# The Rice of LifeSuggestions for Worship in Asian Heritage Month

*by Maria Ling*

Asian Heritage Month is an opportunity to prayerfully reflect on the contributions of Asian Canadians to Canadian society, and to honour and celebrate this important aspect of Canadian history. Try to avoid treating Asian Heritage Month worship services as cultural showcases. Rather, link creative worship expressions to the day’s theme or lectionary readings. Asian Heritage Month is an opportunity not to push Asian traditions, but to explore how we understand God working in and through our racial, cultural, and philosophical identities. As ethnic Christians, how have we expressed and can we express our faith in Jesus? What means best express our diverse worship of God?

## Creative Ideas for Worship

Consider incorporating some of these ideas into your worship services:

1. At the entry to the worship space, present each worshipper with symbols of welcome from their respective cultures. In a multicultural congregation, there could be a variety of symbols, e.g., leis, coloured string/thread of blessing, sweets/candy to sweeten the mouth, rice to symbolize the Rice of Life (Bread of Life).
2. Use dance and exuberant shouts—to God and to each other—in calling to worship.
3. Draw from the congregation symbolic gestures used to greet elders, and use them during the Passing of the Peace. As reconciled people, we honour the other over ourselves.
4. Silence is an important component of Asian spirituality—incorporate silence (without music playing in the background) into the worship service.
5. Consider chanting the psalms. Chanting of scripture or prayers is found in the Christian tradition, and also in many Asian religions.
6. Red is a colour many Asians love and know as symbolic. Tie this colour in with Pentecost Sunday, perhaps draping red cloths over the sanctuary entrance. Draw significance from the blood of Christ and the fire of the Holy Spirit.
7. Give everybody a piece of a jigsaw puzzle. Have someone set up the frame of the puzzle beforehand and at some point in the service or after, ask people to come up to add their piece to the puzzle. We are many parts but one in Christ. We bring with us unique spiritual gifts and talents, and it is when we are in unity that God’s picture will be made whole.
8. Get a piece of linen/cotton fabric and some fabric pens. After the scripture readings, during or in place of the sermon, have people come up to write something that expresses their identity in Christ. Or suggest that they draw the outline of their hand with their name inside, as an expression of solidarity with the call of Jesus Christ to our lives as individuals and as a faith community. The fabric can be displayed for all to see after the worship service.
9. Use coconut oil (familiar to Asians from equatorial/tropical countries) as anointing oil with the sign of the cross on the forehead.
10. Include stories from church members in the worship services over the four Sundays of Asian Heritage Month. Have a time of witness bearing: What does it means to be a Christian, and a person of a particular race or culture, living in Canada? How has Jesus Christ transformed our culture as we have followed his teachings? How has the Holy Spirit enlivened our heritage in the light of our Christian faith?

## Some Liturgical Prayers for Asian Heritage Month

### Invocation

Arise and blow your wind of grace on us;
infuse your people with life-giving joy!

### Invocation

Spirit of God undergirding us,
Spirit of Christ empowering us,
Indwelling Spirit who breathes in grace,

Exhale mercy and compassion,
Hearken to our deep groans and yearning;
Our senses are alert to your Spirit’s movements.

### Call to Worship

Leader: Arise, O people of God.
 Sing God’s praise.

**People: We are God’s wonderful creation.**

Leader: Lift high your heads.
 Look at God’s glory.

**People: We are God’s beloved children.**

Leader: Shout Hallelujah!
 Declare God’s goodness to all creation.

**People: Hallelujah, praise the Lord!**

### Call to Worship

Leader: It is good to be in the presence of the Lord our God.\*

**People: We have come to adore our God.**

Leader: It is good to sing God’s praise.

**People: We have come to sing a new song to our God.**

Leader: It is good to give God thanks.

**People: We have come to offer our grateful thanks to our God.**

Leader: It is good to recall God’s faithfulness through the ages.

**People: We acknowledge God’s loving-kindness to our ancestors and our forebears.**

Leader: It is good to surrender ourselves to God’s holy pleasure.

**People: We declare God’s praise and celebrate God’s goodness to us and to future generations.**

\*“The Lord our God” is a common way that God was addressed in the Bible, First Testament especially. The phrase is used over 190 times in the King James translation. See Exodus 3:18, 5:3, 8:10, or 10:26.

### Collect\*

O Lord of the exiled Hebrews,
God of the sojourning Jews,
Come alongside us as we journey through this beautiful land.
We are here because we were birthed here.
We are here because we have chosen to come here.
We have roots that grow deep tying us to this place.
We are born anew to spread our branches
 to bear the burdens of others
 to reach with love those who are downtrodden
and we pull up those who have been pressed down.

O Lord of the wandering faithful,
God of the seeking saints,
Come empower us as we work for your kingdom’s sake.
Come dwell the praises of your people here today.

\*The imagery here speaks from biblical texts of exile found in Exodus, Isaiah, and the Psalms.

### Collect

Spirit of God, who indwells us, present here today,

We bow in your presence.
We acknowledge your sovereignty.
We declare your glory and might.

You have graciously lifted us up from the pit of oppression.
You have mercifully rescued us from our enemies.
Save us from anxious thoughts and dreams.

We bow in your presence.
We humbly seek your compassionate embrace.
We announce your coming to us.

You have called us to declare your kingdom come.
You have called us to be salt and light in our city.
You have called us to be your joyful witnesses.

We bow in your presence.
We give ourselves afresh to you.
We follow you, our Lord and Sovereign God.

### Litany of Thanksgiving

Leader: God is good.
**People: For life and health, for healing and well-being, we thank you, God.**

Leader: God is great.
**People: For strength to help, for ability to make things better for others, we thank you, God.**

Leader: God is kind.
**People: For compassion that moves us, for empathy that allows us to reach out, we thank you, God.**

Leader: God is our deliverer.
**People: For freedom to be and do, for wisdom to choose the right and godly things to do, we thank you, God.**

Leader: God is patient.
**People: For living in community, for grace in diversity, we thank you, God.**

Leader: God is our foundation.
**People: For our histories, for our heritage, for our race and ethnicities, we thank you, God.**

Leader: God is our Creator.
**People: For our shared faith, for our diverse faith journeys, for our various expressions, for our distinct tastes and preferences, we thank you, God, that in you, we are one.**

**All: All praise and thanks be to God!**

### Prayer of Thanksgiving

Leader: Thank you, Gracious God. *(arms lifted high)*

**People: Thank you, Gracious God.** *(arms lifted high; to be exclaimed in each person’s mother tongue)*

Leader: I thank you for these true and faithful disciples of Jesus Christ. *(indicating the congregation with arms opened wide)*.

**People: We celebrate our church leaders and servants, co-ministers with us in Christ’s service.** *(arms opened wide, looking around the worship space)*

Leader: I thank you for each family represented here by each person worshipping here today. *(arms hugging self)*

**People: Thank you, our loving Father/Mother for our families.** *(arms hugging self)*

Leader: For every culture and race here today, I am grateful. *(head bowed in respect)*

**People: We celebrate our cultural and racial diversities, for in Christ we are one in love.** *(heads bowed in respect)*

Leader: All expressions of worship come from our Creator God who created us as expressive peoples. *(face lifted up and hands extended open)*

**People: We express our thanksgiving to our Creator God with singing, with art, with silence, with food, with dance, with many, many divine expressions! Hallelujah! Praise and thank God!** *(face lifted up and hands extended open)*

**All: Thank you, Gracious God!** *(in our mother tongues)*

### Confession (in unison)

Forgiving and Reconciling God,
We confess that we have become like the very people we detest and fought against.
We are free from oppression but in many subtle ways now, we oppress others.
Forgive us, we pray.

We have at our disposal the many resources found in nature and among humankind,
But we allow greed and the bottom line to rape these natural resources for our own selfish gain.
Forgive us, we pray.

We try to resist racism and domination and we push against discrimination of weaker, powerless persons.
Forgive us, we pray, because we have also discriminated against others and we have tried to dominate others with the new power we have gained.
We protect our self-interests, *Lord*\* God. We have not sought your interests for the marginalized or the exploited. Instead, we perpetuate gender inequality and ageism.
Forgive us, we pray.

As much as we say we love you, Lord, we admit we are obsessed with success and money. We seek fame and status; we want power in order to elevate ourselves.
Help us, *Lord*. Forgive us, we pray.

Forgive us, Lord, when we allow our personal and corporate causes to blind us to our first priority: To love the *Lord* our God, and to love our neighbour as we love ourselves.

*Silent prayer and confession, followed by exchanging the peace.*

*\**Feel free to substitute a name for God beloved in your community.

### Prayer of Confession

We bow our heads and hearts in confession for our individual and our corporate sins.
We continue to impose hierarchies on those we can. *(Silence)*

We reject those different from ourselves and we offer token tolerance instead of true acceptance. (*Silence)*

We criticize and condemn what we do not understand; we do not patiently ask God for help to gain understanding. *(Silence)*

We have not been hospitable to the stranger, even though we have been strangers ourselves. *(Silence)*

We gossip, we hoard, we sneer, we criticize, we close our eyes to the needy around us, we walk away from the wounded and the broken. *(Silence)*

We confess our sins.

#### Assurance of Grace

Leader: “For [Jesus] is our peace; in his flesh he has made [all] groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity…, thus making peace, and might reconcile [us] to God in one bodythrough the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it.” (Ephesians 2:14–16)

In Jesus Christ, you are forgiven.

#### Sharing of the Peace

*(In silence, with a firm handshake or a hug where appropriate)*

### Benediction

The God of all peoples and tribes
 Keep you in the circle of communion.
The God of lands and seas, of mountains and valleys
 Uphold you in all your endeavours.
The God of our forefathers and foremothers
 Keep you in the rich heritage of faith and love.
Amen.

### Benediction

As God’s people of many hues and views,
Go forth with the view of the risen Christ
 Firmly set in your hearts.
Touch lightly but deeply the broken lives
 That need the Spirit’s infilling and healing.
You are blessed to be God’s many lights in this world.

## Hymn Suggestions

“We Are Many” from *Songs of the Bamboo*, posted for United Church use at
www.united-church.ca/planning/seasons/asian.

from *Voices United:*

34 Come Now, O God of Peace (O-So-So)

243 Praise to God (traditional Japanese melody)

354 In Old Galilee, When Sweet Breezes Blew (Gariraya no kaze kaoru oka de)

362 Here, O God, Your Servants Gather (Se-ka-i no To-mo to Te o Tsu-na-gi)

412 This Is the Day (Fijian folk melody)

414 God, Be Praised at Early Morn (Qing-chen zao qi zan-mei Shen)

606 In Christ There Is No East or West

666 In Lonely Mountain Ways (Ya-ma-ji Ko-e-te)

from *More Voices:*

22 God of All the World (Mi pela i bung)

60 God, We Give You Heartfelt Praise (Chú goán kámsia oló Lí) (a round)

103 Ka mana’o ’I’O

129 To the High and Kindly Hills

181 Lord, Your Hands Have Formed (Imegmoy pitak ay yay)

184 Ay, Ay Salidummay (traditional song, Philippines; prayer response or acclamation like an Amen)

218 May the Love of the Lord (Wei yuan Shen di ai) (a lovely blessing)

## Sermon Suggestions for Asian Heritage Month 2013

### Sixth Sunday of Easter, May 5, 2013

**Acts 16:9–15:** Picking up on God’s call to Paul—“Come over to Macedonia to help us”—Asian immigrants to Canada can see themselves as called to Canada to help in doing God’s work (however they understand God’s work). Canadian-born Asians have the call to welcome and be hospitable to those arriving in Canada or those who need a welcome to God’s family.

**Psalm 67; Revelation 21:10, 22—22:5**: Emphasizing God’s overarching love, justice, and healing over the nations that Asians represent in the United Church.

**John 14:23–29:** We have the promise of the help of the Holy Spirit to carry out our calling.

Asian Christians can celebrate our heritage, but we must also see ourselves as God’s people, as God’s various nations who are blessed to bless others.

### Ascension of the Lord, May 9, 2013(not a Sunday but some churches may celebrate Ascension on Sunday, May 12)

**Acts 1:1–11:** God is impartial; God bestows power on us to be witnesses. No one has a monopoly on God’s power.

**Psalm 47:** “[God] chose our heritage for us.” (v. 4, *NRSV*)

**Ephesians 1:15–23:** A question to ask ourselves: What is greater: who we are and what we represent, or who God is?

**Luke 24:44–53:** The lack of Jesus’ physical presence with the believers did not stop them from worshipping him and continually blessing God in the temple.

### 7th Sunday after Easter, May 12, 2013

**Acts 16:16–34:** The tension of customs; leading people to believe in God and not turning them off or away from God.

**Psalm 97:** A question to consider: Are we still worshipping the idols of our heritage, or are we mindful that they are tools in pointing others to the God of our faith?

**Revelation 22:12–14, 16–17, 20–21**

**John 17:20–26:** The prayer of Jesus that all may be one so that the world may believe that God sent Jesus. Diversity in unity—not uniformity or conformity. Our oneness in faith will reveal the love of God in us.

### Pentecost, May 19, 2013

**Acts 2:1–21:** Culturally/racially, we also speak in other tongues but never to marginalize or ostracize but to build a common bond of unity because of the Holy Spirit who unifies us.

**Genesis 11:1–9:** The contrast with Acts 2:1–21 and a reminder never to let our self-wills and self-interests distract us and fragment us from our common faith in God in Jesus Christ.

**Psalm 104:24–34, 35*b***

**Romans 8:14–17:** Outward diversity, but spiritually our common bond is via the Spirit of God, as those who are led by the Spirit are children of God.

**John 14:8–17 (25–27):** The gift of the Holy Spirit.

### Trinity Sunday, May 26, 2013

**Proverbs 8:1–4, 22–31**

**Psalm 8**

**Romans 5:1–5**

**John 16:12–15**

In some places, Asians have the acquired a reputation for harming and abusing creation and greedily ravaging creatures, habitats, and natural resources for selfish gain. We need to show by example that we care for God’s creation. We are *all* created by God and we will care for *all* God’s creation. We will not exploit or oppress others.

Optional resources:

* Let us take a moment to engage with the mission of United Church Mission and Service global partners in Asia: [www.united-church.ca/partners/global/asia](http://www.united-church.ca/partners/global/asia)
* Let us take a moment to engage with global and environmental issues:
[www.united-church.ca/getinvolved/takeaction](http://www.united-church.ca/getinvolved/takeaction)

Asia is the birthplace of many world religions, including Christianity. We as Asians have the humble responsibility of receiving God’s revelations and being not only keepers but sharers of God’s truth to those who do not yet know the truth.

Many Asians have also endured historical, cultural, and political suffering. Asians are also familiar with religious persecution. As such, suffering on account of faith in Jesus Christ brings endurance, “and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.” (Romans 5:4–5, *NRSV*)