

EcoFaith Network Resources for Advent, 2015

Advent this year follows closely on Pope Francis's visit to the United States, during which he addressed both the United States Congress and the United Nations. He called on the nations of the world, and especially the United States, to join in his concern for creation, especially with respect to the crisis of climate change and its impact on both human societies and earth's ecology. With the crucial United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris, 30 November-11 December 2015, the last two months of 2015 therefore offer an extraordinary opportunity for churches to respond to his appeal with teaching, worship and action that manifest our concern for "our common home." Through its EcoFaith Network, the Minneapolis Area Synod offers the following two resources for congregational use, developed by participants in Lutherans Restoring Creation:

Lutheran Study Guide to Pope Francis, by Terra Rowe. A four session study guide on *Laudato Si'*.
<http://www.lutheransrestoringcreation.org/>

Eco-justice comments on the lectionary readings for the Sundays of Advent, with appropriate references to *Laudato Si'*, by Dennis Ormseth; petitions for the Prayers of Intercession by Pastor Ingrid Rasmussen; and hymn suggestions by David Sims; the team is from Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Minneapolis.
<http://www.lutheransrestoringcreation.org/>. Themes for the Sundays include:

Advent 1 : Christ's coming into our world (the *oikumene*) entails a radical reversal of the fortunes of the unjust powers that dominate human history, so that God's intention with the creation might at the last be completely fulfilled. His coming is accordingly a source of deep hope as all creatures, truly for the first time in earth's history, face a global crisis in which all the nations are called to judgment without exception. It is this deep hope that Pope Francis brings to the world in *Laudato Si'*. Yes, the crisis challenges us as never before to confront the most fundamental questions concerning human existence. But at the core of Christian spirituality, he insists, there is an "inner peace" that sustains our "care for ecology and for the common good".

Advent 2: Does our God truly care for all creation, and is our God actually powerful to save it? The terrifying image of mountain removal in this Sunday's Gospel suggests the Creator's power, but to what purpose? The God who is "Most High" is also "Holy Spirit"; the one who "levels every mountain and hill" is also the one who fashions waterways in the wilderness, where God begins a new creation. The view of God in *Laudato Si'* is remarkably consonant with that of texts for this Sunday: God is "Most High" creator who gives creation in love as the "Common Home" for all creatures: "The God who liberates and saves is the same God who created the universe, and these two divine ways of acting are intimately and inseparably connected."

Advent 3: An ax lies at the root of the trees: this sign of judgment suggests a profound crisis of life in God's creation. John the Baptist preached repentance and reformation of life to those who sought to escape the impending disaster they saw on the horizon of their community's existence under Roman occupation and Jewish resistance, not unlike the vision we might see on the horizon of human mistreatment of earth. But he also proclaimed the promise of God who raises life from a stump and waters it from "wells of salvation," so as to "remove disaster from you" and "bring you home." More than enough reason to rejoice this *Gaudete* Sunday. In *Laudato Si'*, the "ax" at the root of planetary life is the technocratic paradigm by which we seek domination over all aspects of nature; reason for hope and joy is nonetheless to be found in an emerging "integral ecology," which provides an "integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature."

Advent 4: Elizabeth becomes a spirit-filled reader of signs of a new creation for Mary. All things human and other-than-human fall within the reach of this salvation, embodied in Mary, who models service to creation as service to God. Those who care for creation will celebrate her service to the Servant of Creation, who in his suffering on the cross served God by loving the earth and all its creatures as God loves them. As Pope Francis puts it, Mary "now cares with maternal affection and pain for this wounded world. . . [S]he grieves for the sufferings of the crucified poor and for the creatures of this world laid waste by human power" But as "Queen of Heaven," she also represents creation "in the fullness of its beauty," and "enable[s] us to look at this world with eyes of wisdom." She models awareness of the Incarnation of one who "comes not from above, but from within" as "the overflowing core of love