Worship Resources for November 29th, 2015—First Sunday of Advent (year C)

Revised Common Lectionary: Jeremiah 33:14-16; Psalm 25:1-10; 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13; Luke 21:25-36

Narrative Lectionary: Josiah’s Reform, 2 Kings 22:1-10, 14-20; 23:1-3 (Luke 24:30-32)

Happy New Year! Welcome to Advent, the beginning of the new year in the liturgical calendar. We are beginning Year C of the Revised Common Lectionary.

We begin with the prophet Jeremiah declaring that God will remember the promises made to Israel and Judah. God will raise up a king from “a righteous branch of Jesse,” someone who will rule in the way David once did—close to God. This new king will reign with justice and righteousness.

Psalm 25:1-10 sings of putting trust in God and in God’s ways. The psalmist sings to God, asking God for guidance and wisdom, and asking for God’s forgiveness for former transgressions. The psalmist encourages others to follow the instructions and teachings of God, because God will remain faithful.

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13 contains a blessing from Paul to the Thessalonians, who have given Paul great joy because of their faith. Paul blesses the Thessalonians by encouraging them to continue to seek the guidance of Jesus and to love one another. In this, their hearts will be strengthened, and they will persevere.

Luke 21:25-36 is part of the final discourse from Jesus to the disciples before his arrest and death. Jesus tells the disciples to be ready for the kingdom of heaven to draw near, to be on guard and not get caught up in the worries or cares of this life—or the fleeting pleasures of drunkenness and other short-time satisfaction. For on the day of the kingdom drawing near—of Christ’s return—it will catch them like a trap. And the trap is one we have made, in our self-centeredness, instead of standing up and raising our heads (vs. 28).

The Narrative Lectionary continues in the Hebrew Scriptures by looking at the Reforms of Josiah in 2 Kings. When Josiah was ruling over Israel, the high priest Hilkiah found a scroll of the law in the temple and read it out loud to Josiah. Hilkiah and others went to the prophetess Huldah on behalf of Josiah, who was concerned because his ancestors did not follow the book of the law. Huldah declared that because of Josiah’s turning back to God and God’s ways, disaster would not befall in his lifetime, but yes, it still would come. The repercussions of the actions of his ancestors, and those who would follow after him, would affect Israel and Judah in the years to come. Still, Josiah and the people made a covenant with God, to follow God’s ways and statutes.

Luke 24:30-32 is the portion of the story after Jesus’ resurrection of the couple on the walk to Emmaus, when they finally recognize Jesus and he vanishes from their sight. Jesus takes bread, blesses and breaks it at the table. And they remember, after he vanishes, how the scriptures were opened to them on the road. Jesus opened the scriptures to new possibilities, just as Josiah’s rediscovering the scriptures opened them to new hope in their time.

We read passages from the final discourses of Jesus on this first Sunday of Advent to remind us that what we are really waiting for is not Christmas, but for Christ to come again. We are rehearsing, every year, for that time when Jesus will enter our world and our lives in a new way. We are called to actively watch and wait, and not get caught up in the worries and cares that hold us back from seeing what God is doing new, right in front of us. In the dreariness of the world, in all the bad news we have received lately, hope is alive! Hope is right in front of us. Indeed, hope is within us.

*[Remember, you can find Advent Candle Lighting liturgies in the Advent/Christmas resources!](http://rev-o-lution.org/resources/adventchristmas-resources/)*

Call to Worship

We are watching and waiting for signs of God’s kingdom;

**O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.**

Though all things will change, Christ remains true;

**O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.**

Be awake, be alert; do not worry, and do not be afraid;

**O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.**

Look! Christ is coming. Christ is breaking into our world, and into our lives in a new way.

**O Come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel! Amen.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Almighty God, we confess that we have become caught up in the worries of today. We have forgotten your ways and have looked for quick satisfaction and worldly pleasures. We have become trapped into a way of life that is without hope, but only provides quick fixes. Call us out of the tunnel into the openness of Your love and life. Call us to live for our neighbors in need around us. Call us to welcome the stranger and the refugee, those without a roof or job, those in need of care. The world awaits us, full of need, and full of hope, if we can become living hope to one another. In the name of Jesus, who gave his life so that we all may have the fullness of hope in this life and for eternity, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance of Pardon

The days are surely coming, when the light will grow, when the days will get longer, when we will not focus on limitations but on the abundance of gifts we have been given. The days are surely coming when we will turn away from selfishness and love our neighbor as ourselves. The days are surely coming when we will know God’s forgiveness and restoration in our own lives, and will share it with the world. Amen.

Prayer

We are making our way on the road to Bethlehem, on our journey of expectation for the Christ-child, knowing that You, O God, are entering our world and our lives in a new way. You will catch us off guard. You will surprise us. You will challenge us. Loving God, guide our hearts and our lives to the fullness of Your hope. Keep us on the journey. In this season of Advent, help us to renew our faith, renew our commitment to You, and renew our covenant to love our neighbors, especially the strangers and refugees, as ourselves. Amen.