

Biblical Background • All Saints Day – Year B



Focus Scripture

Revelation 21:1–6a

Additional Scriptures

Isaiah 25:6–9 or Wisdom 3:1–9

Psalms 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.

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. **Psalms 24** 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.

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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, 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?



Reflecting on the Word

Connecting with life

Recall a time when you experienced the sense of being given “new life” in some way – being given a second chance, fresh start, or forgiveness.

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

Scripture

Revelation 21:1–6a list the nouns in the 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 being persecuted in the first century?**
- **What in this passage fuels your hope? Why?**

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 more positive image for you? Why?**
- **Where have you glimpsed God’s new creation in your midst?**

Isaiah 25:6–9 in another vision of God’s ultimate reign

- **What is the central image of Isaiah’s vision?**
- **What similarities and differences do you find between this text and Revelation 21:16a?**

Connecting scripture and life

“This new heaven and new earth are not to completely replace the old (for that would mean that history is ultimately discarded and unimportant to God). The vision is of renewal. Like the flower in the bulb, the oak in the acorn, the new has been present in the old all along” (from biblical background).

- **What new life is emerging from the old, like a flower from a bulb, in your life?**
- **Where is new life emerging within your congregation?**
- **How do the visions in Isaiah 25:6–9 and Revelation 21:1–6a compare and contrast with the life emerging within and around you?**
- **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 All Saints Day.**



All Saints Day

Prepare

NOTE: All of these suggestions are mere starting points; adapt, delete, and add according to your local needs.

- ❑ Recruit volunteers needed for worship: three for the prayer of confession (optional).
- ❑ Choose an option for hearing Revelation 21:1–6a. For the Bible story, arrange for a storyteller to present the story “Revealed: A Wonderful World” on p. 7. For the meditative reading, arrange for music – either recorded or live.
- ❑ Create a slide show or photo gallery as described under gather.
- ❑ Bring candles for the Communion prayer.
- ❑ Decide which stations you will set, and set stations as described on pp. 8–9.



Music Suggestions

Come and Seek the Ways of Wisdom

Ruth Duck, Donna Kasbohm; *Seasons Songbook*, vol. 7

Come Build a Church

Ken Medema; *Seasons Songbook*, vol. 7

Somlandela/We Will Follow

Zulu; *Seasons Songbook*, vol. 7

God's Family

P. Shelly; *Seasons Songbook*, vol. 7

All Things New

Rory Cooney

Gather

Create a slide show or arrange to have a photo gallery as people enter that includes the members of your community who died in the previous year. You may choose to include a verse of scripture that was read during the person's memorial service. During the prayers of the people or the Communion prayer, these names may be mentioned and the scripture verses read. Play instrumental music during the presentation and/or sound a bell between each name.

Call to worship

(based on Psalm 24)

**Who can climb the mountain of our God,
and dwell in a holy place?**

Come, people of God –

God is here in our midst, inviting us into a new place.

**Who can climb the mountain of our God,
and dwell in a holy place?**

The God who offered a land
flowing with milk and honey,
offers a new heaven and a new earth,
a holy city, a place of God's presence.

**Who can climb the mountain of our God,
and dwell in a holy place?**

God calls us to cleanse our hearts,
to offer ourselves to God with all our beings.

**Let us climb the mountain of our God,
and dwell in a holy place!**

Come, let us worship God.

Opening prayer

Invite people to consider someone who has helped give shape to their faith. It may be a family member, friend, church school leader, minister, or historical figure. Announce that they will be invited to say this person's name aloud at the conclusion of this prayer.

We come into this sacred space mindful
of the generations of faith who have come before us:
adults and children, certain and questioning,
men and women, hopeful and despairing.

We give thanks for the welcome
all receive from you, Divine Beloved,
and for the ways we continue
to be enfolded into community.

With grateful hearts, we mention now
the names of those who have shaped our faith,
making us to be saints in your realm...
(people mention names aloud).



Worship Outline • All Saints Day – Year B

Prayer of confession

Divide the congregation into three sections, each echoing the last two words of the worship leader. Or, arrange to have three readers read the responses from different places in the worship space.

LEADER: In our worry and despair,
for you, O God, we wait...

ONE: We wait...

TWO: We wait...

THREE: We wait...

LEADER: When tears threaten to overwhelm us, we wait...

ONE: We wait...

TWO: We wait...

THREE: We wait...

LEADER: When we long for a fresh start
and newness of heart, we wait...

ONE: We wait...

TWO: We wait...

THREE: We wait...

LEADER: When we consider the state of our world,
we wait...

ONE: We wait...

TWO: We wait...

THREE: We wait...

LEADER: When we have done all that we can,
for you, O God, we wait...

ONE: We wait...

TWO: We wait...

THREE: We wait...

Words of affirmation

(inspired by Isaiah 25:6–9)

This is the day we have waited for;

God's presence is among us

and our salvation is at hand.

God has wiped away the tears from our faces
and disgrace and shame are no more.

Let us rejoice.

Thanks be to God.

Engage

Opening the word

Moving into the focus scripture

Invite the people to think about times when they have been given something new. Ask those who wish to share what they received and how it felt to receive this new gift. What did they enjoy the most about having something new?

Revelation 21:1–6a

Choose from the following for hearing the focus story.

Bible story Have a storyteller present the story "Revealed: A Wonderful World" on page 7. The story comes from the 5–12 age-level resource. Children love to hear a story more than once.

Meditative reading Play a selection of meditative music and invite the people to close their eyes and image the scene, paying attention to what sights, sounds, smells, and taste they experience. After the reading continue with the meditative music before inviting the people to open eyes and come back into the space, as they are ready to do so.

After the focus scripture

Invite children, young people, and all who wish to move to the stations. Others will remain seated for proclaiming the word.

Respond

After proclaiming the word, you might invite those who have not already done so to move to and around the stations, taking ten minutes or so with a chosen practice.

Eucharistic prayer for All Saints Day

God be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to God.

Let us give thanks to God.

It is good to give God thanks and praise.

It is always right and good to praise God,
who created us and never stops loving us.
God has such great love for us
that we can call ourselves the children of God,
and indeed, that is what we are:
we are God's children.

Thanks be to God.

God sent Jesus

to share our life and journey with us,
to show us how to live as God wants.



Through reading the Bible, prayer,
acts of justice and kindness,
and this holy meal,

we seek to be more like Jesus each day.
We are followers of Jesus.

Thanks be to God.

With words and actions
Jesus taught us that the ways of God
are sometimes different from the ways of the world.
We are called to love God
with our hearts, souls, and minds,
and our neighbours as ourselves.
When we do these things,
we are holy, we are saints.

Thanks be to God.

We give thanks for the many people
who have gone before us,

and are with us even now:
a great cloud of witnesses who have tried
to live God's love every day,
and with their lives, have shown us
how to be followers of Jesus.

(Here you may wish to name particular individuals, including those members of your church who have died in the past year. You may toll a bell or light a candle as each departed saint is named.)

We are part of the communion of saints.

Thanks be to God.

Jesus invited saints and sinners
to dine with him and be his friends.
And Jesus invites us to this sacred meal,
in which we can taste and see,
experience and remember the goodness of our God.
(Continue the prayer according to your tradition.)

Bless

Go from this place to continue the work
of making our world new with the Spirit of Christ.
Where there is hurt, and tears are falling,
we will be God's comfort.
Where there is anger, and violence reigns supreme,
we will be God's peace.

Where there is neglect, and loneliness abides,
we will be God's love.
Go as saints of this generation who are
the love of God,
the incarnation of Christ,
and the friendship of the Spirit.
Amen.

Special Days Commentary

November 1 – All Saints Day November 2 – All Souls Day

In many churches, All Saints' Day (November 1) celebrates all people of faith, recalling how, in New Testament usage, the word *saints* refers to Christians collectively, as well as those people of special significance who have been set apart by the church or canonized. It is the recognition of the common bond of Christians, both living and dead, and the common bond of the church here on earth and the church triumphant in heaven. If November 1 falls on a weekday, All Saints' Day is generally observed on the following Sunday.

For those traditions who use All Saints' Day to commemorate canonized saints, or those whose lives have been particularly Christ-like, All Souls' Day on November

2 provides an opportunity to remember other Christians who have died. A simple, reflective service can provide an opportunity to invite those who have been bereaved during the year to gather to remember their loved ones in prayer.

The night before All Saints' Day was originally known as All Hallows' Eve and, over time, became shortened to Halloween. Tracing its roots to an ancient Celtic day of the dead known as Samhain, it was believed that souls and supernatural beings would wander the night. Various traditions have merged over time, ranging from praying for saints and "lost souls" to children dressing up in costumes and going from door to door in search of treats.

The Book of Revelation

The Revelation to John is a challenging book to read and understand. It was written in symbolic language in a time of great danger and persecution. Its language of visions is a kind of secret code that the writer used to encourage Christians to remain faithful and to stand firm against opposition.

Who wrote this book?

The author is named as “John the Divine,” the preacher or teacher. He is not the same person who wrote the gospel of John. The writer of Revelation was a Jewish Christian who was persecuted for his faith. When he wrote Revelation he was living in exile on an island, Patmos, off the coast of Asia Minor.

When was it written?

Revelation was written around the year 95 CE, near the end of the reign of the Roman emperor Domitian. Christians were scattered throughout the Roman Empire. There had been some persecution of Christians under emperors Nero and Caligula. Domitian insisted that he be called “My Lord and my God.” Christians refused to pledge allegiance to him in this way and were sometimes brutally punished.

Who was it written for?

The first chapter begins with the words “...to the seven churches that are in Asia...” Since seven is the number symbolic of wholeness, it is believed that these churches probably represent the whole

church. John’s vision is of the final battle between God and the forces of evil. John describes Rome and the emperor as embodiments of evil. He tries to give hope to Christians, saying that very soon the Roman Empire will be overthrown and the reign of God will be established in all its fullness. The author warns Christians against compromise with the religious, social, and economic values of the Roman world. He also writes to encourage them in their faith during times of persecution.

Apocalyptic writing

“Apocalyptic” means the unveiling of something hidden. Apocalyptic writing seeks to encourage people in the midst of their struggles. An early example of apocalyptic literature in the scriptures is the book of Daniel, written during the revolt of the Maccabees (about 165 BCE) to encourage the Jews to revolt against oppression. The author of Revelation uses images of battle, of dreadful creatures, and of a world dissolving in fire and blood. The message hidden in this vision is a warning that although things will go from bad to worse, God will not

desert the world and will create a new heaven and a new earth. Salvation will come through Christ, called the Lamb, who died and is alive again, and has the power to overcome evil. John ends his book with a prayer, “Come, Lord Jesus...”

How has the book of Revelation been used?

The early church had trouble deciding whether Revelation should be included in the Bible. It was not accepted into the canon of scripture until the fifth century CE. In our own time, Revelation has sometimes been used to predict the time of the end of the world or to warn of a cataclysmic end to our world. The book of Revelation, however, was not a prediction of future events. The images and symbols were intended to encourage Christians living under Roman persecution to remain faithful and to find hope in their belief that God will reign forever. The message of Revelation for Christians today is the same. We live in God’s world and we affirm God’s reign over the whole of creation, while waiting for the time when Jesus will come to bring God’s reign to fulfillment.



Revealed: A Wonderful World

based on Revelation 21:1–6a

*This story comes from the 5–12 age-level resource.
Children love to hear a story more than once.*

Long ago there was a follower of Jesus named John. Well, there were many named John, but this one had a dream that was amazing. This John was one of the saints of the early church.

John's dream was about how God sees the world. In this dream, John heard a voice telling about some wonderful, amazing, stunning things. They were so wonderful that John listened with great care and looked at this vision with wonder.

Then John wrote everything down that he saw and heard, which was what he was told to do at the beginning of this revelation or vision or dream. John wanted everyone to know about God's dream for the world.

This is part of what John saw, heard, and wrote down:

*In God's dream of the world, no one will be sad
because God's home is with every one of us,
almost like God pitches a tent next to where we
live.*

*In God's dream of the world, no one will cry
because everyone will live in peace
so there will be no fighting and arguing.*

*In God's dream of the world, no one, woman, man, or
child, will be hungry,
and everyone will have a home.
Can you imagine anything better?*

*In God's dream of the world, God will never, ever leave us.
Sickness and death will disappear.
What a glorious day that will be!*

What do you think the people thought when they got John's letter telling them about God's dream?

Living, Learning, Growing as Disciples

The following stations might be set up around your worship space or in other places around the church. Choose one or more practices, depending on your space and numbers. If leaders will not be facilitating at these different stations provide copies of the directions, or display the directions where the participants can see them.

Mural

Materials mural paper, art supplies, collage materials, glue sticks, white/craft glue, glue spreaders

Setting the space Stretch a length of mural paper along a table and set out the art supplies. Make a copy of the directions and place where all can see.

The practice of creativity

Directions

All Saints Day gives us a chance to recognize how we are saints when we participate in God's wonderful dream for the world.

1. Work together with the art and craft supplies to create a mural of images and words that express things we can do to participate in God's dream for a wonderful world.

Chalk meditation

Materials black or dark blue construction paper, colour chalk (soaked in water), recording of meditative music, player, copies of the bible story "Revealed: A Wonderful World" on p. 7

Setting the space Cover table with newsprint or plastic table cloths and set out the materials. Make a copy of the directions and place where all can see.

The practice of contemplation

Directions

John's vision invites everyone to imagine God's dream for a new world.

1. Switch on the recording of meditative music.
2. Take a piece of chalk and a sheet of construction paper.
3. As you listen to the meditative music let the chalk move across the paper, without trying to draw anything.
4. When you are ready to stop, find a title for your creation from the words written in italics on the page "Revealed: A Wonderful World."



Balloon game

Materials several balloons (with no design or lettering) for each person, permanent markers, ribbon; (check for latex allergies), copies of the Bible story “Revealed: A Wonderful World” on p. 7

Setting the space Arrange a place to meet and play where it will not distract others. Arrange for someone to be the game leader.

The practice of building community

Directions

On All Saints Day we remember and celebrate the people who share God’s love and hope for the world.

1. Take a balloon and marker and write the names of saints, those who have helped you to imagine God’s vision of a new creation.
2. You might also write words and phrases from the Bible story “Revealed: A Wonderful World.”
3. Inflate your balloon and tie the ends closed.
4. Throw or pat the balloons back and forth to each other, calling out the names and words written on them.

Comforting others

Materials folded card stock/heavy paper, markers, crayons or pencil crayons

Setting the space Set out table, chairs, and materials on the table. Make a copy of the directions and place where all can see.

The practice of care and compassion

Directions

We do not have the power to do away with all tears and sadness, but we can bring comfort to people who are sad.

1. Decorate the outside of the folded paper.
2. Inside write messages of care and comfort.
3. Who might need to hear these words of comfort right now.
4. Arrange to have the cards delivered.

Seeing with new eyes

Materials pencils, copies of the resource sheet “Seeing with New Eyes” on p. 10

Setting the space Arrange table and chairs and set the materials on the table. Make copies of the directions and place where all can see.

The practice of living the vision

Directions

1. Take a copy of the resource sheet “Seeing with New Eyes” and a pencil.
2. Read about the word “Apocalypse” on the page “Seeing with New Eyes.”
3. Think about John’s vision by reading the words in italics on the page “Revealed: a Wonderful World.”
4. Follow the directions in the section “An Experiment” for thinking about situations in your own life.
5. If you have time, talk with a partner about the question in the starburst near the bottom of the page.

Seeing with New Eyes

Apocalypse

a-poc'-a-lips

Have you ever heard this word? Apocalypse? Sometimes movies about destruction and doom are said to be about the apocalypse.

Actually, the word “apocalypse” comes from the Greek word meaning “to remove the veil.” When we use it about God and the Bible, we think about God trying to reveal something that we wouldn’t otherwise see. The book of Revelation is called a book of the apocalypse. Think about it. The vision from God to John lifts the veil and reveals the world as God sees it. That wonderful world is without sadness or pain. Thinking about the world in this way gave hope to people in John’s day, people who are the saints of the early church.

An Experiment

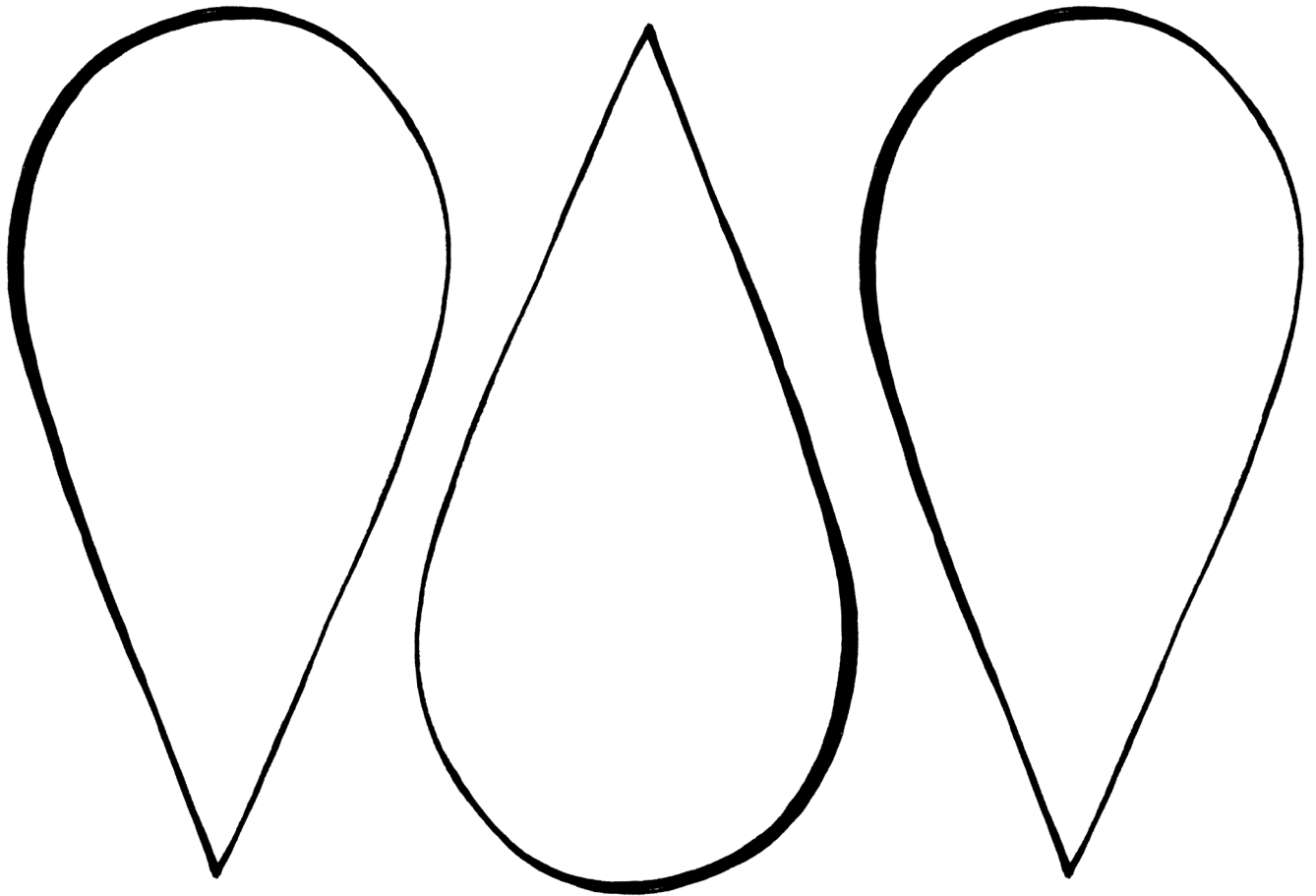
Sometimes when we look at a situation from a different angle or from another point of view, the situation changes for us. That different point of view might be through the loving eyes of God. Think of a situation in your life or community or the world that is troublesome. Write it in this box.

Now, think about that situation as though you were viewing it from God’s wonderful world described by John. How could the situation look different to you? Write about it in this box.

How would your life be different if you tried to imagine that you lived in God’s wonderful world?



Tear drops to Joy



Copy and cut out many tear drops on many colours of paper. The tear shapes can be assembled to create hearts, flowers, and many other joyful objects.

