

Between Memory and Hope
Advent Worship Series - Week 5
...A Time for Resolution

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

With an Ear for the Trumpet

Call to Worship:

“The Word became human and lived here on earth among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness” (John 1:14 NLT)

The operative word of this verse is *among*. He lived *among* us. He donned the costliest of robes: a human body. He made a throne out of a manger and a royal court out of some cows. He took a common name—Jesus—and made it holy. He took common people and made them the same. He could have lived over us or away from us. But he didn’t. He lived *among* us.

He became a friend of the sinner and brother of the poor. He touched their sores and felt their tears and paid for their mistakes. He entered a tomb and came out and pledged that we’d do the same. And to us all, he shared the same message...I will come back and take you to be with me so that you may be where I am” (John 14:1, 3 NLT).

And how do we respond?

Some of us pretend he doesn’t exist. Others hear him, but don’t believe him. But then, a few decide to give it a try. They, like Simeon, “wait for” and “look forward to” the day Christ comes (2 Peter 3:11).

Be numbered among the searchers, won’t you? Live with an ear for the trumpet and an eye for the clouds. And when he calls your name, be ready.

(When Christ Comes, page 155-156)

SB#271 – Rejoice, the Lord is King	TB-200 – Darwalls	HTD1-T7 (3 vs.)
Additional Optional Songs		

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.)

Drama: Lights Out

***Candle Lighting:**

**if this service is Christmas Eve or a New Year’s Watchnight Service*

Reader 1: This is a day for Resolution.

Reader 2: A way to move forward: in maturity, in example, in true holiness living.

Reader 1: A day to act on our faith in Jesus Christ:
God incarnate: the very presence of God as human, among humankind.

*[Light the fifth/central candle]**

Reader 2: We light this / these candle[s] today and declare our intent to be examples of God’s holy light on earth.

Reader 1: The glory of God, announced on high, embodied in Christ, given to us.

Reader 2: The light that is the favor of God: His face, shining on us:
His salvation, reflected in our lives.

Reader 1: It is the resolution to be God’s people.

Reader 2: God’s holy people – that the world may know: Jesus is alive today!

Reader 1: This is a day for Resolution.

HC#45 – While We are Waiting, Come	HC-45	HCD3-T15
Additional Optional Songs		
HC#67 – Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord	HC-67	HCD5-T17
HC#10 – The Light has Come	HC-10	HCD1-T10
HC#72 – Emmanuel	HC-72	HCD6-T12
HC#82 – Jesus, Name Above All Names	HC-82	HCD7-T12
HC#123 – Shine on Us	HC-123	HCD11-T13
HC#187 – Jesus, Messiah	HC-187	HCD17-T17
HC#220 – Incarnate	HC-220	HCD20-T20

Prayer:

[Piano continues to play chorus]

Lord, we have received “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.” You have given us the light of Your presence, Your very own glory, to shine on us, in us, through us, and around us. And now in these days when darkness covers the earth, you call us to action—shine before all humanity, that they may see our good deeds and give praise to you. While we await the ultimate consummation of this promise in the second coming of our Lord, help us to do all we can to dispel the darkness from the world around us.

(The NIV Worship Bible, page 988)

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: "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory.

Leader: All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

All: He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

Leader: "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.

All: For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in,

Leader: I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

All: "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?

Leader: When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you?

All: When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

Leader: "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'

All: "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

Leader: "Then they will go away to eternal punishment,

All: But the righteous to eternal life". (Matthew 25:31-41, 46 NIV)

HC#5 – There is a Redeemer	HC-5	HCD1-T5
Additional Optional Songs		
HC#36 – Candle of the Lord	HC-36	HCD2-T16
HC#10 – The Light Has Come	HC-10	HCD1-T10
HC99 – Shine, Jesus, Shine!	C-99	HCD8-T19

Message – Resolution: the Beginning and the End

SB#750 – Father, I know that all my life	TB-111 – Spohr	HTD10-T14 (3 vs.)
Additional Optional Songs		
SB#588 – I bring to thee my heart to fill	TB-414 – Christ is All	HTD3-T6 (3 vs.)
SB#255 – I’m set apart for Jesus	TB-213 – Aurelia	HTD3-T3 (3 vs.)
SB#610 – My life must be Christ’s broken bread	TB-111 – Spohr	HTD10-T14 (3 vs.)
SB#734 – Precious Jesus, O to love Thee!	TB-323 – Denmark Hill	HTD12 –T4 (3 vs.)

Benediction:

Jesus, draw me close. Apart from you I can do nothing. But if I live in You and You live in me, then I will bear much fruit. So fill me with faith that overflows into good works. Fill me with love that overflows into service to others. And fill me with hope that overflows into courage to do your will.

(The NIV Worship Bible, page 1592)

Vocal Benediction – SB#1025 – For Thine is the Kingdom	TB-618 – same	HTD3-T13 (1 vs.)
Additional Optional Songs		
HC#149 – In Christ Alone	HC-149	HCD13-T19
HC#241 – Crown him with many crowns	HC-241	HCD23-T11

Week #5	
DRAMA	
Lights Out	
By Martyn Scott Thomas	
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Scripture:	Matthew 5:13-16
Synopsis:	A man has a flash light that he is reluctant to use.
Characters:	Marty – the owner of a flash light Ken – Marty’s friend
Props/Costumes:	A bench or two chairs. Marty should have a flash light in a paper bag or a duffle bag.
Setting:	Marty is sitting on a bench with his flash light in a bag.
Running Time:	2:30 minutes.

[Production note: Throughout this sketch, the lights should get dimmer, ending in near black out.]

Ken: *[enters and sits next to Marty]* What are you doing?

Marty: I’m waiting for the sun to go down.

Ken: *[sarcastically]* Must be a busy day, huh? What’s in the bag?

Marty: A new flash light.

Ken: Can I see it?

Marty: No.

Ken: Why not?

Marty: It’s brand new and I want to make sure it’s going to work when I need it.

Ken: Like when the sun goes down?

Marty: You got it.

[Lights dim a little]

Ken: It’s starting to get a little darker. Why don’t you pull it out now?

Marty: No way. If I pull it out now, the batteries may not last until I really

need it.

Ken: If it's brand new, the batteries should last for quite a while. I'm sure you'd be safe just to try it out.

Marty: Not a chance. With my luck, these batteries have been sitting around for years. Do you remember that yo-yo I bought last week with the lifetime warranty?

Ken: Yeah.

Marty: It's dead. The string fell off. And that homing pigeon I bought last month?

Ken: Yeah.

Marty: It flew home – wherever that is. No way. I'm not taking this light out of the bag until I know it's dark and I really need it.

[Lights dim a little more]

Ken: I don't know. It's getting darker. I really think you should take your light out of the bag and turn it on.

Marty: Listen. I appreciate your concern, but I'm just not going to turn it on until it's dark enough.

Ken: Can't you take it out of the bag and not turn it on?

Marty: If I did that, then you'd want me to turn it on for just a second, then for just a minute, and then the batteries go and I'm left in the dark.

[Lights dim almost completely]

Ken: Okay. Is it dark enough, now?

Marty: *[drops his bag]* I think so.

Ken: So, why don't you turn your light on?

Marty: I dropped my bag and I can't find it. It's too dark.

Ken: I don't believe you!

Marty: You don't happen to have a flash light, do you?

[*Blackout*]

Between Memory and Hope
...A Time for Resolution
Advent Sermon – Week 5

“Resolution: the Beginning and the End”

Resolutions are tricky things. We are encouraged by our culture to engage in a kind of game whereby we make promises we all know we’re bound to break. Even as we say the words, “I resolve to lose 15 pounds,” we know our very next action is to reach for another holiday cookie. The end of the resolution – failure – comes along with its beginning.

This kind of resolving – whether we do it at a Christmas Eve service, or a New Year’s Eve service, or whenever – is fruitless. It does not often bring real change. In fact, the whole enterprise is based on the false assumption that simply by wishing to make ourselves better, we can. Because we know the weaknesses in a plan that relies on our own power, failure is written in that kind of promise.

This is true even with what some may call “spiritual resolutions.” These are the kind of promises we make in order to be better people spiritually. But we cannot make ourselves holy. Any attempt to be righteous by a person with an unclean heart is an effort that is short-lived at best. It will soon become a self-righteous attitude, and a works-based salvation story. Simply saying I resolve to be better won’t make it happen. The end – failure – of such a resolution is already present in its beginning, during the promises we whisper in a setting just like this.

In this season [this season just past] that we have been remembering the First Advent of Christ, and during which we have been considering how our actions now make a difference in that consuming judgment of the Second Advent, we have been called to consider what it means to be holy people of God now. In these in-between times, we turn our attention to how we live our lives as God’s people. And it is appropriate to make resolutions.

And the primary resolution, that most of us who call ourselves Christians make, is typified by this 1896 Palmer Hartsough hymn:

I am resolved no longer to linger,
Charmed by the world’s delight,
Things that are higher, things that are nobler,
These have allured my sight.

*I will hasten to Him, hasten so glad and free;
Jesus, greatest, highest, I will come to Thee.
I will hasten, hasten to Him, hasten so glad and free;
Jesus, Jesus, greatest, highest, I will come to Thee.*

I am resolved to go to the Savior,
Leaving my sin and strife;

He is the true One, He is the just One,
He hath the words of life.

I am resolved to follow the Savior,
Faithful and true each day;
Heed what He sayeth, do what He willeth,
He is the living Way.

I am resolved to enter the kingdom
Leaving the paths of sin;
Friends may oppose me, foes may beset me,
Still will I enter in.

I am resolved, and who will go with me?
Come, friends, without delay,
Taught by the Bible, led by the Spirit,
We'll walk the heav'nly way.¹

While this song was no doubt written for use in revivals, to call people to repentance and pledge themselves to living the Christian life, its greatest application for many of us is found in its strong determination to live the holy life. And yet for many it has the hollow ring of wishful thinking. "I am resolved to follow the Savior, faithful and true each day." Those are good words. They make a wonderful resolution: maybe you have said this, prayed this, many times before. But has anything changed?

"I am resolved to [leave] my sin and strife." Are you? Is that a resolution you'd like to make? I think it's the desire of every Christian, at some level, to want to be more Christ-like; to have and live out a godly character.

The holiness scholar and writer John Oswalt, in his book, *Called to Be Holy*, picks up this theme when he addresses the experience of many Christians: "If it is true that God's goal for our lives is that we shall share his character and live out this life, and if all Christians have received the Holy Spirit who makes such a life possible, why do so many Christians seem to fall short of the goal?"

Oswalt then retells a story to illustrate the situation of many believers; people that I think have made resolutions that have ended almost before they began:

A poor man dreamed of taking a journey on a great ocean liner.
He saved his money carefully for many years and finally calculated
that he had enough money to buy the ticket. But when everything
had been added up he realized that he did not have enough money
left over to pay for the kind of sumptuous meals he had heard they
served on ocean liners. So he took what he had and bought a large
box of soda crackers and some cheese and took it aboard with him.
So when the rest of the passengers went to the dining room for
their meals, this man stayed in his room and ate crackers and

¹ Find the text and a midi tune for this hymn at < <http://www.cyberhymnal.org/htm/i/a/iamresol.htm>>.

cheese, just counting himself fortunate to be having this experience at all. But on the last day afloat, he determined that he would have at least one of those wonderful meals, so he took all the money he had left, hoping it would be enough, and went to the dining room. Imagine his surprise and chagrin when he was told by the steward that they had been holding his place at the table all week because the price of meals was included in the price of the ticket.²

Oswalt continues:

I am convinced that this old story accurately describes the state of far too many Christians. The life of the Spirit is theirs. That blessed condition where they can live lives of obedience, free from ravaging self-consciousness, joyously learning and doing the will of their heavenly Father is theirs. It was purchased for them on the Cross. The power of the Holy Spirit is in them ready to be unleashed to enable them to live lives which are blameless before God, lives which are without defect in God's sight. Yet they struggle on with their "crackers and cheese" when a sumptuous feast is spread and a place card with their name on it marks the place reserved for them.

The bad news is that too often we have made the kind of resolution where failure is guaranteed. The good news is that there is another resolution we can make where the end is also guaranteed: but whose end is victory.

What makes the difference? Faith. Oswalt says that Christians do not have the experience that they say they want because, "in God's economy you cannot possess what you do not have the faith to ask for." Now, I imagine there are many out there who are saying, "You just got my hopes again, only to knock me back down – *faith?! – don't I already have faith? If I'm a Christian believer, I already have faith, don't I?"*

And the answer, of course, is yes; you have faith, just like the man had meals prepared and ready for him. You have faith just like you have muscles in your body: it's there, but you're not exercising it. Faith is virtually meaningless unless it's exercised – unless it is put into action.

Here is Oswalt again:

You cannot possess a love that is genuinely self-forgetful, that does not ask what it can get out of a relationship, unless you exercise faith to receive it. You cannot possess a heart that is wholly the possession of God unless you exercise faith for it. You cannot be absolutely faithful, even when it seems to be costing you too much, unless you exercise faith for it. [...Christians] need to discover their need, discover the supply which [is] there to meet that need, and exercise the faith to bring the supply and the need

² John Oswalt, *Called to Be Holy* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel Publ. House, 1999), pp. 149-50.

together.

It's that third part that ends our resolve. You feel the need for living a holy life, you understand and believe that God is able to supply that need through the power of the Holy Spirit. But what is the key to "exercising faith"?

The key is self-less-ness. Think back on every un-Christian thought you've had. Every unholy action you've taken. Every motivation that you've followed that has not reflected the character of a holy God. What is common to all of sin? Sin is directly related to the fundamental drive to protect the self. To protect, to save, to serve, to promote, to love the self.

Faith is believing – and acting on that belief, often in the face of no tangible evidence to warrant it – that by working to protect, serve, love, others first, God will provide all that you need in return. The opposite is also true: when we act to take care of ourselves first, we simply never discover God's provision. The real pain comes when we realize that our feeble attempts to take care of ourselves don't work. We end up still wanting more; discouraged, frustrated, angry, you name it.

In the 1 Thessalonians text, Paul is addressing a group of Christians who need to take that next step, who need to start exercising their faith. Immediately prior to a section regarding the Second Advent, Paul addresses what is lacking in the lives of the believers there.

Put back into context of a letter that moves on to speak about Christ's Second Coming, this series of holiness directives read as if Paul were saying to them, and us, that the time and circumstances of Christ's Second Advent are not as important as the condition of our lives when he does return.

Consistent with this calling is the voice of the prophet Isaiah, who is calling the people of God to act like it – to let the reflected light of God shine so that others, too, will be drawn to the saving presence of God.

And understood as leading us to the proclamations of John the Revelator, we hear as if for the first time the promises of God forever dwelling with his people and the renewal of all creation. We hear and understand that we have a part to play in God's renewing work. Inasmuch as we display lives that speak of the renewing work of Christ, we make real now these truths: on earth as it is heaven; now as it was then, at the beginning of creation, and will be again, at the fulfillment of time; true holiness living between memory and hope.

May we show our true resolution by our actions, this day and every day to come, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Between Memory and Hope
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...A Time for Resolution

Children's Message

“Looking forward, looking back”

In long ago Rome, people told many stories about super-human creatures. Each one of these personalities was connected to a part of every day life. For example, some were thought to control the weather; others were connected to the oceans, or the trees.

One of these was named Janus. The stories told about him involved gates and door ways. When people drew pictures of Janus, he always had two faces: one looking forward and one looking back. Today, we get the name for the month of January from Janus, because this is the month when we also look back over the past year, and look forward to the year ahead.

But there is also a name we give to people who are deceitful: “two-faced.” It means someone who has promised us something only to turn their back on that promise and say something else. It's as if they have two faces, one good and one bad.

People no longer believe in those ancient super-human stories. But we still take the time to look back on what's happened during the year, and to look ahead as well. And this is also the time that we make promises. Many of those promises we make to God, to be better people, or to read his Word more often.

We can trust God's promises, and God wants us to be people others can depend on to lead them to God. Let's all think about this past year, and think about the days that are ahead. What kind of person does God want you to be this year?

Prayer

BETWEEN MEMORY AND HOPE
...A TIME FOR RESOLUTION
Advent Worship Series - Week 5

Supplemental Materials

Invocation³

“O God, in this hour we pray.
We invite your presence.
What we know not, teach us,
What we see not, show us,
What we have not, give us,
What we are not, make us,
Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.”

Benediction¹

“Go from this place of united worship
Strengthened by the Spirit in your inner being,
So that you, at all times,
In all things,
Wherever you are,
May be enabled to do God’s work
In the power of the living Christ. Amen.”

A Prayer for the Day⁴

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

“Purify my conscience, Almighty God, by your daily visitation, that your Son Jesus Christ, at his coming, may find in me a mansion prepared for himself; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.”

Offertory Prayer

O holy God, we offer these gifts even as we offer you our lives. Accept them both as signs of our resolution to *be* your people – the hearts and hands, the feet and voices, that would build in your kingdom, we pray. Amen.

Affirmation of Faith

We believe in the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father through the intercession of the Son; the Spirit inspired the Scriptures of the Old and New

³ 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.”

⁴ From *The Divine Hours: Prayers for Autumn and Wintertime*, compiled by Phyllis Tickle. New York: Doubleday, 2000.

Testaments so that they provide the authority for Christian belief and conduct; he awakens people to their need of salvation, imparts faith to those who would believe and new life to all who trust in Jesus. He commences the work of sanctification which accompanies justification, and can lead the Christian to perfect victory over sin.

Salvation Story Study Guide, p. 124

Call to Worship

Unison: O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Leader: You have set your glory above the heavens.

Response: From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise because of your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger.

Unison: Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation:
O my soul, praise him, for he is thy health and salvation.
All ye who hear, brothers and sisters draw near.
Praise him in glad adoration.

Leader: When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars, which you have set in place...

Response: What is man that you are mindful of him,
the son of man that you care for him?

Leader: You have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.

Unison: Praise to the Lord, who doth prosper thy work and defend thee:
Surely his goodness and mercy here daily attend thee.
Ponder anew what the Almighty can do,
He who with love doth befriend thee.

Leader: You made him ruler over the works of your hands;
you put everything under his feet:

Response: All the flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field; the birds of the air,
and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas.

Unison: Praise to the Lord! O let all that is in me adore him!
All that hath life and breath, come now with praises before him!
Let the amen sound from his people again:
Gladly for aye we adore him.

Unison: O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

from Psalm 8; and S/A song #19: Joachim Neander; trans. Catherine Winkworth

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Scripture Study

Resolution

The concept of living out the revelation of God's presence continues with this series of readings for today. We are called to resolve to pattern our lives after Jesus – to live now as living representatives of (and in) the presence of God. We are called to lives of holiness.

Isaiah 60:1-5

The people of God are called to receive and reflect the “light” so that in their shining example of right living, God is glorified, and the world is brought to God's saving presence.

1 Thessalonians 4:9-12

The keynote of holiness living is struck here by the writer, who subsequently addresses Christ's return. But it is not the time or manner of the Second Advent that forms the primary message here, as much as it how much the writer urges the believers to resolve to live a life more and more pleasing to God, until that final Day of the Lord.

Believers are called to a fuller life commitment: it is not sufficient to claim faith in Christ; we are to put that faith into action so that the results are seen in our life and behavior.

Revelation 21:1-6a

The central image of this great proclamation is the word-picture of a city descending from heaven to be the earthly “dwelling place” of God's people. Its meaning for us now is enriched by understanding its relevance to the incarnation: the divine One, descending from heaven to “dwell” as the embodiment of God-with-people.

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n the promise that God is “making all things new,” we embrace our place and role in this transforming work.

Matthew 25:31-46

The warning of earlier readings is repeated: how we treat others now has a real bearing upon our place as people in God's presence.

For a call-to-worship or benediction:

Psalms 8

A song of praise: the writer's words are echoed and transformed in the New Testament, and remain a wonder – that God would entrust lowly human flesh as a vehicle for

delivering the glory of God.