Worship Resources for December 21st, 2014—Fourth Sunday of Advent

Revised Common Lectionary: 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16; Luke 1:46b-55 or Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26; Romans 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38

Narrative Lectionary: Jesus as Immanuel, Matthew 1:18-25 (Psalm 23:1-4)

The Prophet Nathan brought the word to King David, who desired to build a new, permanent place to worship God, a place where it would be known God dwelled with the people. But the prophet tells David that God does not need a house, but is at home with the people, and that David’s throne shall be established forever. As we know, David’s son Solomon did build an earthly temple, but God has always dwelled among the people, and the people have their home in God, and that shall never end.

We hear Mary’s Song, which was also an alternative reading last week, a song that echoes Hannah in 1 Samuel 2, a song that sings of God’s justice. What God is doing through Mary is for all the people, what God has promised to Abraham and his descendants forever. Mary’s song of praise is not for the faint of heart: to hear the good news of the hungry filled with good things is good news indeed, but for the rich to be sent away empty—that doesn’t sound so great. Nor does it sound good for the powerful who are brought down from their thrones. In all of this, we remember that what God does is for all the people, for the best of the people, and that does not always mean it seems to be the best for ourselves individually. God’s justice is restorative. God is about to do a new thing, and it is indeed good news, even if it doesn’t always sound that way.

Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26 sings of God’s faithfulness through his covenant with David. Through that covenant, God declares faithfulness to all people. As Christians we hear echoes of this through Jesus. Because God made a covenant with one, God makes a covenant with all. God is faithful, protective of the people, and steadfast. God’s steadfast love endures forever.

Romans 16:25-27 contains Paul’s benediction to the Romans, proclaiming that Jesus the Christ has been revealed to all people, a mystery that has now been opened through the prophetic writings, and now to the Gentiles: the good news of Jesus Christ is good news for the world!

The angel Gabriel’s visit to Mary is told in Luke 1:26-38. Unlike Gabriel’s prior visit to Zechariah, Mary’s response, after asking how this could be since she was not married, was “Let it be with me.” Mary gives her consent to God to do a new thing. Gabriel brings Good News, but it won’t necessarily be good news for her. Mary, being unmarried, would most likely have been subject to scorn and shame, but the Good News of God’s Love was being revealed to the world by her saying yes to God. “For nothing is impossible with God” the angel tells her, and so we believe today. Nothing is impossible with God.

The Narrative Lectionary focuses on Matthew’s account of Jesus’ birth, with the announcement coming to Joseph in a dream, telling Joseph not to worry about the child to be. The child is to be named Jesus, and will be called Emmanuel, God Is With Us. Whereas Luke’s account with Mary hearing the words from the angel is astonishment and wonder, the account in Matthew is of fear and misunderstanding until the angel speaks in a dream.

Psalm 23:1-4 is the familiar beginning to the Shepherd’s Psalm, and we are reminded that God is our shepherd, and God is the one who is with us, even into the darkest valleys. God is the one who leads us and restores us.

Emmanuel, God With Us, God is among us now. We are almost to Christmas, almost to the birth of Christ, but we know Christ has come and is among us now, and Christ will come again in a new way. Are we ready for the love that God is about to unfold in our lives? It began long, long ago, and continues to unfold in new ways today.

Call to Worship (the response may be spoken or sung)

The time is drawing near;

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

The preparations are complete;

 **Cast out our sin and enter in; be born in us today.**

We are waiting for God to do a new thing;

 **We hear the Christmas angels, the great glad tidings tell.**

Christ is entering our lives in a new way;

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

 **Come, O Jesus, Come! Amen and Amen!**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

God, we often live as if You are not with us, not even near us, but distant and far away. We forget that You dwell in each of us, among us, and surround us. We forget that You came into our world and our lives as one of us, and You know the great joys and the struggles we face, the challenges and the desires, the fears and the hopes. May we remember anew that You have come to us, vulnerable as any of us to the world, to set us free from sin and death, to lead us into new life, eternal life. In the name of Christ, who has come, who is among us, and who will come again, we pray all things. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

Love has broken into a world of despair. Light has broken into a world of darkness. Life has broken into a world of death. There is no place where love, where light, where life, cannot be found, for Christ makes all things new. Know that You are deeply loved, and Christ gives you the gift of new life, eternal life now. Go in peace, with hope, joy, and love. Amen.

Prayer

Ancient of Days, from the beginning You have set out to do a new thing. You created light, and there was light, and light is good. You created life, and there was life, and life is good. You restored the world after a great flood. You brought a family into hope for a new life far away from home. You brought a people out of slavery into freedom, a nation out of exile to return home. You brought forth Yourself as a helpless, vulnerable baby. You gave Yourself up for us, Your very last breath, and You gave us the promise of new life and the hope of resurrection. And You have given us the promise that all things will once again be made new, a new heaven and a new earth. Until that day, we continue to actively participate in Your reign, watching and waiting for the newness to unfold around us. May we experience You in a new way this Christmas. May Your love unfold in us in ways unimaginable. In the name of Jesus, the One Who Saves, we pray all things. Amen.