



Resources for parish worship

22 January 2017



Following Christ – especially in the work of justice and living out the values of God’s reign – can sometimes get in the way of true relationship with Christ, but without a lived experience of intimacy with God, we lack the empowerment and resources to be a positive influence on the world. This week, the Lectionary calls us, no matter what struggles or challenges we may, or what work we may be called to do, to nurture a strong and vibrant relationship with God. Ultimately this the work of our worship – and it then empowers everything else we do as followers of Christ.

INTRODUCTIONS

For use by lectors, in order of service, parish bulletins and magazines

Isaiah 9:1-4: Isaiah prophesies a reversal of fortune for the people of God who are occupied by Assyria – though they are in darkness, light will break in, and they will be freed from their oppression.

Psalms 27:1, 4-9: David's Psalm celebrating God's protection and the security he finds in God's presence and in God's sanctuary.

1 Corinthians 1:10-18: Paul confronts the Corinthians about the divisions and factions among them, reminding them that it is only the message of the cross that is important and that offers God's power for salvation.

Matthew 4:12-23: Jesus begins his ministry and is seen by Matthew to be fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy of the light shining in the darkness. He preaches the nearness of God's reign, calls his first disciples and heals those who are afflicted with disease.

[Click here to view the readings](http://bible.oremus.org/?show_adj=no&passages=Isaiah%209:%201-4%0Acw%20Psalms%2027:%201,%204-12%0A1%20Corinthians%201:%2010-18%0AMatthew%204:%2012-23)

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COLLECTS OF THE DAY

Collect One

Almighty and everlasting God,
Mercifully look upon our infirmities,
and in all our dangers and necessities
stretch forth thy right hand to help and defend us;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Collect Two

Almighty God,
whose Son revealed in signs and miracles
the wonder of your saving presence:
Renew your people with your heavenly grace,
and in all our weakness
sustain us by your mighty power;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Celebrating the coming of the One who brings the reign of God to all people,
let us pray for the world God loves, the Church God calls, and all people

according to their needs, saying, Lord, in your mercy, and responding, **Hear our prayer.**

[Brief pause]

God who speaks light into being, shine on us. Shine in us. Shine through us. Shine brightly, so that the world may know your care. Lord, in your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

God who speaks love into being, guide us into becoming the loving people you have called us to be. Help us to reach out to our neighbours, especially those who are not loved, and not welcomed. We remember specifically the native peoples who share this land with us. Lord, in your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

God who speaks life into being, increase our wonder at your good creation. May its awesomeness inspire us to care for air, land, water, plants, animals and insects. Lord, in your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

God who speaks hope into being, send us as messengers of expectation. May we look for your presence in the hard places of life; may we see you in the darkness; may we work with you as you bring your reign to our reality. Lord, in your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

God who speaks health into being, use our hands to bring healing to the sick, our presence to bring comfort to the isolated, our voices to bring your word of promise to the hopeless, especially those we name before you now.

[Long pause]

Lord, in your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

God who speaks community onto being, you call us together so we may learn the joy of service. Free us from seeing your gifts as the goal. Strengthen our faith to use them for the good of others. Lord, in your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

God who shines in the darkness, receive these prayers and the prayers of our hearts, in the name of the one who is your light, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

POST COMMUNION

Almighty Father,
your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ is the light of the world.
May your people,
illuminated by your word and sacraments,
shine with the radiance of his glory,
that he may be known, worshipped,
and obeyed to the ends of the earth;
for he is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

PRAYERS

Perfect Light of revelation,
as you shone in the life of Jesus,
whose epiphany we celebrate,
so shine in us and through us,
that we may become beacons of truth and compassion,
enlightening all creation with deeds of justice and mercy. Amen.

O God,
you spoke your word
and revealed your good news in Jesus, the Christ.
Fill all creation with that word again,
so that by proclaiming your joyful promises to all nations
and singing of your glorious hope to all peoples,
we may become one living body,
your incarnate presence on the earth. Amen.

To God who welcomes all in love,
let us pray for the good of the church
and the concerns of those in need.
God of every land and nation,
you have created all people
and you dwell among us in Jesus Christ.
Listen to the cries of those who pray to you,
and grant that, as we proclaim the greatness of your name,
all people will know the power of love at work in the world.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Sisters and brothers,
let us lift our hearts in faith
to the one who hears all prayers
and holds close all those in need.
Holy God, you gather the whole universe
into your radiant presence
and continually reveal your Son as our Savior.
Bring healing to all wounds,
make whole all that is broken,
speak truth to all illusion,
and shed light in every darkness,
that all creation will see your glory and know your Christ. Amen.

God of Blazing light,
through the power of the cross you shattered our darkness,
scattering the fears that bind us
and setting us free to live as your children.
Give us courage and conviction
that we may joyfully turn and follow you
into new adventures of faithful service,
led by the light that shines
through Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen.

LECTIONARY NOTES

REFLECTIONS ON THEME:

In times of oppression and distress – Assyria’s occupation of Israel, David’s fear of attack by surrounding enemies, internal strife and divisions in the Corinthian church, John the Baptist’s arrest and imprisonment – we need light to guide our feet, to give us sight and to warm and protect us. We need a sense of God’s enfolding presence, of dwelling secure in God’s house, of being saved by God and claimed by God’s love. All of these passages reflect this need, and all of them offer a vision of God’s faithful response in the promise of salvation, in God’s presence in our pain, and in the healing and strength that God provides. It is this sense of the reality of God’s presence and action on our behalf, this lived experience of God’s help and grace, that makes faith real. Without it, our faith is nothing more than an intellectual exercise, cold and powerless – having the form of godliness but lacking the power. And so as, with the disciples, we seek to answer Jesus’ call to follow,

as we seek to experience the reign of God that Jesus proclaims, as we seek to live out the message that Jesus preached and embody the healing and liberation that Jesus demonstrated, we can ask for, and expect, a real, vibrant and strengthening relationship with the Living God. Only in this way can we hope to know life, and to truly know and share the blessing of God's reign.

CONNECTING WITH LIFE:

GLOBAL APPLICATION: As we work within the systems of this world to bring about justice it is tempting to get caught into the factionalism and calls for loyalty of the systems we challenge. We may find ourselves subtly becoming more devoted to our causes than to Christ. We may discover that we are seeking to build a kingdom according to our dreams and ideas, rather than according to the values of God's reign. Any time that we, as followers of Christ, allow our place in political parties, advocacy groups or even religious affiliations to become more important than God's truth and grace, we have lost our way. As we face the threats to our world's wholeness – violence and war, poverty and greed, consumption and environmental degradation, exclusion and discrimination – we can only do so in the security and strength of a strong and vibrant lived relationship with God, and an inspiring and challenging vision of the reign of God that Jesus preached and enacted. And, as we allow this relationship with God to be our primary loyalty, we will find ourselves welcoming even those we oppose and disagree with. We will find ourselves challenging the injustices within our own organisations and groups as much as we challenge those we are not part of. We will find ourselves called to stand in places of vulnerable mediation, in-between-ness, and love without partisan loyalty. It may feel like it is only through the system that real change can happen, but in reality it is only as more and more of us are prepared to opt out of the systems as much as we can, and embrace the new way of God's reign, that the kingdoms of this world can truly become the kingdoms of our Lord and of God's Christ.

LOCAL APPLICATION: There are two responses that must be made to the readings this week. The first is to remember, as we seek to serve the most vulnerable in our communities, that meeting their physical and justice needs is only part of the work. If we do not also invite them into an experience of God's reign themselves, if we do not allow them to discover, or deepen, a relationship with the Living God, we are little more than a social service organisation. The poverty of soul, the violence of feeling abandoned by God, the oppression of being at the mercy of this world's systems with no awareness of another reality – these are also justice issues to address. And the Gospel addresses them powerfully in the teachings, the example and the sacrifice of Christ. The second response is for each Christ follower to ensure that we, personally and collectively, nurture our own relationship with God.

Without a constant, vibrant and empowering experience of God's grace and presence, we all too easily grow despondent, cynical and even destructive. The power to live from the reality of God's reign, to work to change the world and bring justice, flows from knowing God's light and presence. Ultimately our first calling is simply to follow Christ and invite others to do the same. Changing the world, then, is not our task – it is God's. We simply get to participate sometimes.

SERMON OUTLINE

Matt 4:12-23 He returned to Galilee

Prior to the account in today's Gospel, Jesus had spent 40 days in the wilderness of Judea in preparation for ministry
Matthew describes the scenario....

1. The Arrest of John – Jn Bpt's ministry had drawn to a close with his arrest & imprisonment at Machaerus. He had criticised Herod for taking his brother Philip's wife & now awaited his fate in prison – eventual beheading - 14.10

2. The Area of Zebulon & Naphtali – Jesus had left Nazareth where his own townsfolk had rejected him – *he went & lived in Capernaum v13* – a strategic centre for his HQ on the Via Maris – the way of the sea – an important trade route of the period.. Someone has said:- *Galilee is the on the way to everywhere*. Josephus, historian & Governor, numbers 204 villages all with population of over 15,000 people. It is described as being *rich in soils & pasturage, producing every variety of tree*. It had suffered dreadfully in the Assyrian invasions of 734 & 732BC – *the people living in darkness (v16 & Is 9:1,2) – living in the land of the shadow of death*. They were to experience a new era – *a light has dawned – the light of the world* – has come!

3. The Arrival of Jesus – *began to preach*

a) the Message – *repent for the kingdom of God is near...*

b) the Messengers – Jesus calls his disciples – James, John Peter, Andrew &– *Come, follow me & I will make you fishers of men..*The work has begun – *v23: Jesus went throughout Galilee teaching, preaching & healing....* He made a major impact on the district as *large crowds v25* throughout the region *followed him*. Throughout the world crowds are still following Jesus... May we be numbered among the faithful!

By Norman Porteous

Unity in Christ

The Old Testament reading from Isaiah is very similar to the Christmas reading from this chapter. The verses about the birth of the Davidic king are dropped at the end, but the reading starts with the reference to "the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali" and "Galilee of the Gentiles. This passage is echoed in the gospel reading, where Matthew introduces it to mark the beginning of the Galilean ministry. Read on Christmas night, it relates to the nativity of Christ; it was then that light dawned in the darkness. Read now, it refers to the beginning of Jesus' ministry. His nativity and His ministry are intertwined; both are aspects of the single Christ-event, the coming of light into the darkness of the world. It is with His coming to Galilee and the launching of His proclamation that people began to become aware of the light that was shining.

As He went throughout Galilee, that light touched every aspect of people's lives and every aspect of society, He went through the region, 'teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people'. One of the aspects of the Bishop's initiative, 'Living God's Love', is about making disciples. As Jesus starts out in His ministry, He calls His disciples. From what we can tell, it would appear that there was not a great flurry of activity or multiple signs or miracles to attract attention to Himself or prove His credentials before Jesus called His disciples to follow Him. They did not seem to chose to follow Jesus because they were 'wowed' by witnessing acts of His supernatural activity or power, they followed Jesus merely because He called them and there was something in that call which was deeply attractive, attractive enough for men who had regular jobs and employment to drop everything and follow Him. At the most, all the disciples would have experienced of Jesus would be to have heard Him preach a few times. And yet, they chose to follow Him and become a group of people who would be united with Him in spreading the good news. People such as Simon-Peter, Andrew, James and John. Fishermen, not individuals known as great speakers or charismatic leaders, but everyday people who heard the call of Jesus and responded.

At this early stage of ministry they were probably very unclear what following Jesus would mean, but they stepped out in faith, left their security behind and followed Him. And throughout his ministry we know that the disciples often talked to each other, trying to work out what a particular parable or action of Jesus signified.

Frequently this is portrayed by commentators as a negative thing, as if the disciples were grumbling about what they had got themselves into, wondering why people didn't see things the way they did, and even questioning the concept of Jesus as the Messiah and His authority. But this isn't the case. Often they were more concerned with understanding the significance of something Jesus had said, trying to work out the implications of some of His actions and radical approach and access to His Father God.

When we are following Christ, God does not mind if we have questions, does not mind if we don't always understand what is happening and why things are the way they are in the world. He wants us, as spiritual descendants of those first disciples, to follow in their footsteps, faithfully following Him as best as we are able with our imperfect understanding of Him and His ways. The uniqueness of the Christian faith is that it is dependent on the uniqueness of Christ, not on a perfect knowledge or understanding of God. And in that uniqueness there is absolute unity, based on the unshakable truths of the gospel message. A unity that Paul was keen to stress to the Corinthian Church. We may express our Christian faith in different ways, but as Christians we are all uniquely united in Christ. Our challenge is to live out that unity every day. *Sam Cappleman*

ONLINE SERMON SOURCES

"Fly Fishing for Christ," the Rev. Ken Kesselus, Sermons that Work, Episcopal Digital Network
<http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/stw/2014/01/06/3-epiphany-a-2014/>

["What Are We Doing Here?"](http://day1.org/2542-what-are-we-doing-here) the Rev. Dr. Ozzie E. Smith, Jr., *Day 1*
<http://day1.org/2542-what-are-we-doing-here>

["Cobwebs on the Confessional,"](http://day1.org/1079-cobwebs-on-the-confessional) the Rev. Dr. William L. Self, *Day 1*
<http://day1.org/1079-cobwebs-on-the-confessional>

CHILDREN

Worshiping with Children, Epiphany 3, Including children in the congregation's worship, using the Revised Common Lectionary, Carolyn C. Brown

<http://worshipingwithchildren.blogspot.co.uk/2013/12/year-third-sunday-after-epiphany-third.html>

"What Do You Want To Be?" Fran Woodruff, On The Chancel Steps

<http://worshipingwithchildren.blogspot.co.uk/2013/12/year-third-sunday-after-epiphany-third.html>

Children's Sermon, Faith Formation Journeys

<http://faithformationjourneys.org/?p=1370>

[Coloring Pages/Puzzles](#). Charles Kirkpatrick, Object Lessons & Children's Sermons, Coloring Pages, Puzzles. Sermons4Kids.com. (Scroll to bottom of page.)

<http://www.sermons4kids.com/>

HYMN SUGGESTIONS

- 52* Christ, whose glory fills the skies
- 324* God, whose almighty word
- 43* [Holy is the seed-time, when the buried grain]
- 192 How brightly beams the morning star!
- 362* O God, beyond all praising
- 306* O Spirit of the living God
- 199* The people that in darkness walked

[The People That In Darkness Sat](#)

[In Heavenly Love Abiding](#)

[Christ, Whose Glory Fills The Skies](#)

[Jesus, Hope Of Every Nation](#)

Christ is made the sure foundation (*Tune Westminster Abbey*)

For I'm building a people of power

Will you come and follow me

May the mind of Christ my saviour (*Tune St Leonard*)

All my hope on God is founded (*Tune Michael*)

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