

Between Memory and Hope
Advent Worship Series - Week 1
...A Time for Reawakening

WORSHIP SERVICE OUTLINES
 Each worship outline contains all elements needed for your worship service. The order of each service presented is only a *suggestion*. No doubt changes will be needed to accommodate the flow and worship style of your corps. The outlines are flexible and allow opportunities to “cut and paste” as needed. If you are blessed with instrumental or vocal music resources, you may find there is more structured material here than needed. It is recommended that the headings of each section of the service be included in the bulletin.

Announcements & Offering

The Memory of the First Advent

Call to Worship:

Every year, Christmas arrives with a promise—a hope—an expectation of what our lives can be. And every year, we're faced with the same decision. Will we choose to stand in the shadows with those who doubt, or will we choose to stand in the bright light of faith with those who believe? Will we give space in our hearts to the jaded ideas and ideals of our culture, or will we turn with child-like faith to embrace the joy-filled message of this amazing season?

(Welcome to Our World, page 22)

| | | |
|---|-------------------------------|------------------|
| SB#103 – Christians awake, salute the happy morn | TB-476 – same | HTD10-T1 (3 vs.) |
| Additional Optional Songs | | |
| SB#114 – Light of the world | TB-653 – Here I am to Worship | No CD |
| HC#146 – Here I am to Worship | HC-146 | HCD13-T16 |
| SB#104 – Come, Thou long expected Jesus | TB-370 – Hyfrydol | HTD1-T14 (3 vs.) |

Drama: Silence Is Golden

Reading:

For nine months Zechariah and Elizabeth waited, he in silence, she humming happy songs as she made baby clothes and chatted cheerfully with the neighbor ladies about the joys of motherhood. For several months their young relative Mary from Nazareth lived with them. The news she brought was even more miraculous than theirs. Watching his Elizabeth spontaneously prophesy as their son leapt in her womb when Mary arrived was

an awe-inspiring event. Listening to his Elizabeth tenderly ministering to Mary, the mother of the Messiah, was a joy. Here under his roof were the two women who carried in their wombs the one who would prepare the way and the One who would pardon humanity. Often he found himself silently watching and listening in wonder.

Finally the wonderful day came. His Elizabeth had never looked so beautiful, even in the midst of the pains of childbirth . . . and then their son arrived. Eight days later the day of naming the child came. Zechariah motioned for a clay tablet. He inscribed in the clay the words that confirmed his baby's name. Suddenly his tongue tingled, and Zechariah spoke. "His name is John." He was speaking! Eyes large with wonder, he looked at his beloved Elizabeth. "His name is John . . . God's gracious gift." His anointed words are now known as the Benedictus. His was the last prophecy of the old covenant and the first of the new covenant. The old man who thought God had forgotten him saw his prayers answered beyond his great expectations.

The Hope of the Second Advent

Responsive Scripture:

Leader: Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near. (Revelation 1:3 NIV)

All: Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him. (Revelation 1:7 NIV)

Leader: Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be?

All: You ought to live holy and godly lives. (2 Peter 3:11 NIV)

Leader: So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. (2 Peter 3:14 NIV)

All: For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? (1Thessalonians 2:19 NIV)

Leader: Indeed, you are our glory and joy. (1Thessalonians 2:20 NIV)

All: Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. (Matthew 24:42 NIV)

Leader: The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber,

All: Our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. (Romans 13:11 NIV)

Leader: The night is nearly over; the day is almost here.

All: So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. (Romans 13:12 NIV)

| | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------|-----------|
| HC#10 – The Light has Come | HC-10 | HCD1-T10 |
| Additional Optional Songs | | |
| HC#123 – Shine on Us | HC-123 | HCD11–T13 |

Candle Lighting:

Reader 1: This is the day of awakening: a time to make ready for the coming of the Lord.

Reader 2: For his Kingdom is near, and is now here.

Reader 1: We live in the time between:

Reader 2: Knowing by the memory of the Church and the witness of Scripture the First Advent of our Lord.

Reader 1: Awaiting by the witness of Scripture and the presence of the Holy Spirit the Second Advent of our Lord.

Reader 2: How we live in the in-between times shows where our faith is.

[Light the first candle]

Reader 1: We light this candle today as a symbol of Reawakening.

Reader 2: May this light be a beacon of salvation, a flame that signals the end of war, and a time of peace.

Reader 1: The candle's burning is a call to make ready for the coming of the Lord: this is the day of awakening.

| | | |
|--|---------------|------------------|
| HC#45 – While We are Waiting, Come | HC-45 | HCD3-T15 |
| Additional Optional Songs | | |
| HC#82 – Jesus, Name Above All Names | HC-82 | HCD7-T12 |
| HC#123 – Shine on Us | HC-123 | HCD11–T13 |
| HC#220 – Incarnate | HC-220 | HCD20-T20 |
| SB#117 – O come, O come, Immanuel | TB-444 – same | HTD11-T8 (3 vs.) |

Prayer:*[Piano continues to play chorus]*

Eternal and most holy God, we praise and honor you as we gather in the name of your dear Son, Jesus. During this Advent season we sense your nearness in the songs we sing and in the words we hear from Holy Scripture.

May your light and peace radiate about us and within us as we worship you today. We praise and thank you for this house of worship and this body of your church. In expectation and joy, we worship you now and each day until Jesus returns to claim his own. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.

Message – Awake! The Time Has Come!

| | | |
|--|---------------|------------------------------|
| HC#120 – In the Manger | HC-120 | HCD10-T20 |
| Additional Optional Songs | | |
| SB#118 – O little town of Bethlehem | TB-136 – same | HTD3-T5 (3 vs.) Bethlehem |
| HC#123 – Shine on Us | HC-123 | HCD11–T13 |
| HC#149 – In Christ Alone | HC-149 | HCD13-T19 |

With an Ear for the Trumpet**Benediction:**

Across the centuries, throughout all recorded history, you have called out to us in your gracious love. You have offered yourself to us, and pleaded with us to come to you. You have invited us to come when we are thirsty; come when we are wounded; come when we are lost in sin; come when we are poor, alone and without hope. And we have come, Lord, in faith, in humility and in gratitude. Now we join our voices and invite you to come to us. Return to us, Lord Jesus, and make your dwelling place among us. We pray Amen.

(Praise & Worship Bible, page 1684)

| | | |
|---|---|---------------------------|
| Vocal Benediction – SB#271 – Rejoice, the Lord is King | TB-200 – Darwalls | HTD1-T7 (3 vs.) |
| Additional Optional Songs | | |
| HC#149 – In Christ Alone | HC-149 | HCD13-T19 |
| HC#241 – Crown him with many crowns | HC-241 | HCD23-T11 |
| SB#260 – Lo! He comes with clouds descending | TB-402 – Helmsley TB-406 – Praise, my soul | No CD HTD2-T12 (3 vs.) |
| SB#1025 – For Thine is the Kingdom, | TB-618 – same | HTD3-T13 (1 vs.) |

| | |
|--|---|
| Week #1 | |
| DRAMA | |
| Silence Is Golden | |
| By Martyn Scott Thomas | |
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| Scripture: | Luke 1:5-25 |
| Synopsis: | Elizabeth brags to a friend about how agreeable and helpful Zechariah has become during her pregnancy. |
| Characters: | Zechariah – a priest Elizabeth – his wife |
| Props/Costumes: | Two chairs (rocking preferred), a newspaper or book for Zechariah. Elizabeth should look pregnant. Casual or Biblical dress. |
| Setting: | Zechariah and Elizabeth are sitting in their living room. All lines are spoken to an unseen guest. Zechariah's motions should be exaggerated as much as possible since this is his only means of communication. |
| Running Time: | 3:00 minutes. |

[Zechariah and Elizabeth are rocking in their chairs. Zechariah is reading his newspaper or book.]

Elizabeth: *[sits up and notices unseen guest]* Oh, Miriam. It's so nice to see you. Thanks for stopping by. We have great news, don't we, dear?

Zechariah: *[looks up and nods his head, smiling]*

Elizabeth: *[stands up and spins around as if modeling]* As you can see, I've put on a little weight and it's not because of Zechariah's cooking – not that he hasn't been doing more than his share around the house lately. Isn't that right, Sweetie?

Zechariah: *[looks up and shrugs]*

Elizabeth: I thought we were well past those child bearing years, too, but then Zechariah had to go to Jerusalem for Temple duty. When he got back, he didn't say a word, but he had this twinkle in his eye and well next thing we know . . . *[looks at Zechariah]*

Zechariah: *[puts his head down, embarrassed]*

Elizabeth: Why yes, we have waited a long time. That's what makes this all so special. That and the fact that Zechariah's been so agreeable. Haven't you, precious?

Zechariah: *[nods his head in agreement]*

Elizabeth: Why, he hasn't talked back to me once since we found out the good news. In fact, he hasn't even talked. Have you, darling?

Zechariah: *[shakes head]*

Elizabeth: These past seven months have been the most peaceful time of our marriage. After all these years of trying to get him to close his mouth so I could talk, I get pregnant and he goes speechless. If only God had heard my prayers earlier.

Zechariah: *[lets out a big sigh]*

Elizabeth: And you won't believe what I've been able to accomplish since Zechariah never seems to object. I asked him if he would mind putting in a nursery and he says nothing. So, we get a new nursery. Then I ask if he would mind if we got the kitchen re-done – again, no objection.

Zechariah: *[throws his hands in the air as if giving up]*

Elizabeth: No, I can't guarantee that if you get pregnant that Benjamin will shut up or that you'll get a new bathroom. *[pauses and listens]* No, unfortunately Zechariah can't talk to him about it, either.

Zechariah: *[starts waving, trying to get Elizabeth's attention]*

Elizabeth: *[keeps talking, not seeing Zechariah]* No, Zechariah can't come over to help at your house. He has plenty to do around here.

Zechariah: *[waves a little more frantically]*

Elizabeth: *[continues talking]* Yes, I do wish that Benjamin could be more like Zechariah, but we all can't have a perfect husband. I guess when you get right down to it, a solid marriage like ours just depends on communication; always knowing what the other person wants.

Zechariah: *[jumps up in front of Elizabeth, waving hysterically]*

Elizabeth: What is it, dear? Is something wrong?

Zechariah: *[opens mouth and points in]*

Elizabeth: Oh, are you hungry?

Zechariah: *[sighs and nods]*

Elizabeth: Me, too. Can you make me a sandwich while you're in there?

Zechariah: *[throws arms up in defeat and exits]*

Elizabeth: *[nods slowly, in victory]* Like I said Miriam, it's all about communication.

[Blackout]

Between Memory and Hope
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Advent Sermon – Week 1

“Awake! The Time Has Come!”

There is a remarkable period in North American Christian history, early in the eighteenth century, when everything was turned upside down. Normally quiet and reserved worshipers began shouting and weeping out loud. Church denominations that had nothing to do with one another suddenly found their members acting and thinking alike, as this phenomenon spread over the continent. Older churches diminished, pouring new members into younger churches. The religious face of this part of the world was changed forever. It even had an impact on how the young nation of the United States grew as settlers moved westward. Students of this period call what was happening in the Church then “the Great Awakening.”

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the Great Awakening is how it all began. The Congregationalist preacher, Jonathan Edwards, cannot fairly be described as an emotional or passionate person. Yet it was his vivid descriptions of the real pain and danger of sin in our lives that began to strike a chord in the heart of the lifeless church members of his day.

Those who heard his sermons began to cry out in heart-felt recognition of their sin, as if for the first time. They began to pray and weep in repentance, crying to God for forgiveness. These people were the descendants of the Puritans. They had all been in church their entire lives. Everyone would have described them as good people, honest, kind, moral, you name it: there was nothing apparently wrong.

But they woke up. They had a spiritual awakening. They woke up to the reality of sin, opened their eyes to the consequences of sin as God sees it. The Great Awakening was all about people recognizing the need for personal salvation. People, who otherwise had considered themselves Christian by birth or nationality, suddenly began to waken to the fact that God was a real living presence. And God was there.

Jonathan Edwards made people understand that the God who intended to call people into account for how they lived was not a distant God. Not far off in space. Nor was the judgment necessarily a long time away. The need to be right with God was immediate – right here, right now! And so people responded. They responded because they suddenly woke up to the fact that “God with us” was a double-sided message. They knew that the presence of God in our midst can bring peace to some, but trouble to others.

Sometimes even a welcomed message can bring unwelcome problems. For two characters in the first Christmas story, this was just the case. Zechariah and Elizabeth experienced this fantastic news in different ways. We know them as the parents of John the Baptist. They were both relatively old and still without any children when they discovered that God was going to do something remarkable within them.

When Elizabeth received a visit from her cousin Mary (now also pregnant, with Jesus), the baby John within Elizabeth leapt for joy at Jesus' presence. This incredible sign of life was also proof of the reawakening of her body to be able to present new life to the world. Like Sarah with Abraham before her, God was doing the impossible. She who was once beyond hope was now the living witness to God's life-giving power. Zechariah responded with the greater anxiety. He was taking his turn in service to God in the temple when an angel delivered the news to him. Zechariah was struck speechless – literally – in disbelieving the news. He found it difficult to awaken to the reality: How is this possible? How can I be sure? The miraculous presence of God brings both good news, but a warning also. It would be months before his regained speech would allow him to bear witness to the truth that he had in fact awakened to the terrible and wonderful reality of God's active presence. But this news is not only hard to understand, it is beyond our ability to control. And this kind of a loss of control can bring discomfort and anxiety.

It is similar to the feelings of the children in C.S. Lewis' "Chronicles of Narnia" books. Upon hearing that Aslan, the Lion, was soon returning to Narnia, the children asked about how safe this Lion was. But of course, Aslan was not a tame Lion, not under the control of others. And so the others said to the children, "Aslan is not safe, but he is good." And so it is with the presence of God. That the good and perfect presence of God suddenly is soon to be appearing among us is an unwelcome message for those who are not good; for those who are following evil.

The writer of the Romans text wanted those who read his words to respond to a Great Awakening message of his own. I imagine that he was writing to a group of believers who were not unlike the congregations of Jonathan Edwards' time. Perhaps many of the Christian believers in Rome were somehow dependent upon an outward form of religion. It's likely that the message of personal repentance and the need to live a life consistent with your beliefs needed to be heard.

One of the primary problems in many of the churches was the fact that people said they loved God, but they didn't act like they loved each other. So the writer in Romans relates to them all about the true nature of God's demands. In Romans 13.10, we read that love does no wrong to a neighbor.

Here is where our text begins. Let me read verse 14 again, this time from the New Revised Standard Version: "Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers." It matters to God how we treat each other. And someday – soon – we'll have to account for how we've lived.

Do you remember when you first believed? Have you grown up as a Christian since then? Have you awakened to the reality that you can't go on living a halfway Christian life? That accounting day will come at a time when we're settled in and comfortable with a half-way religion – and we'll find that God has been there all along.

Some of us will have been living like there's plenty of time to change before it's too late. The Romans text talks about partying and drunkenness, about sexually loose living, and about quarreling and jealousy. Wait: read that last phrase again: "Quarreling and jealousy." Everyone who excused yourself from the first sins, back up and ask why those last two items are in there. What is it about fighting and jealous behavior within the church that is destructive? I think it's because the way we treat each other tells unbelievers what we really think about the presence of God.

If we can claim to love a God who doesn't care if we love each other, then perhaps we don't really believe this idea about "God with us." Maybe we don't really think that salvation includes changing everything about our sinful patterns of living.

Jesus was giving some of the early believers a warning about the need to stay awake to the reality of God's presence among them. In Matthew 24.42, after talking about how some people are going to be partying like there's no worry about tomorrow, he warns those would listen to: "Keep awake, therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming."

Of course, some interpret this verse as talking exclusively about being ready for the Second Advent. And it is about the Second Advent. But it is also about living as if the Lord has never left. Read on in that chapter, beginning with verse 45. These verses are all about "staying at work" while the master is away.

What does it mean to "stay at work" for us? For those in that second Matthew passage, it meant not beating up on our fellow slaves – our fellow believers, if you will. It means for us to live now as if Christ has already returned. It means to behave toward one another as if Jesus himself were standing in our midst.

You know how a group of kids will sometimes suddenly stop fighting with one another when Mom or Dad comes into the room? This is especially true when the kids have been fighting about something inconsequential, when the fight is more about jealousy or selfishness than anything else. (Maybe this has happened to you, either as a child or as a parent.) The presence of the parent usually does two things: it brings about a kind of peace – at least an immediate halt to the argument – but it also brings the threat of trouble. Mom or Dad usually brings with them the air of settling the dispute by enforcing the parental will on all the kids in the room.

Isaiah chapter 2 is something like that. It's a message that was delivered to a people in the midst of turmoil, war, and lawlessness. The restoration of true worship in Zion, the city of God reads, at first, like a dream too good to be true. The coming of Messiah would put an end to all that is bad, would put all good things in their right place. Understand that the temple in Jerusalem is equivalent here to the very presence of the God who is savior and sustainer. And so these first four verses become something of a prayer for God's presence to be restored among them.

But even here is a warning. It comes in verse 5. All along they've been waiting for God. But verse five says that they need to change their ways, that they need to "walk in the

light of the Lord.” This sounds a lot like the other two passages, in Matthew and Romans. All three speak of living now in such a way that shows we know how serious it is to have the presence of the living God among us.

This Christmas, this Advent Season, what is your heart’s desire? Are you longing for a world at peace? Are you wanting more than anything to be at home in a place that helps you to grow, to be surrounded by people who care for you? Are you praying to know the fullness of God’s love and grace? Some people celebrate Christmas, talking about the birth of Jesus just like they talk about their own salvation’s new birth: as if it was something nice, but not very recent. They don’t have a current experience of God with us. And some people don’t want to think about the Second Advent any more than they want to plan spring cleaning in December – it’s simply too far away to bother with. But the reality is that every day ought to be a spring cleaning day. Every day, from now ‘til the end of time, ought to be a day that we keep our hearts clear of sin that so easily grows up between us and our neighbor. The reality is that God is already with us – the peace- and life-giving presence of God – and the convicting and judging presence of God – has been and will always be with us.

Those who live as if this were so need not fear the Second Advent. Those who live as if this doesn’t matter will not be able to care in time to make a difference. The time to make a change in how we live in these days between the “memory” of the First Advent and the “hope” of the Second Advent is now. What are you waiting for? Wake up! The time has come!

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Children's Message

“Wake up! Clean up!”

Do any of you have the job at home of cleaning up your room? Or maybe your part of helping out at home is to help clean the kitchen or some other part of the home on a regular basis. It's not easy picking up our dirty clothes, or books and toys every day, is it? Sometimes, we let things get messy all week long.

And then it's Saturday! And what do we like to do on Saturday mornings if we can? Sleep in, or stay in our pajamas and watch cartoons lazily on the floor or couch! What would happen if the adults in your house went away in the morning and left you to clean up, but instead you stayed in your “sleepy clothes” all day? What would they say when they got home?

“Wake up! Clean up! I told you to keep this room clean, and now look at it!” (You were probably hoping they wouldn't notice, right?) It seems easier living in a dirty room, and it's not hard to let our houses get messy in a short amount of time. The cleaning up part seems to take a long time, though, and it's never much fun.

Jesus talked about a time when people would be surprised that there wasn't any more time to even start getting cleaned up: A time when everyone was enjoying themselves, having a “sleepy Saturday” kind of lifestyle. But then there would come a wake-up call, and there wouldn't be time for any more cleaning.

He wasn't talking about toys or dirty laundry on the floors of your bedrooms. He was warning about the dirty hearts and souls, and messy lives that get that way from doing wrong and ignoring God. Jesus said it's important to keep our lives clean, every day, so that when the wakeup call comes, you'll be ready for it.

Prayer

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Supplemental Materials

Invocation¹

“Eternal and most holy God, we praise and honor you as we gather in the name of your dear Son, Jesus. During this Advent season we sense your nearness in the songs we sing and in the words we hear from holy Scripture.

“May your light and peace radiate about us and within us as we worship you today. We praise and thank you for this house of worship and this body of your church. In expectation and joy, we worship you now and each day until Jesus returns to claim his own. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.”

Benediction¹

“Go in anticipation of God’s grace and mercy. Go in anticipation of Jesus’ love and forgiveness. Go in anticipation of the Holy Spirit’s presence in comfort and hope. Go in peace. Amen.”

A Prayer for the Day²

(Pastoral Prayer, alternate Invocation or Benediction, or after the Candle Lighting)

“Almighty God, give all of us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.”

Offertory Prayer

Receive these gifts, O God, Creator, Preserver and Governor of all, as a sign of our commitment to peace and justice in our time, of our intention to be soldiers of the light and of our continuing desire to have you rule over every part of our lives. Amen.

Affirmation of Faith

We believe that we were created in the image of God to live in harmony with God and creation, but because of our disobedience and sin we are now powerless to choose between good or evil solely on our own.

¹ These may be reprinted for use in the worship service when this notice is included: “From *Invocations and Benedictions for the Revised Common Lectionary*, compiled and edited by John M. Drescher. Copyright © 1998 by Abingdon Press. Used by Permission.”

² From *The Divine Hours: Prayers for Autumn and Wintertime*, compiled by Phyllis Tickle. New York: Doubleday, 2000.

We believe in God the Father, creator and sustainer of all that is, God for us; who created all people in his image, in love and for love. He loves us still, in spite of corruption, waywardness and the sin which alienates us from him and longs to save us from ourselves.

(Salvation Story Study Guide, pp. 131, 130)

Call to Worship

Leader: I rejoiced with those who said to me, “Let us go to the house of the Lord.”
Our feet are standing in your gates, O Jerusalem.

Response: Before Jehovah’s awful throne, ye nations bow with sacred joy;
Know that the Lord is God alone; he can create, and he destroy.

Leader: Jerusalem is where the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord,
To praise the name of the Lord, according to the statute given to Israel.
There the thrones for judgment stand.

Response: We’ll crowd thy gates with thankful songs,
high as the heavens with our voices raise.
And earth, with her ten thousand tongues,
shall fill thy courts with sounding praise.

Leader: Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: may those who love you be secure.
May there be peace within your walls, and security within your citadels.

Response: Wide as the world is thy command: vast as eternity is thy love;
Firm as a rock thy truth shall stand,
when rolling years shall cease to move.

Leader: For the sake of my brothers and friends, I will say, “Peace be within you.”

Unison: Pray for the peace of Jerusalem.

from Psalm 122; and S/A song #4: Isaac Watts

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Scripture Study

Reawakening

The readings for today reflect the theme of in-between times by focusing on scripture texts that speak of the fulfillment of time in “the last days.” The message is consistent: the believer is to live in a state of perpetual readiness, for the Lord’s Second Advent is a belief that is certain, but an event whose date is uncertain.

Isaiah 2:1-5

The belief expressed in this vision, that the Temple in Jerusalem would once again be the focal point for worship and teaching, is by now a familiar concept, as are the images that describe the coming Prince of Peace: no more war, swords turned into plowshares, spears made into pruning hooks. The lesson is this: live now in the light of this coming reality.

Romans 13:11-14

The writer urges the believer to allow the Lord Jesus Christ to take control of their lives, their patterns of living. They should “wake up” to right living now, for every day that passes is one day closer to the end.

Matthew 24:36-44

This text is both a commentary on these in-between times, and a picture of why it is necessary to always be ready. The separating judgment will be unexpected, coming in from the midst of life’s daily activities, and at the unguarded moment.

For a call-to-worship or benediction reading:

Psalm 122

A regular concluding sentence in Jewish “expectation” prayers, even today, is captured in the phrase from this psalm: “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem.”