Worship Resources for January 4th, 2015—Second Sunday of Christmas, Epiphany Sunday

Revised Common Lectionary:

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

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

Narrative Lectionary: Flight to Egypt, Matthew 2:13-23 (Psalm 11:1-3)

For our Second Sunday of Christmas, we begin with the words of the prophet Jeremiah, and the hope of the return from exile. God will gather all the remnant from where they have been exiled—all of the people, abled-bodied and disabled, pregnant, in labor, young and old—God will become a father to them all, a shepherd, who will lead the children home. Their mourning will turn to rejoicing and dancing, and they will be satisfied with God’s abundance in their lives.

Psalm 147:12-20 sings of God’s work in creation as well as God’s work of protection and safety for the people. God is the one who has given ordinances and statutes to Israel, and to them, God relates to them in a special way, unique, unlike any other people. Those who know God’s ways know the assurance of God’s presence.

Ephesians 1:3-14 speaks of God’s adoption of all people, that the promises of God made long ago are now available to all people, Jews and Gentiles, through Jesus the Christ. Through Christ, there is forgiveness of sins. Through Christ, the mystery of God’s will is revealed, to live for the praise of God’s glory.

John 1:1-18 is the prologue to John’s Gospel and the thesis of the work: that the Word became Flesh and lived among us. The Word was in the beginning with God, and the Word is the Light of the World. We see the Light; we have known Jesus, because we have not seen God, but God has been made known through Jesus.

For Epiphany Sunday, we begin with the words of the prophet Isaiah, speaking to the people out of exile who were rebuilding their home: Arise, shine, for your light has come! God’s light has come to the people, and now dwells with them. Nations will be drawn to their light, bringing their best, which includes gold and frankincense.

Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14 is a prayer for God to give justice to the king, and that other kings will give service to him. A blessing given upon coronation of a new king, these words also charge the king to protect the poor and needy, and the psalmist prays that this king will remember God’s ways of justice, which is to prevent violence and oppression.

Matthew 2:1-12 (which was the Narrative Lectionary reading last week) shares the visit of the Magi, who are strangers who come to Jerusalem to ask where has been born the king of the Jews—and Herod, the king of Israel as appointed by Rome, has no idea what they are talking about. They are outsiders who bring the news of a new reign that has come—but Herod and others believe this is a worldly reign, and do not understand what this means. The news is met with fear and deception on the part of Herod. The magi return home by another way when they are warned in a dream (as Joseph was spoken to in a dream and later will be warned as well) not to return to Herod.

The Narrative Lectionary picks up in Matthew with the Escape to Egypt, in which Joseph is warned in a dream to hurry and take Mary and Jesus to Egypt, for Herod is worried about his own reign, and issues an edict to kill all the children in and around Bethlehem under two years of age. Reminiscent of the similar edict in Egypt during the time of Moses, both Moses and Jesus escape the attempt on their newborn life to live and lead their people. Jesus is able to return after the death of Herod, but Joseph goes away to Nazareth in Galilee instead of returning to Bethlehem.

Psalm 11:1-3 begins with the psalmist putting their trust in God, because the wicked are pursuing them. Instead of escaping, they look to God for their protection.

Where do we go from Christmas? How do we go forth with our light? What does the Incarnation mean to us—is it just the story of the shepherds and the angels and the manger, or do we embrace the fullness of the story, the Incarnation of Christ, the Word that has become Flesh and lived among us—and will die and rise?

Call to Worship (from Isaiah 60:1-3)

Arise, shine, for your light has come!

**The glory of the Lord is upon you!**

The darkness is fading into light,

**All people are drawn to the brightness of dawn.**

The Light of the World is Jesus.

**The Light of the World is in each of us.**

Arise, shine, for your light has come!

**Let us worship God, who shines through us. Amen!**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Almighty God, we confess that we have already stopped singing and are tired of tinsel. Christmas seems over and done with and we are already going back to the way things were. Forgive us for not embracing the newness of life, the mystery of the Incarnation, that You have been revealed to us in a new way. Help us to live our lives anew in this new year, remembering that You have entered our world and our hearts in a new way. Help us to live into Your ways of love, justice, and peace. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

It is a New Year, it is a new week, it is a new day. God is doing something new in you. Embrace it. Live into the newness of life in Christ, knowing that you are forgiven and every moment is a new moment. Forgive. Love. Seek justice and peace, and share the Good News of God’s love with the world, this day and every day. Amen.

Prayer

Author of Salvation, write in us a new prayer, a new hope. Our world is full of brokenness: broken systems, broken bones, broken hearts. Sing a new song into us, so that we might seek healing and wholeness in our world, that we might bind up what has been broken, that we can be bearers of Your love and light to the world that needs it. May we see hope where there is despair; may we pursue justice where there is injustice; may we build the way to peace where there has been violence. In the name of Christ, who has come and prepared the way for us, we pray all things. Amen.