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Fresh Breezes

Worship Resources Based on the Revised Common Lectionary

John R. Pritchard, Jr.

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YEAR B

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Preface

Each week millions of people in the United States gather in Christian churches to worship. Some come primarily out of habit. Some come out of deep conviction. Some come out of a vague sense of “rightness” or of hunger for something more in life. They bring with them their aches and longings unfulfilled their hopes and dreams, their needs and thanks, their strengths, their faults, their sin and saintliness. Beneath and behind all that they bring and all that brings them to worship is one overarching hunger—to meet God, to face the mystery at the heart of life, a mystery at times fierce, at times tender, but through it all gracious.

Unfortunately, in recent years many of those Christians who gather for worship each week no longer gather in mainline churches. The reasons for that are many and complex, but among them is the dryness that sometimes invades mainline worship. Centered on the Word and words, mainline worship is at times so programmed that there is little room for mystery (for God). At times it becomes hardened in its ways, with little flexibility and no room for the spirit. At other times it is so focused on theological exactness and so fixed on theological language that it becomes disconnected from the real lives of real people.

It is the conviction behind these resources that, with all of its troubles, the worship of many mainline churches still has life and

power—the power to usher people into God’s presence, the power to give voice to their hurts and hopes, the power to shape them as the people of God. These resources are designed for use in mainline worship. In fact, most of them have been used in worship in United Methodist churches. These resources have been designed with the goal of connecting the real lives and concerns of real people with the presence of the living God. As such, the language is meant to be evocative, not exact; to be open, not closed; to be common, but not pedestrian; to be fresh, not stale, while still touching the heart of and standing within an age-old tradition of faith. The conviction beneath and within these resources is that the Spirit is always with us—within and around us—the Spirit whose presence is wondrous, whose touch is gracious, whose work is to birth passion and compassion in us and healing in all creation. Worship is a moment to open our eyes, and even our hearts, to that presence.

These resources are based on year B of the revised common lectionary and include material for each Sunday of the year, as well as several additional days (Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Ascension Day, World Communion Sunday, All Saints Day, Thanksgiving Day). They are organized by season, following the church year from Advent to the season after Pentecost. Included for each day is an invocation, an opening responsive interchange (opening sentences), an opening prayer, a prayer for

illumination, and a closing prayer.

Occasionally, a resource appropriate to a given day is added as well (such as a Blessing of the Ashes for Ash Wednesday). Also included with each season are several metered responses that are appropriate to the season, capable of being sung in response to a reading, a scripture lesson, a prayer or offering.

These resources come out of my ministry, out of the lives, struggles, joys, prayers, and praise of United Methodist churches over the last twenty years. It is my intent, and sincere hope, that they might touch the lives of other churches. Whether they are used as is, altered for a use more appropriate to another congregation, or simply consulted as a springboard to launch further creativity, the goal is to stir, stretch, feed, and enliven our worship of God, the God who works to stir, stretch, feed, and enliven us.

Many people throughout the years are responsible for my faith and the growth of my spirit, far too many to name or thank. But I offer these resources in deep gratitude for one whose persistent friendship, passionate faith, powerful words, gentle spirit, and constant grace have touched and shaped not only my faith, but also the very depths of who I am. To Bruce Hazelwood for all he has been and is, I dedicate these resources.

The Pentecost story in Acts notes that the Spirit was present as a rushing wind. May something of the same breeze blow afresh on us, our worship, our lives, our work and growth as the people of God.

The Seasons of Advent and Christmas

The First Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 64:1-9
1 Corinthians 1:3-9
Mark 13:24-37
Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

Lighting of the Advent Wreath

Leader: The days grow shorter, nights longer,
darkness ever more powerful,
and something deep and primal in us
fears that this time its advance
will not be halted.

People: Stir up your might, O God;
come and save us.

Leader: We light this candle
with the prayer and faith
that light will touch
and turn back the darkness,
the dark of night and
the dark plaguing human hearts.

People: Stir up your might, O God;
come and save us.

Invocation

Come, O Christ, for whom we wait.
Make life new. Amen.

Opening Sentences

Leader: Come, friends, gather here.
We begin our Advent waiting.

People: Waiting? Waiting?
We're people of instant everything,
of faster and faster lives.

We don't do waiting.

Leader: That's the problem.

People: Problem? What problem?

Leader: That we've lost the art of waiting,
that we think we can do everything,
solve our own problems,
feed our own hungers,
fill our own emptiness.

People: But we're independent,
so aching, emptily, drivenly,
sadly independent.

Leader: There's another way to be,
a way of connection, a way of peace.

People: We hunger for something like that
in our lives.
Can we learn?

Leader: Come, friends,
let's begin our Advent waiting.

People: Living Christ, come to us.
Bathe us in your healing Spirit.

Opening Prayer

You for whom we wait
even though we have long forgotten it:
open in us again a space for your coming.
Amidst all the busy ways we fill our time,
running here and there,
racing against the clock,
moving faster and faster;
amidst all the shallow ways
we try to fill our emptiness,
with things to own and food to eat
and drugs to dull our ache;
amidst all the sad ways we try to end our loneliness,
TV's droning, radios blaring,
surface encounters with people
we never really know;
amidst all the brokenness in our lives and world,
clear an empty place, a still place,
a place only you can fill.

Come again to us,
like a breath of fresh air,
like a renewing walk,
like a long lost friend.
Come again to us.
Set us free to live and to live in you. Amen.

Prayer for Illumination

You whose strange way
is to come among us gently,
glory hidden in a stable,
healing power in a helpless child,
open the eyes and ears of our hearts
that ancient words may point us to your presence,
among us even now. Amen.

Closing Prayer

God who came and comes and will come in Christ,
we give thanks for your presence to us,
in this place, in all places.
Send us now into your world,
filled with your Spirit,
alive with hope,
to give ourselves for others
in Christ. Amen.

The Second Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 40:1-11
2 Peter 3:8-15a
Mark 1:1-8
Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13

Lighting of the Advent Wreath

Leader: Frost hardens the ground,
chill winds blow,
icy tentacles streak the windows,
even as all that's cold and harsh
in the world
chills our hearts.

People: Show us your steadfast love, O God,
and grant your salvation.

Leader: We light this candle
with the prayer and faith
that a great thaw is coming,
to melt winter's icy grip
and to shed compassion's warmth
on all life.

People: Show us your steadfast love, O God,
and grant your salvation.

Invocation

Come, O Christ, and move among us.
Work the healing of your ways. Amen.

Opening Sentences

Leader: Come, friends, gather here.
Let our hearts be renewed in hope.

People: Hope? We have plenty of hopes—
hope for a day off,
hope for a quiet evening,
hope that our kids stay out of trouble,
hope for a nice Christmas.

Leader: But our hopes are so small.
Where are our grand dreams?

People: Dreams? Dreams?
Nightmares, perhaps—
poverty, violence, cancer, drugs.
Small hopes are all we can muster.

Leader: But what of the mighty fallen and
the lowly raised,
of the hungry filled and earth renewed?
What of peace, real peace,
of life restored to simple delight,
of a meaningful future for our kids?

People: Can these things be?
O we wish it were so!

Leader: Then know this:
it is the dream of God, the work of God,
to make it so.

People: Can we believe it?
Do we dare to hope?

Leader: Come, friends, gather here.
Let our hearts be renewed in hope.

People: Living Christ, come to us.
Bathe our hearts
in the hope of your healing Spirit.

Opening Prayer

This is a comfortable season, O God,
a warm and nostalgic time.
Familiar decorations stir memories,
bright lights lighten our hearts,
carols wrap us in their age-old arms.
We give thanks for the sweetness
of this time of year,
when even the coldest heart thaws a bit
and even the hardest heart is softened
and learns to give.
Yet we know we have tamed your power,
you who put on flesh

to show the glory of all flesh,
you who came in poverty
to show the humanity of the poor,
you who entered life as an outcast
to shatter all such distinctions.
Stir up your might,
beneath all our comfortable traditions.
Break free in our lives,
as a hunger for justice, a thirst for peace,
a wild and holy hope for all your earth.
Touch us again with your mighty Spirit,
that our hearts may ache with hope
and our lives be given to love's work,
your work,
in Christ. Amen.

Prayer for Illumination

You whose way is to come among us as a stranger,
in poverty and filth,
among the lowest and least:
open our ears to your voice
in the strangeness of Scripture.
Open our eyes to your face
in the look of a stranger.
Open our hearts to your call
to live in strange and healing ways,
in Christ. Amen.

Closing Prayer

Mighty God,
keep alive in us a hunger for your *shalom*,
your wholeness.
Wean us from all that dulls our spirits
and lets us settle for less than your promise.
Whet our appetites with a hope in your healing,
through Christ. Amen.

The Third Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 61:1-4,8-11
1 Thessalonians 5:16-24
John 1:6-8, 19-28
Psalm 126

Lighting of the Advent Wreath

Leader: Trees, stripped bare,
raise their naked arms to heaven,
longing to be clothed again with life,
and a raw nakedness in us
yearns for new clothes,
the garments of salvation,
the robes of righteousness,
something holy and healing
for our lives and world.

People: Restore our fortunes, O Lord,
like rivers in the desert.

Leader: We light this candle
with the prayer and faith
that God will weave
a stunning new wardrobe,
the green of new life to cover
naked branches,
the deep joy of wholeness to wrap
around our sorrows.

People: Restore our fortunes, O Lord,
like rivers in the desert.

Invocation

Come, O Christ, and make your home with us.
Release in us your power of new life. Amen.

Opening Sentences

Leader: Come, friends, gather here.
Let's wait together for the light.

People: Light? We don't wait for light.
We flick a switch, and on they come—
lamplights, house lights, street lights,
holiday lights, bright, bright lights.

Leader: And with them all,
we still live in darkness.

People: Darkness? With all these lights?

Leader: There is a deeper darkness,
one that wounds our hearts
and infects our world,
the dark of greed, of hatred,
of self-absorption and cold indifference.

People: We know these shadows,
within us, around us.
Is there any release?

Leader: Come, friends,
let's wait for the light together.

People: Living Christ, come to us.
Bathe us in your healing Spirit.
Bring light to our hearts
and to all the darkness of our world.

Opening Prayer

We are enlightened people, O God,
advanced beyond the ancients'
wildest imaginings.
We are capable of so much.
We harvest the power that lights the stars,
cool the summer, heat the winter,
eat fruit in season and out,
engthen life and hold death at bay.
We know more than ever before
and access information with astounding speed.
We are so enlightened,
yet our world and our lives are such a mess.

With all we know,
we lack the wisdom to make our world a home.
With all we can do,
we lack the power to live in healing ways.
With all we can buy,
we lack the simple wealth of contentment.

Holy One,
yours are the wisdom, the power, the joy
that make life full.
As we lean toward Bethlehem,
with all our empty enlightenment,
fill us with true light.
Release in us your life
that something new may truly be born
in us and in our world,
through Christ. Amen.

Prayer for Illumination

You whose strange way
is to come among us unexpectedly,
to creep through the back door
and cradle in a feeding trough:
Work your surprise on us again.
Through ancient words and doubt-riddled faith
and far too ordinary worship,
creep into our midst again
and grasp our lives with your healing power,
in Christ. Amen.

Closing Prayer

You whose light shines in the darkness
and has not been overcome:
Draw near to us.
Illumine the shadows of our lives by your presence.
Pierce the darkness of our world
with the bright light of your love,
shining even through us,
in Christ. Amen.

The Fourth Sunday of Advent

2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16

Romans 16:25-27

Luke 1:26-38

Luke 1:47-55

Lighting of the Advent Wreath

Leader: Veiled from our sight are
bulbs buried deep,
seeds lying in the cold earth,
already planted but waiting,
harboring life,
hidden but readying to rise,
even as the dark womb holds a seed,
the cold manger a bulb,
readying to rise with life for all the world.

People: The Almighty has done
great things for me,
and holy is the name of the Lord.

Leader: We light this candle
with the prayer and faith
that the cold and dark of our lives
cradle in them
the seed of holiness,
of God's healing power.

People: The Almighty has done
great things for me,
and holy is the name of the Lord.

Invocation

Come, O Christ, be born among us.
Let our lives cradle your glory. Amen.

Opening Sentences

Leader: Come, friends, gather here.
Our time of waiting grows short.

People: Short it is,
only 3 more days to shop till Christmas,
and then it's party time, gift time,
family time and feast time.

Leader: That's not all we wait for,
not even the best.

People: Is there more? Is there better?

Leader: God come among us,
healing wonder in our lives,
healing power in our world,
the birth of something fresh and new.

People: Can there really be such things?

Leader: Yes,
even now our lives
are pregnant with possibility,
our world full of God's Spirit.

People: And something new may be born,
even in us, even through us.

Leader: Come, friends,
our time of waiting grows short.

People: Living Christ, come to us.
Be born in us with healing power
and in our world with your *shalom*.

Opening Prayer

Gracious God,
while we have done much to get
ready for the holiday,
we have not yet prepared ourselves
for your coming.
So ready us, we pray.
Calm in us a place where your peace can begin.
Raise up in us a hope for life made new.
Open our eyes to signs of your presence and work.

Tune our ears to your call
and our hearts to your love.
Birth in us something new and wondrous,
even as you are
born into our world in Bethlehem.
Ready us to receive you,
in Christ. Amen.

Prayer for Illumination

You who comes among us
in new and astonishing ways,
birth to a virgin,
life where none could be:
Open a place in us
where something new can emerge.
Where we are cynics,
expecting only more of the same,
pour out your Spirit
and unleash the power of virgin birth,
in us and all your world. Amen.

Closing Prayer

Mighty God,
Your way in the world is virgin birth,
cracking open the old with the power of new life.
Grant us eyes to look for your touch
where none seems possible.
Grant us lives ready to be your touch
where none can be found.
We ask this through Christ,
your power of hope among us. Amen.

Christmas Eve Day

Isaiah 62:6-12

Titus 3:4-7

Luke 2:(1-7) 8-20

Psalm 97

Invocation

Gather us in the wonder of this night, O God,
and be born anew,
among us. Amen.

Opening Sentences

Leader: This is the night when
we remember Christ's coming.

People: Alleluia! Christ is born.

Leader: But what do we celebrate,
a tender birth?

People: No! The sacrifice of God,
who came as one helpless
and homeless and poor.

Leader: What do we celebrate,
lavish gifts purchased and given?

People: No! The self-giving of God,
who took on flesh
and knew pain and death for us all.

Leader: What do we celebrate,
a sweet little child?

People: No! The Christ,
who brought Good News to the poor,
who welcomed those excluded
and befriended those ignored,
who confronted the powerful
and criticized the comfortable,

who was crucified for his honesty
and raised by God's power.

Leader: This is the news,
that God comes among us.

People: The news is good, that God is with us.

The news is disturbing,
that God would change us.

The news is wondrous,
that God will heal us.

All praise to God who comes in Christ:
Alleluia! Alleluia!

Opening Prayer

Gracious God,
we join again in the glad time of Christ's birth,
laughing, singing,
praising you for coming so long ago.

As we do, we pray for your miracle again.

Come among us this night.

Be born in us.

Touch our lives and world with your healing wonder,
in Christ. Amen.

Prayer for Illumination

Wondrous God,
as your wisdom is cradled in these
Scriptures,
so your Christ is cradled in our lives and our
world.
This night open our eyes. Amen.

Closing Prayer

Mighty God,
cradling in Bethlehem,
glory hidden in the ordinary,
but to eyes that see,
the power to make all things new:
Receive the lives we bring you this night.
Bathe them
in the wondrous mystery of your presence.
Shine into them the light of your healing love
and through them
lighten all that is cold and dark in your
world. Amen.

First Sunday After Christmas

Isaiah 61:10-62:3

Galatians 4:4-7

Luke 2:22-40

Psalm 148

Invocation

You who gathers the
hopes and fears of all the years
in Bethlehem,
gather us now in your presence.
Still all that clutters our hearts and minds.
Help us see into the depths of our days
to the glory of you come among us,
in Christ. Amen.

Opening Sentences

Leader: Come, friends, gather here.

Let's celebrate the mystery of faith.

People: What is this mystery?

Leader: "The Word became flesh
and dwelt among us,
full of grace and truth."

People: What does it mean,
this holy speech in flesh and blood?

Leader: That all flesh is holy,
every life cradles God's presence.

People: Can this be,
holy depth in us?

Leader: Yes, and days lived amidst glory,
a world alive with holy wonder.

People: Our lives?

Our very ordinary,
one-day-pretty-much-like-another,
ho-hum lives?

Leader: Yes,

filled with God's presence,
charged with fierce beauty,
holding an awesome preciousness.

People: This is the mystery of faith?

Then we will rejoice:
Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace, goodwill to all.

Opening Prayer

We join to give you thanks, holy One,
that you dare to come among us,
and we pray for hearts renewed in
your gracious mystery.

In Bethlehem we see you give yourself to us,
and we pray for hearts grown large
that we might give ourselves to others.

In Bethlehem we see you emptying yourself,
and we pray for hearts free enough
to be vulnerable,
to live openly and joyfully
before all we cannot control.

In Bethlehem we see you embracing
what is small and insignificant in the world,
and we pray for hearts wise enough
to embrace the seemingly worthless
in our lives
and to find your presence there.

In Bethlehem we see you become like us
that we might become yours,
and we pray for lives rooted in your Spirit
and growing in your love,
that all we do might give you praise,
through Christ. Amen.

Prayer for Illumination

You who comes into our midst with a whisper,
give us ears to hear you.
In today's worship,
in ancient tales of faith,
in the humdrum of each of our days,
let us know your presence and glory,
in Christ. Amen.

Closing Prayer

You whose coming causes us to sing:
as the carols fade away
and decorations come down
and life returns to normal,
keep alive in us the joyous news,
that you are among us.
Let our lives sing,
not one day but every day,
of your glory and love,
in Christ. Amen.

Second Sunday After Christmas

Jeremiah 31:7-14

Ephesians 1:3-14

John 1:1-18

Psalm 147:12-20

Invocation

You who comes among us
though we know you not,
Grant us eyes to see you in our midst,
ears to recognize your voice,
hearts to know you
and your great abundance,
in Christ. Amen.

Opening Sentences

Leader: Come, friends, gather here.
Rejoice in God's abundance.

People: Abundance?
The world is cold and barren right now,
firm in winter's grip.

Leader: But there is still an abundance,
one that gathers home
those who have been far off.

People: There is something in all of us
that pines for home,
for where we belong.

Leader: There is still an abundance,
one that makes a place
for those who have been left out.

People: There is something in all of us
that longs to be welcome,
to be wanted.

Leader: There is still an abundance,
one that blesses our spirits,
that calls us to high purpose.

People: There is something in all of us
that yearns to matter,
to make some difference.

Leader: There is still an abundance,
one that makes of us children of God.

People: There is something in all of us
that sense who we are,
that aches for release.

Leader: There is still an abundance
of God's grace among us.

People: We will rejoice in the
who gathers us, welcomes us, calls and adopts us,
the One who stirs us to praise:
Alleluia! Alleluia!

Opening Prayer

You who takes on flesh,
help us know your presence in all flesh,
in the skin of each other,
the hide of animals,
the flesh of insect and bird,
the great pulse of life flowing through us
and weaving us together.

You whose glory is among us in Christ Jesus,
help us know your glory in all things,
from the fierce grandeur of a mountain range
to the delicate beauty of a flower,
from the simple rhythm of the surf
to the intricate pattern of a spider's web,
from the delighted play of chipmunks
to the awesome gift of life itself,
the rich depth and wonder of your presence.

You from whom we receive grace upon grace,
help us to know your grace in each of our days,
in tenderness, in caring,
in challenge and support,
in tears and laughter,
in each simple breath,

a presence filling life full.
You who gives us power to become God's children,
help us to know who we are,
to know our great worth,
our vast potential,
our high and holy calling.
You through whom all things were made,
help us to know your presence always
and to turn toward you with praise. Amen.

Prayer for Illumination

O Wisdom of God,
Word become flesh,
come to us again this hour.
Through ancient words of faith,
through songs of praise,
through prayers of commitment,
[through a meal of hope,]
come to life in our midst.
This day again take on flesh,
even ours. Amen.

Closing Prayer

You whose coming is as gentle
as it is surprising,
as hidden as it is glorious,
tune us to your wonder among us.
In all that is ordinary,
help us to know your presence,
your grace,
your claim on our lives,
in Christ. Amen.

Responses for Advent and Christmas

1. Meter: 87.87 Suggested tune: Stuttgart

Lord, our hearts we open to you.
Pour your Spirit like the rain.
Grow us into hope, we pray you,
'til all life shall praise your name.

2. Suggested tune: "In the Bleak Midwinter"

Holy One, come near us,
let our sorrows cease.
Bathe us in your Spirit,
touch us with your peace.
Dry each tear and capture
every heart that's here.
Fill each one with love that
away all fear.

3. Meter: 87.87.87 Suggested tune: "Regent Square"
("Angels From the Realms of Glory")

God in Christ has come among us,
human flesh housing glory,
that our eyes may see the wonder,
healing power in our story.
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Praise and gifts to Christ we bring.

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