Worship Resources for December 28th, 2014—First Sunday of Christmas

Revised Common Lectionary: Isaiah 61:10-62:3; Psalm 148; Galatians 4:4-7; Luke 2:22-40

Narrative Lectionary: Magi’s Visit, Matthew 2:1-12 (Psalm 96:10-13)

The prophet Isaiah declares to a people returning from exile and rebuilding in the aftermath of destruction that God is with them, that the people have risen out of the ashes because God has raised them up, and that nations will see the glory of God because of Israel’s renewal and salvation, and she will be given a new name by God. God’s faithfulness will be made known because of their faithfulness in returning and rebuilding.

Psalm 148 sings praise to God and calls upon all of creation to praise God, all the earth and heavens, all the angels, all creatures and all peoples—the powerful and the powerless, the old and the young—all people of all walks of life are called to praise God the Creator!

Galatians 4:4-7 are just four short verses of Paul’s letter, but tell that because Jesus came to us, fully divine and fully human, all of us are God’s children. All people can claim God as their parent because God came as any one of us, a vulnerable baby born to set us all free, a child who calls God Abba, Father, Parent—and so we all can claim God as our parent, and we are God’s children.

Luke 2:22-40 contains the story of Jesus’ dedication in the temple and the visit of Simeon and the prophet Anna. Simeon blesses the family, but also warns Mary that a sword will pierce her soul, foreshadowing her son’s death. Through this visit to the temple, Mary and Joseph fulfill the tradition and promises of their people by dedicating Jesus and offering a sacrifice for him, but they also receive blessings, and Anna begins to proclaim God’s redemption to all who will hear.

The Narrative Lectionary focuses on the visit of the Magi, who are strangers who come to Jerusalem to ask where has been born the king of the Jews—and Herod, the king of Israel as appointed by Rome, has no idea what they are talking about. They are outsiders who bring the news of a new reign that has come—but Herod and others believe this is a worldly reign, and do not understand what this means. The news is met with fear and deception on the part of Herod. The magi return home by another way when they are warned in a dream (as Joseph was spoken to in a dream and later will be warned as well) not to return to Herod.

Psalm 96:10-13 sings praises to God who is king, who is the Creator, who reigns over the earth and will judge all. Above all earthly kings, God is the one who is the ultimate judge and in whom we rejoice.

Our faith in Jesus is a faith that as human beings, we are worthy of God’s love. As human beings, we are children of God. Because God became human, so we can know the love of God and know we belong to God. Jesus bridges the gap between God and humanity, between death and life. Though Jesus is fully human, he is also fully divine, ushering in a reign in which the division between heaven and earth is no more.

Call to Worship

The light of revelation has come;

 **The light of the world is Jesus.**

The light of hope has come;

 **The light of the world is Jesus.**

The light of truth has come;

 **The light of the world is Jesus.**

Arise, shine, for your light has come.

 **The light of the world is Jesus.**

 **The light of the world is in us.**

 **Come, let us worship and share the light. Amen**.

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

God of our Ancestors, God of our Children, we confess that we still do not see our neighbor as our kin; we do not see the people of the world as Your children. We ignore our neighbors in need, we cut ties with those whom we disagree with and disfellowship those who are different from us. Forgive us for not acting as Your children. Forgive us when we feel entitled over others and when we forget who our siblings are, that each one of us is important, beloved to You as Your child. In the name of Jesus, our Brother, our Redeemer, and our Savior, we pray all things. Amen.

Blessings/Assurance of Pardon

God cannot forget you. You are not lost, you are not forgotten. Though the world may have neglected you, God loves you madly. Know that your sins are forgiven, and you will find restoration and reconciliation in Christ. Live into the Good News. Amen.

Prayer

Holy One, we come to You as the new year is approaching. We look back upon our past with both fondness and regret, and look forward to the future with both hope and uncertainty. Help us to know You are lighting the way forward. Help us to reach out confident that Your faithfulness endures forever, and we are not alone. May we look for ways of drawing more closely to You in this coming year, knowing that You are always drawing close to us. In the name of Christ, who makes all things new, we pray. Amen.