a bass line accompaniment, both in G minor.

Out / of the depths
I / cry to you, O LORD;
Lord, / hear my voice.
Listen closely as I / call on you for help.

LORD, if you kept / track of sins,
 O / Lord, then who could stand?
 But with you there is for- / giveness,
 in order / that you may be feared. *Refrain*

I wait for the LORD, my / soul waits,
 and in his / word I put my hope.
 More than watchers wait for / morning
 my / soul waits for the Lord.

Israel, put your hope / in the LORD,
 for with the / LORD is faithful love;
 with him is complete re- / demption.
 He will redeem Israel from the / guilt of all their sins.

**Glory be to the Father and / to the Son
 and to the / Holy Spirit,
 as it was in the be- / ginning,
 is now, and will be for- / ever. Amen. *Refrain***

SECOND READING

1 Corinthians 1:3–9

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
 I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ
 Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in every way —

with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge— God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you. Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia. Show us your unfailing love, LORD, and grant us your salvation.
Alleluia.

GOSPEL

Mark 13:26–37

“At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.

“Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door. Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

“But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. It’s like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.

“Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back— whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’ “

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise be to you, O Christ!**

HYMN OF THE DAY

"Comfort, Comfort All My People"

Hymn 312

"Comfort, comfort all my people; speak of peace," so says our God.
"Comfort those who sit in darkness, groaning from their sorrows' load.
Speak to all Jerusalem of the peace that waits for them;
tell them that their sins I cover, that their warfare now is over."

All their sins our God will pardon, blotting out each dark misdeed;
all that well deserved his anger he no more will see or heed.
They have suffered many' _ a day; now their griefs have passed away.
God will change their aching sadness into ever-springing gladness.

John the Baptist's voice is crying in the desert far and near,
calling people to repentance for the kingdom now is here.
O that warning cry obey! Now prepare for God a way;
let the valleys rise to meet him and the hills bow down to greet him.

Then make straight the crooked highway; make the rougher places plain.
Let your hearts be true and humble, ready for his holy reign.
For the glory of the Lord now o'er earth is spread abroad,
and all flesh shall see the token that his word is never broken.

SERMON

Isaiah 40:1-2

NICENE CREED

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation, he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became truly human. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate. He suffered death and was buried.

On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who in unity with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. We believe in one holy Christian and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Gracious Lord, you sent your Son into our world to destroy the power of Satan and restore the human race as your children and heirs. Work in us during this Advent season so that we may rejoice in the coming of our Savior and long for his coming again.

Make us eager to receive the King who comes to save us.

Use the preaching of your holy law to rid us of all delusions that we can gain your love with our own efforts. Move us to realize how hopeless we are because of sin and to feel sorrow for what we have done wrong.

Lead us to be honest about our sinful status in your sight.

Lift up our hearts to see the King who comes to save. Reveal to us his willingness to take on our human form and stand in our place. Show us the power he extends in his Word and sacraments to make us your children and keep us in faith. Thrill us with his promise to come and take us to our eternal home to live with you forever.

Open our eyes to see and believe the wonders of the Savior's love.

As we live with Christ and trust in him, move us to turn away from sin day after day with the strength your Holy Spirit provides. When we fall, forgive us and renew us to love and serve you and all people.

Empower us and guide us to walk with Christ by faith.

Protect us from the distractions that come at this time of the year. Even in gift-giving and celebrating, keep our hearts focused on Christ and his forgiving love.

Give us joy at his coming at Christmas, his coming in the gospel, and his coming again.

Move us to share with others the most important gift of this season, the truth about Jesus. Even in busy times lead us to pray for those whose joy is diminished because of sickness, pain, or loss. [Especially bless... *here name the person and the cause of the petition.*] Give us opportunities to provide help to those in need.

May others see the love of Christ in our words and actions.

Hear us, Lord, as we pray in silence.

Silent prayer

Loving Lord, work in us during this Advent season so that our joy may be genuine and may rest in the promises of the King who comes to save.

Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.

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 and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

THE SACRAMENT

(Guests, please see our communion practice on page 2.)

(Gluten-free wafers are available; ask Pastor.)

PREFACE (SUNG)

M: The Lord be with you.

C: **And also with you.**

M: Lifts up your hearts.

C: **We lift them up to the Lord.**

M: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

C: **It is right to give him thanks and praise.**

It is truly good and right that we should at all times and in all places give you thanks, O Lord, holy Father, almighty and everlasting God, through Jesus Christ our Lord, whose way John the Baptist prepared when he called people to repentance and pointed to Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Therefore, with all the saints on earth and hosts of heaven, we praise your holy name and join their glorious song:

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY (SUNG)

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power, God of 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, hosanna in the highest!

WORDS OF INSTITUTION

Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night he was betrayed, took bread; and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my T body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

Then he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; this is my T blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."

The peace of the Lord be with you always. **Amen.**

JESUS, LAMB OF GOD (SUNG)

Jesus, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us.

Jesus, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us.

Jesus, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; grant us your peace.

DISTRIBUTION HYMN

“Jesus Came, the Heavens Adoring”

Hymn 319

Jesus came, the heav’ns adoring, came with peace from realms on high;
Jesus came to win redemption, lowly came on earth to die;
Alleluia! Alleluia! came in deep humility.

Jesus comes again in mercy when our hearts are worn with care;
Jesus comes again in answer to an earnest, heartfelt prayer,
Alleluia! Alleluia! comes to save us from despair.

Jesus comes to hearts rejoicing, bringing news of sins forgiv’n;
Jesus comes with words of gladness, leading souls redeemed to heav’n.
Alleluia! Alleluia! Hope to all the world is giv’n.

Jesus comes on clouds triumphant when the heav’ns shall pass away.
Jesus comes again in glory; let us, then, our homage pay,
Alleluia! ever singing till the dawn of endless day.

CLOSING PRAYER

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his mercy endures forever.

Whenever we eat this bread and drink this cup,
we proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

We give you thanks, O Lord, for the foretaste of the heavenly banquet you
have given us in this Sacrament. Through this gift you have fed our faith,
nourished our hope, and strengthened our love.

By your Spirit, help us to live as your holy people until that day when you
will receive us as your guests at the wedding supper of the Lamb, who
lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
Amen.

BLESSING

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.

The Lord look on you with favor and give you peace. **Amen.**

CLOSING HYMN

"Savior of the Nations, Come"

Hymn 301 vs. 1-3

Savior of the nations, come; Virgin's Son, make here your home.

Marvel now, O heav'n and earth, that the Lord chose such a birth.

Not by human flesh and blood, by the Spirit of our God
was the Word of God made flesh, woman's offspring, pure and fresh.

Wondrous birth! O wondrous Child of the virgin undefiled,
though by all the world disowned, yet to be in heav'n enthroned!

OFFERING

*If you prefer online giving, you may scan this code
with your mobile device.*



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Join Us in Worship This Holiday Season!

Advent Wednesdays - Beginning on December 6, 3:30 and 6:30 pm

Advent Dinners at 4:30 pm

Sunday, December 17 - **Children's Christmas Service** at 3 pm

Christmas Eve Candlelight Service - 4 and 7 pm

Christmas Day Festival Service - 9 am

New Year's Eve Service/Lord's Supper - 5 pm, Join us for our annual Game Night after the service!

Making Guests Feel Comfortable in Church

1st Time Guests:

Provide convenient parking spaces;
Greet with enthusiasm;
Have a conversation (ex., ask questions, etc.) before and after the service;
Provide a nametag;
Sit with them;
Introduce them to other church members;
Ask them to complete the attendance registry by example and/or by handing it to them;
Show them around the church;
Invite them downstairs for fellowship and Bible study and bring them down, personally;
Ask them for feedback about their visit;
Send them a follow-up communication (ex., card/email);
Provide a Welcome Packet;
Create an Exit Team

Recurring Guests:

Welcome back;
Use name in conversation;
Provide a permanent nametag;
Thank them for coming and express excitement for their attendance;
Introduce them to other members;
Invite them to Bible Study and ask them to sit with you;
Invite them to other events/service opportunities/women's groups;
Find out about children; show them around the school; introduce to teachers;
Ask for feedback/suggestions;
Bring Welcome gift/basket;
Ask them if they want to talk to Pastor/have Pastor contact them

BIC/New Member Class:

Ask them if they have specific needs that would make it easier to attend BIC (ex., childcare);
Join them in class;
Encourage participation (ex., bring treats);
Remind them membership doesn't end with church attendance;
Have a luncheon/dinner;
Follow up/ask for feedback;
Identify interests (roles and holes?);
Provide a Member Directory;
Introduce in church

Presenter Question – Is there a sign for guests to show them what door to use?