Worship Resources for December 30, 2018—First Sunday after Christmas

Revised Common Lectionary: 1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26; Psalm 148; Colossians 3:12-17; Luke 2:41-52

Narrative Lectionary: Shepherd’s Visit, Luke 2:8-20 (Psalm 95:6-7)

The young prophet Samuel was given over to the priest Eli, to be raised in the temple when he was weaned, as he had been promised to God. But once a year, his mother Hannah and his father Elkanah would make the pilgrimage to the temple to make the yearly sacrifice, and Hannah would bring a new little robe that she made for him. The priest Eli would ask for God’s blessings upon the family and for the gift of their son to God. The boy Samuel grew up in the temple with the favor of the people and of God.

The psalmist calls upon heaven and the heavenly beings to praise God in Psalm 148. In this cosmic call to worship, the psalmist calls upon everything above the earth (as they understood the world made in Genesis 1, with the dome of water above the earth); everything below the seas including the great sea creatures; and all of creation. The psalmist calls upon the rulers of the earth, all peoples of all ages to praise God, for God is the God of the people, the faithful, the people of Israel, who are close to God.

The passage from Colossians is about the Christian life. In 3:12-17, the writer speaks of clothing one’s self with humility and kindness, forgiving those whom one may have a complaint against, and above all, to clothe one’s self with love. The writer speaks of the peace of Christ ruling in one’s heart, being thankful, and letting the word of Christ dwell inside. The writer advises to teach in wisdom, and sing with gratitude to God, doing all things in the name of God.

The only passage in our canonical Gospels that speaks of Jesus’ childhood, in Luke 2:41-52, the boy Jesus has traveled with his family to Jerusalem for the Passover celebration. However, on the way home, his parents discover he isn’t with them. It takes them three days to find Jesus, who remained in the temple. He was sitting with the teachers, listening to them, and asking questions. Those in the temple were amazed at his understanding and his answers to their questions. When his parents find him, they are astonished, and Mary says, “don’t you know that your father and I were so worried about you?” Jesus responds, “Why were you looking for me? Didn’t you know I’d be in my Father’s house?” The scriptures tell us that Mary and Joseph didn’t understand what he was saying, but nevertheless, he obeyed his parents and returned home with them. And for the second time in this chapter (the first being after the arrival of the shepherds in vs. 19), Mary treasurers all these things in her heart. Even though she doesn’t understand fully, she understands enough of God’s mystery to wonder, and to treasure this time.

The Narrative Lectionary focuses on the Shepherd’s Visit in Luke 2:8-20. The shepherds were out in their fields, making sure no one stole any sheep and keeping them safe from predators that came in the middle of the night. These were the low-wage earners on the night shift, when suddenly, the messenger of God appears. They were afraid, but the angel tells them to not be afraid, for the angel has good news of great joy! And with the angel were the heavenly host—the army of God. These were not the cherubs of renaissance art, but the warriors of God, scary heavenly creatures. And they deliver the message, “Peace on earth, and goodwill to all.” Once again, as with the story of Noah in the re-creation of the world, God is not going to make war with the earth, but God has brought a new peace: this time, in the birth of the Christ-child.

The psalmist calls the people to bow down and worship God, who is our maker, in Psalm 95:6-7. The psalmist uses the image of the people as the sheep of God’s hand, the people of God’s pasture—the ones whom God leads and dwells with in safety.

Jesus was both fully human and fully divine. In the fullness of humanity, as a child he questioned, he sought answers, and he didn’t always remember to tell his parents where he was or what he was up to. In the same manner, his parents didn’t remember where he came from, that he didn’t only belong to them, but to God. We don’t always remember that we belong to God. We don’t always remember where we have come from. But God continues to unveil the mystery to us—speaking to us by angels in the night, or by songs of joy and praise, and by this life we have been given, to live in the fullness of God’s love.

Call to Worship (from Psalm 148:1-5)

Praise the Lord!

 **Praise the Lord from the heavens; praise the Lord in the heights!**

Praise God, all the angels!

 **Praise the Lord, all the heavenly host!**

Praise God, sun and moon!

 **Praise the Lord, all you shining stars!**

Praise God, from the highest heavens!

 **Let all things praise the Lord; for God commanded, and all were created.**

 **Praise the Lord!**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Holy One, we confess that often we miss the miracles happening around us. We forget to ponder, and wonder in our hearts at the mystery of Your love for us. The joy that might be found is often quickly swept under the rug as the memories of the holidays fade. Help us to remember that You are with us, now and always. Help us to live with the spirit of wonder, awe, and praise in our hearts all year long. In the name of Christ, who came into this world in an unexpected, yet wonderful way, we pray, knowing Christ will come again. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

In the newness of this day, this week, this coming year: may we know God’s abundant love for us. May we turn back to God’s ways, forgiving one another and loving one another, and may we know that God is making all things new again. Go with joy into this new year, knowing that in Christ there is always new life. Amen.

Prayer

God of All Seasons, we give You thanks for the memories of this past year. We cannot go back and relive the good or the bad, but we can live in the now. Help us to know that You are present with us, right now. Your love is with us, right now. No matter what suffering we have endured, no matter what pain we are going through, no matter what worries we have for the road ahead, You are present with us, right now. May we live with the wonder and awe of this gift in this moment. May we look forward with hope, peace, joy, and love, into this New Year, knowing that in You, this moment is eternal. Amen.