

Feasting on the Word[®]
WORSHIP COMPANION

✿ LITURGIES FOR YEAR A ✿
VOLUME 1

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Introduction

This volume of the *Feasting on the Word Worship Companion: Liturgies for Year A* offers language for the church's worship for every Sunday and holy day in Year A of the Revised Common Lectionary from Advent through Pentecost. It is intended to serve as a supplement to the liturgical resources of denominations and not as a substitute for any of those fine works.

The texts herein were written by people from five ecclesial bodies who share similar convictions about worship and its language, yet pray with distinct voices. Because the writers come from a range of Protestant traditions, the attentive reader will notice some differences in theological background; in every case, however, it is our hope that these texts are grounded in deep and careful theological reflection. We seek to offer liturgy that is accessible yet elegant, in words that are poetic but not overwrought. These texts are written for the ear; we hope they are easily spoken, and their meanings quickly apprehended, in order to encourage full and rich congregational participation in the church's life of prayer.

These words are rooted in Scripture, as the church's liturgies have been for centuries. Using the Revised Common Lectionary as a guide, the writers of this volume offer words for worship that do not merely spring from their own imaginations but are rooted and grounded in the Word of God.

What This Book Includes

- Prayers and other liturgical texts—from Opening Words to Blessing—for every Sunday and holy day in the Christian year (Year A) from Advent through Pentecost
- A collection of greetings to be used at the beginning of a worship service

- Thanksgivings for Baptism, for use at the beginning of a worship service or for reaffirmation of baptism
- Prayers for communion, or Eucharist, for Sundays between Advent and Pentecost
- Questions for reflection on the texts for each Sunday and holy day
- Morning and evening prayers for household use, to be prayed by individuals, families, or groups, based on the week's lectionary readings. (These prayers are written in both singular and plural, so adapt them as needed.) These may be distributed throughout a congregation for use during the week as a way to continue reflecting on the Sunday texts.
- A CD-ROM, which enables worship planners to copy text and paste it in the worship bulletin. Permission is granted to reprint individual prayers and liturgical texts for worship provided that the following notice is included: Reprinted by permission of Westminster John Knox Press from *Feasting on the Word® Worship Companion*. Copyright 2013.

Eucharistic prayers are provided in a separate section in acknowledgment that not all Christian churches celebrate the Lord's Supper every Sunday. In addition to one prayer for general use, prayers for holy days and seasons are also provided. A congregation that celebrates communion weekly might consider using one eucharistic prayer for a season, or other period of time, to allow people to become familiar with the prayer through repeated use.

How to Use This Book

One may use this book in a variety of ways. You may use the texts just as they are, or you may adapt them for your context. While new texts are offered for each Sunday in Year A, there is value in repeating portions of liturgy so that people might become familiar with them. When worshipers are able to speak the same set of words over a period of time, they are not continually adjusting to new ideas and patterns of speech. You may, for example, use the same prayer of confession for a season, allowing the people to enter more deeply into that prayer over time.

Although a basic fourfold pattern of worship is used here, the elements of worship may not be arranged in the same way they appear in your own church's order of worship. This is not intended to privilege one tradition over another, but simply to arrange the elements in a way that will look familiar to many who use this book.

You will notice that these texts are arranged in "sense lines"—that is, they

look more like poems than paragraphs. This is intentional. The eye can pick up phrases quickly, enabling worshipers to pray them with greater understanding. So, if you reproduce any of these texts, please retain the sense lines. This layout on the page also helps leaders to better speak the texts so that they can actually proclaim (and not just read) the texts, while maintaining eye contact with worshipers.

In cases where a congregational response is used, instructions are often included that will allow the prayers to be led without printing them in their entirety.

This book is full of words. Worship, however, does not happen on a page. As you use these texts, do not just read them. Pray them. Spend time with the words and make them your own so that you may lead with authenticity, wisdom, and a true sense of prayer.

A Word about the Lectionary

During Ordinary Time, or the season after Pentecost, liturgy is provided for both the semicontinuous and complementary streams of the Revised Common Lectionary. Each of these tracks uses the same Epistle and Gospel reading, but the Old Testament and Psalm lections are different. The semicontinuous track allows congregations to read continually through a book of Scripture from week to week. In the complementary track, the Old Testament readings are chosen to relate to (or complement) the Gospel reading of the day. In both cases, the psalm is understood as a response to the Old Testament reading. Liturgical resources for the Season after Pentecost will appear in the second volume of each year in the lectionary cycle.

Since the numbering of Sundays after Pentecost varies from year to year, the designation of “Proper” is used here, as it is in the *Feasting on the Word* commentaries. It can be confusing to navigate the various ways churches designate Sundays; a handy resource for viewing all those labels in one place can be found at <http://lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu/>, a user-friendly site provided to the public by Vanderbilt University.

Different Voices: The Ecumenical Nature of the Project

Each writer comes to his or her task having been formed by a particular liturgical tradition. We are Methodist, Episcopal, United Church of Christ, Presbyterian, and Lutheran, with a variety of backgrounds and experiences.

Working as a team, we chose elements of worship that are common to all of us, as well as some elements that are particular to one church but not necessarily to another. Presbyterians, for instance, insist on including prayers of confession and prayers for illumination that invoke the Holy Spirit. Lutherans and Episcopalians expect a prayer for the day and include prayers for the departed in the intercessions. Lutherans also commonly use language about law and grace, and declarations of forgiveness sometimes refer to the ordination of the presider. These particularities were retained in order to preserve the ecumenical character of the book.

We use a variety of ways of praying but a consistent pattern of worship elements for each Sunday in the Christian year. Feel free to adapt the forms, change the words, or choose what is best suited for your context.

Who We Are

Just as this book is intended to serve as a companion to *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary*, we seek to be companions along the way with those of you who plan and lead worship.

The core team of writers includes:

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The generosity of many people has helped bring this work to fruition. David Maxwell, executive editor of Westminster John Knox Press, has provided gentle guidance, shown great wisdom, and shared his seemingly boundless good humor. David Dobson, editorial director of WJK, has offered constant support and encouragement. Columbia Theological Seminary provided meeting space, hospitality, and encouragement for the project.

No words are sufficient to describe the depth of God's grace or beautiful enough to address to the creator of the cosmos. We offer these words with the prayer that they might be useful to the church in enabling worshiping communities to stammer forth their thanks and praise.

Kimberly Bracken Long

First Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 2:1–5

Romans 13:11–14

Psalm 122

Matthew 24:36–44

OPENING WORDS / CALL TO WORSHIP

I was glad when they said to me, *Ps. 122:1*

“Let us go to the house of the Lord!”

Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, *Isa. 2:3*

that we may learn God’s ways and walk in God’s paths.

Our feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem. *Ps. 122:2*

Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord! *Isa. 2:5*

CALL TO CONFESSION

You know what time it is: *Rom. 13:11*

Now is the time to wake from sleep.

Salvation is near!

Let us confess our sin.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

God of night and day, *Rom. 13:12–13*

there is no shadow that can conceal our sin from you

and no secret that you will not bring to light.

For our reveling and drunkenness,

forgive us, O God.

For our debauchery and licentiousness,

forgive us, O God.

**For our quarreling and jealousy,
forgive us, O God.**

**O God, forgive us our sins,
renew us in love,
and teach us to live in a way
that brings honor and glory to your name;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

DECLARATION OF FORGIVENESS

[spoken from the baptismal font]

Beloved, in your baptism
you were bathed in light
and clothed with grace.

Rom. 13:14

Therefore, put on the Lord Jesus Christ!
Know that you are forgiven,
and live in peace.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

God of glory,
we know that you are coming at an unexpected hour.
Come to us now, in spirit and truth.
Take us up into your presence,
and make us ready for your reign of peace;
through Jesus Christ our Savior. **Amen.**

Matt. 24:36–44

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

O God of our people
and Lord of every nation,
let your Word ring out from the mountains
and your Spirit shine forth in the earth,
so that all may hear your teaching
and all may do your will;
through Jesus Christ our peace. **Amen.**

Isa. 2:1–5

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Sisters and brothers in Christ,
for the sake of the world that God so loves, let us pray.

Ps. 122:8–9

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem.
**We pray for peace in every nation—
that people will turn their swords into plowshares
and their spears into pruning hooks
and study war no more.**

*Ps. 122:6
Isa. 2:4*

Pray for the peace of the church.
**We pray for peace in Christ's body—
put an end to fear and fighting,
and help us to proclaim in word and action
the good news of salvation to all.**

Rom. 13:11–14

Pray for the peace of this community.
**We pray for peace in this place—
for safety in our homes and streets,
for the prosperity of our neighbors,
and for the health of family and friends.**

Ps. 122:6–8

God of the future,
make us ready for the coming of your reign,
when you will bring everlasting peace
and renew the face of the earth;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Matt. 24:37

INVITATION TO THE OFFERING

Come with gratitude and joy
to the table of the Lord.
Bring the works of your hands
and the gifts of your lives
as an offering of praise.

Isa. 2:1–5; Ps. 122

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING/DEDICATION

We give you thanks and praise, O God,
that you have built us up in faith
and bound us together in love.
By your grace, may all that we do
show the glory of your name
and serve the good of your people;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Ps. 122:3, 9

CHARGE

About that day and hour no one knows. *Matt. 24:36, 42, 44*
Therefore keep awake,
for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.
Be ready, for the Lord will come at an unexpected hour.

BLESSING

May the grace of Christ, *Isa. 2:5*
the love of God,
and the Spirit's joy surround you
as you walk in the light of the Lord.

Questions for Reflection

What does it mean to “get your house in order” for the coming of the Lord?
Can we ever be perfectly ready for Christ's return? Why is the coming of
the Lord compared to a thief in the night? Is there grace in God's surprising
advent, God's unexpected arrival?

Household Prayer: Morning

Lord God, you have woken me from sleep; *Rom. 13:11–14*
the night is gone, the day is here.
Enable me to put on the Lord Jesus Christ
and help me to live honorably this day,
to the glory of your holy name. Amen.

Household Prayer: Evening

God, my Savior, you are even nearer now *Rom. 13:11–14*
than when I first learned to trust in you.
Help me to lay aside the burdens of the day
and rest in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
my strength and my salvation. Amen.

Second Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 11:1–10

Romans 15:4–13

Psalm 72:1–7, 18–19

Matthew 3:1–12

OPENING WORDS / CALL TO WORSHIP

Christ, the One who was, and is, and is to come,
welcomes you to this place.

Rom. 15:6–7

As one body, with one voice,
we honor and glorify the giver of wisdom,
counsel, knowledge, and joy.

Amen. So be it.

CALL TO CONFESSION

Let us lay before God and one another
the distances between us,
the impatience, idolatries, and lack of compassion
that form our confessions this day.

For if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves.

Yet in mercy, God will forgive us and renew us.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

**Gracious and welcoming God,
have mercy on your people.**

We confess that we do not believe in your incarnation.

We do not heed your word each day in all that we say and do.

**We do not see our neighbors, families, and friends
as beloved children whom you have made.**

**In your mercy, forgive us,
for we repent of our ways
and look to your power
to heal us and raise us up,**

**so that, at the last, you will gather us to you
and give us peace. Amen.**

Matt. 3:12

DECLARATION OF FORGIVENESS

The reign of God has come near;
the repentant will be judged with righteousness.
You are forgiven.
Be filled with hope,
believing in the power of the risen Christ
to bring you to new life.
Rejoice and believe.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

O Root of Jesse, O Peace, stir up your power within us,
that in this time we may await with abundant expectation
the fulfillment of your eternal presence in creation,
for you live and reign among us,
Maker, Savior, and Giver of Life,
one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Isa. 11:10

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

Your word, Holy God, was written for our instruction.
By your Holy Spirit open our ears
and fill us with the mysteries of your ancient love;
through Jesus Christ we pray. **Amen.**

Rom. 15:4

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Let us pray to the Lord, saying,
Hear us, O God; your mercy is great.

We come to you this day, O God,
with a deepening anticipation of your birth among us.
We thank you for the gift of your love.
Hear us, O God; **your mercy is great.**

We pray for the church throughout the world,
and for all the ministries that build up the body of Christ,
that in our many vocations we may serve to your glory.
Hear us, O God; **your mercy is great.**

We pray for this nation and for all nations,
remembering especially those who are victims of political
and social injustice.

We pray for elected officials and all leaders,
that they will govern with courage and equity.
Hear us, O God; **your mercy is great.**

We pray for all in need:
for the sick, the destitute, and the dying;
for strangers in our land, for the invisible ones;
for the elderly and children; for parents and grandparents;
for those who live alone and those who live lonely in the
midst of family.
Hear us, O God; **your mercy is great.**

We remember with mercy those who sleep without shelter,
cold and vulnerable, lacking enough food;
those who are overworked
and those who have no work.
Stir up in us the capacity to see ourselves in their struggles
and to act so that others may have life abundant.
Hear us, O God; **your mercy is great.**

We pray for this community, for our neighbors and friends,
and for those with whom we study and work.
Guide and strengthen all people in our common life
to know the gifts of your grace and love.
Hear us, O God; **your mercy is great.**

For what else does this assembly pray on this day?
[Let there be silence for a time when individuals might offer up petitions.
At the end, say,]
Hear us, O God; **your mercy is great.**

We give thanks for the saints who have gone before us, especially *[name
some of those in the history of the church whose commemoration day
falls in the coming week]*, asking that our gratitude for their witness
be apparent in all that we do.
Hear us, O God; **your mercy is great.**

May all that we ask and all that you see is needed in our world,
be given to your people;
through Christ, our Lord.

Amen.

INVITATION TO THE OFFERING

We bear fruit worthy of our repentance
when we give our tithes and offerings for the well-being
of the poor.

Matt. 3:8

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING/DEDICATION

We give you thanks, Holy One, for all good things:
for this universe and for Earth itself,
for creatures and plants, for water and food, for light and darkness;
for Jesus, our brother, who enlarged our vision,
setting himself before us as the bread and wine of abundant life;
and for the Holy Spirit, who comes to us in baptism
and moves in our midst with the power to lead us to you.
Turn our offerings to your good will,
and turn us always to you in gratitude.

Amen.

CHARGE

May the God of steadfastness and encouragement
grant you to live in harmony with one another,
in accordance with Christ Jesus,
so that together you may with one voice
glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Rom. 15:5-6

BLESSING

May the God of hope
fill you with all joy and peace in believing,
so that you may abound in hope by the power of
the Holy Spirit.

Rom. 15:13

Questions for Reflection

Look for places where the wolf and the lamb lie down together in peace. Where do you see that peace in your relationships, in your family or circle of friends, in the neighborhood, the city, the nation, and the world? Even within yourself, where has peace been forged between previously warring factions?

Household Prayer: Morning

As I rise, O God, I give you thanks for safety in the night,
for rest from my labors, for another day in this creation.
Turn my eyes toward what is noble.
Teach me to see hope where it is veiled.
Give me the wisdom to desire the good.
Help me to love not only those I encounter
but myself as well,
for with you, I know my many frailties and failings.
Let peace reign. Amen.

Household Prayer: Evening

As I end this day, Holy One,
I give you thanks for the richness of my hours:
for family and friends,
for people with whom I work and play,
for my neighbors,
for those who fill this world with music and art,
for those whose needs remind me of my blessings
and whose skills make me grateful for differences.
Guard us all, O God, and keep us in your embrace
until the daylight comes. Amen.

Third Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 35:1–10

Psalm 146:5–10

or Luke 1:46b–55

James 5:7–10

Matthew 11:2–11

OPENING WORDS / CALL TO WORSHIP

My soul magnifies the Lord;
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.

Luke 1:46b–47, 49

The Mighty One has done great things.
Holy is God's name!

CALL TO CONFESSION

[Pouring water into the baptismal font]

Let the desert rejoice,
and let the dry land be glad,
for God has come to save us.
Let us confess our sin.

Isa. 35:1, 4

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

**God of majesty and glory,
we are thirsty for your grace.
You made a way for us in the wilderness,
and still, in our foolishness, we go astray.
We hide our eyes from your presence.
We do not listen to your word.
We are lifeless when we ought to dance
and speechless when we ought to sing.**

Isa. 35:1–10

**Forgive us, O Lord.
Speak peace to our fearful hearts,
strengthen our weak hands,**

**and make firm our feeble knees
as we seek to follow in your holy way. Amen.**

DECLARATION OF FORGIVENESS

Now return to the Lord with joy and gladness.

Isa. 35:10

Sing a song of redemption!

Let sorrow and sighing be no more.

In Jesus Christ we are forgiven.

Thanks be to God.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Holy God, your prophets have long spoken
of the one who would come to save us.

Matt. 11:2-11

Now the promise is fulfilled;

now your kingdom has come near.

Send us as messengers of your way,
to go and tell all the world

of the wonders we have seen

and the good news we have heard;

through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

Lord God, in this dry and dusty place,

Isa. 35:1-10

pour out the power of your Spirit

so that your Word may blossom in our lives;

through Jesus Christ, our way in the wilderness. **Amen.**

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Remember your mercy, O Lord, and help us,

Luke 1:46-55

according to the promise of your steadfast love.

Let all generations see your blessing,

for your name is holy and your mercy is great.

Show the strength of your hand,

and lift the burdens of the poor.

Work wonders for the humble,

and scatter the plans of the proud.

Look with favor upon the lowly,
and cast down tyrants from their thrones.

Fill the hungry with good things,
and empty the hands of the greedy.

Then we will sing out with joy and glorify you forever;
through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

INVITATION TO THE OFFERING

As a farmer plants the seeds
and waits for the rains to come,
let us entrust our gifts to the Lord
as we await the coming of God's reign.

James 5:7

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING/DEDICATION

Thanks be to you, O God, maker of heaven and earth—
giver of justice, lover of righteousness,
hope of the afflicted, and friend of the poor.
Your faithfulness never fails.
Take and use these gifts we offer
to further your purpose in the world
and to fulfill the promise of the world to come;
through Christ our Lord we pray. **Amen.**

Ps. 146:5–10

CHARGE

Be patient, beloved ones,
and let your hearts be strong,
for the coming of the Lord is near.

James 5:7–8

BLESSING

Bless the Lord with all your soul,
and may the blessing of God be with you.

Luke 1:46b, 48

Questions for Reflection

What does the kingdom of heaven have to do with the signs that Jesus describes for John's disciples: "the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them" (Matt. 11:5)? Where have you seen or heard such things?

Household Prayer: Morning

Holy God, at the dawning of this day
new life blossoms like the crocus,
and fresh promise wells up like a spring.
As I go forth in your presence,
confirm my resolve to worship you,
strengthen my hands to serve your people,
and keep me always in your holy way;
through Jesus Christ the Lord. Amen.

Isa. 35:4-6

Household Prayer: Evening

Mighty God, my soul rejoices
at the great things you have done this day—
giving daily bread for my hunger,
showing endless mercy for my sin.
As you have blessed my ancestors
bless and keep me this night;
in Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Luke 1:46-55