

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

In this season of watching and waiting, let us pray for all people and places that yearn for God's presence.

A brief silence.

Nurturing God, you give us life and care for our every need. Use the church's gifts and ministries for your service, bringing your word to all who seek your transforming grace. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Creator God, you proclaim your boundless love for all that you have made. Renew barren lands, polluted waters, and melting ice caps. Make us servants of your creation that brings forth abundant life. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Righteous God, you bring down the mighty and lift up the lowly. Strengthen those who seek justice. Bless the work of community organizers, activists, journalists, and all who call our attention to imbalances of power. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Preparing for Next Week

Monday (commemoration of Katharina von Bora Luther, renewer of the church, 1552) Psalm 113. Tuesday Romans 8:18-30. Wednesday Isaiah 42:14-21. Thursday Micah 4:6-8. Friday (Nativity of Our Lord, Christmas Eve) Luke 2:1-14 [15-20]. Saturday (Nativity of Our Lord, Christmas Day) John 1:1-14. First Sunday of Christmas 1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26; Psalm 148; Colossians 3:12-17; Luke 2:41-52.

Compassionate God, you proclaim your love and mercy. Show your lovingkindness to teen parents and those who are pregnant. Comfort any struggling with infertility and those who await test results, are in treatment and hospice care, and others in need (especially). Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Gracious God, you fill the hungry with good things. Bless the feeding ministries of this congregation and community. Guide us to share your bounty with those who hunger or live in poverty. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Here other intercessions may be offered.

Faithful God, you stir up the hearts of those who love you. We give you thanks for those who, like Mary, were courageous in their witness (especially). Give us such courage until that day when you fulfill all things. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

God of new life, you come among us in the places we least expect. Receive these prayers and those of our hearts, in the name of Jesus.

Amen.



Celebrate

Fourth Sunday of Advent
December 19, 2021

Cradle and cross are inextricably connected on the fourth Sunday of Advent. Between a lovely tribute to the little town of Bethlehem and Mary's magnificent song of praise, the letter to the Hebrews reminds us in no uncertain terms that Christ's advent is for "the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." It is the kind of tension in which the church always lives as when in holy communion—with high delight—"we proclaim the Lord's death."

Prayer of the Day

Stir up your power, Lord Christ, and come. With your abundant grace and might, free us from the sin that binds us, that we may receive you in joy and serve you always, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

First Reading

Micah 5:2-5a

The prophet Micah, having pronounced judgment upon Judah, speaks of a future shepherd-king who, like David, will come from the small town of Bethlehem. (Ephrathah refers to the area around Bethlehem.) This king will restore Israel and bring peace. New Testament writers understood this passage to be referring to Jesus.

But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah,
who are one of the little clans of
Judah,
from you shall come forth for me
one who is to rule in Israel,
whose origin is from of old,
from ancient days.
Therefore he shall give them up
until the time
when she who is in labor has
brought forth;

then the rest of his kindred shall
return
to the people of Israel.
And he shall stand and feed his flock
in the strength of the LORD,
in the majesty of the name of the
LORD his God.
And they shall live secure, for now he
shall be great
to the ends of the earth;
and he shall be the one of peace.



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

or Psalm 80:1-7; refrain, Ps. 80:7 [not printed]

*The author of Hebrews uses the image of religious sacrifice to convey the significance of Christ's coming. Through obedient acceptance of God's will, Christ allows his own body to become the greatest sacrifice of all, one through which we are made a holy people.*

Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said,  
“Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired,  
but a body you have prepared for me;  
<sup>6</sup>in burnt offerings and sin offerings  
you have taken no pleasure.  
<sup>7</sup>Then I said, ‘See, God, I have come to do your will, O God’  
(in the scroll of the book it is written of me).”

<sup>8</sup>When he said above, “You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings” (these are offered according to the law), <sup>9</sup>then he added, “See, I have come to do your will.” He abolishes the first in order to establish the second. <sup>10</sup>And it is by God's will that we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

## Gospel

Luke 1:39-45 [46-55]

*Elizabeth, John's mother, and Mary, the mother of Jesus, are two women filled with the Holy Spirit and with faith. In Elizabeth's inspired greeting and Mary's song of praise we hear of a saving God who remembers, scatters, lifts up, and fulfills all things.*

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, <sup>40</sup>where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. <sup>41</sup>When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit <sup>42</sup>and exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. <sup>43</sup>And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? <sup>44</sup>For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. <sup>45</sup>And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.”

[<sup>46</sup>And Mary said,  
“<sup>47</sup>My soul magnifies the Lord,  
<sup>47</sup>and my spirit rejoices in God  
my Savior,  
<sup>48</sup>for he has looked with favor on  
the lowliness of his servant.

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;  
<sup>49</sup>for the Mighty One has done great things for me,  
and holy is his name.  
<sup>50</sup>His mercy is for those who fear him  
from generation to generation.  
<sup>51</sup>He has shown strength with his arm;  
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.  
<sup>52</sup>He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,  
and lifted up the lowly;  
<sup>53</sup>he has filled the hungry with good things,  
and sent the rich away empty.  
<sup>54</sup>He has helped his servant Israel,  
in remembrance of his mercy,  
<sup>55</sup>according to the promise he made to our ancestors,  
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”]