Worship Resources for January 3rd, 2016: New Year’s Sunday, Second Sunday of Christmas, or Epiphany Sunday

There are several choices for the Revised Common Lectionary, so I am including them all here:

New Year’s Sunday: Ecclesiastes 3:1-13; Psalm 8; Revelation 21:1-6a; Matthew 25:31-46

Second Sunday of Christmas: Jeremiah 31:7-14; Psalm 147:12-20; Ephesians 1:3-14; John 1:1-18

Epiphany Sunday: Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14; Ephesians 3:1-12; Matthew 2:1-12

Narrative Lectionary: Jesus’ Ministry Begins: Mark 1:21-45 (Psalm 103:1-5)

Happy New Year! We begin with Ecclesiastes, with the ancient poem reminding us that there is a time for everything in its season, and that we ought to enjoy the time we are given with the work we are given to do. It is easy for us to live in the past, or look too far in the future, instead of accepting the present and finding joy where we are at.

Psalm 8 sings of the greatness of God as the creator, and how human beings are a very small part of that creation—yet God has made us a little lower than the angels, and has given us, a very small part of creation, authority and dominion over creation the way God has authority and dominion over us. God has entrusted us with the care of creation.

Revelation 21:1-6a is the vision of the new Jerusalem, in which death and mourning are no more, and God is making all things new. As we look towards this new year, we live into the hope of this vision: that God indeed is making all things new now.

Matthew 25: 31-46 is a final parable by Jesus about the importance of how we live our lives. God will separate the sheep from the goats—those who do God’s will, and those who do not. And God’s will is how we care for and treat others, for when we care for the least of all, we care for Christ.

We are still in the Christmas Season, and we begin with the prophet Jeremiah giving a word of hope to the people, the promise of return from exile. The promise is for all, especially those who might have been left behind—those who are disabled, those who are pregnant and with child—there is hope for all, and all are due a home with joy and blessing, and God will lead them.

Psalm 147:12-20 is a passage of the psalm about God’s blessings to the people, to their children, for peace within their borders. But the psalmist also sings of God’s power through the image of winter storms, and that God has the power to both bring snow and hail, and melt them, and God is faithful to the people.

Ephesians begins with the promise of adoption through Jesus Christ to become children of God. God has a plan to gather all of us, and all things in heaven and earth, and that plan is made known to us in Christ, in whom we have redemption and the forgiveness of sins.

John 1:1-18 harkens back to Genesis, and the Word (logos) has always been with us, and has always been since the beginning of time: light shining in the darkness. The Word became Flesh and lived among us. John’s prologue sets Jesus not as coming into the world only two thousand years ago, but having always been there—it is the revelation of Christ to the world through the Incarnation that has changed our perspective, and now we have seen God’s glory. God is now made known to us through Jesus Christ.

Epiphany Sunday begins with the words of the prophet Isaiah: “Arise, shine, for your light has come!” Light has come to the people who have been in darkness, and now they are the light, and nations are drawn to their light. The wealth of the nations shall come to the people, including gifts of gold and frankincense.

Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14 sings praise to a king’s son, that he may be blessed, and rule with justice for the poor and defend the orphans and those in need. The psalmist prays that all other kings will follow this king, because he is the king who delivers the poor and those in need, and hears their call.

Ephesians 3:1-12 contains Paul’s message that the good news of Jesus Christ is for the world—that God has revealed through Jesus Christ that Gentiles are “fellow heirs” of the Gospel. This mystery has now been made known, that God’s salvation and grace is for everyone, for the whole world, through Christ.

Matthew 2:1-12 is the story of the revealing of Christ to the world by the Magi, outsiders, who come to Herod and reveal to him and all Jerusalem that the Messiah, “the king of the Jews” has been born. Epiphany means revelation, the revealing to the world that the Word has become Flesh and dwells among us. They were warned in a dream (as Joseph is later warned in a dream) not to return to Herod, and they leave by another road.

The Narrative Lectionary focuses on the beginnings of Jesus’ Ministry in Mark 1:21-45. When Jesus is confronted by someone with an unclean spirit, the unclean spirit reveals that it knows who Jesus is: “I know who you are, the Holy One of God” (vs. 24). Those listening in the synagogue remark that this is a new teaching, one that comes with authority. Jesus heals many, including Peter’s mother-in-law, and a leper whom Jesus orders not to tell anyone, but the leper also goes and reveals who Jesus is to anyone who will hear, proclaiming it freely.

Psalm 103:1-5 sings blessings to God, the one who heals, forgives, and redeems. God is the one who redeems us from death, and renews our endurance, our youth like an eagle’s.

Whichever selection you choose for this Sunday—it is a New Year, it is a time of Christ being revealed to the world in a new way, and the hope that all things can be made new in Christ. This is not just for New Year’s Day, but for each and every day—God is doing something new, in this time, right now.

Call to Worship

Welcome to this new day, this new week, this new year!

 **Welcome, Christ, and guide us in this new year.**

Join together our hearts, this body of Christ;

 **Lead us, Christ, as Your people in this new year.**

Come, join us in this time of worship,

 **May we begin our new year with Christ in our hearts;**

 **May we worship with gladness and joy together!**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Creator of All, as we enter this New Year, we confess that sometimes we are caught living in the past, or only looking to the future. Help us to be present in this moment now. Call us into your ways of justice and peace now. Lead us to live in Your ways today, in this moment. Guide us to help our neighbor in need now, not when we have more time, and more resources, because You have shown us who Your children are in this moment. Birth in us a newness of Your love for Your children. In the name of Christ, who has been revealed to us, and continues to reveal You in the world around us, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

Every moment is new. Every millisecond God is showing you how much you are loved. Every moment is sacred. Know that in this very moment, you are forgiven, you are loved, and you are given a fresh start in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

Prayer

Guide us, O Creator, into this new year. Guide us, O Holy One, in the same way You guided the magi to the Christ-child. Guide us, O Sovereign One, as You guided the magi to go a different way. In this new year, call us into Your way of life. Remind us of the promises of old, the promise of a future with hope, and reveal to us Your love at work in the world around us. May we see the signs and wonders You have given us, to share Good News with the world. In the name of Christ, who has revealed to us Your grace, love, and truth, we pray. Amen.