Worship Resources for December 9th, 2018—Second Sunday of Advent

Revised Common Lectionary: Malachi 3:1-4; Luke 1:68-79; Philippians 1:3-11; Luke 3:1-6

Narrative Lectionary: Esther 4:1-17 (Matthew 5:13-16)

The prophet Malachi, in 3:1-4, declares that a messenger is being sent to prepare the way for God. The messenger of the covenant will come like refiner’s fire and like a purifying soap. The messenger is going to prepare the way by leading the people back to God’s ways of righteousness, as the prophet reminisces how the people once pleased God in former years.

The Song of Zechariah in Luke 1:68-79 is a song of praise to God. Zechariah, who could not speak after Elizabeth conceived because he dared to question the angel Gabriel, was finally able to speak after the boy was born. Zechariah sings this great song, of how his son will be the prophet of the Most High, for God will come and guide the people in to the way of peace.

Paul’s letter to the church in Philippi begins with Paul’s message of thanksgiving to the church. Paul is full of joy for this church that has continued to share in the gospel, and prays for their continued encouragement, as they have encouraged him while he is prison. Paul prays that their love will overflow with more knowledge and insight, so they can determine what is best and stand before Christ.

John, son of Zechariah, experienced the word of God while in the wilderness in Luke 3:1-6. He came into the region of the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of the repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The gospel writers of Matthew, Mark, and Luke all link John’s call to the call of Isaiah 40, the voice crying out in the wilderness to prepare the way of God.

The Narrative Lectionary focuses on Esther, specifically chapter 4. When her relative Mordecai learns of the plot against the Jewish people by Haman, he publicly grieves. When Esther seeks to find out why, Mordecai shares with her the evidence of what is happening—the persecution and genocide of their people. He warns her that even though she is the queen, married to the Persian king, she is not safe. If she keeps silence, help will still come, but not for her. But perhaps, Haman suggests, she was made queen and has this power for such a time as this.

Jesus declares to the disciples in Matthew 5:13-16 that they are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. They are the ones who must shine their light, who must “season” the world. Otherwise, what good are they if they hide their light, or lose their saltiness? Instead, their purpose is to shine the way to God and what God is doing in the world.

God is at work preparing the way for us. God needs each of us. But instead of thinking of God having a specific individual plan and purpose for us, it’s more like God has a design and intention that includes all of us. Like Esther, we can choose to be part of that design, and God intends for each of us to be part of it—but if we choose differently, God’s design is still intact. And when we begin to ignore and turn away from God’s design, God has sent us messengers to help prepare the way, to call us back, to repent and believe in the good news. For God’s design is relationship with us, to be our God and for we to be God’s people, as declared from Genesis to Revelation.

Call to Worship (from Luke 1:76-79)

God has prepared a way for us;

 **The prophet calls us to repent, to turn back to God.**

God has given us the knowledge of salvation;

 **God has forgiven us of our sins.**

By the tender mercy of our God,

 **The dawn from on high will break upon us.**

To give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,

 **To guide our feet into the way of peace.**

Prayer of Brokenness/Confession

Almighty God, we confess that we have ignored the voice that calls us to repent, to turn back. We have looked instead to the ways of the world to fulfill us. We seek worldly comforts and measures of success. We want a quick fix, instead of the transformation You offer us. Forgive us. Remind us that repentance is lifelong work, but Your love and forgiveness are available for us right now. Help us to know Your ways, to live into Your ways, and to strive for Your ways on earth as it is in heaven. In the name of Christ, who is coming again in a new way, we pray. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

The dawn breaks every morning, giving us light out of the shadow of darkness and death. Every day we have the opportunity to know God’s grace and mercy, for it is always available for us. You are forgiven, loved, and restored. Continue to do the work Christ is calling you to do. Repent, and believe in the good news. Amen.

Prayer

God, grant us Your peace. Guide us in Your ways of justice and mercy. Help us to find ways to be at peace with our imperfect selves, while always striving to love better. Help us to find ways to be at peace in the world, while always striving for justice. Help us to find ways to make peace with those who have wronged us, while always defending the oppressed and marginalized. Help us to know Your peace that surpasses all understanding. In the name of the Prince of Peace we pray. Amen.