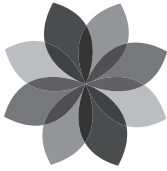


Year C, Volume 1

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 and support 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 and support 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

EUCHARIST

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

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.

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

Contributors to this volume include Claudia Aguilar Rubalcava, Mamie Broadhurst, Marci Auld Glass, Marcus A. Hong, Emily McGinley, Samuel Son, Slats Toole, and Byron A. Wade. Their deep faith, pastoral wisdom, creative gifts, and fervent prayers are the lifeblood of this work. The editor also expresses deep gratitude to David Maxwell, vice president for curriculum and church resources at Westminster John Knox Press, for his guidance in the development of this project, and to Jessica Miller Kelley, senior acquisitions editor at Westminster John Knox Press, for shepherding it to completion.

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



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Making Connections

Advent is a season of surprising paradox and reversal. As the calendar year draws to a close, the church's year is just beginning. As the days grow darker (at least in the northern hemisphere), we watch and wait for the light that is coming into the world. As we look back across the centuries to celebrate the mystery of God's incarnation in Jesus of Nazareth, we look forward to the consummation of history and Christ's coming again in glory to reign.

Mary's song, the Magnificat (Luke 1:46–55), epitomizes the upside-down nature of Advent. Mary sings about the downfall of the proud and the exaltation of the lowly, the desolation of the rich and the satisfaction of the poor. She sings about the hopes of ancestors and the memories of generations to come. She sings about a mighty God who is known to us in acts of tender mercy.

Year C in the Revised Common Lectionary, with its focus on the Gospel of Luke, presents an opportunity to rediscover the good news through Mary's eyes. Indeed, Mary's song is a fitting introduction to Luke's Gospel, with its focus on salvation history, concern for the oppressed and outsiders, emphasis on the transforming work of the Spirit, prominent portrayal of women, attention to the power of prayer, distinctive treatment of meals, and depiction of Jesus as the fulfillment of God's promise to Israel.

As you prepare for this season of Advent and the beginning of Revised Common Lectionary Year C, consider ways to heighten the paradoxes and highlight the reversals that herald God's realm of righteousness, justice, and peace. Make use of the evocative symbols of light and darkness, but take care that they do not reinforce racial stereotypes. Look back with gratitude for the gift of the Messiah, but don't neglect to look forward with hope for Christ's glorious return. Work, watch, and pray for signs of God's liberating love, lifting up the oppressed, welcoming outsiders, and humbling the powerful and proud. Devote yourself to the service of people who are hungry and poor, even as you attend to the rich banquet of worship.

Keep singing with Mary—and in all that you do, let your own humble, holy, human voice magnify the glory of God.

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.

There is a voice crying out
in the wilderness of sin.
God is calling to us with love.

Let us confess our sin,
trusting in God's saving grace.

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

**We confess to you, O God,
that we are not prepared to welcome your way
of righteousness, justice, and peace.
You call us to repentance,
but we refuse to change our ways.
You call us to resist oppression,
but we resign ourselves to evil.
You call us to be reconciled,
but we remain divided and afraid.**

**Forgive us, God of grace.
Pour out your Spirit in our lives
so that we may be forgiven, set free,
and made ready to meet you
at the coming of your holy realm;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.**

Water may be poured or lifted from the baptismal font.

Every valley shall be filled
and every mountain made low
and the crooked made straight
and the rough made smooth,
and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

This is the good news we are waiting for:
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.

Speak to us this day, O Lord.
Visit us with your wisdom,
overshadow us with your Spirit,
and let it be with us
according to your Word:
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.

Holy One, our strength and might,
with joy we come to draw water
from the well of salvation—
where sin is washed away
and death is drowned in love;
where grace is overflowing
and a new creation is born.
In times of trouble or grief
help us to remember our baptism,
that we may trust and not be afraid.
Teach us to call upon your name
and bear witness to your work.
And let our lives be hymns of praise;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **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.

Lord God, our Savior,
our souls magnify your glory
and our spirits rejoice in your presence.
From generation to generation
you have done great things for your people,
showing the strength of your hand
and sharing the mercy of your heart.
Holy is your name!

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

We give you thanks for Jesus,
who gave up a heavenly throne
to scatter the powers of sin and death,
lifting the lowly from the dust
and filling the hungry with good things.

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

This humble, holy meal
that we share in Jesus’ name
is our offering of thanks and praise.

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

Pour out your Holy Spirit
to strengthen us with the bread of life
and fill us with the cup of blessing.
Send us forth to help and serve
as members of Christ’s body.
Prepare us for the great day to come
when we join our ancestors and descendants
to magnify your name forever.

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

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

The prayer after Communion is led from the Communion table.

Blessed are you, O Lord our God,
for you have smiled upon us with favor
and fed us with your tender mercy.
Send us forth to share your light
with those who live in the shadow of death,
and guide our feet in the way of peace;
through Jesus Christ our Savior. **Amen.**

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

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

We give you thanks, O God,
every time we remember your generosity and grace.
Teach us to share your gifts with others
so that we may be an answer to their prayers
and live as faithful witnesses to the gospel
of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

BLESSING

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

The blessing of the Holy Trinity—
faithful God,
overshadowing Spirit,
and long-awaited Savior—
be with you all. **Alleluia!**

First Sunday of Advent

Jeremiah 33:14–16

1 Thessalonians 3:9–13

Psalms 25:1–10

Luke 21:25–36

OPENING SENTENCES

God of our salvation, for you we wait.
Night and day we pray for your return.

Come and fulfill your promise to us.
Come and deliver your people!

PRAYER OF THE DAY

God of all generations,
though signs and seasons change,
your promise is faithful
and your word will never pass away.
Give us courage and strength
as we watch and wait
for Jesus Christ, our redeemer,
who is coming in glory to reign. **Amen.**

INVITATION TO DISCIPLESHIP

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

The psalmist sings:
Make me to know your ways, O Lord;
teach me your paths.
All the paths of the Lord
are steadfast love and faithfulness.

As this season of Advent begins,
we invite you to join us
on the path of discipleship,
seeking the way of the Lord.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

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

To you, O Lord, we lift up our prayers,
trusting that you will deliver us from evil
and lead us in your way of truth and life.

Your creation is groaning for redemption . . .
Put an end to our destructive ways,
and restore the glory of your good creation.

Your saints are crying out for justice . . .
Establish righteousness and justice in the land
so there will be peace and plenty for all.

Your church is waiting for renewal . . .
Let us be a sign of your saving power
and a source of your abundant grace.

Your people are longing for healing . . .
Give peace to those who are suffering
and comfort to those who mourn.

For you, O Lord, we wait.
Surely you are coming soon.
Come to us with healing.
Come to us with renewal.
Come to us with justice.
Come to us with redemption.
Come, Lord Jesus! **Amen.**

INVITATION TO OFFERING

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

Our lives are a gift from God,
who causes us to grow in faith
and abound in love for one another.

Let us offer our lives in love to the Lord.

INVITATION TO THE TABLE

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

How can we thank God enough
for all the gifts we have received?
This is our table of thanksgiving.
This meal is our offering of gratitude
for the grace of Jesus Christ.
This is the feast of redemption
where we see Christ face to face.

Come and share this holy meal.

CHARGE

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

Be alert. Be faithful.
The day of the Lord is coming.
The realm of God is near.
Amen. or Thanks be to God.

Second Sunday of Advent

Baruch 5:1–9
or Malachi 3:1–4
Luke 1:68–79

Philippians 1:3–11
Luke 3:1–6

OPENING SENTENCES

A messenger from God is coming.
Prepare the way of the Lord!

A new day of mercy is dawning.
Prepare the way of the Lord!

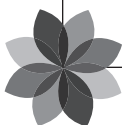
A voice is crying in the wilderness.
Prepare the way of the Lord!

PRAYER OF THE DAY

God our Savior—
your word shakes the wilderness,
washes away evil,
and causes all flesh to rejoice.
Make us ready to greet you
at the coming of your holy realm;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins. By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.

Luke 1:76–79



INVITATION TO DISCIPLESHIP

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

If you are here today,
sharing in the good news
and joining us in prayer,
we are confident that God
has already begun a good work in you.
We believe that God
will bring that good work to completion
by the day of Jesus Christ.

We invite you, therefore, to join us
as we watch and work and pray
for the coming of God's new creation.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

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

This is our prayer—
that the love of God
poured out for us in Jesus Christ
might overflow in the world.

Let us pray for the church . . .
Make us messengers of your covenant,
sharing the good news of Jesus
with a world in need of hope.

Let us pray for the world . . .
Let there be life in desolate places
so that every living creature
may see your saving work.

Let us pray for this community . . .
Teach us to love our enemies
and serve you without fear
as you guide us in the way of peace.

Let us pray for loved ones . . .
Help us to hold in our hearts
all who need your healing power
and transforming touch in their lives.

Loving God, we live in confidence and faith,
trusting that you have begun a good work among us
and that you are bringing it to completion, even now.
Make us witnesses and partners in your work
as we watch and wait and hope and pray
for the coming of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

INVITATION TO OFFERING

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

Let us offer our lives and gifts to God,
trusting that the God of righteousness
will purify them, like a new garment,
and refine them, like silver and gold,
so that they might be worthy of praise
and pleasing to the Lord.

INVITATION TO THE TABLE

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

A great feast is prepared for us—
the harvest of righteousness
that comes through Jesus Christ.
God's grace overflows for us—
the cup of promise and blessing
that we share in Christ the Lord.

Come to the table.
Come to the feast.

CHARGE

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

The promise of God is for all.
Prepare the way of the Lord.
Amen. or Thanks be to God.