

A EUCHARISTIC CELEBRATION OF TẾT, THE VIETNAMESE LUNAR NEW YEAR

(This order of worship follows the suggestions of "A Celebration of Word & Table," from Upper Room Worshipbook, Music and Liturgies for Spiritual Formation, pages 34-42).

MUSIC FOR GATHERING

* GREETING (people standing as able)

Leader: *This is the day that the Lord has made;*

All: Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Leader: *This is the beginning of the springtime that the Lord has made;*

All: Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Leader: *This is the beginning of the Lunar New Year, the time that the old year is fading away and another one is renewed.*

All: Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Leader: *This is the day that we remember our ancestors who risked their life, left their home to bring us here to this new land to find hope for a better life with freedom.*

All: Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Leader: *God made beautiful flowers & provide fresh fruits for us to enjoy.*

All: Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Leader: *This is the time that we clean our houses and God cleans our hearts. We decorate our homes beautifully and meditate on God's word, cook our traditional food for Tết and enjoy God's beautiful creation.*

All: Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Leader: *God brought our church and our family together.*

All: Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Leader: *God made you, and God made me.*

All: Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Leader & All: **Come, let us praise God for making all things good!**¹

OPENING HYMN

"Nguồn Ôn Phước - Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing"

Words by Robert Robinson, 1758, and Music by Asahael Nettleton, 1825

OPENING PRAYER

Let us pray together:

O God,

You have created the universe with such splendor

That all of it rises up to praise you.

We, the people you have called to be your own,

Join with sun and moon, stars and mountains,

In singing hymns of glory to your wonderful name.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord,

who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,

one God for ever and ever. Amen.²

¹ Calvin Institute of Christian Worship and Faith Alive Christian Resources, *The Worship Sourcebook*. (Grand Rapids, MI.: Calvin Institute of Christian Worship: Faith Alive: Baker Books, 2004), 373–374. *With the italic texts inserted by Joseph Dai Nguyen*

² Saliers, *Upper Room Worshipbook*, 35.

MUSICAL RESPONSE

“Xuân Ngợi Ca – New Year, the season of singing.”

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

Leader: Prepare our hearts, O Lord, to accept your word. Silence in us any voice but your own, that, we may also obey your will, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All: **Amen.**³

FIRST READING

Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-9 (NRSV)

After the reading:

Leader: The Word of Life.

All: **Thanks be to God.**⁴

PSALM READING

*Psalm Of Lament For Immigrants Of The Land*⁵

Leader: O Lord, God of my salvation, when at night, I cry out in your presence, let my prayer come before you; incline your ear to my cry.
How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?
How long must I bear suffering in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all day long? How long, O God of provider, will you hide your face from me?

All: **Hear our prayer.**

Leader: O Lord, I cry out to you in the morning my prayer comes before you.
I left my home country because of injustice, war, and destruction. I came to this land, not familiar with its language and customs, to find hope for a better life.
Though I have eyes, I felt like I am blind.
Though I have ears and able talk, I felt like I am deaf and dumb
Though I have a healthy physical body, I thought I am a disabled, useless person in the room.
Though I am capable and excellent in everything I do, no one offers me a promotion because of my disabilities.

All: **Hear our prayer.**

Leader: O Lord, I cry out to you in the evening, and my tears wet my bed.

³ Saliers, *Upper Room Worshipbook*, 35.

⁴ Saliers, *Upper Room Worshipbook*, 35.

⁵ “Psalm of for Immigrants of the Land” (based on Psalm 13, 88, and other psalms) existed because of the requirements for my DM722 Class Fall 2019. As a pastor of Vietnamese Alliance Church in the South Atlanta, here is my thoughts: “We are an immigrant community. We experienced life and death, war and destruction, able and disability. Many people in my church are currently suffering, both physically and psychologically, in their new lives in the States. Many people chose to live in the States, and they are willing to risk everything to be here. Others as political refugees who are forced by the Vietnamese government to leave their friends and families in Vietnam. I pray that this psalm of lament might help a faith community and its members to be able to negotiate with their issues at hand, such as poverty, immigration, family issues, etc. Thus, I hope their song of praise will sound because of their trust in the Almighty God’s steadfast love who loves us unceasingly.”

Though I am trying to be a good parent, my children cause me a great deal of stress. My children do not want to talk to me because I do not have time for them, and they feel shameful of my inabilities to speak the language of the land.

All: Hear our prayer.

Leader: O Lord, I am a stranger in the land, I suffer, and I am desperate.
O God, for my soul, is full of troubles, and my life draws near to death.
I am walking among those who go down to the pit,
I am like those who have no help,
like those forsaken among the dead,
like those whom you remember no more,
for they are cut off from your hand.

All: Hear our prayer.

Leader: Hear my cry, O God; consider and answer my prayers!
Save me from my pit, and my time of troubles, O God the Provider!
Do not let my enemy rejoice because I am fearful and distressed
But I will sing my song of praise, my God of salvation.
Because I trust in you, you are my God Almighty.
And I will sing of your steadfast love, O Lord, forever.

All: Hear our prayer. Amen.

GOSPEL READING

Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23 (NRSV)

After the reading:

Leader: The Word of Life.

All: Thanks be to God.⁶

HOMILY

“The Tale of the Watermelon: Every Perfect Gift, is from God”

“Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.” (James 1:17, NRSV)

Long, long ago, during the time of the Hùng kings, there was an official named Mai An Tiêm. He was originally from a foreign kingdom. When he was just about seven or eight, the king purchased him from a merchant ship as a slave. When he grew up, he was upright in appearance and could remember and understand many kinds of matters. The king granted him the name Mai Yễn and called him An Tiêm. The king also granted him a wife who gave birth to a boy. The king was very trusting and assigned him to many important projects in the kingdom.

Gradually he became rich. Everyone was terrified of him, especially the ruling elite who wanted to do business with him. An Tiêm became prideful. He often said: “All of the blessings and the possessions I got, I acquired on my own.”

The king heard about it and got very angry and said: “He is working along my side, but he is arrogant, not grateful to his owner! Now I will bring his family to a place where there are no people in the middle of nowhere, and see if he can still acquire wealth or not?”

The king exiled Mai An Tiêm to the island of the Nga Son region. The four sides were covered with sand and water and bore no traces of human footsteps. The king in his mercy also left sufficient food and water for An Tiêm and his family to survive for three or four months.

⁶ Saliers, *Upper Room Worshipbook*, 35.

An Tiêm's wife lamented that she would die in this place because there would be no food left after four months. Nevertheless, An Tiêm said: "God gives birth to me, and He will feed me too. To live and die is by God's will. Do not worry!"

A couple of days later, suddenly, An Tiêm saw a white bird flying back from the West, sitting at the top of the mountain, shouting for three words, spit seven black seeds of melon falling into the sand. Then the seeds bloomed into strings, growing and spreading dense like a vine along the ground. Eventually, many enormous dark green fruits started to sprout under the leaves.

An Tiêm happily said: "This is not an unusual fruit, but a godsend to feed me." Then he opened one of them, ate it, and felt the delicious taste of its refreshing. An Tiêm planted more of this fruit to eat. If he could not finish it, he exchanged it for rice or other food to feed his wife and children. However, he did not know what to call the fruit. Because bird had brought the seeds from the West, he called them Tây Qua, or watermelon from the West.

The fishermen and the merchants who came by loved this kind of watermelon and considered it delicious. They wanted to buy and exchange their products for watermelon. Ultimately, the people living in the villages far away heard and want to buy seeds and grow them everywhere. People started calling An Tiêm the "parent of watermelon."

One day, when Mai An Tiêm was sitting on the beach, thinking about the way his life had turned out, he thought about the king, and he repented of what he had done. He carved his name on many watermelons and threw them into the waves, hoping they would carry the watermelons back to the Kingdom of Vietnam.

A fisherman found one of these watermelons on the beach and decided to take it to the palace as a gift to the king during Tết, the Vietnamese Lunar New Year. When the king saw the name of An Tiêm that was carved on the fruit, he remembered his long-exiled son. The king opened the dark green skin of the watermelon, tasted the red flesh of the fruit inside, and found it wonderfully refreshing. He thought this fruit was the best possible gift that could be bestowed on a king, better than all the many precious presents he had ever received.

The king thought about his love for Mai An Tiêm, and he forgave him. Two weeks after that, a ship sent by the king came to the desert island to bring Mai An Tiêm and his family back to the mainland. Then the king restored An Tiêm to his former position and returned all his possessions to him.

My Reflection

I retell this story of how the watermelon came to Vietnam many centuries ago because watermelon is the fruit that is always chosen to be put on the altar or to be used for decoration on Tết. Many people think watermelon brings good luck because of its red color. Others think of watermelon because of how the freshness of its juice quenches the thirst of those seated around the dinner table. Some think that watermelon will bring well-being throughout the year. This story is about Mai An Tiêm, whom the king of Vietnam adopted. He became successful, but he also became prideful. However, the watermelon's seed brought by a white bird and his repentance toward the king brought him back to the palace. The king restored him to his position alongside of him because of this red colored fruit, the watermelon.

I think this story should be retold every Tết to remind our second-generation Vietnamese-American Christians of our Vietnamese culture and its association to Tết (VLNY). I hope that this story can be a bridge that connects Christian principles embedded in the Vietnamese culture

and the understanding of how God (Mr. Heaven or Ông Trời) is the one who gives “every perfect gift, from above” to all Vietnamese.

Further, although the tradition of adorning our homes with red decorations symbolizes our belief that red brings blessings in the new year, I firmly believe that the watermelon, the red color of the refreshing juice, and how the Vietnamese tell the story, remind us of the blood of Jesus Christ, which he “shed for us” to clean us from our sins and restore us to our position as children of God at the Lord’s Table of the Eucharistic celebration.

RESPONSE

Leader: Let us pray together.

All: I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord, Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, Born of the Virgin Mary, Suffered under Pontius Pilate, Was crucified, dead, and buried. He descended into hell; The third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, And sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost; The Holy catholic Church, the Communion of Saints; The Forgiveness of sins; The Resurrection of the body, And the Life everlasting. Amen.

CONFESSION

Leader: Let us confess our sin in the presence of God and of one another.

Silent confession

Leader: Let us pray together.

All: Gracious God, have mercy on us. In your compassion forgive us our sins, known and unknown, those things done and left undone. Uphold us by your Spirit so that we may live and serve you in newness of life, to the honor and glory of your holy name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.⁷

DECLARATION OF PARDON

Leader: In the name of Jesus Christ, we are forgiven people. Glory to God!

All: Alleluia! Amen.

THE PEACE

Leader: Let us offer one another signs of reconciliation and love.

OFFERING

Leader: As forgiven and reconciled children of God, let us now offer ourselves and our gifts.

A celebration song may be sung or played

as the gifts of Tết (Vietnamese Lunar New Year) are brought to the Lord’s table.

TAKING THE BREAD AND THE CUP

The minister receives the bread and wine and prepares the table.

⁷ Saliers, *Upper Room Worshipbook*, 36.

*** THE GREAT THANKSGIVING**

Based on the “Great Prayer of Thanksgiving from a Multicultural Perspective” by Greer Anne Wenh-In Ng, excerpted from *A Book of Reformed Prayers*, edited by Howard L. Rice & Lamar Williams, Jr. & A Celebration of Word & Table by Don E. Saliers, excerpted from Upper Room Worshipbook, Music and Liturgies for Spiritual Formation).

The people stand.

Minister: The Lord be with you.

All: And also with you.

Minister: Lift up your hearts.

All: We lift them up to the Lord.

Minister: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

All: It is right to give our thanks and praise.

Minister: “It is indeed good and right to give you thanks and praise, God of many names. You made a covenant with Noah, and caused nations, in their amazing diversity of culture, ethnicity and language, to spread over the face of the earth. As of old you led your people out of a land of enslavement to a land of promise, so too you led our ancestors and some of us into new lands of possibility, there to find you anew.”⁸

**All: And so,
With your people on earth
and all the company of heaven
we praise your name and join their unending hymn
Holy, holy, hoy Lord, God of power and might
Heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

Minister: “In the fullness of time you sent Jesus,
in every aspect human as we are,
to grow up in a small town in Galilee
speaking with a distinct accent,
far from the seat of religious and civil power.
In his ministry he was challenged by a gentile mother
to rethink his stance into inclusivity,
beside Jacob’s well he was moved
by an encounter with a minority woman
to disclose his messianic identity.
On the last night he spent with his friends,
Jesus took an age-old tradition from his people

⁸ Howard L. Rice and Lamar Williamson, Jr., eds., “Great Prayer of Thanksgiving from a Multicultural Perspective,” in *A Book of Reformed Prayers*, 1st edition (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 170–171.

and transformed it into something new.
He took bread, the staple food of his land,
blessed and broke it, and gave it to those around him,
saying, “take, eat, this is my body, broken for you.
Whenever you do this, remember me.”
After supper he took a cup of wine,
the common drink of his people, and gave it to them,
saying, “Drink this, all of you,
This is the new covenant in my blood;
each time you do this, remember me.”⁹

All: Amen.

LORD’S PRAYER

Minister: And now, with the confidence of the children of God. Let us pray:

**All: Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours.
Now and for ever. Amen**

*** BREAKING OF THE BREAD**

The minister breaks the bread in silence:

Minister: Because there is one loaf, we who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf. The bread which we break is a sharing in the body of Christ.

The minister lifts the cup in silence:

Minister: The cup over which we give thanks is a sharing in the blood of Christ

GIVING THE BREAD AND THE CUP

Vietnamese-style instrumental music may be offered as the gifts are shared and prayer continues.

*** PRAYER AFTER RECEIVING**

Minister: Let us pray:
We thank you, God, for inviting us to this table
where we have known the presence of Christ
and have received all Christ’s gifts.
Strengthen our faith,

⁹ Rice and Williamson, Jr., *A Book of Reformed Prayers*, 170–171.

Increase our love for one another,
and let us show forth your praise in our lives,
through Jesus Christ our Savior.

All: **Amen.**¹⁰

*** DOXOLOGY** *“Tôn Vinh Chân Thần – Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow”*
 Words by Thomas Ken, 1692, and music by Louis Bourgeois, 1551.

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
Praise Him, all creatures here below;
Praise Him above, ye heav’nly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost!

*** DISMISSAL WITH BLESSING**

Minister: God’s blessing be with you,
 Christ’s peace be with you,
 the Spirit’s outpouring be with you,
 now and always.

All: **Amen.**¹¹

¹⁰ Saliers, *Upper Room Worshipbook*, 41.

¹¹ Saliers, *Upper Room Worshipbook*, 42.