Worship Resources for January 11th, 2015—First Sunday after Epiphany

Revised Common Lectionary: Genesis 1:1-5; Psalm 29; Acts 19:1-7; Mark 1:4-11

Narrative Lectionary: Jesus’ Baptism, Matthew 3:1-17 (Psalm 2:7-8)

We begin this New Year with the beginning of creation, the first act of creation in Genesis, in which a wind from God sweeps over the waters, and the voice of God calls out to “let there be light!” This marks the first calling of God, and over the next few weeks during this season after Epiphany, we will read the callings of God’s prophets throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, to be light in places of darkness, to proclaim the word of the Lord.

Psalm 29 is a litany for worship, ascribing to God the Creator all the power and glory. The God who created the heavens and earth is still master of creation, and the voice of God commands the works of creation.

Acts 19:1-7 tells of Paul’s journey to Ephesus. In this account in Acts, Paul discovers that the believers there have never heard of the Holy Spirit, and they were baptized according to the followers of John the Baptist, to repent from sins, but Paul now lays hands on them and blesses them to receive the Holy Spirit, and that they would know Jesus.

Mark 1:4-11 contains the story of John the Baptist preparing the way for Jesus, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. John tells his followers that the one coming after him, who is more powerful, will baptize them with the Holy Spirit. The baptism of John in water is a symbolic baptism; the passing through the waters of death into life. The One who is coming after John will proclaim the work of the Holy Spirit among them, and the One that is coming is also God With Them (Emmanuel).

The Narrative Lectionary also follows Jesus’ Baptism but from Matthew’s account. Matthew’s account tells of John’s preaching before Jesus about repentance and the kind of people who were coming to John, that even the religious leaders of different groups in his day, Pharisees and Sadducees, were coming to him, looking for something new. John does not want to baptize Jesus when Jesus comes to him, because he feels he is unworthy, but Jesus demands that he do it to “fulfill all righteousness.” As in Mark’s account, the Holy Spirit confirms this act of repentance and a voice from heaven confirms that Jesus is God’s Son, the Beloved, with whom God is well pleased.

The Narrative Lectionary also quotes from Psalm 2 as a supporting scripture, of the king that follows the way of God being called the son of God, and that all things will come under this king. The psalmist is speaking of a king in their days, when their nation was facing turmoil and attack from other nations, but shares this connection with God, this relationship of being the child of God when one follows God’s ways.

A new beginning, a new birth. Baptism by water is still used as our primary symbol of having joined the family of God, of starting anew in Christ. But it is a symbol. God is already among us. Emmanuel, God with us since creation; and in a new way since the Incarnation. It is our recognizing that God is at work in our lives that calls us to commit our lives to God, to be baptized, to start anew with God. Our joining in the work together is why we join churches and communities of faith. It may seem new to us, but it is not new to God—by the time we come to the realization of God in our lives, God has long been at work in us, among us, and around us.

Call to Worship

Listen! God is about to do a new thing;

**God is already at work here in this place.**

Listen! God is calling us to a new vision;

**God is already calling us into the world.**

Listen! God is showing us a new way;

**God had shown us the Way through Christ our Lord.**

Come! Let us worship and follow Christ together!

**Let us be renewed in this journey of faith.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Holy God, we confess that we do not always listen for Your call; we often follow the ways of the world. We often think we know better, and follow the paths for success and wealth, only to be disappointed. Forgive us for our foolish ways, and help us to follow You in living justly, loving our neighbors, and walking humbly with You. In the name of Christ, our companion on this journey of faith, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

God is already with you. Wherever you have gone astray, you can always find God with you. Turn into the embrace of God’s acceptance, forgiveness and love. May you be renewed in your spirit and be ready to share the Good News with the world. Amen.

Prayer

Creator of Light, shine through us. May we understand Your calling in our individual and collective lives. Lead us away from the way of sin in this world, the way of greed and the lust for power, and instead seek Your ways of justice, mercy and peace. May we, most of all, understand Your call to love one another, for You have loved us so much You sent the Christ to us, that we might know Your love more fully in our lives. You have shown us a love that knows no bounds and surpasses death. May we reflect Your love in the world to all, especially those on the margins of society, those who are oppressed, those who have been rejected. In the name of Christ, who is the Way, we pray. Amen.