Worship Resources for January 5th, 2019—Second Sunday after Christmas, Epiphany Sunday

(for New Year’s Sunday, please see the previous week’s resources)

Revised Common Lectionary:

Second Sunday after Christmas: Jeremiah 31:7-14; Psalm 147:12-20; Ephesians 1:3-14; John 1: (1-9) 10-18

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

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

For the Revised Common Lectionary, we begin with the good news from the prophet Jeremiah, of the exiles return in 31:7-14. God has not forgotten the people; rather, God will be like a father to them, bringing home the remnant of the scattered. They will celebrate with dancing and singing, both young and old. God will comfort them, and the priests will minister to them, and they will rejoice with God.

This portion of Psalm 147 praises God for the holy city of Jerusalem and for its protection. The psalmist sings of God the Creator, for the weather was thought to be controlled by God and sent as warnings and messages in those days. However, the psalmist sings of how the people know their God, and they know God’s ordinances and commandments, and they follow them. The Lord is their God.

In the introduction to the letter to the Ephesians (most scholars do not believe this was Paul, or if it was, this was a copy of another letter, as most of its contents are generic Christian teachings rather than specific to the community), the writer begins with blessing God, and reminding the people they have been blessed by God through Christ. Writing to a mostly Gentile audience, the writer speaks of how they have received adoption as God’s children. God has planned to gather everyone to God through Jesus Christ, and all have obtained an inheritance: the promise of redemption.

The beginning of the Gospel according to John begins with the Word that was in the beginning with God, the Word that became flesh and lived among us, and the light shining in the darkness. A man came to testify to the light, whose name was John. The light was in the world, but the world did not know the light. To all who received the Light, the Word, they were given the power to become children of God. In John’s view, the people had received the law through Moses, and grace and truth through Jesus Christ. No one has seen God, but the Son has made God known to the people.

The readings for Epiphany begin with the prophet Isaiah, speaking to those returning from exile in 60:1-6. Arise, shine, for your light has come! Though darkness covers the world, the light has come, and nations will be drawn to their light. The wealth of the nations will come to them, gold and frankincense on the backs of camels, and those from other lands will praise the name of God.

The psalmist blesses a new king in Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14. The psalmist challenges the king to rule with justice for the poor, to deliver the needy and crush the oppressor, and calls upon God’s blessing for peace. The psalmist continues to bless the king, speaking of Tarshish and Sheba, lands named in Isaiah 60, bringing gifts to bless the king. The psalmist prays that the king will deliver the needy and poor, and to redeem the people from violence and oppression.

The writer of Ephesians speaks of how the great mystery has been revealed: gentiles can become heirs and members of the same body through Jesus Christ in Ephesians 3:1-12. The writer, purporting to be Paul, speaks of how they are a servant of God through this gospel, and that they have been called to bring the gospel to the Gentiles, to reveal the plan of the mystery of God.

The Magi visit Jesus in Matthew 2:1-12. Scholars, most likely astrologers from ancient Persia traveled to Jerusalem having observed the stars, came in search of a newborn king. But Herod, appointed king under the Roman Empire, was frightened by the words of these foreign travelers. The scribes and chief priests, looking through the Hebrew scriptures, found a passage about one who was to shepherd the people Israel—born in the city of David, of Bethlehem. Herod sent the travelers to Bethlehem, asking them to return to Jerusalem to tell him where the new king is so that he can visit him. The travelers arrived in Bethlehem, and were overwhelmed with joy, paying homage to the baby with gifts. They were warned in a dream (a familiar theme in Matthew’s account) not to return to Herod, instead, returning home by another road.

The Narrative Lectionary focuses on Mark’s Gospel and the beginnings of Jesus’ ministry. In Mark 1:21-45, Jesus began by casting out an unclean spirit of a man who was at a synagogue, while everyone was astounded at Jesus’ teachings. From the synagogue, they visited Peter’s home, where Peter’s mother-in-law was sick with a fever. Jesus took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her. Jesus healed many, and cast out demons, to the point he left early one morning to go pray by himself—only to have his disciples find him and tell him that everyone was looking for him. He ministered throughout Galilee, cleansing a leper, who then began to tell everyone about Jesus even though Jesus had warned him not to, and Jesus had stay out in the country while people continued to come to him.

The psalmist begins Psalm 105 by blessing God, who forgives and heals, who saves from death. God who grants steadfast love and mercy also renews us, renewing our lives like eagles who rise on the wind.

The world that the Gospel writers knew was a world dominated by the Roman Empire. Jesus had come to them, preaching the Good News, and had been killed on a Roman cross. The movement hadn’t died, it had spread, moving from within the Jewish community to the Gentiles as well. All of our Gospel accounts were written after the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple during the Jewish uprising of 66-70 C.E. The light had shined in the darkest of times, and the darkness had not overcome it. A movement, a leader that had been killed had not died, but lived, and now, the world knew the Good News. Epiphany, the revealing of Christ to the World, reminds us that our light shines always.

Call to Worship (from Isaiah 60:1-6)

Arise, shine, for your light has come,

**The glory of the Lord has risen upon you.**

Thick darkness covers the earth and the people,

**But the Lord will arise upon you, God’s glory appear over you.**

You shall see and be radiant;

**Your heart shall thrill and rejoice.**

The light of the world has come, and is with us;

**Shine your light, and proclaim the praise of the Lord!**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Creator of the Stars and Sun, creator of all light we know: we confess that at times it is difficult to find light, to trust that hope is alive. When children are separated from their parents in cages; when floodwaters threaten and wildfires wreck havoc and climate change spirals out of control; when a nation is divided and families are divided: come unto us, O Creator God. Be the light in our world. Help us to shine Your light and to become the light the world needs. Breathe into us the breath of hope, speak into us Your truth, that Your love reigns. Life and light have the last word, not death and destruction. Reveal in us Your light, and send us forth to become living hope to the world. In the name of Jesus, the Light of the World, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

Every moment is a new beginning, a fresh start with God. In every moment, grace is present, forgiveness granted, and love revealed. You are forgiven, loved, and restore. Begin this moment afresh now, with God and with one another, and share the Good News. Amen.

Prayer

God of New Beginnings, You are bringing forth something new in our world and in our lives. In this new year, may we commit to being open: open-minded to new ideas; open-hearted to loving one another; open-handed to serving wherever we are needed. Plant in us the seeds that will bloom into new ideas, new insights, and new hope, for the world needs what You are growing in us. Bless us, encourage us, and help us to shine Your light into this world in 2020. Amen.