Worship Resources for January 7th, 2018—Epiphany (January 6th) and Baptism of the Lord (January 7th)

Some churches choose to observe Epiphany this Sunday and Baptism of the Lord the following Sunday; others will stay with Baptism of the Lord for this Sunday.

Revised Common Lectionary

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

Baptism of the Lord Readings: Genesis 1:1-5; Psalm 29; Acts 19:1-7; Mark 1:4-11

Narrative Lectionary: Jesus Says Come and See, John 1:35-51 (Psalm 66:1-5)

Arise, shine, calls the prophet Isaiah, for your light has come! As the people come out of exile, the light has returned, and the glory of God will rise upon them. Nations will be drawn to their light, to see what God has done for them, to see how God has brought them home and restored them. All nation will come to know God because of what God has done for Israel.

The psalmist asks God to bless the king with wisdom and sound judgment in Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14. The psalmist prays for the king to defend the cause of the poor and deliver those in need. The psalmist prays for the blessing of longevity, and for other kings to turn to him, to serve him. This psalm may have been sung at the coronation ceremony, blessing a king who remembers to care for those who are most in need in the kingdom.

In the letter to the Ephesians, the writer (who assumes to be Paul, but scholars are uncertain that Paul was the author) speaks of the revelation of Christ, the great mystery to the world, that Gentiles are now also included as children of God and heirs of God’s reign. This is the work that Paul was called to do, to reveal the mystery of God through Christ to the world, that the wisdom of God may be made known to all, even rulers and kings in heavenly places. All may now directly relate to God through Jesus Christ.

In Matthew’s account of the Nativity, after Jesus was born, wise men, or magi, came from the East, who had observed a star rising that marked the birth of a newborn king. They came to Jerusalem, but King Herod was frightened, hearing that a new king had been born. This was not something expected. So in order to understand these events, the scholars in Jerusalem looked through the scriptures and found passages referring to a Messiah, to a new king. Looking at a passage in Micah, the scholars determine that a new ruler would be born in Bethlehem, the city of David. The magi set out, find the child with Mary inside a house, and they bring the newborn babe gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. The stark contrast with the poor humble beginnings in Luke’s account verses the lavish gifts of the magi, Matthew’s account also contains fear, fear on the part of Herod that a new king will replace him—a fear not found in Luke’s account.

In the selection for the readings for Baptism of the Lord Sunday, we begin with the beginning—when God made the heavens and the earth. A wind from God swept over the waters of the deep (a formless void) and God’s voice calls out “Let there be light!” The first act of God was to separate light from darkness, to create something out of nothing.

The psalmist calls upon the heavenly beings to praise God in Psalm 29. The psalmist speaks of how powerful the voice of God is, for it was the voice of God that called out and began creation. The voice of God is all-powerful, bringing forth creation as well as destruction, calling forth fire and wind, and shaking the face of the ground. God is the one who is over creation, and over all as a king. The psalmist ends this call for praise with a blessing for the people to have strength and peace.

Paul discovers some disciples of John in Acts 19:1-7 that do not know the baptism of the Holy Spirit. John baptized with water to prepare the way for Christ, but some of John’s followers were still waiting for the Messiah (remember, even John became a skeptic after he himself was arrested, as recorded in Matthew 11). Paul reminds them that they were baptized in a baptism of repentance in preparation for Jesus, and then Paul lays hands on them, and they receive the Holy Spirit.

We are in year B of the lectionary, so the readings will follow Mark’s account, beginning with Mark’s account of Jesus’ baptism in 1:4-11. John appeared from the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. John tells the people that the one who is coming after him is more powerful. John baptizes with water, but Jesus will baptize with the Holy Spirit. And then, Jesus came along, John baptized him, and as he arose from the waters, a voice descended like a dove, stating that Jesus was God’s son, the Beloved, and God was well pleased.

The Narrative Lectionary also focuses on Jesus’ Baptism, but from John’s account. In John’s account, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, is among John’s disciples first. He and another hear John declare that Jesus is the Lamb of God. Andrew and the other disciple ask Jesus where he is staying, and when Jesus says, “Come and see,” they follow him and stay with him for a while. Then Andrew goes and tells his brother, Simon Peter, that they have found the Messiah. The next day, Philip follow Jesus, and goes and tells Nathanael, and though Nathanael has doubts, he discovers that Jesus already knows him, and declares that Jesus is the son of God.

The psalmist calls the whole earth to praise God and sing with joy. The psalmist concludes this section with, “Come and see what God has done!” In this call to worship, the worshiper is invited to experience what God has done in creation, and for the people.

Arise, shine! God has done great things. God is revealing the fullness of God’s intentions to the world! God’s plan for salvation is for the whole earth, for all things to be renewed, for all creatures and people to know God’s love. Come and see! Come and see what God is doing, for all of us are called beloved because of the love known in Jesus Christ.

Call to Worship (for Epiphany Sunday)

Arise, shine, for your light has come!

**The glory of God has risen upon you!**

Lift up your hearts and look all around,

**Our hearts rejoice because Christ has done something new!**

God sent the world the Christ-child,

**God’s love has been made known to us through the life of Jesus Christ.**

Come, worship God, who is our Light,

**May we share the Light in all we say and do!**

**May we become God’s light in the world, through Jesus Christ. Amen.**

Call to Worship (for Baptism of the Lord Sunday)

Out of the formless void, God called forth light;

**God is creating something new, now.**

Out of the wilderness, God called forth a new message of hope;

**God is calling us to something new, now.**

Out of the birthwaters, God brought forth life;

**God is bringing us into new life, now.**

Out of death, God gave us eternal life;

**God has sent us Jesus the Christ, so that we may all live.**

Come, worship Christ,

**Who leads us into eternal life.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

God, we confess that we do not live as children of light. We dwell on the hard times and the difficulties around us. Though we will say our hope is in God, we live as if we have no hope. We live as if there is no joy. We live as if we have nothing left to give for others. Call us into Your light. Remind us that the light has come, that it is time to get up. Remind us that others will be drawn to our light, for we have become the light of the world. The light of the world is in us, and we must hold on to it, and we must claim it, not only for ourselves, but for the sake of others. In the name of Christ, who is the light of the world, the light that now shines in all of us. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

From the wise Maz Kanata in Star Wars: The Force Awakens, we hear these words of wisdom: “Close your eyes. Feel it. The light, it’s always been there. It will guide you.” The light of the world is Jesus, and the light of the world shines in us. It can never be taken away. Feel it. Know it. Let it guide you into the ways of love, forgiveness, and peace. Amen.

Prayer

Creator of the stars of night, You have given us light that is internal and eternal through Jesus Christ. Help us to hold on to the light that guides our way. When the ways of the world pull on us to call us to hate, to fear, to dismiss and to distrust, bring us back to Your ways. Help us to know that in You there is no fear, there is no hate, there is a love that surpasses all understanding. Help us to live into that love, and to share that love with one another. May we be transformed by the light of Your love found in Christ Jesus, and help transform the world together. In the name of all that is holy and good, in the light of the world, we pray. Amen.