

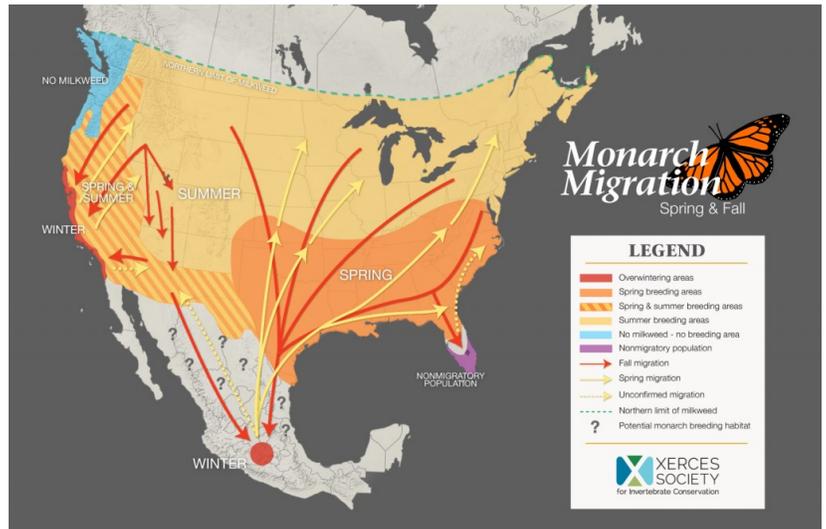
Advent I - Hope

You Will Need:

Advent Candles
A Way to Play YouTube

To get acquainted with these amazing creatures, watch this short YouTube video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3njFNmc-W2k&t=9s>) on the Monarch migration in Mexico.

After you watch the video, reflect on how it made you feel. What would it be like to be surrounded by millions of monarchs? Phil Torres, the creator of this video and others he calls the Jungle Diaries, has wanted to see the butterfly migration site since he was five. What animal migrations have fascinated you? What natural wonder would you like to see?



Monarchs are fascinating creatures and their migration pattern unique among migratory animals. There are western and eastern monarchs although, genetically, they are the same creature. Their location simply refers to their migration site. The eastern monarchs, those east the Rocky Mountains, tend to migrate to southern Mexico. The western monarch migrates to the California coast, not far from your home. Tagging efforts have revealed however, that this is not a hard and fast rule. Western monarchs have been found overwintering in Mexico and vice-versa.



For more on these remarkable creatures, watch this four-minute video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FLYImwInXwE>

Listen for these facts and record your answers:

How fast and how far they can fly in a day.

What they do at night.

How far they fly during migration.

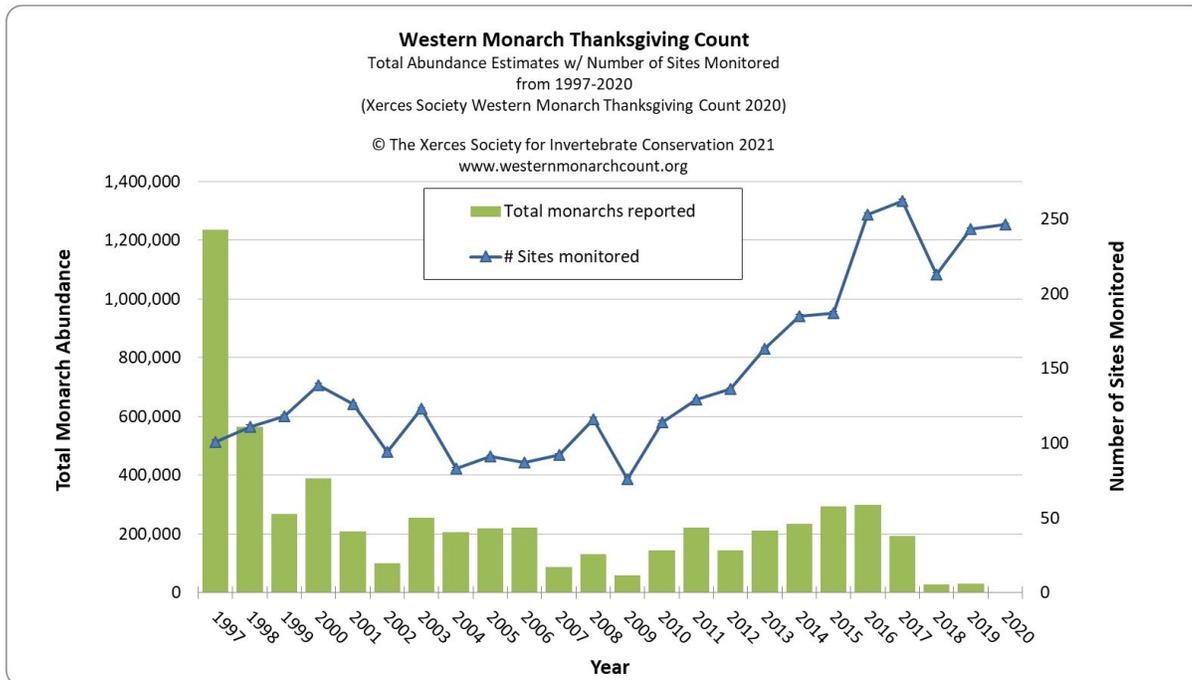
What signals their migration.

How long they live.

What determines their boundaries – how far they will go north and what they are looking when they fly into Texas in the Spring.

The uniqueness of monarch generations.

The Xerces Society works to protect invertebrates, like the monarch. Every Thanksgiving 100s of volunteers spread out along the California coast and count monarchs. They are counting right now and will finish on December 5th. Last year they found only 1,914 monarchs. That is 99.9% decrease since the 1980s. Monarchs, especially the western monarch are in trouble. Unfortunately, the eastern monarchs have experienced a sharp 80% decline as well. The numbers are so dangerously low that Xerces Society and others fear the population could collapse. There is an effort to protect them under the Endangered Species Act but there are currently other species considered more critical.



This graph shows the falling number of monarchs over the past 24 years that the Xerces Society has lead the Thanksgiving count.

Why Monarchs are Endangered? You know the answers....

As with many species, climate change is wreaking havoc on the monarch population. Knowing what you know about their migration, why is climate change a problem?

As you heard, the presence of milkweed determines where the monarchs fly. They go only as far north as the milkweed grows. Right now, that is in southern Canada. Milkweed is essential for monarchs as it is the only place a monarch can lay its eggs and the only food source for a monarch caterpillar. Milkweed is a toxic plant. The monarch caterpillar, however, is unaffected and instead stores the toxins or glycosides in its body. It retains those glycosides as an adult butterfly. If a bird eats a monarch, it becomes sick learning by experience to avoid the color pattern of the monarch. They can then fly in that bird's territory unmolested.

The monarchs dependance on milkweed has made them susceptible to extinction. Why? What do you imagine has happened to milkweed throughout the United States? Consider what happens to wide open green spaces, how we treat/spray our yards, and how we seek to kill "bad" insects in and around our homes and offices.

Another problem for the monarch is the degradation of their overwintering sites. What do you think is happening in your area to these important sites?



Hop

Light the first Advent candle, the candle representing HOPE.

Read Romans 8:18-25

¹⁸ I believe that the present suffering is nothing compared to the coming glory that is going to be revealed to us. ¹⁹ The whole creation waits breathless with anticipation for the revelation of God's sons and daughters. ²⁰ Creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice—it was the choice of the one who subjected it—but in the hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from slavery to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of God's children. ²² We know that the whole creation is groaning together and suffering labor pains up until now. ²³ And it's not only the creation. We ourselves who have the Spirit as the first crop of the harvest also groan inside as we wait to be adopted and for our bodies to be set free. ²⁴ We were saved in hope. If we see what we hope for, that isn't hope. Who hopes for what they already see? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we don't see, we wait for it with patience.

Wrestle with the Text

The reading above is part of a letter written by the apostle Paul to the church in Rome. It is a difficult text. Upon first reading, what makes you uncomfortable or seems confusing?

While the text is tricky, it also contains some beautiful passages of hope and connection. Let's look at the text more closely. Consider these questions:

- What do you think is the “present suffering” in our world today?
- What is the relationship between the creation and God's people (“God's sons & daughters”)?
- Who is groaning and suffering labor pains?
- Part of the good news of this text is the connection Paul draws between God's people and creation. How are humans and the environment connected? How is this connection good news? In other words, we know all the ways that humans have hurt the environment, but how is our connection to the world also good news?
- Paul calls the suffering and groaning labor pains. Why is this important and hope-filled?
- What are we and the creation longing for, according to Paul?
- What are you longing for on behalf of yourself & our world?



Preparing the space for the garden

What is HOPE?

Paul believes that our bodies will be “set free.” By linking the creation to human bodies, Paul envisions a time when our bodies and all of creation will be set free from sickness, humiliation, and decay. To Paul, this is reason to hope. We are looking at this passage because it is a text about hope on this first Sunday in Advent. What according to Paul, is hope?

How is this definition of hope, hopeful?

What does it mean for you, as a young person who will inherit this earth, to hope for healing of the world?

What does it require of you to hope for a better future for our environment?

How is building a pollinator garden to help the western monarch an act of hope? Why does it matter?

Advent Week I Project:

If you and your family have time over the holidays, visit one of the migration sites in your area. It is a rare treat to be able to see the monarchs as they rest over the winter. Fortunately, there are several sites near you. And there is a bit of good news—this year, they have already counted more monarchs than last year! So, you might be able to see hundreds of these amazing creatures. If you want to see the monarchs flying around, go when it is above 55 degrees and sunny. When it is below 55 degrees, they huddle in groups to keep warm. This is also an amazing sight as they fold their wings up making themselves look like dead leaves hanging from the tree. This helps protect them from predators.

If you go to one of these sites, bring your binoculars and take pictures. Share your photos with Sally or Jim. We want to use them in worship and for publicity about our new pollinator garden!

Here are a few places you can visit:

- Ardenwood Historic Farm in Fremont
- Monarch Grove, Natural Bridges State Beach, Santa Cruz
- Monarch Sanctuary, Pacific Grove, Monterey
Pacific Grove has one of the largest monarch overwintering sites in America and the largest population of overwintering monarchs in Monterey County for public viewing.

For more information visit: <https://www.gamblegarden.org/where-to-view-monarchs-bay-area/>



Thousands of monarch butterflies gather in the eucalyptus trees at the Pismo State Beach Monarch Butterfly Grove. Credit...George Rose/Getty Images

Resources for Additional Information:

<https://www.monarchmilkweedmapper.org/western-monarch-biology/>

<https://xerces.org/blog/western-monarch-population-closer-to-extinction-as-wait-continues-for-monarchs-protection>

A ray of hope: <https://ktla.com/news/california/california-sees-return-of-monarch-butterflies-after-record-low/>