Worship Resources for November 30th, 2014—First Sunday of Advent

Revised Common Lectionary (year B): Isaiah 64:1-9; Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19; 1 Corinthians 1:3-9; Mark 13:24-37

Narrative Lectionary: Faith as a Way of Life, Habakkuk 1:1-4, 2:1-4, 3:17-19 (Matthew 26:36-38)

Happy New Year! We have begun a new year in the church liturgical calendar, and we begin by preparing for Christ to enter our lives and world in a new way!

The prophet Isaiah was speaking to a people who were returning from exile, who were falling back into their old ways. The prophet longs for God to just tear into this world and break open so that people would know God, because the people keep falling astray and turning away from God. The prophet pleads for God to enter their world as God did for their ancestors, to turn the people back to their God. The prophet uses the image of the potter, and that the people can be made into something new. Though they have failed time and again, God is still their God, and they are still God’s people.

Psalm 80: 1-7, 17-19 uses the refrain “Restore us, O God; Let your face shine, that we might be saved.” The psalmist prays for God’s deliverance, seeing only destruction all around them. Where is their hope, when you cannot see it? The psalmist sings for God to restore the people, to lead them as a shepherd leads their flock, through the darkness and danger into safety; to hear their prayers and that God’s presence will be made known to them.

Paul begins his first letter to the Corinthians with this greeting, stating that God is faithful and God has blessed them with gifts, and they have been strengthened by Christ through the testimony of Christ. They await the revealing of Christ, that is, Christ’s return. They were waiting, as we are now, for Christ to enter our lives in a new way, as they remain in the fellowship of Jesus the Christ.

In Mark 13:24-37, Jesus draws on images from the prophet Joel to describe his coming again. Jesus speaks of watching and waiting for the signs and the times that his return is near, but that no one knows except God. Jesus tells the disciples three times to keep alert and awake in this passage, to be actively looking for signs of his return.

In the Narrative Lectionary, the prophet Habakkuk speaks that while there is violence and destruction all around, there is still hope. “Write the vision,” Habakkuk is told by God. There is still time, make it plain so that all may understand, but there is still time to turn back to God’s ways. There is still time to see God’s faithfulness. Don’t lose hope.

In Matthew 26:26-38, we read of Jesus’ last supper with his disciples, his betrayal, and his prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus knows what will happen and calls upon his disciples to do this one act to remember him. But even Jesus struggles with what is to come. Even Jesus wishes it did not have to happen this way. But we know the whole story, and we know that hope still prevails.

We do not know exactly what the Second Coming will look like, we just have these images drawn upon by the past. But what we do know is this: God is entering our world and our lives in a new way, and we are called upon to be actively looking for these signs and to be ready for the reign of God to come. We are called to proclaim that God is present among us, and that God’s presence will be made known to us in a new way, just as it was long ago in a stable in Bethlehem.

Call to Worship *(can be sung or spoken)*

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

 **Come, thou long-expected Jesus, born to set your people free!**

O Come, Thou Dayspring, come and cheer

 **Dear Desire of every nation, Joy of every longing heart!**

O Come, Thou Wisdom from on high

 **O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray!**

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

 **O come to us, abide with us, O Lord, Emmanuel!**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Almighty God, we come to You and confess that we are tired, we are burned out, we are busy and worn and frazzled. We have too much to do and too little time to do it. How can we find time to be on the lookout for Your coming reign? How can we be prepared for You? Help us to hand over our burdens, O God. Help us to give over to You our worries and cares and to slow down and remember that You are our God. You are our Creator. You are the one who saves us, time and again, and You are entering our world in a new way, if only we would take the time to perceive it and participate. Forgive us when we put our ways of the world ahead of Your ways that You have designed for us and desire us to live. In the name of the Christ, who is coming, we pray all things. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon (from Isaiah 43:19)

Behold! God is about to do a new thing, now it springs forth! Do you not see it? Do you not know that God is already with you, all around you, and loves you? God is about to do something new in you. Know that you are forgiven and loved, and be present with God, who is already present with you. Amen.

Prayer

Ancient of Days, from ancient times You have entered our world in a new way, revealing Yourself as our Creator through new understandings of our created universe. Our relationship with You has changed and grown and deepened, as our understanding of ourselves as a people and as individuals has also transformed. We call upon You to be revealed in a new way, to open Yourself to us in a new way, so that we can tear back the veils that separate us from knowing You more fully. We wait for You to come and bring justice, and mercy, and peace to our world that desperately needs it. We wait in hope for You to come again. In Your name we pray. Amen.