Worship Resources for December 24, 2017—Fourth Sunday of Advent, Christmas Eve

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: Word Made Flesh, John 1:1-18 (Psalm 130:5-8). Evening: Birth of Jesus, Luke 2:1-20 (Psalm 96:7-10)

Please see my Advent/Christmas resources for ideas of what to do on Christmas Eve, from unrehearsed pageants to dramatic sermons to Lessons and Carols.

King David wanted to do something great for God, to build a temple grander than his own palace, and the prophet Nathan told David to do what he planned. However, God spoke through Nathan that this is what David desires, but what God will do is to establish the reign of David’s kingdom forever. In this kingdom there will be rest from enemies and war, for God already dwells among the people.

Luke 1:46b-55 was a lectionary selection last week as well. Mary’s Magnificat is her song of praise to God, for what God will do. Echoing Hannah’s Song in 1 Samuel 2, Mary sings of what God will do for the people, lifting up the lowly, bringing down the powerful, filling the hungry with good things and sending the rich away empty. God’s justice is restorative, and for those who have had their spoils, for those who have lived lives of luxury, God’s justice will seem like hardship, but for those who have been without, they will have their needs met, for God is holy, and God has remembered the covenant made with Abraham and Sarah and their descendants.

Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26 sings of God’s steadfast love and promises, especially of the covenant with David, that the reign of David’s throne will endure forever. The psalmist sings of David being God’s chosen one, and through God’s voice, proclaims that God’s strength will always be with David. God will keep David’s enemies away, and David will know God is the source of his salvation.

Romans 16:25-27 is the conclusion of Paul’s letter to the Romans. In Pauls’ benediction, he states that the mystery of the ages has now been revealed, and now made known to all people, especially the Gentiles, because of the proclamation of Jesus Christ as Lord.

The angel visits Mary in Luke 1:26-38. Mary wonders what sort of greeting she has received, because angels don’t always bring good news—they are simply messengers of God. And being called “favored one” usually means something great is being asked of the one favored. This time is no different, but the angel tells her, “Don’t be afraid.” And after explaining what is going to happen to her, Mary’s response is, “Let it be with me, according to your word.” Mary accepts what God desires of her. Mary gives her consent, and in her, “Let it be,” transforms not only her life, but all of humankind.

The Narrative Lectionary focuses on the beginning of John’s gospel account, which places Jesus as Logos (the Word), present at the beginning with God, and who has now come into being. In the Word is life, the light of all the people, a light that shines in the darkness. John was sent by God to testify to the light, and to help the light come into the world. John’s eloquent prologue declares that the Word, Logos, became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory full of grace and truth.

The psalmist sings of thirsting for God in Psalm 130:5-8, and how their soul waits for God more than those who are waiting for dawn. God is faithful, and will redeem the people, for with God there is steadfast love.

Luke 2:1-20 is Luke’s account of Jesus’ nativity. The setting for Luke’s account is a census conducted by Emperor Augustus, and Mary and Joseph had to travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem, right when she was due to give birth, and finding no room in the inn. The story of Jesus’ birth happens unexpectedly in an unexpected place and time. Despite our tendency as Christians to look back through the Hebrew Scriptures for signs that point to the Messiah’s birth, the people in Jesus’ day, least of all his parents, were not expecting Jesus to be born outside of their hometown, even outside of a room to stay. The shepherds in the fields were not expecting to behold the vision of the heavenly host, and Mary was not expecting strangers to come by to see the newborn child. It all happened unexpectedly, but has become our story that we wait for expectantly year after year.

Psalm 96:7-10 call the people to worship God and have awe at God’s name. The psalmist calls the people to acknowledge God as king and judge of all the nations. God is just, and God will judge with equity.

The nativity is an unexpected event. No matter how much one prepares for the birth of a child, one cannot predict what will happen or when exactly the baby will come. Mary and Joseph knew that the child they would have was holy, but they did not expect strangers to come in the middle of the night to see the newborn king. Every year, we come to this day knowing what will happen, and yet we wait for Christ to enter our world and lives again in an unexpected way, at an unexpected hour.

Call to Worship

Unexpectedly, the time came! The child was born!

**The Savior of the world is here!**

Unexpectedly, the angels told the shepherds of the newborn Savior;

**The Savior of the world is here!**

Unexpectedly, the shepherds went and found the child, lying in a manger.

**The Savior of the world is here!**

We wait for Christ to come again. We wait for Christ to enter our world and lives in a new way.

**Come, Lord Jesus, Come!**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Almighty God, we confess that we rush and hurry about. We wait impatiently for what will happen next, and to move forward, because that’s the only way we know. We confess that we do not understand the vastness of the universe You created, and our concept of time is limited to counting our days and lamenting what is lost, while at the same time rushing to meet our future. Help us to use our time wisely. Help us to savor our moments in which we touch Your holiness in our lives. Open our minds to understanding that Your ways are not our ways. In the name of Christ, who came into our world, and is coming again now into our lives in a new way, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

God’s steadfast love endures forever. God’s love is eternal. Though our time is short, love will see us through, and love will see us beyond death into eternal life. Live with gratitude, love as if your love will never end, and work for peace and justice. Go, live, forgive, and love. Amen.

Prayer

O come to us, abide with us, our Lord, Emmanuel! God with us, You came to us long ago as a helpless babe, as one in need of human love and care. You taught us how to love and care for one another. Help us to hold on to childlike wonder, amazement, and love, and help us to love one another all year long. Guide our feet into the way of peace, as only the Prince of Peace can lead us, by laying down our lives for one another and serving one another. In the name of Christ, Emmanuel, God with Us, we pray. Amen.