Worship Resources for December 29th, 2013—First Sunday of Christmas

Revised Common Lectionary: Isaiah 63:7-9; Psalm 148; Matthew 2:13-23; Hebrews 2:10-18

The prophet Isaiah looks back with hope on how God has delivered the people in the past and has been faithful to the covenant. While the people are returning from exile and looking to the rebuilding of Jerusalem, they face incredible challenges. What saves the people is God’s presence among them. God is with them—God is not sending an angel to them, but is coming to be with them, to be their Savior. As God was present with them in the Exodus, so God will again be present with them.

Psalm 148 praises the God of creation whose purpose is to create. God orders creation and the psalmist sings, ordering the worship of creation towards God: the earth and sea, the wind and rain, all living creatures, people and kings—all are created to worship God.

Matthew 2:13-23 is a bit out of order for those of us who will read 2:1-12 for Epiphany Sunday after this, but this is part of the story we often skip over: going to Egypt to escape Herod. Referencing the story of Joseph going to Egypt, and later Moses’ own story of surviving the infanticide of Pharaoh, Joseph of Genesis is linked to Joseph, Mary’s husband, and Moses is linked to Jesus. The writer of Matthew’s Gospel was writing to a Jewish audience and uses verses throughout the Hebrew Scriptures to point the way to Jesus, often saying, “This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet.” Matthew sees Jesus as the fulfillment of God’s covenant and promises through the prophets, and finds passages to fit; however, while Matthew has read the Scriptures, he does not always understand them. A Nazorean probably refers to being a Nazarite in the Hebrew Scriptures, one set aside, who did not drink alcohol or cut their hair (like Samson in the book of Judges), rather than actually from the town of Nazareth, but we do know that Jesus was known to be from Nazareth. What we know is this: it was important for the audience of Matthew’s Gospel to know that Jesus was a fulfillment of the promises of God to the people, who were waiting for someone to save them. It was important to hear Jesus had been through the same story of their people, that Jesus really was Emmanuel, God with Us, that Jesus had experienced the same drama of fear and hope that they knew, that was the story written in their blood.

Hebrews 2:10-18 proclaims why Jesus had to become like us: so that we might be free from suffering and death. Jesus takes on our suffering, and calls us brothers and sisters. Jesus came to be one of us, to live our lives, so that we might have the hope of resurrection, the promise of eternal life, and that we can overcome our fear of suffering and death. We believe and follow a God who knows us through and through, and offers us the gift of forgiveness from sins and the promise of new life.

Jesus lives out our story. Jesus has been written into our stories so that we see ourselves in him, and that we can see God working in us. We are broken, in need of forgiveness, in need of healing: Jesus came to bring wholeness, forgiveness and healing through living our life, through teaching us how to love, and by conquering death on the cross. Death no longer has power over us, but we are raised with Christ to the promise of resurrection and eternal life.

Call to Worship:

Christmas Day has come and gone, New Year’s Day is upon us.

 **The Word has become Flesh and lived among us.**

But the world does not notice, and we have turned away from Christmas,

 **Our Messiah has been born, Emmanuel, God With Us.**

Turn away from the pace of the world, and tune your hearts to Christ,

 **Who humbled himself, and became obedient, even to the cross.**

God has exalted him, and has given him the name that is above every name:

 **Jesus Christ our Lord. Let us worship our Savior!**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Loving God, we confess that we deceive ourselves. We ignore the sufferings of others, and at times we even deny our own suffering. We brush over the pain of others, and at times hide our own pain. Forgive us, and show us how to love ourselves and to love others, knowing that You also have lived into our own story, our own fear and pain, and have triumphed on the cross, defeating death forever. In the name of Jesus, who was born, who lived, who died and was resurrected for us, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

Jesus calls us brothers and sisters. We are kin to Jesus. We cannot be rejected, we cannot be forgotten, for we are loved. We are children of God. We are forgiven. Amen.

Prayer

Holy God, in this Christmastide, we proclaim the gift of Your Son Jesus to the world. Emmanuel, God with Us. God who knows us, who knows our lives, who knows our joys and sorrows and our burdens, our suffering and pain and fear; God who knows life and death and resurrection, we proclaim You our Savior. Holy is Your name. You lead us into life, through death and into the hope of resurrection. Help us to follow You, letting go of our fear, our guilt and shame, and taking on the power of Your love and forgiveness. May we go and share the Good News with the world. Amen.