

Year B, 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

[IF THE EUCHARIST IS OMITTED]

Invitation to Offering

Invitation to Offering

Offering

Offering

Invitation to the Table

Great Thanksgiving

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Communion

Prayer after Communion

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 for preparation. With hope and longing, we prepare to welcome the coming realm of God and the glorious return of our Savior. With wonder and joy, we prepare to celebrate the nativity of Jesus and the mystery of the incarnation. During these Advent days, we make way for Christ's coming.

The Gospel of Mark begins with the theme of preparation. Mark recalls the prophecy of Isaiah, "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord'" (Mark 1:2–3; cf. Isa. 40:3). Unlike the other evangelists, Mark provides no birth narrative, no grand genealogy, no poetic prologue. This Gospel plunges us into the story "immediately" (one of Mark's favorite words). John the baptizer is already waiting in the wilderness. The life and mission of Jesus are already underway. Ironically, perhaps, the reader has little time to prepare.

The Revised Common Lectionary Year B focuses on the Gospel of Mark, the shortest of the four canonical Gospels and the first to be written, according to scholarly consensus. Because Mark is shorter and lacks some of the accounts of Jesus' life and ministry provided by the other evangelists, Year B sometimes supplements Mark with passages from the other Gospels, particularly around Christmas, Easter, and in the time after Pentecost. Yet Mark has its own structure and style, propelled by an action-packed narrative, the fulfillment of time, and the in-breaking of the reign of God.

As you keep watch and prepare for worship this Advent season, remember the immediacy and urgency of Mark. People are hungry, hurting, homeless. Friends and family are sick and suffering. Nations and neighborhoods are plagued by violence. Earth is groaning for renewal. Now is the time for fervent prayer and bold action. Now is the time to "repent, and believe in the good news" (Mark 1:15).

Christ is coming! Prepare the way of the Lord.

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.

When we turn to the Lord in our hearts,
God speaks peace to us.

Trusting in God's faithfulness and steadfast love,
let us confess our sin.

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

**God of the past, present, and future,
we praise you for your presence in our lives.
We confess that we have turned away from you.
Our hearts are devoted to the desires of the flesh.
Our thoughts focus on our own needs
at the expense of others.
Our minds are occupied with what is happening
in our lives at this moment
instead of focusing on your calling.**

**In your mercy, forgive us, O God.
Through the power of your Holy Spirit,
turn us away from our own desires
and turn us toward your will;
through Jesus Christ we pray.**

Water may be poured or lifted from the baptismal font.

Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet;
righteousness and peace will kiss each other.
Faithfulness will spring up from the ground,
and righteousness will look down from the sky.

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.

Eternal God, by your Holy Spirit
and through these prophetic writings,
reveal to us the mystery of the ages,
teach us to be faithful to your will,
and strengthen us according to the gospel
of Jesus Christ our Savior. **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.*

Glory to you, O God,
Alpha and Omega.

In the beginning of creation,
you sent your Spirit over the water
and called all things into being
through the voice of your Word.

In the beginning of Jesus’ ministry,
you poured out your Holy Spirit upon him
and claimed him as your Beloved,
your Word made flesh to dwell among us.

At the beginning of this new year
in the life and mission of your church,
fill us with the power of your Spirit,
that we may bear witness to your Word.

Keep us faithful to the end,
living according to the promise of our baptism
until Christ comes in glory
to establish your realm of justice and peace.

Glory to you, O God,
Alpha and Omega. **Amen.**

GREAT THANKSGIVING

The Great Thanksgiving is led from the Communion table.

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

O Lord our God, how great is your love
and how wonderful is your name!
You created this world
and provide all we need to live.
You call us to be your people
and lead us as a flock.
You turn tears into laughter
and fill us with good things.
When we lose our way
you send prophets to call us home.

In hope we sing your praise:

The Sanctus (“Holy, holy, holy . . .”) may be sung or spoken.

We give thanks that you sent Jesus
to be born and live among us
as a gift of your love and grace.
We confess that we rejected him
and allowed him to be crucified.
Yet we rejoice that his death was not the end
and that his resurrection brings a new creation.

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

With great thanksgiving, O Lord,
we remember your love for all people
revealed in Jesus Christ.
As we break this bread and drink this cup,
we offer ourselves in service to you
from this day to the end of the age.

A memorial acclamation (“Christ has died . . .”) may be sung or spoken.

Pour out your Holy Spirit, O Lord,
upon these gifts of bread and wine,
and upon us as your people,
that together we may be the body and blood
of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Empower us by your Holy Spirit
to live as one people in the world.
Help us to live in peace and joy
until Christ comes again.

A Trinitarian doxology and Great Amen may be sung or spoken.

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

The prayer after Communion is led from the Communion table.

Gracious God, we give you thanks
for this meal we have shared.
Strengthen us through this bread and cup
to serve you with love, peace, and compassion.
Lead us to live in joyful expectation
until the coming of Jesus Christ,
your Son and our Savior. **Amen.**

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

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

Almighty God, in Jesus Christ
we have witnessed your saving work.
We give you thanks and praise
that you have guided us in the past,
you still guide us in the present,
and you will guide us into the future.
We thank you for all the blessings
you have provided in this life,
especially for the gift of your love
and the calling to share that love with others.
Especially we thank you for Jesus Christ,
who came to dwell among us
and has shown us your way of life.
With hope and prayer, we await his return
on the day when your righteousness
will reign over the whole world.
Until that glorious day,
fill us with your love and mercy.
Help us to be a thankful people,
rejoicing in your service;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

BLESSING

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

May God Most High look upon you with favor,
may the Holy Spirit overshadow you,
and may it be with you according to God's Word. **Alleluia!**

First Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 64:1–9

1 Corinthians 1:3–9

Psalms 80:1–7, 17–19

Mark 13:24–37

OPENING SENTENCES

When God performs deeds
that we did not expect,
it is God coming down to be among us.
Mountains quake and hearts are changed.

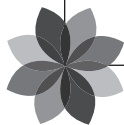
Let the God of the unexpected
be among us today.
Let us worship God.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Faithful God, tear open the heavens
and come to dwell among us,
that we might be enlivened by your presence.
Reveal your ever-present activity among us,
that our hearts may be renewed
and our minds inspired to join your mission.
Work with us, as the potter works with clay,
that we might be molded for your good purposes.
We pray in the name of Christ,
who draws close to us,
that we might draw closer to you, our God. **Amen.**

*Yet, O LORD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you
are our potter; we are all the work of your hand.*

Isaiah 64:8



INVITATION TO DISCIPLESHIP

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

We are yet-unfinished clay,
ready to be molded for a worthy purpose
in God's new creation.

If you would like to be crafted by the Master Artist
who sees all of what we can be,
give yourself over for transformation
and see what God will do with you!

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

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

Compassionate God,
you see our pain and still choose to come close.
Stir up within us a deep awareness
of how we might live and serve with your compassion,
even in a world that entices us toward despair.
Come close, dwell among us, and receive our prayer.

We pray for our neighborhoods . . .
that our alienation might be healed
and torn social fabrics might be mended.
Help us to reach out, make connections,
and extend your gracious hospitality,
remembering that you work alongside us.

For our towns and cities . . .
that we might pay attention to the referendums,
policy changes, budgetary decisions, and rhetoric
that shape our collective social imaginations.
Help us to be voices of your grace
and agents of your restorative justice.

For our nation and world . . .
that we might see what you see
in one another and in the broader world
that you are seeking to cultivate.
Let us not become cynical or withdrawn,
but follow your lead and incline our ears
to those who suffer under oppression and injustice.

God who not only sees and listens but also acts:
We long for your restorative work within and around us.
Help us to remember that
as we wait with Advent hope,
this an active waiting,
Grant us your power—
rooted in deep love,
fueled by gospel courage,
and sustained with prophetic joy,
living in the world that is
even as we watch and work for the world to come;
in Jesus' name. **Amen.**

INVITATION TO OFFERING

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

All that we have belongs to God.
Despite what we have been told and taught
about earthly economic structures,
we know that this is God's world.

Let us act on this truth together,
trusting that when we share our gifts,
God will do more through us
than we could ever do on our own.

INVITATION TO THE TABLE

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

At this table, we remember that
while the world is not yet what it could be,
we have access to the history and hope
of all the faithful who came before us.
We are not alone on this path
of seeking a world where God's will is done.

In this season of Advent,
you are invited to activate your hope
by remembering God's story among us
and communing with those
who have gathered at this table
since the earliest days of the church.

CHARGE

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

Go forth from this place with hope activated,
imagination stirred, and love renewed,
all for the renewing of the world.

Amen. or Thanks be to God.

Second Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 40:1–11

2 Peter 3:8–15a

Psalms 85:1–2, 8–13

Mark 1:1–8

OPENING SENTENCES

A voice cries out in the wilderness:
Prepare the way of the Lord.

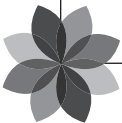
Let us make straight in the desert
a highway for our God.
Let us worship God.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

God of comfort and might,
as we gather together,
mend us for your good purposes,
that we might have the courage
to speak your truths out loud
and the holy confidence
to live and love without fear;
in Christ's name we pray. **Amen.**

*But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the
Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand
years are like one day.*

2 Peter 3:8



INVITATION TO DISCIPLESHIP

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

Friends, God is not slow in keeping promises
but is patient with us,
not wanting any to perish
but desiring that all people
may come to restored relationship—
with self, with one another, and with God.

Are you longing for relationships restored?
Come to Jesus and let him lead you
in the work of your healing
for the sake of a world made new.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

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

God of comfort and mercy,
of restoration and forgiveness,
we ask that you accomplish within us
what you alone can do:
Forgive us and liberate us
from the ways that we have fallen short,
that we might know your forgiveness,
be restored to one another,
and be sent for your purposes in the world.
As we discern our next steps,
hear our prayers.

For those struggling with despair, depression, addiction,
and other mental health challenges during this season . . .

For those who are grappling with what it means
to believe that your promises are true,
when so many promises are left unfulfilled . . .

For those moving through this season for the first time
after experiencing loss and grief in their many forms . . .

For those among us who struggle and suffer
with pains that others do not know . . .

We give you thanks, O God,
that you see who we are where we are.
We entrust our longing to you.
Equip us to be people of compassion and grace,
that as we anticipate your coming,
we might already know the joy
of your presence and peace among us;
through Christ our Savior. **Amen.**

INVITATION TO OFFERING

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

Remember the words of the psalmist—
faithfulness comes up from the earth
and righteousness comes down from the sky.
In the faithful offering of ourselves
we participate in God's righteous work,
meeting in the middle.

Let us offer our lives and gifts to God,
for God has invited us to share
in the building of a new creation.

INVITATION TO THE TABLE

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

At this table we remember and look forward,
joining the hopes of a long line of ancestors—
pilgrims of peace and purveyors of possibility.

Let us gather with saints of all times and places
to be renewed, reconciled, and repurposed
for God's good work in the world.

CHARGE

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

May the God who meets us
in every phase of life and living
grant us peace and empower us
to offer grace and comfort
for the world in which we live.
Amen. or Thanks be to God.

Third Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 61:1–4, 8–11

1 Thessalonians 5:16–24

Psalms 126 *or*

John 1:6–8, 19–28

Luke 1:46b–55

OPENING SENTENCES

Rejoice, people of God!
The Lord is restoring our lives.

Those who sow in tears
will reap with shouts of praise.
**Those who go out weeping
will come home with songs of joy.**

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Lord God, you sent your servant John
to testify to the light of Jesus Christ.
Help us to heed the words of the prophets
as we prepare the way
for the new thing you are doing.
Prepare your way in us,
that our hearts may be ready
for the coming of the Messiah;
in whose holy name we pray. **Amen.**

INVITATION TO DISCIPLESHIP

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

The one who calls us is faithful.
God will transform our lives
to make us ready for the coming
of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Come to the God of peace.
Bring all that you are—
body, mind, and spirit—
and God will make you new.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

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

Lord God, send us your Spirit
to renew this weary, waiting world.
Hear our prayers.

Bring good news to the oppressed . . .
Come quickly to bring justice;
set all people free.

Bind up the brokenhearted . . .
Heal those who are sick and suffering;
sustain them by your grace.

Proclaim liberty to the captives . . .
Release those who are wrongly imprisoned;
break the chains of poverty and addiction.

Comfort those who mourn . . .
Support loved ones who are grieving;
fill them with your deep peace.

Rebuild the ancient ruins . . .
Restore our broken communities;
let them be places of safety and plenty.

Announce the year of your favor . . .
Show us glimpses of your new creation;
come among us here and now.

All this we pray in the name of Jesus,
the one anointed by your Spirit,
who comes to establish your holy realm
of righteousness, justice, and peace. **Amen.**

INVITATION TO OFFERING

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

Mary sang, “My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.”
In Mary’s vision of Christ’s coming,
God looks with favor on the lowly,
casts the rich and mighty from their thrones,
and fills the hungry with good things.

Let us offer our lives to the Lord,
rejoicing in the God and Savior
who magnifies our gifts with grace.

INVITATION TO THE TABLE

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

This is the table of the Lord,
where sorrow is transformed into joy—
where those who are hungry find a great feast;
where those in exile are welcomed home;
where a broken body is given
for the healing of the world.

Come to this table.
Christ invites you.
Come and join this joyful feast.

CHARGE

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

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing,
and give thanks in all circumstances,
for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.
Amen. or Thanks be to God.

Fourth Sunday of Advent

2 Samuel 7:1–11, 16

Romans 16:25–27

Luke 1:46b–55 *or*

Luke 1:26–38

Psalm 89:1–4, 19–26

OPENING SENTENCES

We sing of the steadfast love of the Lord.
We proclaim God's faithfulness to all.

The faithfulness and steadfast love of God
have come to dwell among us in Jesus Christ.
**The Lord is our God,
the Rock of our salvation.**

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Holy One,
nothing is impossible with you.
By the power of your Spirit,
you sent the child of Mary
to be the redeemer of the world.
Look upon us with favor,
be with us this day and always,
and let it be with us according to your Word,
Jesus Christ our Savior. **Amen.**

INVITATION TO DISCIPLESHIP

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

There was once a great mystery,
kept secret for long ages—
the mystery of God's purpose
in the history of the world.
Now the secret is revealed
with the coming of Jesus Christ.

In this season of Advent,
we invite you to meet Christ,
even as he comes to meet us.
Come and learn your purpose
in the life of the world God loves.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

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

God of all history, God of all mystery,
we come before you in prayer
seeking your purpose for the world.

We pray for those without housing . . .
Help them find refuge and safety.

We pray for leaders of nations . . .
Give them wisdom to seek your will.

We pray for the meek and lowly . . .
Claim them as beloved and blessed.

We pray for the high and mighty . . .
Humble them to serve others.

We pray for children and youth . . .
Empower them to answer your call.

We pray for older people . . .
Satisfy them with dreams fulfilled.

We pray for those who wait . . .
Let them not lose hope.

We pray for those who work . . .
Equip them in building up your realm.

Help us to be faithful in serving you, O God.
Strengthen us according to the gospel
to proclaim the good news of Jesus,
to whom we give glory forever! **Amen.**

INVITATION TO OFFERING

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

King David wanted to build a house for God,
a great and glorious temple for the Lord.
But the Lord said: Do you not remember?
I am the one who called you from the pasture
and made you the shepherd of my people.
I am the one who will build a house
for you and your descendants forever.

God is the giver of life and every good thing.
God will build us up as the body of Christ
to be shelter and sanctuary for all people.
Let us offer our lives to the Lord.

INVITATION TO THE TABLE

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

This is the table of Christ our Lord.
Here there is food for the hungry.
Here there is plenty for the poor.
Here there is welcome for the outcast.
Here there is justice for the oppressed.
Here there is favor for the forgotten.

Come to this table of grace.
Come, eat and drink in the presence
of the one who is coming in glory.

CHARGE

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

Go forth to magnify the Lord,
rejoicing in God our Savior.
Nothing is impossible with God.
Amen. or Thanks be to God.

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