

# Lectionary Journey



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Worship Aids for the Christian Year

PAXSON JEANCAKE

*Foreword by Scott Sauls*

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LECTIONARY JOURNEY  
Worship Aids for the Christian Year

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“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.”  
—Colossians 3:16



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## Foreword

The older I get, the less creative I become in my life of worship and prayer. Likewise, the less pressure I feel to “bring my best” to God, as if he was somehow measuring my prayers with a yardstick. I have made this shift because of a later-in-life discovery of the rich tradition of church liturgy, built around the words of Scripture and the rhythms of the church calendar. The benefit of this approach is that formative devotion from the outside (shaped by the words of God) takes the place of innovative prayer from the inside (shaped by the insights of man). This is a wonderful way of ensuring that the whole counsel of God is not only preached from our pulpits, but also through our worship and devotional liturgies.

What Paxson has provided with this volume is a simple, accessible, usable resource for this journey of formation from the outside. I pray that you will benefit from *Lectionary Journey* in the way I know that I will, as well.

SCOTT SAULS

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Author of *Jesus Outside the Lines* and *A Gentle Answer*



## Preface

Over the years I have become quite a fan of Johann Sebastian Bach. I deeply enjoy listening to his cantatas and discovering the inspiration behind the music and the text. When Bach moved to Leipzig, Germany, in 1723 and took his position as Thomascantor (with responsibilities at the St. Thomas School and the four city churches), he channelled his energy into writing one cantata each week based on the Lutheran lectionary of his day. He kept up this weekly pace of writing lectionary-based cantatas for several years (1723–25). His goal was to create “a well-regulated church music to the glory of God.” Gardiner writes:

For, from the moment of his official induction as Thomascantor in Leipzig in the early summer of 1723, Bach set off at a pace of weekly church cantata composition so furious that probably no one—not even he, with his extraordinary reserves of creative energy and powers of concentration—could sustain it for more than a couple of years (as indeed he didn’t) . . . Such zeal went far beyond any contractual obligation to compose and perform music to adorn the liturgy of the Lutheran church.<sup>1</sup>

The sheer volume of Bach’s creative output is astonishing. The wealth of expression he has left for the church and the world is a gift, and it evokes a sense of admiration and respect in me as a worship leader and songwriter. I feel a kindred spirit with Bach, and his influence sparked a desire in me to create an ordered and comprehensive resource for the church based on the lectionary of my day.

In addition to Bach, I have been greatly influenced by Russell Mitman and his book, *Worship in the Shape of Scripture*. Mitman’s basic paradigm is “from lectionary to liturgy.” Mitman encourages those involved in worship planning to create an “organic liturgy” that flows from the themes and language of Scripture.<sup>2</sup> At a time when biblical literacy is on the decline and the presence of Scripture in our worship services is low, Mitman’s paradigm appeared as a timely remedy to these unfortunate situations.

1. Gardiner, *Bach*, 288–89.

2. Mitman, *Worship*, 33.

Inspired by both Bach and Mitman, I began to write songs and a weekly blog, offering lectionary-based resources for pastors and worship leaders. This book and other endeavors are the fruit of that inspiration.<sup>3</sup>

Because the content of this resource is based on the Revised Common Lectionary (RCL), it will be of great benefit to you to understand its structure and purpose. A lectionary is simply a collection of readings or selections from the Scriptures, arranged and intended for proclamation during the worship of the people of God.<sup>4</sup>

The RCL was first published in 1992 and contains readings for the Sundays and major festivals over a three-year cycle (Year A, Year B, Year C). The RCL has its roots in Jewish lectionary systems and in early Christian practice. Some of the earliest lectionaries were in use by the fourth century as a way to organize Scripture readings and sermon texts throughout the year.<sup>5</sup>

For each Sunday and for special days in the Christian Year, the RCL assigns a group of four readings: an Old Testament reading (first reading), followed by a psalm of response; a reading from one of the New Testament Epistles (second reading); and a Gospel reading. The RCL's three-year cycle centers Year A in Matthew, Year B in Mark, and Year C in Luke. The Gospel of John is woven throughout the three-year cycle.

Even though it is the last reading, the Gospel reading is the primary or governing text; it is the "hermeneutical key" to understanding the relationship of the other readings. From the First Sunday of Advent to Trinity Sunday of each year, the Old Testament reading is chosen to complement the Gospel reading of the day. The psalm is a response to the first reading and follows its themes. The Epistle is also related to the Gospel reading and gives us insights into the faith and struggles of the early Christian communities.<sup>6</sup>

For the Season after Pentecost, the RCL offers two patterns of readings: the complementary track and the semicontinuous track.<sup>7</sup> Each of these tracks uses the same Epistle and Gospel readings, but the Old Testament and psalm readings are different. In the complementary track, the Old Testament readings are related to the Gospel reading of the day. In the semicontinuous pattern, the emphasis is on reading through an Old Testament book. In both cases, the psalm is chosen as a response to the Old Testament

3. *You Keep Hope Alive* is the first collection of songs for the *Lectionary Journey*. It is available on various music platforms.

4. CCT, *Revised Common Lectionary*, 185.

5. Green, *Connections*, xv.

6. Green, *Connections*, xv.

7. *Lectionary Journey* follows the complementary track.

reading.<sup>8</sup> Each new cycle in the RCL begins on the First Sunday of Advent and ends on Christ the King.

The RCL offers a steady diet of Scripture from the Old and New Testaments, follows the cycles and seasons of the Christian Year, and forms us spiritually as we regularly feast on God's word. The goal of this project is to provide Scripture-based worship aids, songs, and devotions for each Sunday in the Christian Year over the three-year lectionary cycle. It is my hope that these resources will be helpful for those involved in planning various elements of corporate worship; however, they can also benefit anyone interested in following a regular pattern of Scripture readings for worship and devotion.

A project like this is never created in a vacuum. I would like to acknowledge and thank those who have been a part of this endeavor in some capacity.

I would like to thank the leadership and congregation of Covenant Church for allowing me the opportunity to incorporate and "field test" these resources in the context of corporate worship.

I would like to thank those who have gone before me, providing resources, inspiration, and insights that have influenced and informed my worship practices and paradigms.

I would like to thank my wife, Allison, and my two daughters, Laura and Mallory, for understanding my need to write and craft this resource for the worshiping church. You are so full of grace and support, each and every day.

Finally, all praise be to our triune God, who relentlessly pursues and restores us. To God alone be the glory.

8. Long, *Feasting on the Word*, xi.



## Introduction

I will never forget a particular lecture in seminary many years ago. In a course on worship, the professor wrote the number “52” on a white board. He circled it and then stood there for a moment before commenting on its meaning for us. After his dramatic pause, he began to describe the challenge the worship leader faces in planning creative, vibrant, God-honoring worship services, Sunday after Sunday, for fifty-two Sundays every year, not counting Christmas Eve and other occasional services! This is a daunting task for worship planners.

In addition, worship planners are called to steward God’s story of redemption (the gospel) through the various elements of worship that we choose each week. Within this task, there is an inherent responsibility of stewarding the word of God.

Regarding the word, I have noticed an interesting dynamic in the life of the church over the years. Ironically, in a tradition that highly values the centrality of the gospel and the word of God, many evangelical churches do not actually have much Scripture woven into the fabric of their worship services. Churches may have Scripture passages printed or projected during the preaching of the word, but that may be the only place where Scripture is read aloud. Additionally, it is either read by the pastor or another leader in the church, not in a participatory way by the congregation as a whole.

Thus, I have become an advocate for more Scripture and more Scripture-based worship elements in the context of corporate worship. This is one of the primary reasons I have found such affinity with the Revised Common Lectionary (RCL).

My passion for crafting lectionary-based worship aids is so that we, the people of God, are singing, praying, being called into worship, and affirming our faith through the word. My desire is for Scripture to be woven *throughout* our corporate worship services, letting its language, narrative, metaphors, themes, teachings, truths, and paradigms form and shape us, week after week.

This desire is captured in the latin phrase *lex orandi, lex credendi* (the law of prayer is the law of belief) which has long been championed in the Christian tradition. As worship planners, it is so important that we understand the relationship between worship and belief.

With this context and these challenges in mind, I believe those involved in worship planning will find this resource to be of benefit in four meaningful ways: as an annual guide for stewarding God's story, as a weekly guide for planning corporate worship, as a steady rhythm for spiritual growth and formation, and as an ecumenical resource that fosters community within the body of Christ.

## AN ANNUAL GUIDE FOR STEWARDING GOD'S STORY

As worship planners, we are called to steward God's story. Jesus is at the heart of this story: his birth, life, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, sending of the Holy Spirit, and future return. In worship, we remember, recall, and appropriate these events and realities. We do this, in part, by following the cycles and seasons of the Christian Year

Our call to steward God's story comes from the various exhortations in Scripture. For example, in Deuteronomy, Moses describes how we are to immerse ourselves in God's story, passing it on at home, at work, and in worship. He wrote to the people of Israel:

Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates (Deuteronomy 6:4–9).

In 2 Kings, Hilkiah, the high priest, found the Book of the Covenant. Finding and restoring the word of the Lord sparked a revival and ushered in a number of reforms through King Josiah.

The king stood by the pillar and made a covenant before the Lord, to follow the Lord, keeping his commandments, his decrees, and his statutes, with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. All the people joined in the covenant (2 Kings 23:3).

The psalmists functioned as storytellers in the Old Testament. They often retold all or portions of the story of redemption, spurred on by passages such as this one:



One generation shall laud your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts (Psalm 145:4).

In the New Testament, we see how important the Scriptures were to Jesus. Tempted by Satan, Jesus responded by quoting from Deuteronomy:

One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God (Matthew 4:4).

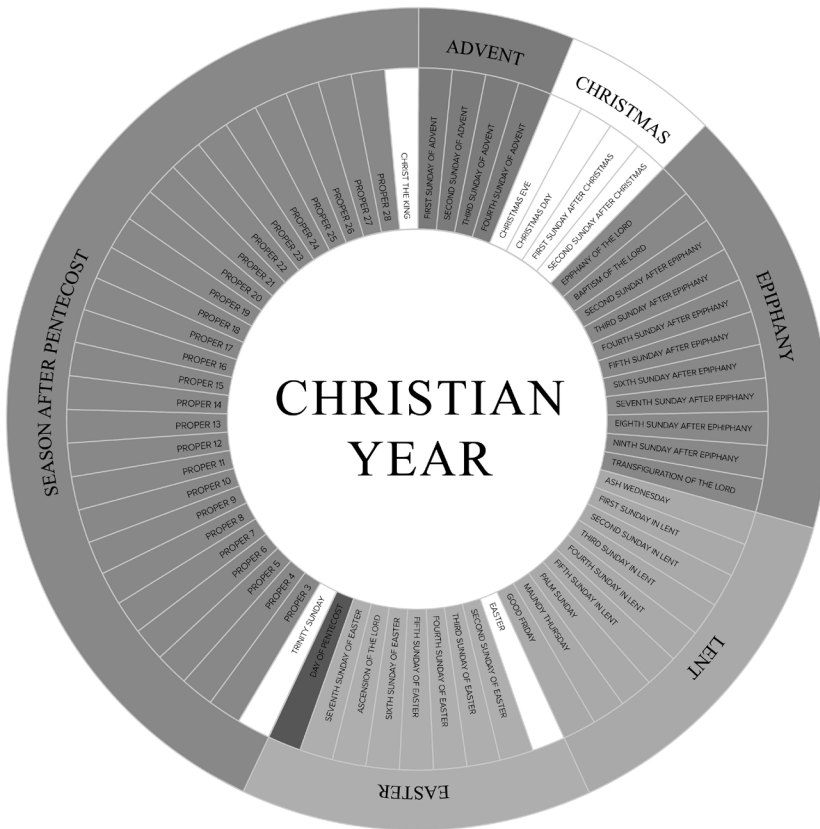
We also receive various exhortations from the apostle Paul. To the Colossians he wrote:

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God (Colossians 3:16).

To encourage Timothy, a young leader in the church, Paul wrote:

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:14–17).

When it comes to stewarding God's story, we should not be motivated by tradition or novelty, but by a *conviction* to immerse our people in the word and to pass this story on, one generation to the next. The liturgical calendar below is a helpful way to visualize this story through the seasons of the Christian Year.



Advent is a time of preparation; a time to remember Christ’s first coming and to anticipate his return. At **Christmas** we retell and reorient ourselves around the reality that God put on flesh and walked among us. Throughout **Epiphany** we tell about Christ’s manifestation to the world. We recall the Magi who came to see him, his baptism in the Jordan River, and his transfiguration.

Like Advent, **Lent** is a season of preparation. It offers us forty days (not counting Sundays) to orient our lives and prepare for the events of Holy Week and Easter. Thus, we have the opportunity to reflect on those areas of our lives that have too strong a hold on us. We can acknowledge, surrender, and repent over the various idols in our lives: power, addictions, money, control, security.

During Holy Week, we walk through the major events of our redemption. On **Palm Sunday** we sing and shout “Hosanna!” to the King of kings; however, we also remember the irony of this day as Jesus wept over Jerusalem

for her blindness and hardness of heart. On **Maundy Thursday**, we remember how Jesus gave us a new mandate to love one another and recall the way he demonstrated this by washing the disciples' feet. We celebrate the Lord's Supper, remembering how Jesus first instituted this meal with the disciples. We walk through the sobering events of his arrest, trial, and crucifixion on **Good Friday**. We rise on **Easter Sunday** to celebrate Christ's resurrection and the hope of new life.

Though it is definitely the forgotten festival among evangelicals, many congregations recognize the **Ascension** (either on a Thursday or the following Sunday) and the reality that Christ is now at the right hand of the Father interceding and advocating for his people. We remember the **Day of Pentecost**, celebrating the coming of the Holy Spirit in power to the church. Pentecost is a time to acknowledge the present ministry of the Holy Spirit who empowers, comforts, fills, and guides us, the people of God.

We celebrate **Trinity Sunday**, acknowledging our worship of one God in three persons. We then enter the long **Season after Pentecost**, celebrating our life in the Spirit as the people of God. As we tell God's story we are formed and transformed, year after year, by the spiritual realities of a living, sanctifying God.

## A WEEKLY GUIDE FOR PLANNING CORPORATE WORSHIP

In addition to the annual rhythm of the Christian Year, this resource will be of help in recounting God's story through the weekly rhythm of the RCL. For years, my worship planing involved several independent and sometimes unrelated choices. I found myself spending a lot of time searching for a psalm as a call to worship or for a Scripture reading or a prayer that would flow out of a couple of opening songs. I used to comb through resources looking for an affirmation of faith based on the sermon text for that Sunday.

*Lectionary Journey* is the fruit of engaging with the Scripture readings for each Sunday (and special services) in the Christian Year and then crafting integrated calls to worship, prayers, and affirmations of faith. With this resource, you will be able to offer your people an integrated and healthy diet of word and prayer without having to spend time each week searching for independent worship elements.

In addition, this resource is of great benefit even if your church does not follow the RCL in its preaching. If your pastor chooses the sermon texts and themes, *Lectionary Journey* still provides you with a weekly structure

for utilizing Scripture-based worship aids. And within this structure, there is plenty of room for creativity and spontaneity.

You may choose to incorporate all of the resources for a given Sunday: all four lectionary readings, the call to worship, the prayer, and the affirmation of faith. Alternatively, you may find that it better fits your context to pick and choose from the various resources for a given Sunday.

Often, I will have a vocalist read one of the lectionary readings, and then I will lead the congregation in a corporate prayer of renewal. I will often give some pause for people to make the prayer their own, to silently add their own confessions and petitions; and then I will lead us in an extemporaneous prayer before transitioning into a song of response. Other Sundays, I will choose to emphasize the affirmation of faith.

I contextualize the resources for each Sunday, making choices about what to use and what not to use. There are countless ways that you can make these worship aids your own and tailor them to the culture and context of your church.

## A STEADY RHYTHM FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH AND FORMATION

Although my church does not follow the RCL in its preaching, I have found that by personally engaging with the lectionary readings each week, I am being formed and fed, spiritually. I use these resources not only in worship, but also in family devotions and in my small group. This regular immersion in the word has become an anchor for my faith. It is a rhythmic practice that brings steadiness and stability amidst the various trials and challenges of life. In *Music and the Arts in Christian Worship*, Tom Schwanda writes:

The strengths of the lectionary actually exert a dynamic, silent force. The more Christians gather around the Scripture, the stronger they grow in Christ. As more pastors and musicians gravitate toward the lectionary approach, there is an increased strength within the church, not just isolated and scattered congregations, but in the church as the body of Christ. While initially this trend may not be easily detected, with time it will disseminate a formative influence much like yeast does to a piece of dough. Anything that can foster broader dialogue with Scripture and about our triune God should be strongly encouraged.<sup>9</sup>

9. Webber, *Music and the Arts*, 447.

I have definitely seen this formative influence in my life and in our church. It is my hope and prayer that this resource would be like yeast, exerting a “dynamic, silent force” in the dough of your own heart and congregation. In an age where our attention span is short and our impulse to try something new is so prevalent, this resource offers a steady rhythm for spiritual growth and formation.

## AN ECUMENICAL RESOURCE THAT FOSTERS COMMUNITY WITHIN THE BODY OF CHRIST

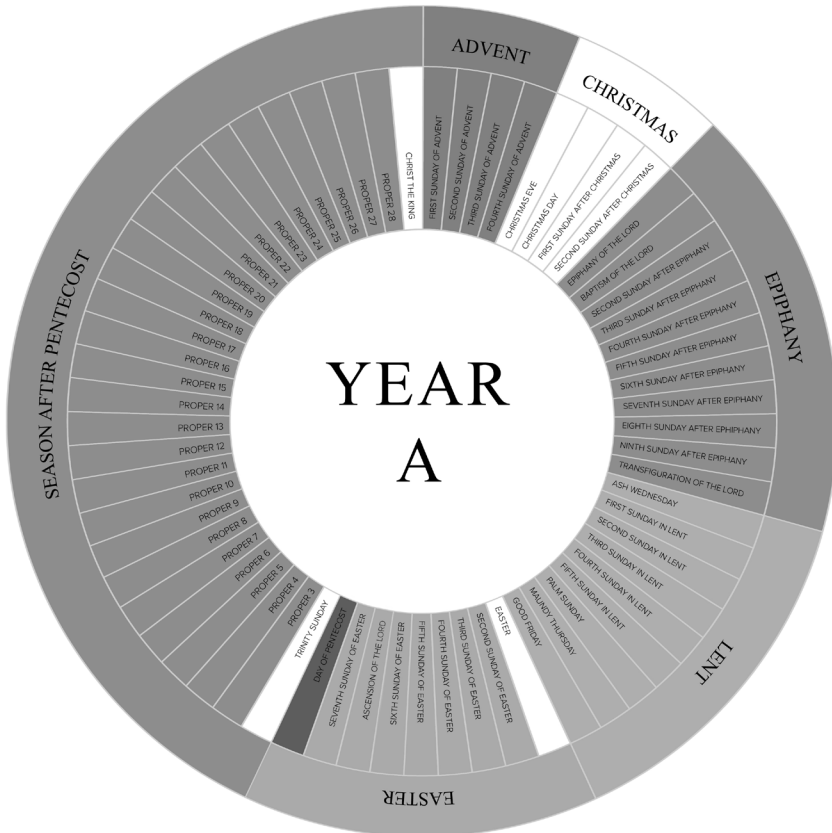
Finally, *Lectionary Journey* not only serves as an annual and weekly guide for worship and a source of spiritual formation, but it also connects us with the larger body of Christ. Utilizing this resource may encourage you to identify other churches in your local community that follow the RCL. You may explore holding weekly gatherings to brainstorm and share resources for upcoming services.

You may choose to simply educate your own congregation on the global and historic aspects of using a lectionary. You can remind them that as we participate in a prayer of renewal on the Fourth Sunday of Easter, or an affirmation of faith on the Third Sunday of Advent, or in a Scripture reading on Pentecost Sunday, we are proclaiming the gospel along with our brothers and sisters in Christ. We are joining our voices with those around the world and across the centuries who have stewarded God’s story each week, engaging with the Scriptures related to the various cycles and seasons of the Christian Year.

It is my prayer that we will steward God’s story well in our generation, allowing our hearts, minds, and imaginations to be captured by the saving events and amazing realities of our triune God. In doing so, we are heeding the call to let the word of Christ dwell in us richly.



# The Year of Matthew



# First Sunday of Advent (Year A)

## LECTIONARY READINGS

Isaiah 2:1–5

Psalm 122

Romans 13:11–14

Matthew 24:36–44

## CALL TO WORSHIP

Isaiah 2:3, 5

Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,  
to the house of the God of Jacob;  
that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.  
**For out of Zion shall go forth instruction,  
and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.**  
Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!

## PRAYER OF RENEWAL

Based on Matthew 24:36–37, 44; Romans 13:12–14

Lord Jesus,  
we do not know the day or hour of your return.  
Keep us awake and ready,  
for your coming will be unexpected.  
Help us to lay aside the works of darkness  
and put on the armor of light.  
By your grace, may we live honorably,  
making no provision for sinful desires.  
In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.



## AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

Based on Romans 13:12–14

*How are we to live in light of Christ's return?*

We believe we are to lay aside the works of darkness  
and put on the armor of light.

We believe we are to live honorably as in the day,  
not in reveling and drunkenness,

not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy.

We believe we are to put on the Lord Jesus Christ,  
and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

## Second Sunday of Advent (Year A)

### LECTIONARY READINGS

Isaiah 11:1–10

Psalm 72:1–7, 18–19

Romans 15:4–13

Matthew 3:1–12

### CALL TO WORSHIP

Psalm 72:18–19

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel,  
who alone does wondrous things.

**Blessed be his glorious name forever;  
may his glory fill the whole earth.**

### PRAYER OF ADORATION

Based on Isaiah 11:1–2, 4, 6–7, 9; Matthew 3:1–3

Lord Jesus,

you are the Root of Jesse upon whom rests  
the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might.

You judge the meek and the poor with righteousness and equality.

As it was prophesied, John came as a voice in the wilderness,  
calling us to repentance for your kingdom is near.

We long for the fullness of this peaceable kingdom,

when the wolf shall live with the lamb,

and the cub and the calf shall lie down together.

We place our hope in your promises and look forward to the day  
when the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord.

In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

## AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

Based on Romans 15:4, 7

*What do we believe concerning the Old Testament Scriptures?*

We believe that whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction,  
so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

*What do we believe concerning hospitality?*

We believe we are to welcome one another,  
just as Christ has welcomed us, for the glory of God.

## Third Sunday of Advent (Year A)

### LECTIONARY READINGS

Isaiah 35:1-10

Psalm 146:5-10

James 5:7-10

Matthew 11:2-11

### CALL TO WORSHIP

Psalm 146:5-7

Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob,  
whose hope is in the Lord their God,  
who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them;  
**who keeps faith forever;**  
**who executes justice for the oppressed;**  
**who gives food to the hungry.**

### PRAYER OF RENEWAL

Based on James 5:7-10; Matthew 11:2-6

Lord Jesus,  
Give us patience as we wait for your return.  
Like John, sometimes we doubt and wonder if your promises are true.  
Strengthen our hearts and reassure us, for  
the blind receive their sight, the lame walk,  
the sick are healed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised,  
and the poor have good news brought to them.  
By your grace, help us not to grumble against one another,  
but take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord,  
as examples of suffering and patience.  
In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

## AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

Based on Isaiah 35:5–7

*What do we believe concerning the coming of the kingdom?*

We believe there will be healing and restoration:  
the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped.  
We believe there will be an overflow of adoration:  
the lame shall leap like a deer,  
and the tongue of the speechless shall sing for joy.  
We believe all of creation will be vibrant and renewed:  
waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert;  
the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of  
water.

## Fourth Sunday of Advent (Year A)

### LECTIONARY READINGS

Isaiah 7:10-16

Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

Romans 1:1-7

Matthew 1:18-25

### CALL TO WORSHIP

Psalm 80:1-3

Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock!  
You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth  
before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh.  
Stir up your might, and come to save us!  
**Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved.**

### PRAYER OF RENEWAL

Based on Matthew 1:21-23

Lord Jesus,  
We thank you for coming to us,  
and for saving us from our sins.  
During this Advent season,  
we stand in awe and wonder  
of the fulfillment of your gospel promise:  
“The virgin shall conceive and bear a son,  
and they shall name him Emmanuel,”  
which means, “God is with us.”  
Help us to walk in faith,  
knowing your mighty presence is among us.  
In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

## AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

Based on Romans 1:1–4

*What do we believe concerning the gospel of Jesus Christ?*

We believe that the gospel of God was promised  
through his prophets in the holy scriptures,  
the gospel concerning his Son,  
who was descended from David according to the flesh  
and was declared to be Son of God with power  
according to the spirit of holiness  
by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.