

Year A, Volume 1

Advent through Pentecost



Connections

Worship Companion

David Gambrell, editor

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Introduction

This is not a book of prayers—
at least not yet.

These words will not become prayers
until the Holy Spirit breathes them,
until the body of Christ speaks and hears them,
until the people of God live them
in acts of service and love.

These words come from different people
in different places of ministry—
pastors and poets,
students and scholars,
activists and artists,
evangelists and educators,
bakers and baristas,
mission workers and musicians.

They have different voices,
and those voices will resonate
with different worshipers
in different ways.

It will be up to you,
as a planner and leader of worship,
to make these words sing:

to pray them
among the beloved people of God
with honesty, passion, wonder, and grace;

to enact them
as the whole body of Christ
with heart, mind, soul, and strength;

to transform them
through the gifts of the Spirit,
with rhythm, color, texture, and taste.

You are encouraged, then,
even challenged,
even required
to find your own voice,
to inhabit these texts,
to adapt them as needed,
so that these words
may become the prayers
of your people
in your place
for the sake of the world,
all people,
in every place.

Only then
will these words become prayers.

Only then
will they rise like incense before God,
joining the intercession
of our great high priest,
Christ Jesus,
who still teaches us to pray.

David Gambrell

How to Use This Book

Three kinds of materials are provided in this volume. First, at the beginning of each major section is a short essay titled “Making Connections.” These brief passages of commentary have several purposes:

- they introduce the primary theological themes of a given time in the Christian year;
- they highlight a particular biblical text, drawn from the lectionary, that may be used as a kind of lens for magnifying and examining the themes of the season;
- they point to distinctive features of the lectionary cycle included in this volume; and

- they offer practical and pastoral guidance for leaders as they seek to prepare faithful, thoughtful, creative, and engaging worship for the people of God.

These essays can be used in discussion with worship committees, planning teams, or church staff groups to promote biblical study, inspire theological reflection, and inform liturgical action.

Second, each section includes a collection of seasonal/repeating resources. These are liturgical texts intended for use during a certain span of time in the Christian year, whether occasionally or for several weeks in a row. Specifically, these resources include the following acts of worship:

Confession and Pardon
 Prayer for Illumination
 Thanksgiving for Baptism
 Great Thanksgiving
 Prayer after Communion
 Prayer of Thanksgiving (for the dedication of the offering when the Eucharist is not celebrated)
 Blessing

These texts are somewhat broader and more general in their theological content and liturgical language, and they are designed for multiple uses within a liturgical season or period of Ordinary Time. They promote diachronic (meaning “through time”) connections from one Sunday to the next, deriving their benefit from regular engagement with the church’s tradition as people return to worship from week to week. They emphasize central convictions of Christian faith and life, supporting the kind of faith formation that takes place through sustained, long-term participation in worship. These texts are especially connected with the celebration of the sacraments.

Third, there is a set of resources for each Sunday or festival in the Christian year. Specifically, these resources include the following elements of the service:

Opening Sentences (or Call to Worship)
 Prayer of the Day (or Gathering Prayer)
 Invitation to Discipleship
 Prayers of Intercession
 Invitation to Offering
 Invitation to the Table
 Charge

These texts are somewhat narrower and more specific in their theological content and liturgical language, and they are designed for use on a given Sunday

or festival in the Christian year. They promote synchronic (meaning “same time”) connections between the liturgy and the lectionary, deriving their benefit from flashes of insight that collect around a common word, image, or phrase from the biblical texts for the day. They emphasize particular practices of Christian faith and life, supporting the kind of faith formation that takes place in more concentrated, short-term experiences of worship. These texts are especially connected with the proclamation of the word.

By combining the **seasonal/repeating resources (in bold type)** with the *Sunday/festival elements (in italics)*, as well as other elements not provided in this resource (in regular type), as indicated below, worship planners will be able to assemble complete orders of worship for the Lord’s Day.

GATHERING

Opening Sentences

Hymn, Psalm, or Spiritual Song

Prayer of the Day

Confession and Pardon

WORD

Prayer for Illumination

Scripture

Sermon

Hymn, Psalm, or Spiritual Song

Affirmation of Faith

Invitation to Discipleship

Thanksgiving for Baptism

Prayers of Intercession

EUCCHARIST

Invitation to Offering

Offering

Invitation to the Table

Great Thanksgiving

Communion

Prayer after Communion

[IF THE EUCHARIST IS OMITTED]

Invitation to Offering

Offering

Prayer of Thanksgiving

SENDING

Hymn, Psalm, or Spiritual Song

Blessing and *Charge*

This order of worship is offered as one example. The actions and elements of worship may of course be arranged in a variety of other ways according to denominational patterns and congregational practices. This resource is also available in ebook format, from which users can copy and paste liturgies for use in bulletins and other worship materials.

Lectionary Readings

This resource is designed to support and equip users of the three-year Revised Common Lectionary (1992), developed by the ecumenical Consultation on Common Texts as an adaptation and expansion of the Common Lectionary (1983). The contents and composition of this volume reflect that emphasis, consistent with the Connections commentary series.

However, this resource also includes supplemental liturgical materials for the four-year Narrative Lectionary (2010), designed by faculty at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota. Taking advantage of overlap between the two systems, with these supplemental materials, this resource will address (at least obliquely) all of the primary texts of the Narrative Lectionary over the course of its six volumes.

See the Scripture index for the list of the lectionary readings supported in this volume (in canonical order). A comprehensive biblical index for both lectionaries will be published when all six volumes of the *Connections Worship Companion* have been completed.

Acknowledgments

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Key to Symbols and Abbreviations

Regular	Leader
Bold	People
<i>Italics</i>	Rubric describing liturgical action or identifying options
...	Time for individual prayers, spoken or silent
<i>or</i>	Alternate readings or responses

**Resources for the Revised
Common Lectionary**



SEASON OF ADVENT



Making Connections

The season of Advent is a time of endings and beginnings. Advent begins by looking forward to the end—the culmination of God’s saving work, the coming of a new creation, and the return of Christ to reign in glory. Advent ends by returning to the beginning—a fresh chapter in the story of salvation, the opening words of the Gospels, and the birth of Jesus the Messiah. The thread that holds all these themes together is the promise of the presence of God.

The Gospel of Matthew, featured in Year A of the Revised Common Lectionary, begins and ends with the promise of God’s presence in Jesus Christ. In the first chapter of Matthew, an angel of the Lord announces to Joseph that Mary’s child will be called “‘Emmanuel,’ which means ‘God is with us’” (Matt. 1:23); these words are read on the Fourth Sunday of Advent, Year A, just as the season of Advent comes to its conclusion. In the final chapter of Matthew, the risen Lord tells the disciples, “Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20); this promise is proclaimed on Trinity Sunday, Year A, as the second half of the Christian year commences. Thus, the promise of God’s presence has a special significance in the way it is woven into the first Gospel and this lectionary year.

As the church begins its year with the Gospel of Matthew, be attentive to the theological themes of promise and presence as they appear throughout the Gospel—from the opening genealogy to the closing Great Commission. Be mindful also of the ways in which they are manifest in Christian liturgy and Christian life—especially through the proclamation of the word, the celebration of the sacraments, and the everyday patterns of prayer and spiritual disciplines that sustain us from Sunday to Sunday.

During the season of Advent, there are ample opportunities to connect the promises of God through the prophets to the concerns and challenges of our present age. The readings from Isaiah have particularly strong implications for peacemaking, social justice, ministries of compassion, and the care of creation. The readings from Matthew begin with the *challenge* of Jesus’ presence to those who are unprepared for his coming, turning in the final week of Advent to the *comfort* of his presence as Emmanuel and

Savior. Three readings from Romans complement the themes of promise and presence while anticipating an extended engagement with this epistle in the time after Pentecost.

Trust this promise: God is with you. Know this presence: God is with you. The one who has loved you from the beginning will meet you at the end.

Seasonal/Repeating Resources

These resources are intended for regular use throughout the season of Advent.

CONFESSION AND PARDON

The confession and pardon may be led from the baptismal font.

Now is the time to wake from sleep—
to cast off the shroud of sin
and put on the garment of grace.

Let us trust the promise of God's mercy,
for the day of salvation is near.

The confession may begin with a time of silence for personal prayer.

**God of the ages,
through the prophets and apostles
you have challenged us
to lay aside the works of destruction
and prepare for your new creation.
We confess that we continue
to cling to our sinful ways—
greed and lust,
abuse and waste,
envy and strife.**

**Forgive us, Holy One.
By your Spirit, lead us to live
in a way that honors you,
proclaiming the good news
of Jesus Christ our Savior,
who is coming in glory to reign.**

Water may be poured or lifted from the baptismal font.

Through the gift of baptism
we are cleansed in the Holy Spirit,
clothed with the righteousness of Christ,
and covered by the grace of God.

Believe the good news:
In the name of Jesus Christ, we are forgiven.
Thanks be to God.

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

The prayer for illumination is led from the lectern or pulpit.

Faithful God,
through the gift of your word
you offer us instruction,
encouragement, and hope.
By the power of your Spirit
teach us to live in hope,
sharing joy and peace with the world;
in the name of Jesus our Lord. **Amen.**

THANKSGIVING FOR BAPTISM

The thanksgiving for baptism is led from the baptismal font.

The introductory dialogue (“The Lord be with you . . .”) may be sung or spoken.

We give you thanks, O God,
for the blessing of baptism—
water in the wilderness
and streams in the desert;
healing for the thirsty earth
and hope for hungry souls.
Continue to shower upon us
the gifts of your Holy Spirit.
Strengthen us in our weakness,
and take away our trembling.
Lead us on the homeward path,
and teach us the heavenly song
of everlasting joy and gladness;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

GREAT THANKSGIVING

The Great Thanksgiving is led from the Communion table.

In this eucharistic prayer, the responsive phrases (“Here we lift our hearts . . .”) may be replaced with a musical setting of “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” or with sung or spoken versions of the introductory dialogue (“The Lord be with you . . .”), the Sanctus (“Holy, holy, holy . . .”), a memorial acclamation (“Christ has died . . .”), and a Trinitarian doxology and Great Amen.

Here we lift our hearts to you,
praying: Come, Lord Jesus!
O come, O come, Emmanuel!

All glory and honor to you, O Lord,
for the promise of your saving love—
new life and hope springing forth
from the stump of Jesse’s tree;
a world where wolf and lamb,
leopard and kid, lion and calf
will live together in safety and peace
and a little child will lead us.
Here we lift our hearts to you,
praying: Come, Lord Jesus!
O come, O come, Emmanuel!

All glory and honor to you, O Lord,
for by your grace you sent us a Savior—
one who delights in worshiping you
and brings equality and justice
to people who are humble and poor,
one who has destroyed the power of death
and will be faithful and righteous forever.

The words of institution are included here, if not elsewhere, while the bread and cup are lifted (but not broken/poured).

Remembering your promises
and rejoicing in your presence,
we offer the sacrifice of praise.
Here we lift our hearts to you,
praying: Come, Lord Jesus!
O come, O come, Emmanuel!

All glory and honor to you, O Lord,
for the gift of your Holy Spirit—
the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and might,
the Spirit of knowledge and wonder.
Pour out your Spirit upon us
and upon this heavenly banquet
until the earth is full of your glory
like the waters that cover the sea.
Here we lift our hearts to you,
praying: Come, Lord Jesus!
O come, O come, Emmanuel!

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

The prayer after Communion is led from the Communion table.

Good and gracious God,
as you have been with us
at this holy meal,
be with us in our daily bread.
Help us to be with others
in the name of the one who says,
“I am with you always,”
Jesus Christ, Emmanuel. **Amen.**

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

The prayer of thanksgiving may be led from the Communion table.

Blessed are you, O Lord our God,
for you have done wondrous things.
Your glory fills the whole earth.
You send the rain to water the land
and cause the fields to flourish.
You defend those who are poor
and deliver those who are oppressed.
Use the works of our hands
to establish your holy realm,
and strengthen our hearts
as we wait for the coming
of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

BLESSING

The blessing and charge may be led from the doors of the church.

May the God of steadfast love
lead you forth in harmony.
May the Lord of everlasting life
welcome you into glory.
May the Spirit of abounding hope
fill you with joy and peace. **Alleluia!**

First Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 2:1–5
Psalm 122

Romans 13:11–14
Matthew 24:36–44

OPENING SENTENCES

The prophet Isaiah
made this invitation to his listeners,
and he extends it to us again today:

**Come, let us go up
to the mountain of the Lord.
Let us go to the house
of the God of Jacob and Rachel.
May God teach us
to walk in God's paths.**

Let us worship God.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

God of yesterday, today, and tomorrow,
God of the beginning and the end times:
As we begin this journey through Advent
and start a new year in our Christian story,
we remember that your time is different from our time.
We must stay awake and pay attention
because your peace is not our peace,
and your ways are not our ways.
We do not know the hour or the day
when you are coming,
but we know that we must be watchful
for all the ways you will appear.
Even as we remember this beginning,
we know that you will be with us to the end.
With hope, peace, joy, and love we pray. **Amen.**

INVITATION TO DISCIPLESHIP

The invitation to discipleship may be led from the baptismal font.

In times of uncertainty,
when new things are just beginning
or when we cannot see the end,
we are invited to put our trust in God;
we are invited to be ready for anything.
We may not know what will happen next,
but we know we will not be alone.

This week, how can you reach out to someone
to let them know they are not alone?
How will you remember that God is with you?

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

The prayers of intercession may be led from the midst of the congregation.

God of hope,
we come to you as our waiting time begins—
this “already but not yet” time.
We look forward just a few weeks
and prepare to celebrate your coming years ago.
We remember to prepare for your coming again.
We pray in hope.

God of peace,
as part of the preparation for your coming,
may we begin to beat our swords into plowshares.
May we dismantle our weapons of mass destruction,
and rid ourselves of our stockpiles of fear.
May we sow seeds of connection rather than discontent.
May we teach peace to the nations
who continue to study war, including our own.
We pray for your peace.

God of joy,
lead us in the joyful work of making peace.
May we seek ways to feed those who hunger,
to bind up those who are wounded,
to get treatment for all who are addicted,
to find housing for all who need it,
and provide protection for any who are not safe.
May our joy be rooted in your promises
to care for the stranger,
to release the captive,
to bring good news to the poor,
and to let the oppressed go free.
We pray for such joy.

God of love,
a joy so deep and wide will surely expand our hearts.
So today as we pray for those we love already—
family, friends, neighbors, colleagues—
we pray also for those who are harder for us to love—
family, friends, neighbors, colleagues.
Love isn't easy,
so we ask for your strength and guidance.
We pray to love well.

As we journey toward Bethlehem
to meet you at the manger once again,
may we not forget to look for you
all around and at all times—
wherever we encounter
your hope, peace, joy, and love.
In Jesus' name we pray. **Amen.**

INVITATION TO OFFERING

The invitation to offering may be led from the Communion table.

In the season of Advent we remember
that God came as a gift to and for us.
As we enter this season of preparation,
may we bring our own gifts to and for God.

INVITATION TO THE TABLE

The invitation to the table is led from the Communion table.

Just as Advent invites us
to look forward and to look back,
this table does as well.
We look back to all the meals Jesus shared
with all the different people
in all the different places.
This table offers us a chance
to share a meal with Jesus today,
but it also points us to the final table—
a table at the end of time
where there will be a feast for all,
with no swords or spears,
no quarreling and jealousy.

At this table we come to taste
the hope, peace, joy, and love of Christ,
and to imagine a world in which
we know it all completely.
Come to the table.

CHARGE

The blessing and charge may be led from the doors of the church.

The psalmist writes,
“For the sake of the house of the Lord our God,
I will seek your good.”
As we go forth in this new church year,
preparing to celebrate God’s birth into this world,
let us go out and seek the good of others.
Amen. or Thanks be to God.

Worshipers may be invited to say to one another, “I will seek your good.”

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