

Where Two or Three Are Gathered: Worship for Small Assemblies Advent and Christmas Year C

December 1 - 29, 2024

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HAPPY NEW YEAR! In Advent we begin a new year in the church calendar. The gospel focus for the year is the Gospel of Luke. Luke lifts up the needs of the weak and the poor, and tells the story of Jesus' interaction with, and compassion for this community of God's people.

THE CHRISTMAS CYCLE

— excerpts from *Keeping Time* by Gail Ramshaw and Mons Teig, pp. 71-73 © 2009 Augsburg Fortress

“Scholars argue over several competing theories as to the origins and development of the Christmas Cycle. Since our data about the development of Christmas comes nearly entirely from some extant sermon texts, we have little access to what was in the minds and lives of most Christian believers.

One theory proposes that such a festival in late December has prehistoric roots in the peoples of the northern hemisphere observing the winter solstice. In the dark of the year, with vegetation dormant and food sources closely monitored, people celebrated with candles, evergreens, and feasting what must have seemed to them a magical restoration of the life of the universe: the return of the sun.

Many scholars propose that in the fourth century church leaders presented Christmas as an alternative to the Roman Saturnalia, with its excessive partying.

Early theological focus of this festival was on the mystery of the incarnation, God present in our world. Liturgical and domestic attention to the baby Jesus seems not to have arisen until the twelfth century.

In some places Advent was taught as an ascetic fast from rich food and sexual activity; in some places a forty-day unit replicated Lent; in some places the weeks functioned as catechumenal preparation for baptism at Epiphany; by 600, four Sundays became the usual length of a preparation for the celebration of Jesus' birth and baptism.

Evangelical Lutheran Worship invites us to see the Christmas cycle as a season beginning with the first of four Sundays in Advent, peaking in Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, and concluding twelve days later with the Epiphany of our Lord. Thanksgiving at the table III (ELW p. 110) is especially appropriate for this entire season. In this prayer we bless God as the giver of life: the life in the universe, the life in human hopes and prophets' dreams, the life in Mary's story and in the Word made flesh. We acknowledge God's presence in the past, the present, and the future; we pray for

the Spirit to come into us, for the Word of God to take flesh in us. The concluding doxology uses biblical language in calling God the Holy One of Israel, the Word of God incarnate, and the Power of the Most High. In this way we begin the liturgical year praising the triune God, who will effect in us now what was promised and experienced in the past.

Christians affirm that Christ comes not only in the past event but also in our present life and the world's unfolding future. So it is that Advent is not about Mary's pregnancy but about the church's continual prayer that God will come (the root meaning of "advent") to us, bringing life to a dying world."

DRESSING THE SPACE

~ The colour for Advent is blue. Hang and drape as much blue fabric as possible in your space to transform it into the blue of predawn light.

~ The Advent wreath takes a prominent place in the worship space. As each candle is lit, sing a song or hymn verse. Some possibilities are:

ELW 240 Light One Candle to Watch for Messiah

ELW 241 O Lord, How Shall I Meet You

ELW 247 Come Now, O Prince of Peace

ELW 253 He Came Down

~ You might erect a Jesse Tree. This could be a real tree or a representation of one, such as a large deadfall branch 'planted' in a bucket of sand or rocks. Each week add more decorations to symbolize God's plan from the beginning of time to redeem God's people by sending a Saviour. These could be symbols of Jesus' family tree. The decorations could also be symbols from the lessons for Advent.

How to teach the Jesse Tree?

Have people create "leaves" from their own handprints. Create symbolic ornaments each week to decorate the tree. Have people develop and create ornaments with personal symbols, such as their names, descriptive words, or collages—however they feel led to express Christ in their own lives—and add these to the tree.

The Jesse Tree is a way of telling the story of God's plan from the beginning of time to redeem God's people by sending a Saviour. It follows the lineage of Christ's family and key people in the Old Testament that God uses to tell God's story from Creation through Christ's birth.

~ The colour for Christmas, and Epiphany of our Lord is white. If you display a creche, wrap the baby Jesus in white. You may use extra candles to illuminate the space as Christ illuminates our lives and thinking.

The following are some options for your Advent worship:

~ An alternate Gathering Rite, which would either replace the Kyrie, or precede it. The Gloria is omitted in Advent.

GATHERING RITE — HOLD US IN YOUR MERCY - text by Rory Cooney

L: Hold us in your mercy.

ALL: Hold us in your mercy.

L: Maker's love poured out from heaven.

ALL: Hold us in your mercy.

L: Mercy's word-made-flesh among us.

ALL: Hold us in your mercy.

L: Born as one of homeless pilgrims.

ALL: Hold us in your mercy.

L: Sent to bring the poor good news.

ALL: Hold us in your mercy.

L: You who shared our life and labour.

ALL: Hold us in your mercy.

L: You who chose to walk our roads.

ALL: Hold us in your mercy.

L: Hold us in your mercy.

ALL: Hold us in your mercy.

L: Kyrie eleison. Christe eleison. Kyrie eleison.

ALL: Lord have mercy. Christ have mercy. Lord have mercy. Amen.

~ A "Story of the Meal" which would replace the Words of Institution in the Communion Service. Communion is celebrated when there is an ordained or authorized lay person to lead worship.

THE STORY OF THE MEAL - Rev. Elina Singh

It was evening. The sun had set, the breeze was cool, but the heat of the afternoon still lingered in the air. Jesus and his disciples were settling down for dinner, dusty, sweaty, and tired. They all gathered – we don't know how many were there, likely more than just the twelve. There were stories, there was laughter, there was companionship.

During the meal, Jesus took the bread. He held it for a moment, until the conversation stilled and everyone was paying attention. Then he gave thanks, broke the bread, and said, take this bread and eat, this is my body, given for you. When you eat, remember me. Don't forget.

So they took the bread, and they ate.

A little later, dinner was done. Stories and jokes had been shared, there had been laughter and arguments and friendship. Their bellies were full, and their hearts were full. Jesus took a cup of wine. He held it for a moment, until the conversation stilled and everyone was paying attention. Then he gave thanks and said to them, this cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. When you drink, remember me. Don't forget.

So they all took the wine, and they drank. Then they sang their song of praise and walked into the night, and nothing would ever be the same again.

And so we eat, and we drink, and we remember. We enter the story, and the moment.

And we ask the Spirit of God to bless our bread and wine, to be present with us in this moment, and to bless us through these gifts so that we will not forget. We ask the Spirit of God to be present with us, and to transform us to become bread for the hungry world.

Bread of life, cup of love. These are God's gifts, given for you. It is time to enter the story.

~ In some liturgical settings the [GOSPEL ACCLAMATION](#) has the option of using a 'Proper Verse', as opposed to the standard verse "Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." The Proper Verse comments on the lessons for the day. The Proper Verse can be found in the Leader's Desk Edition. The Holy Communion Settings in ELW that provide for this option are Settings 1, 2, 5 and 9. In ACS it is Setting 12. The Proper Verse is included in the list of Readings and Psalms provided below.

Another musical option is to sing an Alleluia that the congregation knows, then one person chant, or everyone speak, the words of the Proper Verse, followed again by the Alleluia.

ADVENT ONE, December 1, 2024

Readings and Psalm

Jeremiah 33:14-16 *A righteous branch springing up from David*

Psalm 25:1-10 *To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. (Ps 25:1)*

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13 *Strengthen hearts of holiness for the coming of the Lord*

Gospel Acclamation: Alleluia. Stand up and raise your heads — your redemption is drawing near. Alleluia. *(Lk 21:28)*

Luke 21:25-36 *Be alert for the coming of the Son of Man*

Prayer of the Day ELW p. 18 Year C

Hymn Suggestions

ELW 244 Rejoice, Rejoice Believers

ELW 241 O Lord, How Shall I Meet You

ELW 436 Wake, Awake, for Night is Flying

ELW 438 My Lord, What a Morning

ACS 903 Freedom is Coming

ADVENT TWO, December 8, 2024

Readings and Psalm

Malachi 3:1-4 *My messenger is a refiner and purifier*

Luke 1:68-79 *In the tender compassion of our God the dawn from on high shall break upon us. (Lk 1:78)*

Philippians 1:3-11 *A harvest of righteousness on the day of Jesus Christ*

Gospel Acclamation: Alleluia. Prepare the way of the Lord. All flesh shall see the salvation of God. Alleluia.

Luke 3:1-6 *Prepare the way of the Lord*

Prayer of the Day ELW p. 19 Year C

Hymn Suggestions

ELW 254 Come, thou Long-expected Jesus

ELW 266 All Earth is Hopeful

ELW 264 Prepare the Royal Highway

ELW 247 Come Now, O Prince of Peace

ACS 904 Come to Be Our Hope, O Jesus

ACS 984 May the God of Hope Go With Us

ADVENT THREE, December 15, 2024

Readings and Psalm

Zephaniah 3:14-20 *Rejoice, the Lord is in your midst*

Isaiah 12:2-6 *In your midst is the Holy One of Israel (Is. 12:6)*

Philippians 4:4-7 *Rejoice, the Lord is near*

Gospel Acclamation: Alleluia. I am sending my messenger before you, who will prepare your way before you. Alleluia.

Luke 3:7-18 *One more powerful is coming, baptizing with fire*

Prayer of the Day ELW p. 19 Year C

Hymn Suggestions

ELW 242 Awake! Awake, and Greet the New Morn

ELW 244 Rejoice, Rejoice, Believers

ELW 267 Joy to the World

ACS 905 We Are Waiting for Jesus

ACS 901 Now the Heavens Start to Whisper

ADVENT FOUR, December 22, 2024

Readings and Psalm

Micah 5:2-5a *From Bethlehem comes a ruler*

Luke 1:46b-55 *You, Lord, have lifted up the lowly (Lk 1:52) OR*

Psalm 80:1-7 *Let your face shine upon us, and we shall be saved (Ps 80:7)*

Hebrews 10:5-10 *I have come to do your will*

Gospel Acclamation: Alleluia. Here I am, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word. Alleluia.

Luke 1:39-45(46-55) *Blessed are you among women/ My soul magnifies the Lord*

Prayer of the Day ELW p. 20 Year C

Hymn Suggestions

ELW 257 O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

ELW 265 The Angel Gabriel from Heaven Came

ELW 258 Unexpected and Mysterious

ACS 907 Filled with Hope and Gratitude

ACS 906 No Wind at the Window

CHRISTMAS EVE, NATIVITY OF OUR LORD, December 24, 2024

Readings and Psalm

Isaiah 9:2-7 *Light shines: a child is born for us*

Psalm 96 *Let the heavens rejoice and the earth be glad. (Ps 96:11)*

Titus 2:11-14 *The grace of God has appeared*

Gospel Acclamation: Alleluia. I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people; to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. Alleluia.

Luke 2:1-14 [15-20] *God with us*

Prayer of the Day ELW p. 20

CHRISTMAS DAY, NATIVITY OF OUR LORD, December 25, 2024

Readings and Psalm

Isaiah 62:6-12 *God comes to restore the people*

Psalm 97 *Light dawns for the righteous, and joy for the honest of heart. (Ps 97:11)*

Titus 3:4-7 *Saved through water and the Spirit*

Gospel Acclamation: Alleluia. I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people; to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. Alleluia.

Luke 2: [1-7] 8-20 *The birth of the Messiah revealed to shepherds*

Prayer of the Day ELW p. 20

Hymn Suggestions

ACS 973 The Word Who Sang the Light Into Creation

ACS 1096 Joyful is the Dark

FIRST SUNDAY OF CHRISTMAS, December 29, 2024

Readings and Psalm

1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26 *The boy Samuel grew in favour with the Lord and the people*

Psalm 148 *The splendour of the Lord is over earth and heaven. (Ps 148:13)*

Colossians 3:12-17 *Clothe yourselves in love; let the peace of Christ rule your hearts*

Gospel Acclamation: Alleluia. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, and let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. Alleluia.

Luke 2:41-52 *The boy Jesus increased in wisdom, and in divine and human favour*
Prayer of the Day ELW p. 21 Year C

Hymn Suggestions

ACS 909 Where Shepherds Lately Knelt
ACS 1091 Hallelujah! Sing Praise to Your Creator

SECOND SUNDAY OF CHRISTMAS, January 5, 2025

Readings and Psalm

Jeremiah 31:7-14 *Joy at the gathering of God's scattered flock*
Psalm 147:12-20 *Worship the Lord. O Jerusalem; praise your God, O Zion. (Ps 147:12)*
Ephesians 1:3-14 *The will of God made known in Christ*
Gospel Acclamation: Alleluia. All the ends of the earth have seen the victory of our God.
Alleluia.
John 1:[1-9]10-18 *God with us; the incarnation of the Word*
Prayer of the Day ELW p. 21

Hymn Suggestions

ELW 292 Love Has Come
ELW 300 The First Noel
ELW 295 Of the Father's Love Begotten
ACS 1093 In a Deep, Unbounded Darkness

OR

ΕΠΙΦΑΝΥ OF OUR LORD, January 5, 2025

Readings and Psalm

Isaiah 60:1-6 *Nations come to the light*
Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14 *All kings shall bow down before him. (Ps 72:11)*
Ephesians 3:1-12 *The gospel's promise extends to all*
Gospel Acclamation: Alleluia. We have observed his star at its rising, and have come to
worship him. Alleluia.
Matthew 2:1-12 *Revelation of Christ to the nations of the earth*
Prayer of the Day ELW p. 21

Hymn Suggestions

ELW 311 Hail to the Lord's Anointed
ELW 665 Rise, Shine, You People

ELW 866 We Are Marching in the Light

ELW 306 Come, Beloved of the Maker

ACS 915 When a Star is Shining