

The prayers are prepared locally for each occasion. The following examples may be adapted or used as appropriate.

With hope and expectation, we offer our prayers for the church, the world, and all who await God's day of restoration.

A brief silence.

You promise mercy to Abraham and Sarah and their descendants forever. Bring your church into thoughtful, caring, and collaborative relationship with those of other faiths. Strengthen our shared values, that we work together in caring for our world. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

As fields and crops lie dormant, bless them with holy rest. Prepare them to thrive, that they provide abundant food in due season. Protect animals who hibernate and provide for all who scavenge for food in the lean season. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

You raise up the lowly and cast down the arrogant. Teach humility to all in positions of authority. Break down systems of oppression, especially systems that perpetuate inequity and exclusion. Do not allow wealth, power, or pride to become idols that obscure your call to justice. Merciful God, **receive our prayer.**

Preparing for Next Week

Monday (Nativity of Our Lord, Christmas Day) John 1:1-14. **Tuesday** (Stephen, Deacon and Martyr) Acts 6:8—7:2a, 51-60. **Wednesday** (John, Apostle and Evangelist) John 21:20-25. **Thursday** (The Holy Innocents, Martyrs) Matthew 2:13-18. **Friday** Psalm 148. **Saturday** 2 Peter 3:8-13. **First Sunday of Christmas** Isaiah 61:10—62:3; Psalm 148; Galatians 4:4-7; Luke 2:22-40.

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Celebrate

Fourth Sunday of Advent
December 24, 2023

God keeps the promise made to David to give him an everlasting throne. The angel tells Mary that God will give David's throne to her son Jesus. She is perplexed by Gabriel's greeting and by the news of her coming pregnancy, but she is able still to say, "Count me in." We who know that Jesus is called king only as he is executed still find it a mystery hard to fathom, but with Mary today we hear the news of what God is up to and say, "Count us in."

Prayer of the Day

Stir up your power, Lord Christ, and come. With your abundant grace and might, free us from the sin that would obstruct your mercy, that willingly we may bear your redeeming love to all the world, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

First Reading

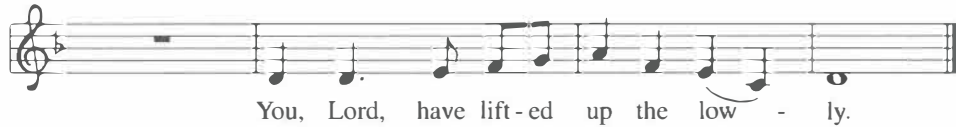
2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16

Instead of David building a house (temple) for God, God promises to establish David's house (dynasty) forever. Centuries later, after the Babylonian exile, no king sat on the throne. Even then, however, the people of Israel remembered this promise and continued to hope for a king, the messiah, God's anointed.

Now when [David] the king was settled in his house, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, ²the king said to the prophet Nathan, "See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent." ³Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that you have in mind; for the LORD is with you."

⁴But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan: ⁵Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the LORD: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? ⁶I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle. ⁷Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, "Why have you not built me a house of

cedar?" ⁸Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the LORD of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel; ⁹and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. ¹⁰And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly, ¹¹from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. ¹⁶Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.



My soul proclaims the greatness ¹ of the Lord,
⁴⁷my spirit rejoices in ¹ God my Savior,
⁴⁸**for you, Lord, have looked with favor on your ¹ lowly servant.**
From this day all generations will ¹ call me blessed;
⁴⁹you, the Almighty, have done great ¹ things for me,
and holy ¹ is your name.
⁵⁰**You have mercy on ¹ those who fear you,**
from generation to ¹ generation. R
⁵¹You have shown strength ¹ with your arm;
and scattered the proud in ¹ their conceit,
⁵²**casting down the mighty ¹ from their thrones**
and lifting ¹ up the lowly.
⁵³You have filled the hungry ¹ with good things,
and sent the rich ¹ away empty.
⁵⁴**You have come to the aid of your ¹ servant Israel,**
to remember the prom- ¹ ise of mercy,
⁵⁵the promise made ¹ to our forebears,
to Abraham and his chil- ¹ dren forever. **R**

or Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26; refrain, Ps. 89:1 [not printed]

Paul closes his letter to the Romans by praising God because, in the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, God has revealed the promised, divine plan of salvation for all humanity. Paul proclaims this gospel of Christ in order to bring about the obedience of faith among all nations.

Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages ²⁶but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all

the Gentiles, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith— ²⁷to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever! Amen.

Gospel

Luke 1:26-38

In this annunciation, Luke makes clear that God comes with good news for ordinary people from little-known places. This king will not be born to royalty in a palace, but to common folk in a stall. Here Luke highlights the role of the Spirit, a special emphasis in this gospel.

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." ²⁹But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³²He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor

David. ³³He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." ³⁴Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" ³⁵The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. ³⁶And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. ³⁷For nothing will be impossible with God." ³⁸Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.