Worship Resources for December 24th and 25th, 2016—Christmas Eve and Christmas Day

Revised Common Lectionary: Isaiah 9:2-7 or 52:7-10 or 62:6-12; Psalm 96, 97 or 98; Titus 2:11-14 or 3:4-7 or Hebrews 1:1-12; Luke 2:1-20 (2:1-7, 2:1-14 or the whole) or John 1:1-14

Narrative Lectionary: Birth of Jesus, the Shepherd’s Visit, Luke 2:1-20 (2:1-14, 2:8-20, or the whole) (Psalm 96 or 96:3, or Psalm 123:1-2 or 123:2)

There are several choices for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, and a variety of ways of splitting up the Gospel text for the day.

The first selection from Isaiah takes place before the northern exile. Hope is found in the birth of a newborn king. God is shining the way for the people who live in darkness, for God will free the people of tyranny. The vivid images of battle—the boots from soldiers, the blood-soaked clothes—will be burned. Instead, this newborn babe will be the one to establish peace from the throne of David.

The second selection from Isaiah takes place during the return from the exile to Babylon. Isaiah proclaims that the messenger from God has brought good news of peace and salvation, and calls the people to listen, to break forth into song and to praise God. All nations shall know God’s salvation because of what God has done for the people coming out of exile.

The third selection from Isaiah is during the aftermath of the return from exile. God promises the people that what they have will not be taken from them, will not be given to their enemies again. God is preparing the way for the people to salvation. God proclaims that the people will be known as The Holy People, Redeemed of the Lord, and they will not be forgotten again.

Psalm 96 calls the congregation to sing their praises to God, who created the earth and heavens. Other gods are only idols, for there is only one God. The psalmist calls the congregation into worship, to give God all the glory and honor and praise that God is worthy of. The psalmist calls the people to enter the temple and bring their offering. The psalmist concludes by reminding the congregation that all of creation worships God, and that God is coming to judge with righteousness and equity.

God’s power and might are shown through creation in Psalm 97. The whole earth trembles before God the king. Those who worship idols are put to shame, because God is above all other gods, and the people of Israel rejoice because they worship God. The psalmist concludes by calling the righteous to rejoice, for God is with them.

Psalm 98 calls for the people and all of creation to sing praise to God, through musical instruments and through the sound of nature. The people have experienced a victory against their enemies, and the occasion calls for the people to praise God, who is the judge of the world. The psalmist claims the victory as assurance of God’s approval and greatness.

The writer of Titus speaks of the grace of God appearing to us as Christ in 2:11-14, and that we are waiting for Christ to return, to make God’s glory manifest. In this time as we continue to wait, we live our lives according to God’s ways, knowing that Christ will return.

Titus continues in 3:4-7 with proclaiming that the Holy Spirit was poured out through Jesus Christ, and that through our baptism, we know the saving grace of God. Through Christ, we are heirs to the promise and have the hope of eternal life.

The introduction to the letter to the Hebrews in 1:1-12 sets the stage for Christ’s role in the history of the people and their relationship with God, who spoke through the prophets and now speaks through the Son. The writer centers Christ as the pinpoint of prophecy and revelation, that God has revealed through Christ God’s intentions for humanity. Christ is above all angels and heavenly beings, and God has spoken to us through him.

Luke 2:1-20 contains Luke’s account of Jesus’ birth narrative, the census taken by Emperor Augustus, the journey to Bethlehem by Joseph and Mary, the laying of Jesus in a manger because there was no room in the inn. It is unexpected and wondrous. The shepherds are the first to receive the message from the angels and come to see what has taken place—not the emperor, not the king, not the powerful or rich—but the poor shepherds working the night shift with the smelly sheep. And Mary treasures all of their words and ponders them in her heart.

The introduction to the gospel according to John in 1:1-14 identifies Jesus as the Word that was present since the beginning, and the Word is Life, and the Light that shines in the darkness. The Word became flesh and lived among us, and through Christ we have seen the glory of God. John came to testify, to witness to Christ, but Christ is the true light for everyone, and through Christ, we are known as children of God.

Advent has come to a close in the calendar, but our time of waiting is not over. But for one moment, for one night and day, we have seen the glory of God, the power to transform the world forever. We have seen the promise of God manifest in a newborn babe. The world has changed, and will never be the same. For one moment, we know that our waiting is not in vain, that God loves the world and gave us his only Son, Jesus, and we celebrate, we share in God’s love, and we look to the world with hope.

Call to Worship (from Luke 1:78-79)

By the tender mercy of our God,

 **The dawn from on high will break upon us,**

To give light to those who sit in darkness

and in the shadow of death,

 **To guide our feet into the way of peace.**

Come, for the time has drawn near;

 **Come, let us welcome the Christ-child**

 **into our hearts anew!**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession:

Almighty God, we confess that Jesus is Lord. We confess that Your love has come into the world, incarnate in the person of Jesus the Christ, and that You have been revealed to us through His love, grace, and truth. We confess that through Christ we have the promise of eternal life, the hope of salvation, and the forgiveness of our sins. We confess that through Christ we are challenged to love our neighbors as if they were ourselves, we are encouraged to seek reconciliation and wholeness, and we are empowered to work for Your justice. We confess that You are the One in whom we live and move and have our being. We confess that You are the Love that saves the world. In the name of Emmanuel, God With Us, Jesus the Christ, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

What has come into being through Christ is life, and the life is the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness does not overcome it. The light now lives in each of us. Go, share the Light of the World, for the Light of the World is Christ the Lord. Amen.

Prayer

For Unto Us has been born a Savior, Christ the Lord. For Unto Us we have the promise of new life in Christ. For Unto Us we have the hope of salvation and the promise of new life. For Unto Us we are challenged to live and grow in new ways, to seek justice and to become peacemakers in the path of the Prince of Peace. For Unto Us a child has been born, a Son given to us, and authority rests on his shoulders. For Unto Us we follow the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace, Jesus the Christ, and we look to the world and to our future with hope. Amen.