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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:

Kimberly L. Clayton, Director of Contextual Education at Columbia Theological Seminary, Decatur, Georgia; Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

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Carol L. Wade, Dean of Christ Church Cathedral, Lexington, Kentucky; Episcopal Church
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, “Let us go to the house of the Lord!”
Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, that we may learn God’s ways and walk in God’s paths.

Ps. 122:1
Isa. 2:3

Our feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem.
Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!

Ps. 122:2
Isa. 2:5

CALL TO CONFESSION
You know what time it is:
Now is the time to wake from sleep.

Salvation is near!
Let us confess our sin.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION
God of night and day,
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.
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.

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.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Sisters and brothers in Christ,
for the sake of the world that God so loves, let us pray.
Pray for the peace of Jerusalem.  
Ps. 122:6

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.

Isa. 2:4

Pray for the peace of the church.
We pray for peace in Christ’s body—
Rom. 13:11–14
put an end to fear and fighting,
and help us to proclaim in word and action
the good news of salvation to all.

Pray for the peace of this community.
We pray for peace in this place—
Ps. 122:6–8
for safety in our homes and streets,
for the prosperity of our neighbors,
and for the health of family and friends.

God of the future,
Matt. 24:37
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.

INVITATION TO THE OFFERING
Come with gratitude and joy
Isa. 2:1–5; Ps. 122
to the table of the Lord.
Bring the works of your hands
and the gifts of your lives
as an offering of praise.

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING/DEDICATION
We give you thanks and praise, O God,
Ps. 122:3, 9
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.

First Sunday of Advent
About that day and hour no one knows. 
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.

May the grace of Christ,
the love of God,
and the Spirit’s joy surround you
as you walk in the light of the Lord.

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?

Lord God, you have woken me from sleep;
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.

God, my Savior, you are even nearer now
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.