

WORSHIP READINGS AND PRAYERS
FOR CONTEMPORARY CHURCHES
VOLUME 1: THE CYCLE OF LIGHT

Liturgies and Readings for Advent, Christmas, New Year, and Epiphany

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Come Lord Jesus

The First Week Of Advent

Celebrant: Anticipation grows within us.
Community: *The day of Your incarnation is near.*

Celebrant: There is no wound in the world that will not be healed.
Community: *The day of Your incarnation is near.*

Celebrant: There is no darkness nor shadow that will be untouched by light.
Community: *The day of Your incarnation is near.*

Celebrant: There is no evil on earth that will not be uncovered; no authority that will not kneel.
Community: *The day of Your incarnation is near.*

Celebrant: In this first week of Advent, we sing with the prophets.
Community: *That One will come who will right the world.*

Celebrant: In this first week of Advent, we shout with the children.
Community: *Hosanna, the Lord delivers us from fear.*

Celebrant: In this first week of Advent, we pray with believers around the world.
Community: *Come Lord Jesus, come.*

ALL: Lord, we prepare the ground of our hearts for this Advent season. Once again, we reclaim Your work within us and in Your world, to make all things new. The story of advent reminds us that when You come there is transformation and healing. You transformed lives then, You transform our lives now, and You will transform all things on the Day of Your return. We look forward to this great Day, when all creation will be made new.

We prepare our hearts in this Advent season by praying, listening, singing and responding to Your coming. With the ancients who awaited You, we say "Living Lord, come among us."
Amen.

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Readings For The First Week Of Advent

(From The Book Of Common Prayer)

Old Testament Reading

Isaiah 64:1-9a

New Testament Reading

1 Corinthians 1:1-9

Gospel Reading

Mark 13:(24-32)33-37

Psalms Reading

Psalm 80 or 80:1-7

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A Savior Will Come

The Second Week Of Advent

Celebrant: Anticipation grows within us.
Community: *The day of Your incarnation is near.*

Celebrant: There is no heart in the world that is too far away for You to reach.
Community: *The day of Your incarnation is near.*

Celebrant: There is no situation nor challenge that is outside the realm of Your concern and care.
Community: *The day of Your incarnation is near.*

Celebrant: There is no power of this age, nor of the age to come, that can hold us in bondage.
Community: *The day of Your incarnation is near.*

Celebrant: In this second week of Advent, we sing with the prophets.
Community: *That One will come who will wipe away every tear from our eyes.*

Celebrant: In this second week of Advent, we shout with the children.
Community: *Jesus, Lord, save and rescue us from the sting of death and the grip of sin.*

Celebrant: In this second week of Advent, we pray with believers around the world.
Community: *Saving Lord, intervene in this good world and restore all things to Your original purpose.*

ALL: Lord, we recognize that You are the God who draws near to Your creation. You are not far, not distant, not oblivious to our needs. Come, save us from our enemies within and without, rescue us from the idolatries of our age, and renew our voice to sing once again of Your saving power in our world.

We prepare our hearts in this Advent season by praying, listening, singing and responding to Your saving acts of love in history. With the ancients who awaited You, we say "Living Lord, come save us."
Amen.

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Readings For The Second Week Of Advent

(From The Book Of Common Prayer)

Old Testament Reading

Isaiah 40:1-11

New Testament Reading

2 Peter 3:8-15a,18

Gospel Reading

Mark 1:1-8

Psalms Reading

Psalm 85 or 85:7-13

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A Peacemaker Will Come

The Third Week Of Advent

Celebrant: Anticipation grows within us.
Community: *The day of Your incarnation is near.*

Celebrant: There is no war nor division in the world that is beyond Your capacity to heal.
Community: *The day of Your incarnation is near.*

Celebrant: There is no hatred in the cosmos that cannot be transformed by Your forgiving love.
Community: *The day of Your incarnation is near.*

Celebrant: There is no social ill, relational breach, nor systemic evil that will not dissolve at Your touch.
Community: *The day of Your incarnation is near.*

Celebrant: In this third week of Advent, we sing with the prophets.
Community: *That One will come who will bring the shalom peace of God to all human conditions.*

Celebrant: In this third week of Advent, we shout with the children.
Community: *Prince of Peace, quiet a world screaming in pain, and hungry for your Presence.*

Celebrant: In this third week of Advent, we pray with believers around the world.
Community: *Master of hearts, bring harmony to the discord between us and those unlike us.*

ALL: Prince of Peace, we recognize that You are the God who alone can bring restoration to a fallen planet. Your capacity to restore broken relationships, communities, nations and ancient rivalries is boundless. Come, restore peace to our hearts today, and intervene among our restless human family. Lord, make us instruments of this same transforming peace wherever we go.

We prepare our hearts in this Advent season by praying, listening, singing and responding to Your restoring forgiveness. With the ancients who awaited You, we say "Prince of Peace, plant the seeds of Your coming restoration in our hearts. After Your likeness, make us your Peacemakers."
Amen.

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Readings For The Third Week Of Advent

(From The Book Of Common Prayer)

Old Testament Reading

Isaiah 65:17-25

New Testament Reading

1 Thessalonians 5:(12-15)16-28

Gospel Reading

John 1:6-8,19-28 or John 3:23-30

Psalms Reading

Psalm 126

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A King Will Come

The Fourth Week Of Advent

Celebrant: Anticipation grows within us.
Community: *The day of Your incarnation is very near.*

Celebrant: There is no power nor ruler who does not owe their allegiance to You.
Community: *The day of Your incarnation is very near.*

Celebrant: There is no universe that is without purpose, no world that cannot name its True Leader.
Community: *The day of Your incarnation is very near.*

Celebrant: Every man, woman and child is made to dance within Your Law of Love.
Community: *The day of Your incarnation is very near.*

Celebrant: In this fourth week of Advent, we sing with the prophets.
Community: *That One will come who trump the powers of every age – and show us the way to be truly human.*

Celebrant: In this fourth week of Advent, we shout with the children.
Community: *King of the Universe, dwell in our midst and teach us the ways of Your Everlasting Kingdom.*

Celebrant: In this fourth week of Advent, we pray with believers around the world.
Community: *Ruler of Heaven and Earth, sovereignly act to restore loving leadership among those who bear Your image.*

ALL: King of the Ages, we are broken in our understanding of loving leadership, and have lost the capacity to understand the ways of a benevolent Sovereign. Show us Your face, teach us your ways, elevate the law of Love among us, and help us to receive Your Guidance on our ashamed planet.

We prepare our hearts in this Advent season by praying, listening, singing and responding to Your Rightful Kingship in our lives and in Your world. With the ancients who awaited You, we say "King of Kings and Lord of Lords, come quickly to us, right Your world, and spark the dawn of New Creation."

Amen.

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Readings For The Fourth Week Of Advent

(From The Book Of Common Prayer)

Old Testament Reading

2 Samuel 7:4,8-16

New Testament Reading

Romans 16:25-27

Gospel Reading

Luke 1:26-38

Psalms Reading

Psalm 132 or 132:8-15

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Incarnation

A Christmas Reading

Celebrant: The fire of heaven has taken on flesh.
Community: *Living God, You are the Wonderful Counselor.*

Celebrant: The voice of stars and suns is now audible to our ears.
Community: *Living God, You are the Mighty God.*

Celebrant: The love that binds all the cosmos has revealed Himself.
Community: *Living God, You are the Everlasting Father.*

Celebrant: The Son of God has walked the sojourn of earth.
Community: *Living God, You are the Prince of Peace.*

Celebrant: Now we live, to share Your flame of hope.
Community: *Living God, let the flame of transforming hope light our days.*

Celebrant: Now we live, to hear Your voice of truth.
Community: *Living God, let the voice of enduring truth guide our lives.*

Celebrant: Now we live, to give Your love that heals.
Community: *Living God, let the love that heals the world move our hands.*

Celebrant: Now we worship You, Jesus, Son of God.
Community: *Living God, let our worship rise from lives surrendered to Your will.*

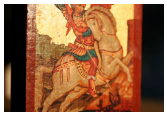
ALL: Emmanuel, God with us, today you reign supreme over all things. All things began in You, and all things find their completion in You. The dawn of Your new creation has come, the days of Your redemption are upon us, and the hope of life forever calls us forward. With you, by Your Spirit, we will live the life of love.

We celebrate that for all time to come, for all generations and in all places in this universe, You are the resurrection. You are the life. All who believe in You, will never die. *Amen.*

Scriptures referenced: Isaiah 9:6, Colossians 1:15-20, John 11:25

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A Fresh Vision Before Us

A New Year Prayer

Living God, Restoring Son and Transforming Spirit,
The fresh vision of a New Year spreads out before us.

The times we measure by are made by us, trusted by us and invested with meaning, by us.
A year is one of the simple ways we plan our moments, our days, our lifetimes and our history.

We ask that there would be a gift from You in this turning of the times
That we call the New Year.

In this New Year, we ask you for a fresh vision of Who You know Yourself to be,
To unfold before us.

In this New Year, we ask for a fresh vision of who we are, formed and adored by You,
To expand in our minds eye.

In this New Year, we ask for a fresh vision of the families of which we are a part,
To explode onto our imagination.

In this New Year, we ask for a fresh vision of our children, and those to whom we give
both care and leadership,
To renew our energies to selflessly serve once again.

In this New Year, we ask for a fresh vision of the people around us to
To welcome us out of isolation into the nurturing of just and loving communities.

In this New Year, we ask for a fresh vision of this good world, and this good creation,
to inspire us to embrace all that You have so lovingly given.

Living Lord Jesus, we offer ourselves to You, and ask that a
Fresh vision of You, ourselves, our families, our communities and creation
Would be painted on the canvas of our vision.

As we turn our attention with the calendar page,
Renew in us a fresh vision of Your highest and best plans for Your people.
In Jesus Name, Amen.

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Light All Around

An Epiphany Reading

It is in Your Revealing, Your Epiphany,
That we find Light to see this world,
A Manifestation of all that is Good,
All that is Right, All that is Lovely, All that is True, is laid before us.
Each, and its opposite, seen by this same Light.

Epiphany - light blazing all around us,
Light, Revealing,
Light, Defining,
Light, Enlightening,
Light, Inspiring,
Light, Warming
Light, Transfiguring.

Light, all around us,
Showered from Your heart onto this dim world,
Sparks falling from a shimmering Star,
A descending Dove,
A vivid Voice.

A Star, shining in an warm eastern sky
Welcoming we who were pushed to the fringe, we from worlds unfamiliar,
Into the center of Your plan.

A Dove, descending on a Restorer in a river
Announcing the days of humankind were turning
Turning toward a New Creation to come.

A Voice, vivid and speaking into this wild world,
Singing of the arrival of this melodic Rule, this harmonic Purpose, this unison Love,
Sung by the Voice that gives volume to all others.

Light, all around us, blazing; the gift of a Star, a Dove, a Voice.
Spirit of Light, announce this Epiphany among us now -
Jesus, Manifest Yourself - Jesus, Show Yourself - Jesus let Your Light shine all around us.

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On Epiphany: The Manifestation

What Is Epiphany All About?

"How does the church express the spirituality of being with *Christ in his incarnation, manifestation to the world, death, resurrection, ascension, and coming again? How can we as members of the church participate in a present spirituality that is rooted in past events and anticipates a future event? The answer to this question is that we are shaped and formed spiritually by Christ in the church through a worship that continually orders the pattern of our spirituality into a* remembrance *of God's saving deeds and the* anticipation *of the rule of God over all creation.*

...The Christian year represents the historical unfolding of the life of Christ and his sure return. One may observe that Advent deals with the coming of Christ; Christmas, his birth; Epiphany, his manifestation to the Gentiles; Lent, his journey toward death; the Great Triduum, the last days of Jesus' earthly life; Easter, the time to celebrate his resurrection; and Pentecost, the time to experience life in the power of the Holy Spirit. According to this historical representation of the life of Christ, the Christian year begins with Advent and ends with Pentecost."

(from Robert Webber, Ancient Future Time*, p. 31)*

When we consider the patterns through which we as human beings live our lives, we must always remember that we are creatures of both repetition and memory. In other words, to lose the rhythm of repetition is to quickly forget a story, an idea, a hope - no matter how life-changing it may be. Rhythm and repetition therefore become servants of worship, servants of devotion and vital components of both ancient and contemporary expressions of communion with God. Rhythm and repetition keep vital ideas ever before us - and the arts of worship are often the most profound vehicle for transmitting those ideas across generations.

This is true in the celebration of what we call the church holiday of *Epiphany*. This holiday officially falls on Jan. 6th, and propels us through the Epiphany season all the way to the beginning of Lent - and the great festival of Easter.

The Epiphany season *celebrates the manifestation of Jesus as the Savior of not only the Jews, but also of the Gentiles. It goes beyond this to convey Jesus rescuing work as a gift to all humanity and the cosmos in which we live.*

It is a season for us to remember that God can be known, interacted with, enjoyed and embraced due to His supreme self-revealing in Jesus. Epiphany remembers the "appearing" (the literal meaning of the Greek word *epiphanian*) of God in Jesus Christ, and recalls the story of the Magi as a primary source text for reflection. The Epiphany season then leads us into the world of Judaism at the time of Jesus baptism and the declaration of his role as the Holy Spirit lights on him. The Wedding Feast at Cana, the calling of the disciples, the Transfiguration - all of these passages reflect the amazing reality that God has stepped into our world as the "Word made flesh," and opened the doorway to intimate union with His people.

Epiphany-centered spirituality delivers to us not only a season to reflect on Jesus' manifestation to us as the living Son of God, but also on our vocation to be a people who manifest God's nature in the world. Epiphany is a season of calling the people of God to embrace the Light shining around us, shining in us, and inviting us into the shadows of this world as ambassadors of the New Creation.

The manifestation of God in Christ, propels us to manifest Christ in us. We are no longer purposeless, mission-less, or without direction in this life. On the contrary, we bear the gifts of Jesus' new creation activity every time we care, feed, love,

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forgive, reconcile, deliver, pray and sing. We are signs, emblems proclaiming that "God is near" in a world that feels He is distant from their everyday concerns.

An Epiphany Prayer

An Epiphany Prayer from The Book Of Common Prayer leads us before God with a sense of calling and vocation to manifest his love to the world we know.

"Give us grace, O Lord, to answer readily the call of our Savior Jesus Christ and proclaim to all people the good news of his salvation, that we and the whole world may perceive the glory of His marvelous works; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen."

In Church history, Epiphany has also been called the Illuminatio, the Manifestio and the Declaratio (Illumination, Manifestation and Declaration). Jesus indeed came to *illumine* for us the way to be truly human, to *manifest* the glory and goodness of God in our midst, and to *declare* the year of the Lord's favor to we who "walked in the shadow of death."

For more contemporary reflections on Epiphany, read the late Robert Webber's excellent book, *Ancient Future Time*, from which many ideas in this synopsis are drawn.

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