

All Saints Day (Year B)

All who claim and trust in the promises of God are blessed. As in ages past, God's saints today are called to embrace God's new creation, here and now. In baptism, we become God's new creation – God's saints – and are commissioned to live now in the presence of God's promises, working toward their fulfillment.

Focus Scripture: Revelation 21:1–6a

The beginning of the book of Revelation tells us that it is the record of the visions of John concerning “what must soon take place” (1:1). The term for this kind of revelation is *apocalypse*, meaning “unveiling.” Revelation was likely written around 95 CE. This date, plus the style of language, leads most scholars to say it was not written by the apostle John or the author of the gospel of John. This John was a Christian prophet, speaking a vision of God's word to seven early churches.

A central tenet of Judeo-Christian beliefs is that the universe has been created by God for a purpose; therefore, history has meaning and purpose. According to this belief, history is not an endless cycle where events are destined to repeat themselves, but rather a path with a destination. As the Bible begins with creation in Genesis, so it ends with re-creation in Revelation. There, John speaks of the goal of God's creation – a purpose never fully realized in the history of time and space, but not entirely beyond history, either.

The text speaks of a new Jerusalem “coming down” from heaven, the place of perfection. Jerusalem, the central and most important point in the world for Jews – and at this early stage the church was predominately Jewish in self-understanding – is portrayed as a character in a wedding ceremony. In this new time of living, God will remove death and tears. The time of human pain will have passed.

At the same time, the sea is “no more.” For ancient Jews, the sea was a threatening place and in Revelation it was a place from which the beast had come (13:1). With it gone, there would no longer be any chaotic forces that resist God's sovereign love. There would be “a new heaven and a new earth” – perfect, holy, and in union with God.

This new heaven and new earth are not meant to completely replace the old, for that would mean that human history is ultimately unimportant to God. The vision is one of renewal. Like the flower in the bulb or the oak in the acorn, the new has been present in the old all along.

Another vision of God's ultimate reign is given in **Isaiah 25:6–9**. The prophet describes the time when God will call “all peoples” to a new life on God's holy mountain – a location that suggests the meeting of heaven and earth – where death will be swallowed up forever. On a similar note, the writer of **Wisdom 3:1–9** describes how God watches over the souls of righteous ones forever, in spite of what mortals may perceive. **Psalm 24:4** echoes the refrain of God's glorious reign as home for those “who do not lift up their souls to what is false.”

John 11:32–44 is the account of Jesus journeying to be with Mary and Martha as they grieve the death of their brother Lazarus. Jesus weeps with them, yet still offers the promise of new life in God's glory.



It is often said that the past informs the present, but it may be just as true to say the future informs the present. When we faithfully place ourselves in God's presence, new possibilities for life and service become visible. All Saints Day is a time to remember the saints who have gone before us and to give thanks for the blessings God has given us to share with others. Visions of renewal, of new covenant, and of all creation singing praises to God – how do these glimpses of God's hope for the new heaven and the new earth inspire us to bring renewal right here, right now?



Focus Scripture
Revelation 21:1–6a

Additional Scriptures
Isaiah 25:6–9 or
Wisdom 3:1–9
Psalm 24
John 11:32–44

Holy God, your wisdom has formed all that has been, that is, and that shall be. Thanks for revealing your glorious ways in Christ and in the lives of all your saints. Strengthen us to live faith-filled lives, with confidence in your eternal love. Amen.

The Focus for Adults

Adults may be familiar with the image of the phoenix bird, rising with new life from the ashes of death, or other symbols of new life. Adults also understand what “new life” means in the sense of receiving a second chance or experiencing a new beginning after some time of trial or testing. For some, these experiences may have brought fear of the unknown, as well as hope for a better future. From your own life experiences, what memories of “new life” are most vivid?

Today is All Saints Day, a day when our gaze is pulled forward to the time when God’s blessings and promises of new life to all who believe will be fulfilled. A saint is one who has been chosen, or blessed, for the work of

God, and this includes all those baptized into Christ. This may be a new understanding for some in the group. Pray for group members, that all may grow in understanding of how God is making all things new in your lives and what it means to live as a blessed saint in the new life of God’s reign.

In your group, there may be adults who are in the middle of a time of testing or trial, and you may or may not be aware of it. Think of ways the group be supportive, affirming, and encouraging to those who cannot see beyond their current pain to a possibility of a new beginning: listening with care, a ministry of meals and housekeeping, or respite for exhausted caregivers.

Prepare

Before the session

- ❑ Read and prayerfully reflect on this week’s scriptures – Isaiah 25:6–9 or Wisdom of Solomon 3:1–9; Psalm 24; Revelation 21:1–6a; John 11:32–44 – and biblical background material for this session.
- ❑ Choose songs for gathering and closing worship from the *Seasons* music resources. Print music and recordings are available as MP3 downloads.

Gather

- ❑ Prepare the worship space with *white fabric* and a *large white candle*. Bring *matches* or a *lighter*.
- ❑ Bring *tealights*.

Engage

- ❑ Bring *copies of the biblical background material* for this session.
- ❑ Bring *copies of “Vision of Hope,”* one of the resource sheets for this session.
- ❑ Bring a *Seasons of the Spirit poster* that suggests awe or wonder.
- ❑ Bring *newsprint* and *markers*.
- ❑ Bring *pens* or *pencils*.

- ❑ Print these Bible references on *slips of paper*:
1 Chronicles 15:1–3; 1 Kings 11:31a–32;
2 Kings 24:10–14; Ezra 1:2; Psalm 147:2, 12;
Matthew 23:37–39; Revelation 3:12.

Respond

Choose one or two options. Prepare and bring the materials.

- ❑ **Dig deeper: vision of hope:** *copies of “Vision of Hope” resource sheet, map of Middle East in the first century from a study Bible or Bible atlas, writing paper, listening music*
- ❑ **New Jerusalem mural:** *mural paper, tempera paint and paintbrushes or oil pastels, kitchen foil, listening music*
- ❑ **A new vision:** *copies of “Seeing with New Eyes,” one of the resource sheets for this session*



All Saints Day (Year B)

Scripture

Revelation 21:1–6a

FOCUS To celebrate the blessings of living as a community of saints in the midst of God’s new creation.

Gather

Welcome group members by name.

Opening ritual

Gather in the worship space. Note that on All Saints Day, Christians honour the memory of saints who have gone before us and also anticipate our own lives in Christ’s eternal presence. Invite group members to name saints who are on their minds today, lighting a tealight for each one and placing it in the worship space.

Pray Form two groups and read **Psalm 24** as an opening prayer, alternating verses between groups.

Sing a gathering song from the *Seasons of the Spirit* music resources or from a hymnal or songbook

used in your church.

Moving into the theme

Invite group members to recall a time when they experienced the sense of being given “new life” in some way – being given a second chance, fresh start, or forgiveness – and to share their stories with the group. If your group is large, form groups of three for sharing stories. After a time of sharing, discuss:

- **What is hopeful about the experience of receiving such “new life”? What is frightening or challenging about it?**

Engage

Setting the context

Distribute copies of the biblical background material and copies of “Vision of Hope” resource sheet. Ask a volunteer to read aloud the first paragraph of “Vision of Hope” to review the setting of the book of Revelation.

Exploring the texts

Take a quiet moment to view a *Seasons of the Spirit* poster that suggests awe or wonder. Invite group members to wonder about the source of energy or light in this image. Talk together about what you wish this energy could do in the world today.

Ask a volunteer to read aloud **Revelation 21:1–6a**. Together, list the nouns in this passage.

- **What images come to mind from these words? Which words seem to have more than one meaning?**
- **What does this passage say about God’s ongoing work of creating?**
- **What in this passage might have fuelled hope for Christians in the first century?**
- **What in this passage fuels your hope? Why?**

Distribute the slips of paper prepared earlier to individuals or pairs. Ask each to read the passage and note what it says about Jerusalem. Have pairs or individuals report in the order that the passages are listed in Prepare. Recall that Jerusalem was captured – and the temple destroyed – by the Romans in the year 70, about 25 years before the book of Revelation was written.

- **What is significant about the name of God’s new holy city?**

From the biblical background, summarize: A central tenet of Jewish and Christian beliefs is that the universe has been created by God for a purpose. As the Christian Bible begins with creation in a garden in Genesis, so it ends with a new creation in a city in Revelation.

- **Garden of creation and city of new creation – which of these is a more positive image for you? Why?**
- **Where have you glimpsed God’s new creation in your midst?**

Another vision of God’s ultimate reign is given in **Isaiah 25:6–9**. Ask a volunteer to read aloud these verses.

- **What is the central image of Isaiah’s vision?**
- **What similarities and differences do you find between this text and Revelation 21:1–6a?**

Take a moment for group members to skim the familiar story in **John 11:32–44**.

- **How do you understand the significance of Jesus’ tears?**
- **What new life does Jesus offer to Mary and the crowd that was gathered?**

Making life connections

“See, I am making all things new.” These words from **Revelation 21:5** could serve as an umbrella over this week’s readings and their commentary on what it means to live in the midst of God’s new creation.

- **When have you felt God “making all things new” in your life?**
- **How might the glimpses of God’s ongoing work of creating anew in the readings for today inspire you and your church to bring renewal right here, right now?**
- **If you were writing guidelines for how to live as God’s saints, what would you include from the readings for this session?**

Respond

Choose one or two of the following options:

- **Dig deeper: vision of hope** Learn more about the communities of saints to whom Revelation’s words of hope were first written. Read “Vision of Hope” resource sheet together, and then form pairs to look up the references on the sheet. Use a map of the Middle East in the first century to locate these communities. If the writer of Revelation were writing a letter to your church, what words of challenge and encouragement might be included? Try your hand at composing such a letter.
- **New Jerusalem mural** Revelation gives a vivid picture of the blessings of living in the midst of

God’s new creation. Create a mural of images and words that expresses how you picture the vision described in **Revelation 21:1–27**; **Revelation 22:1–5**. You might want to divide the reading and the creating among pairs or small groups. Play listening music as you work. Give your mural a title and display it for the congregation to enjoy.

- **A new vision** God’s saints are called to embrace God’s new work of creation. Distribute copies of “Seeing with New Eyes” resource sheet. Allow a few moments for individuals to read and reflect on the questions, then discuss as a group.

Bless

Comment that All Saints Day is a time to remember the saints who have gone before us and to give thanks for God’s blessings of new life. Imagine that these saints are with you in the room. What words of encouragement would they speak?

Pray Offer this prayer aloud, inviting group members to name saints who have blessed them – renowned or known only to them – at the pause:

O God, we thank you for your saints: people who have carried in their lives a love of you

and who have been important in shaping our faith. We thank you for (*pause for group members to name the saints who have been important to them*). May we honour their service by our own living into the hope of God’s new creation, grounded in love for God and love for neighbour. Amen.

Sing a blessing song from the *Seasons of the Spirit* music resources or from a hymnal or songbook used in your church.

Reflect

How is God making all things new in the lives of your group members? In what ways could you sense group members expanding their under-

standing of what it means to be a saint? Take time this week to express thanks to the saints who have been important in your life.



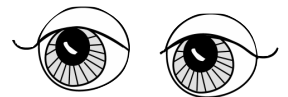
Seeing with New Eyes

Do you wear eyeglasses or contact lenses? If so, do you remember the first time you put on your lenses? What do recall about that experience? What did you see in a different way? Putting on glasses for the first time is an experience of suddenly being able to see clearly things that had been fuzzy and blurred. It's like seeing the world with new eyes.

In Revelation, the scriptures speak to us of all things being made new, of a new heaven and a new earth. Jesus surprises us, showing us a new way of looking at ourselves and at life.

The young adult novel, *I am David* by Anne Holm, is the story of 12-year-old David who has spent his whole life confined to a work camp in eastern Europe. He is given the chance to escape and makes his way to Denmark. Because he has never been outside the camp, the whole world is new to him and he must learn how the world works, who to trust, what to eat. It is a story about seeing the world with new eyes. David decides that he needs to find God and the novel is about the way in which he chooses the kind of God he will follow – the God of another David, the shepherd.

**What would it mean to look upon your world with new eyes?
What would you see? What would seem strange to you?**



New vision

In order to see an object, the eyes actually perceive two images. The brain puts these images together into a single image. It is this double vision that enables us to see in depth and dimension. Also, the eyes actually perceive the image of objects as upside down, and again it is the brain that gives meaning to the images by turning them right-side up.

When we look at life, we perceive a variety of experiences and viewpoints, some of which appear to be in conflict with others. At times it seems as though we are seeing double or even upside down. As Christians, we are challenged to use our God-given intelligence and rely on our faith as we consider the variety and diversity of viewpoints and try to make sense of them. This active work of finding meaning in events and experiences is part of the seeing with new eyes to which Jesus calls us.



What challenges in your life or your community call out to be examined with the eyes of faith? How can you engage others in “seeing with new eyes”?



Vision of Hope

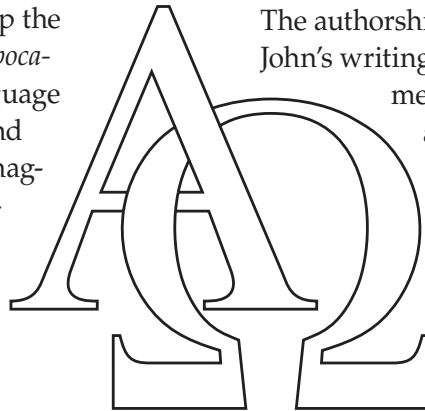
Near the end of the first century after Christ, Christians were being persecuted. The writer of the book of Revelation sought to reassure those in difficult circumstances, proclaiming that God is faithful and that God will prevail. The writer also sought to encourage these Christians “under fire” to keep the faith and stand firm. This book is *apocalyptic literature*, full of symbolic language that tells about the end of the age and God’s final victory in Christ. The imagery used would have seemed harmless to Roman officials, but carried a powerful message to those who understood the symbols – in spite of the current trials, God will be victorious in the end.

Traditionally, the apostle John was thought to have written this book while banished by the Roman government to the island of Patmos. More current scholarship questions this. For some, the political

situation described in the book seems most closely linked to Domitian, who was the Roman emperor around 95 CE. If this is accurate, any apostles still living probably would have been 90 years old or older.

The authorship, whether John or a student of John’s writing in his name, is not the essential message of the book. This book is addressed as a letter of encouragement and hope to seven churches that were actual congregations. The centre of the church at that time was located in Asia Minor in the areas occupied by these cities. Ephesus had replaced Jerusalem as the spiritual centre of the church after Jerusalem

was destroyed in 70 CE. A different message is directed to each of these communities, but the central context for them all is summarized in Revelation 1:4b–8.



Look up the following references to find out where these churches were located.

Revelation 2:1 _____

Revelation 3:1 _____

Revelation 2:8 _____

Revelation 3:7 _____

Revelation 2:12 _____

Revelation 3:14 _____

Revelation 2:18 _____