Worship Resources for January 1, 2017—First Sunday after Christmas Day, New Year’s Day

Some churches may observe Epiphany this Sunday so I have included those readings here (they will also be included for January 8th), along with reading for Holy Name of Jesus.

Revised Common Lectionary for First Sunday after Christmas: Isaiah 63:7-9; Psalm 148; Hebrews 2:10-18; Matthew 2:13-23

Revised Common Lectionary for Holy Name of Jesus: Numbers 6:22-27; Psalm 8; Galatians 4:4-7 or Philippians 2:5-11; Luke 2:15-21

Revised Common Lectionary for New Year’s Day: Ecclesiastes 3:1-13; Psalm 8; Revelation 21:1-6a; Matthew 25:31-46

Revised Common Lectionary for Epiphany: Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14; Ephesians 3:1-12; Matthew 2:1-12

Narrative Lectionary: Simeon and Anna, Luke 2:21-38 (Psalm 131 or 131:3)

**In our readings for the First Sunday after Christmas**, the prophet Isaiah recounts what God has done. God has sent no angel or messenger, but God’s own presence has saved the people. God’s own presence has carried the people home after exile. God has become the savior of the people—not a hero of old or a mighty warrior, but God’s own presence has redeemed the people.

Psalm 148 is a song of praise, calling first the heavens, heavenly bodies and heavenly beings into worship of God. Because God is the creator, the psalmist next calls creation into praise of God—the earth itself, and its creatures. Finally, the psalmist calls all people—rich and poor, powerful and weak, women and men, young and old—for God has made them all. The psalmist at last praises the people who are faithful to God, and calls them into worship.

The letter to the Hebrews continues from last week’s introduction, declaring that Jesus is also made of flesh and blood—a human being—and calls us brothers and sister, kindred of Jesus. The writer is making the argument that Jesus is fully human because Jesus came not to help angels, but to help the children of Abraham—all of us—and knows our temptations, our suffering, our struggles.

Joseph is warned in a dream in Matthew 2:13-23 that Herod is looking to kill the child that has been born. Mary, Joseph, and Jesus flee to Egypt. This passage contains three references to passages in the Hebrew Scriptures, and the story as a whole of fleeing Herod’s wrath is reminiscent of Pharaoh’s killing of the children when Moses was born. The writer of Matthew is connecting Jesus with Moses, Jesus with the fulfillment of ancient prophecies, and why Jesus is born in Bethlehem but later known as from Nazareth (though the passage quoted about a Nazorean is not about being from Nazareth, but rather a term of being set aside for God—Samson in the book of Judges is perhaps the most famous Nazorean).

**In the readings for Holy Name of Jesus**, we begin with a blessing from God given through Moses for the people, a blessing that is often used as a benediction to this day. This passage is used to send forth the people with the assurance of God’s presence. God’s face (which was often hidden, and it was thought one would die if they saw the face of God) will shine upon the people and give them peace.

Psalm 8 declares that God has made human beings a little lower than the angels, despite all the other wondrous creations of God. God has put humanity in charge of caring for creation the way God has cared for us. The psalmist concludes with declaring God as Sovereign, majestic in name.

Paul speaks in Galatians 4:4-7 of Jesus becoming like them, born of a woman, born under the law as the readers of the letter to the Galatians would understand. Jesus became like them so they might know that they are children of God, not slaves of God. Through God they have become heirs, as Christ became one of us.

The passage from Philippians echoes the sentiment from Galatians on Christ becoming one of us, so that we would know God the way God knows us. Jesus humbled himself to become one of us, so that we would know him, and he has been given the name above all names: Jesus Christ is Lord.

The shepherds have listened to the angels, and now travel to Bethlehem to see what has taken place. All who heard what the shepherds had been told were amazed, but Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. And after eight days, the baby was brought to the temple to be circumcised. In another unusual twist (the first being that Mary and Elizabeth were the first to know—two women—that God was entering the world in a new way), Mary is the one who brings forth the name as given to her by the angel. The child is not named after Joseph, but given the name Jesus.

**The selections for New Year’s Day** begins with the poem of seasons and time from Ecclesiastes 3:1-13. The Teacher explains that we do not know the plans of God, though we have a sense of future and past. Instead, we must find enjoyment in our work now, to know that this life we have is a gift from God—not the things we work for such as money or possessions; rather what we do with our life is what matters.

Psalm 8 is also a choice for Holy Name of Jesus (see above), in which humanity has been created a little lower than the angels, but has the responsibility by God to care for creation.

Revelation 21:1-6a declares the vision of a new heaven and a new earth, reminiscent of Isaiah’s vision Isaiah 65:17, in which there will be no more death, mourning, or suffering, for God is making all things new, and the dividing line between earth and heaven—death—will no longer exist.

The writer of Matthew tells a final parable of the sheep and the goats being separated by the king in 25:31-46. The king welcomes all the “sheep,” the ones who have cared for the poor, visited those in prison, fed the hungry, clothed the naked—no matter who they have helped, they have helped the king (Christ) when they have helped others, even the least of all. But those who ignore the needs of others ignore the king, and will not know the welcome of the king, because they never welcomed others.

**The readings for Epiphany** begin with Isaiah’s call that the light has come in Isaiah 60:1-6. The light has come to the people who were in exile as they return home, but Isaiah shifts the image—the light has come to the people, but now they *are* the light, and other nations are *drawn* to their light because they see what God has done for the people. Other nations will bring their wealth, including frankincense and gold upon the young camels of Midian.

Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14 speaks of a king that rules justly, because they rule with God’s justice. The psalmist asks for God to bless the king with the ability to judge rightly, especially for the poor. The psalmist prays that the king’s reign will be in peace, that other nations will serve him, because this king rules justly and defends the cause of the poor.

Paul declares in Ephesians 3:1-12 that the great mystery of God’s inclusive love for all people has finally been revealed in Christ, that the Gentiles are also heirs to the promise of God. This “wisdom of God in its rich variety” has been revealed through the church, and the eternal purpose is for the world to know God’s love.

The Magi visit Jesus in Matthew 2:1-12. These “wise ones,” scholars or astrologers are outsiders, Gentiles, who know something that King Herod and his own scribes don’t—that a new king has been born. They have observed the star rising for a new king, and have come to pay him homage. Herod’s own scribes have to scramble to find passages in the Hebrew Scriptures that point to a Messiah, and the city of David’s own birth. And unlike our Nativity crèches, the Wise Ones find Mary and the child in a home, pay him homage and give him their gifts there. And then, warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they go home by another way.

**The Narrative Lectionary for January 1st** focuses on Anna and Simeon, who were in the temple awaiting Jesus in Luke 2:21-38. Simeon had been waiting for the Messiah, and declares Jesus as a light for the Gentiles, but will be a sign of the rising and the fall of many, and that a sword would pierce the soul of Mary, foreshadowing Jesus’ death. Anna, a prophetess, also has been waiting for the Christ-child, and praises God and proclaims to all who were seeking hope for Jerusalem.

The light of God that we see in Jesus now shines in us. And that light is inclusive—inclusive of the poor and the hungry and the marginalized, inclusive of the Gentiles and other outsiders. This light is found in all who do the work of God in this life. As God’s light is revealed to the world, may we reveal that light in our life—in all we do. For our lives are the very witness of the light of God, for it lives in us.

Call to Worship

Today is a new day, a new month, a new year!

 **Let the light of God shine through us, each and every day!**

We make resolutions, promises for fresh starts;

 **In Christ, we have a fresh start, every moment of every day.**

May we set aside the demands and hopes and frustrations of the world

 **With the Holy Spirit’s guidance, may we live into God’s ways, now and every day.**

Come, let us worship God, who leads us into new life;

 **Come, worship God, who is making all things new!**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Almighty God, we confess at times we see only our flaws. We want to change our lives for the better because we feel insufficient. We focus on concerns of the world—how we look, how we are perceived by others, instead of looking to Your concerns: how we care for the poor, how we include the marginalized, how we work for justice. Forgive us for our short-sightedness. Turn us away from the voices of the world that tell us we aren’t good enough, and instead, help us to hear Your voice calling us to the work of justice, to live for others, and to live for You. In the name of Christ, who has given us new life, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

There is a time for everything, and God is using this time now to do something new in us. Listen to the call of God, and know that you are forgiven, renewed, and restored, and given new life now, whether it is January 1st or December 31st—God is doing something new in you, right now. Cling to this hope, and go, change the world! Amen.

Prayer

God of Revolution, we have revolved around the earth once again to this day that we mark as the first day, but for You, each day is a first day. Help us to join the revolution of love in this world that works through justice. Call us to care for the poor, to care for the earth you created, to lift up the children of the world. Call us to revolve our thinking when we become narrow minded. Call us to revolve our vision when we turn away from seeing the struggles of people around us. Call us into Your revolution of radical inclusive love, justice, and peace. Amen.