Worship Resources for December 3rd, 2017—First Sunday of Advent

Revised Common Lectionary: Isaiah 64:1-9; Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19; 1 Corinthians 1:3-9; Mark 13:24-37

Narrative Lectionary: Daniel, the Fiery Furnace, 3:1-30 (John 18:36-37)

Happy New Year! We begin the first Sunday in the new liturgical year, the first Sunday of Advent, with these words from the prophet Isaiah, 64:1-9. The people have returned from exile, but the people have returned to their old ways and are turning away from God. The prophet cries out, wishing that God would just come down and fix everything now. In the ancient view of the world, the heavens were separated from the earth by a dome (the firmament). Isaiah calls upon God to tear open the barrier, to rend the heavens and come forth. The prophet pleads for God to come and put things right, for nations to tremble, and for God to forgive the people.

The psalmist calls upon God in Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19 to restore the people, who are suffering. The psalmist cries out to God, because the people are oppressed, living in grief and perpetual mourning for the suffering they have endured. Save us, the psalmist pleads, so that the people will be saved and have life.

Paul begins this letter to the church in Corinth by giving thanks for the testimony of Christ that has become known among them. This church in particular has experienced much conflict and division, especially over spiritual gifts. However, in this introduction, Paul begins by giving thanks for the testimony of Christ and encourages them that God will strengthen them through any spiritual gift God has given them. Paul also reminds them that they have been called into fellowship through Jesus Christ, the Son of God—not any other.

As Jesus neared the end of his life, he began to speak of the Day of the Lord in Mark 13:24-37. Jesus begins by quoting from the prophet Joel about the sun being darkened and the moon turned to blood. Jesus uses the metaphors of harvest—we know the signs when it is time for harvest, so we also know the signs for Christ’s return into our world and into our lives in a new way. Jesus tells the disciples to keep awake, for we know not the day or the hour. As a master goes away, leaving servants in charge, so we must be ready for the master to return.

The Narrative Lectionary focuses on the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. A story told of the days in exile, King Nebuchadnezzar has erected a tall golden statue and ordered that everyone bow down and worship the statue. Of course, the three Jewish men that Nebuchadnezzar had appointed in his government refused to bow down, and they were thrown into the fiery furnace as punishment. They not only survive, but Nebuchadnezzar sees a fourth man among the flames. Nebuchadnezzar calls them out of the fire, recognizing they serve the God Most High, and he praises the three Jewish men for their obedience to their God and for God’s deliverance.

In John 18:36-37, Jesus, brought before Pilate, declares that his kingdom is not of this world. When Pilate asks him if he is a king, however, Jesus says, “you say that I am a king.” Jesus came into this world to testify to the other realm, the reign of God, that is not made by human beings, that does not conform to the rules we have put in place.

Advent is the season of watching and waiting for Christ’s return. It is not passive, but actively waiting, and watching for signs that Christ is returning in our world and in our lives in a new way. As we prepare for Christmas, and it can seem that we do the same thing year after year, we are putting into practice by remembering how Christ came into our world in an unexpected way—as a newborn child. So Christ will come again in an unexpected way, but we must be ready.

Call to Worship

God spoke through the prophet Isaiah,

 **“Comfort, O comfort, my people.”**

A voice cries out,

 **“Prepare the way of the Lord!”**

Every valley will be lifted up, every mountain brought low,

 **And the glory of the Lord will be revealed.**

All people shall witness this together,

 **For the mouth of God has spoken.**

Come, O Come, Emmanuel;

 **We wait for You to enter our world and our lives in a new way.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

We confess to You, O God, that we have fallen asleep. We often go through the motions and live our daily lives without much thought outside of ourselves. Forgive us for our short-sightedness. Forgive us for not being awake to the wonders and signs that You are doing something new in our world, and in our lives. Help us to seek You in the face of others. Call us into You ways of love and justice, so that we might be fully awake, watching and waiting for Your return in our world and in our lives in a new way. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

O Holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us we pray. Cast out our sin and enter in, be born in us today. As we wait for Christmas, we know that Christ has already come into our world and lives, has already been born in us. We are renewed and restored. Go and share the good news of God’s love and restoration. Amen.

Prayer

O that You would come now, O God! O that we might see the day when the barrier between heaven and earth is torn open, when death and mourning and suffering are no more. O that we might be reconciled to one another and to You, instead of suffering from our own sins of selfishness and greed. O that we might awaken, open our minds to understanding You are already at work in our world and lives in a new way. O that we might participate in the work You called us to do, through the prophets long ago: to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with You. O that we might tear down our own walls, our own barriers between us, so that we might live into Your reign on earth as it is in heaven. We pray that we might be open to what You are already doing in our lives. In the name of Christ, who is coming again in a new way, we pray. Amen.