Worship Resources for December 4, 2016—Second Sunday of Advent

Revised Common Lectionary: Isaiah 11:1-10; Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19; Romans 15:4-13; Matthew 3:1-12

Narrative Lectionary: Joel, God’s Promised Spirit, Joel 2:12-13, 28-29 (Luke 11:13)

The prophet Isaiah finds hope in a future king, one who will rise from the family of David, and rule in a similar manner. The people will once again be led by someone who seeks wisdom, who judges with equity. His reign will bring peace, and the prophet speaks of peace even among natural enemies in the world. Other nations will be in awe and will come to him, and all will be full of the knowledge of God.

In Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19, the psalmist sings a blessing for a new king’s coronation. The psalmist prays that the new king will be full of wisdom, that he will judge with righteousness, and that is reign will be long and full of peace and prosperity. The psalmist blesses God, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things.

Paul declares that all the scriptures written before, in the former days, was to encourage and give hope in Romans 15:4-13. Paul calls upon the people of the church in Rome to welcome one another as Christ has welcomed us. Paul interprets the prophets hope of a future king from the root of Jesse as also hope for the Gentiles, through Jesus Christ.

Matthew 3:1-12 is the call of John the Baptist out of the wilderness, a call for repentance for the kingdom of heaven has drawn near. The people heard John’s message and came to the Jordan to be baptized by him, but he warned the religious leaders that gathered near him that they couldn’t rely on their ancestry as proof of their religiousness. Now, they needed to bear fruit worthy of repentance, for the one coming after John is coming to separate out the wheat from the chaff—to separate out of each of us what is not useful. The winnowing fork separates chaff from each stalk of wheat, and each of us have work that needs to be done, that is begun when we repent but only finished through the work of Jesus.

The Narrative Lectionary continues focusing on the prophets with Joel, and Joel’s call to turn back to God. Joel calls upon the people to turn back, and that God will restore the people. God’s spirt will be poured out upon all—old and young, women and men, slaves and free.

Jesus is teaching the disciples about prayer and remaining steadfast in Luke 11:13, and makes this strange comment—because we ought to do the right thing, but we are evil—we still do not always do the right thing—but how much more faithful God will be with us! God’s spirit will be with all who call upon God.

Prepare the way! God is coming again, into our world and into our lives in a new way. Prepare the way for the reign of God! Prepare our hearts to love more fully and deeply. Prepare our world to be ready to love as God has called us to love, to care as God cares for us, to do justice because God judges us all with equity.

Call to Worship (from Romans 15:4,7,13; Matthew 3:2,3,11)

What is written in Scripture is to encourage and guide us;

**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is drawing near!**

Welcome one another, as Christ has welcomed you;

**Prepare the way of the Lord!**

May God fill us with all joy and peace in believing,

so we may be full of hope by the power of the Holy Spirit;

**The one who is coming will baptize us with the Holy Spirit and with fire.**

Come, repent; turn back to God, and prepare the way,

**for Christmas, for the Christ-Child,**

**for God to enter our world and lives in a new way!**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

We confess, O God, that we have fallen asleep. We confess, O God, that we have not kept awake, that we have not been looking for signs of Your return. Instead, we have been looking at the broken world around us and wondering how it will get fixed. We have been looking at what will help us right now, and not what will help the world in the long term. Forgive us. Call us into repentance, to turn back to You, to remember that You are the Savior of the World, and that we need to work together to prepare Your way, to build Your beloved community here, now, for others as well as for ourselves. In the name of the One who has come and is returning, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

Every moment we turn back, God is there, ready to receive us. Every moment we work to build God’s beloved community is not in vain. God has need for all of us; God has need for you. Know that you are forgiven and loved, and very much needed in this kingdom-building work. Come, join your hearts, and use your gifts for the reign of God here on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

Prayer

O Holy Child of Bethlehem, Descend to us we pray; Cast out our sin and enter in, be born in us today. O Holy Child, enter our lives again. With childlike faith, may we see You and Your work in our world in new ways. May we be open to the Holy Spirit as a child just learning about the faith. May we see what You are already doing in our lives and in our world with fresh hearts, so that we can participate in Your reign now and in the time to come. In the name of Jesus the Christ, we pray. Amen.