

*Feasting on the Word*<sup>®</sup>  
WORSHIP COMPANION

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✿ LITURGIES FOR YEAR C ✿  
VOLUME I

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## *Introduction*

**T**he *Feasting on the Word Worship Companion* offers language for the church's worship for every Sunday and holy day in the Revised Common Lectionary for Years A, B, and C. 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. This first volume provides liturgy for Year C, Advent through Pentecost.

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, 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 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 through Pentecost (Year C)
- 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 throughout the Christian year
- 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 2012.

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 two prayers for general use and prayers for holy days 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 C, 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 volumes 2, 4, and 6.

Since the numbering of the 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. The Presbyterians, for instance, insist on including prayers of confession and prayers for illumination that invoke the Holy Spirit. Lutherans and Episcopalians expect a prayer of 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 worshipping communities to stammer forth their thanks and praise.

*Kimberly Bracken Long*

# *First Sunday of Advent*

Jeremiah 33:14–16    1 Thessalonians 3:9–13  
Psalm 25:1–10                      Luke 21:25–36

## OPENING WORDS / CALL TO WORSHIP

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, *Jer. 33:14–16*  
when I will fulfill my promise to my people.

**Justice and righteousness will fill the land  
and all will live in peace and safety.**

*[or]*

There will be signs in the heavens *Luke 21:25–36*  
and distress among the nations.

**When Christ returns in power and glory  
people will faint with fear.**

But when you see these things, lift up your heads:

**our redemption is drawing near!**

Heaven and earth may pass away,

**but the Word of God will stand unshaken.**

## CALL TO CONFESSION

Jesus said, Do not let your hearts be weighed down *Luke 21:25–36*

by the sins and worries of this life,

but watch and pray for the grace of God,

who will save you in your time of trial.

With confidence in God's mercy,

let us confess our sin.

## PRAYER OF CONFESSION

**Lord, have mercy on us.**

**We are not ready for your coming.**

**We live in sin,**

**as though there were no justice.**

**We live in fear,  
as though there were no grace.  
Forgive us, Lord.  
Show us your mercy and steadfast love.  
Lead us in your truth, and teach us your paths,  
for you are the God of our salvation. Amen.**

*Ps. 25:4–6*

#### **DECLARATION OF FORGIVENESS**

Friends, believe the good news:  
In Jesus Christ you are forgiven.  
**Thanks be to God.**

May the Lord guide your way,  
strengthen you in all holiness,  
and make you abound in love  
for one another and for all.

*1 Thess. 3:9–13*

#### **PRAYER OF THE DAY**

Holy One, you have promised us  
that the day of our salvation is near.  
Keep us faithful in love and watchful in prayer,  
so that we may stand with confidence and joy  
at the coming of Christ, our redeemer and Lord. **Amen.**

#### **PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

God our salvation,  
there is wisdom, peace, and joy  
for those who keep your Word.  
By the power of your Holy Spirit,  
lead us in your truth  
and teach us to do your will;  
for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

*Ps. 25:1–10*

#### **PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION**

*[A brief silence may follow each petition.]*

Let us pray to the Lord, saying,  
in your mercy, Lord, save us.

Merciful God,  
you call us to goodness and lead us on right paths.

You encourage us with signs of your coming  
and urge us to keep watch,  
that we might greet you with heads raised high  
when you come to restore all of creation.  
Watching and waiting, we pray for this world that needs  
your saving power.

For nations at war,  
in your mercy, **Lord, save us.**  
For all who suffer from violence, in the streets or in their homes,  
in your mercy, **Lord, save us.**  
For all who live in worry or fear,  
in your mercy, **Lord, save us.**  
For those who have forgotten the ways of righteousness,  
in your mercy, **Lord, save us.**  
For those who have never heard of your rescuing love,  
in your mercy, **Lord, save us.**  
For all those who have lost hope, or never had it at all,  
in your mercy, **Lord, save us.**

We pray, too, for your church in the world,  
that we may increase in ardor for you and your children,  
and work in confidence for your coming reign.  
Now by the power of your Holy Spirit, make us ever more faithful,  
that we may greet you in confidence and joy on that great day;  
through Christ, in whose name we pray. **Amen.**

#### INVITATION TO THE OFFERING

Trusting in the sure promises of Christ,  
and grateful for the Spirit's sustaining power,  
let us bring our tithes and offerings to God.

#### PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING/DEDICATION

God of righteousness,  
you have saved us from the worst the world can do  
and have promised to redeem the whole creation when  
Christ comes again.  
In faith and hope we offer our gifts of money and self,  
that we may be part of what you are doing in the world even now,  
as we watch for Christ's coming in glory. **Amen.**

**CHARGE**

Go in peace,  
live in love,  
and seek to be holy in all that you do.

**BLESSING**

May the God of mercy keep you,  
the Holy Spirit cheer you,  
and Christ in glory greet you,  
now and at the day of his coming.

*Question for Reflection*

Even in the midst of trouble and turmoil, God allows us glimpses of the kingdom to come. What signs of promise do you see that bolster your hope in a new heaven and a new earth?

*Household Prayer: Morning*

Thank you for this new day to sing your praise  
and watch for signs of your kingdom.  
By your Spirit, let me abound in love for you and your children,  
that in living and loving I may point to your coming reign.  
In the name of Jesus I pray. Amen.

*Household Prayer: Evening*

Thank you for the signs of your coming reign,  
and for the power of your saving love.  
Bless all those whom I met today,  
and strengthen their hope in your power and grace.  
Now as I close my eyes,  
I relinquish all anxieties and fears,  
trusting in your providence and mercy. Amen.

## *Second Sunday of Advent*

Baruch 5:1–9 *or* Malachi 3:1–4      Philippians 1:3–11  
Luke 1:68–79      Luke 3:1–6

### OPENING WORDS / CALL TO WORSHIP

John came out of the wilderness to preach repentance;  
he preaches to us still.

**Make straight the paths we now walk  
and prepare the way for God's reign of justice and love.**

### CALL TO CONFESSION

Saints, let us trust in God's love for us and confess our sin,  
confident in God's mercy.

### PRAYER OF CONFESSION

**Refining God, you have sent us prophets and we have not listened.  
We have not always determined what is best  
or made way for your reign  
in our lives, our church, and our society.  
Forgive us, we pray, and renew your covenant within us,  
for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.**

### DECLARATION OF FORGIVENESS

Friends, I am confident of this:  
if we repent, God is sure to forgive us.  
The One who began a good work in us will bring it to completion.  
Grateful for the promise of joy and of peace,  
let us share that peace with one another.

## PRAYER OF THE DAY

Covenant God,  
you send us messengers  
to cleanse and refine us for your coming.  
Help us endure the mirror of the prophets' message,  
that we may see you  
when you suddenly appear among us;  
through Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

## PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

Holy One, through your Holy Spirit  
instruct us by the light of your prophets.  
Illumine our hearts, that we may hear your call  
to become your path into the world.  
In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. **Amen.**

## PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

*[A brief time of silence may be kept after each intercession.]*

Loving God, through the gift of prayer *Phil. 1:7*  
you teach us to hold one another in our hearts.

Hear now our prayers:

for the leaders and people of every nation:	<i>Luke 3:1</i>
for the church and all who serve the Lord:	<i>Luke 3:2</i>
for those who suffer in sorrow and affliction:	<i>Bar. 5:1</i>
for refugees and travelers far from home:	<i>Bar. 5:5-7</i>
for all who are in prison or facing trial:	<i>Phil. 1:7</i>
for those who sit in darkness, or in the shadow of death:	<i>Luke 1:79</i>

Gracious God, this is our prayer:  
that your love will overflow more and more *Phil. 1:9, 8*  
in our lives, in your church, and in all the world,  
until all may know the compassion of Christ Jesus,  
our Savior and Lord, in whose name we pray. **Amen.**

## INVITATION TO THE OFFERING

We are called by God to present a harvest  
of righteousness—

*Phil. 1:11, 6*

not by virtue of our own works,

but by the grace of the one who began a good work in us,  
and is even now bringing it to completion.

Let us bring the offerings of our lives to the Lord.

## PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING/DEDICATION

God of all righteousness,  
receive these gifts of gratitude,  
the offerings of our lives.

*Mal. 3:1–4*

Purify them with your refining fire  
so that they may serve your purposes  
and shine with your glory;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

## CHARGE

I am confident of this:  
that the one who began a good work in you  
will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.

*Phil. 1:6*

Prepare the way of the Lord!

*Luke 3:4*

## BLESSING

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

*Phil. 4:23*

### *Questions for Reflection*

The prophet Malachi says that God is “like a refiner’s fire and like fuller’s soap” (Mal. 3:2). Reflect on events of the past year. How has God been working to refine and purify your life or your community of faith?

Paul writes to the church at Philippi: “I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now” (Phil.1:3–5). Think about people in your life for whom you give thanks, who have been in your prayers, and who have brought good news and joy to you this year. Consider writing them a letter or card to express your gratitude.

*Household Prayer: Morning*

Blessed are you, Lord God:  
by your tender mercy  
the dawn breaks upon us.  
Guide our feet this day  
in paths of peace;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*Luke 1:68, 78–79*

*Household Prayer: Evening*

Blessed are you, Lord God:  
for you have smiled on us this day  
and redeemed us from our sin.  
Give light to all who wait in darkness  
until we rest with you in perfect peace;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*Luke 1:68, 79*