



Weaving God's Promises

THE CITY OF GOD

SUMMARY OF TODAY'S STORY

John shares a series of revelations and visions that tell how God will defeat all of the enemies of God and reward God's faithful people with the blessings of a new heaven and a new earth.

The story told in this lesson focuses on the visions of praise to Christ, the Lamb from the whole universe, and the visions of heavenly bliss when God has triumphed over evil.

KEY CONCEPTS

- **John's visions**
- **City of God**
- **Messages of comfort**

WHERE YOU'LL

FIND TODAY'S STORY

In the Bible

We recommend the *New Revised Standard Version* Bible.

Revelation 5:1-14 (scroll and lamb)

Revelation 7:9-17 (praise from every nation)

Revelation 21:1-7 (new heaven and new earth)

Revelation 21:9-27 (vision of New Jerusalem)

Revelation 22:1-5 (river of life)

In Our Sunday Lectionary

Today's story is told in church on the following Sundays:

Year C: Fourth Sunday of Easter and All

Saints' Day

Year C: Sixth Sunday of Easter



WEAVING OUR STORY WITH THE BIBLICAL STORY

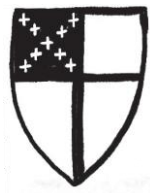
The Revelation to John was written at a time when Christians were

being persecuted because of their faith in Christ. The writer's main concern is to give hope and encouragement and to urge his readers to remain faithful during times of suffering and persecution.

The book consists mostly of a series of revelations and visions couched in symbolic language. It is John's vision of the end of the age, when Satan and all evil are defeated by God and we shall "see God face to face."

As John describes in beautifully poetic language, our final reconciliation with God in heaven brings life free of the alienation begun in the Garden of Eden.

THE EPISCOPAL THREAD



The book of Revelation is seen by Episcopalians as a message of hope, not one of condemnation. The Anglican love of learning, with its respect for human reason and intelligence, leads Episcopalians to look at the context of the biblical writings and to see their message in the life situation in which they were written. Thus the book of Revelation is recognized as a writing of comfort and hope for people under severe persecution, not—as some believe—a prediction of the future.

In this light, some passages in Revelation are used quite widely as a lesson in the Rite of Burial. Because the document expresses the joy that will come when God finally reigns at the end of time and the Lamb will sit at the throne over all creation, these passages that give praise to God the King, and to the saints who have found reward through their goodness, are read on All Saints' Day, on the day commemorating the Holy Innocents (the babies slaughtered by Herod in Bethlehem) and during the Easter season when we look to the themes of resurrection and redemption.

The violent passages of Revelation are not read in church, and generally these passages are seen in their historical context in which John comforts

the persecuted Christians by promising vengeance on the persecutors and the oppressors. But the message of hope that is woven within this book are of great comfort to all of us who look at the New Jerusalem and hope for the New Newark, or the New Cincinnati or the New Detroit, where God's rule will finally be supreme over all creation.



WEAVING GOD'S BELOVED COMMUNITY

The city of God in heaven is pictured as a beautiful place of precious jewels, where people praise God day and night. But Revelation also says that “the home of God is among mortals.” (Rev. 21:3) Our dream is to build up God's Beloved Community, a society and a world where God's dream of abundance and love have triumphed over any worldly nightmare of scarcity and hatred. This is a community that embraces inclusion over exclusion, welcome over rejection, mercy over vengeance, peace over war, and love over hate. The foundations of God's Beloved Community are the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. These attributes would form the basis for the social systems and institutions in the community.

- **How can we make our humble earthly home a place that pleases God to dwell?**
- **What is keeping us from fully living into having the “home of God” here?**
- **What are some examples that we do have of earth being the “home of God”?**



Weaving God's Promises

REVELATION 5:1-4; 7:9-17;

21:1-7; 21:9-27; 22:1-5

One day, John goes up to visit heaven. Then he tells us all about it. Here is his story.

God on the throne with the Lamb of God

Heaven is a mighty place, full of power and glory, and full of God.

Heaven is like a mighty palace, inside a jeweled city, populated by angels and archangels and a whole company of heaven.

And there, in the center of heaven, is a throne—a mighty throne for the great King of Heaven. He is surrounded by angels, and saints, and good people from all over space and from all time, and creatures I never see on earth. There are thousands and millions and gazillions of beings, all singing and worshiping the One on the throne.

And then, I saw Him—the Lamb. The Lamb of God, Jesus. He is the Lamb because like the lambs that were killed to save Israel from Pharaoh, Jesus was killed to save us all.

I hear the angels and other creatures sing this song:

“To the one who is sitting on the throne, and to the Lamb
be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever! *Amen!*”

And then there come still others, so many people that no one can count them all. They come from every nation, speak every language, and

they all come together in front of the throne of God and in front of the Lamb of God. They are wearing white robes. What are they saying all together? I cup my ears to hear, and this is what they say:

“Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

Yes! I cry. Yes, yes!

Someone says to me, “Let me tell you who these are, all dressed in white.”

Please, I say.

“They are people who gave their lives to Jesus. They suffered pain for him.

Now they can sit at God’s throne to worship him day and night. Now God will shelter them.

They will hunger no more, and thirst no more. The sun will not burn them anymore.

Jesus the Lamb of God will be their shepherd. He will lead them to water—to the water of life. And they will cry no more,

for God will wipe every tear from their eyes.”

A new heaven and a new earth, and a new Jerusalem

Now what do I see? Heaven and earth are gone!

But look! There is a brand-new heaven and a brand-new earth! And on this brand-new earth, there is a brand-new city of Jerusalem! This must be the City of God!

But the City of God will not be in heaven. It will be brought to earth, where people are. It does not belong to the angels in heaven, but to people on earth. A loud voice tells me this. The voice is saying:

“See? God’s home is with people, with humans. God will live among people.

And earth’s people will be God’s people. God himself will be with them.

When they are sad, God will wipe every tear from their eyes. When God is here, there is no more death, no more pain or sadness or crying.”

The City of God—What’s it like?

Now an angel is carrying me away. He takes me up to a big high mountain where I can see the New Jerusalem, the new City of God. It is coming down from heaven to land on earth. God will bring heaven to earth!

What a glorious city! How beautiful it is! The city shines like jewels, like crystal, like diamonds. It is made of jewels and pearls and gold, all over, and I think it was built by the angels.

But where’s the temple? Here is a city of God, but where is the temple for us to worship God?

Ah, there is no temple. The temple is God himself, and Jesus himself. And the sky! Where is the sun and the moon? The city is shining brightly,

but what gives it its light and its brightness? How strange, that it should be so bright, without sun or moon or stars or lamps!

But then I see. The glory of God is the light. The Lamb of God is the lamp.

They don't need any earthly lamp or sun or star! God is their light!

A river of life

Then another angel taps me on the shoulder and points to a marvelous sight.

There is a river, bright as a diamond, flowing from God's throne through the city. This water in this river is the water of life itself!

On each side of the river, there is a tree, *the tree of life*. The leaves on the tree are healing leaves. They will heal us all, heal us of all sickness and sorrow and sadness and hatred.

And at the center of everything—the throne of God and of Jesus. And everybody who is here can finally look upon God and see God's face. And everybody who is here can look upon Jesus and see his face. And they all know that God is with them always, even to the end of the age—and beyond.

Thanks be to God!