

Peace, Love, Justice, Hope & Joy:

Churches for Middle East Peace's 2011 Advent & Christmas Reflections

*A Coming
for All People*

O God, I pray
for peace and justice
for all people.

O God, I pray
for love and joy
for all people.

O God, I pray
for all children,
women and men
of the Holy Land.

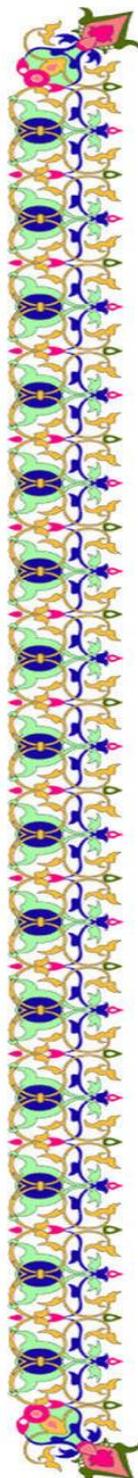
Through my words
and actions this day
help me live as
an instrument of
Your peace
and justice.

Through my words
and actions this day
help me live as
an instrument of
Your love and joy.

Let my expectations
of God with us,
of You with us,
include all people.

Help me to be like
Christ this and every
season.

Amen.



Do not be afraid,
for behold, I proclaim to you good news
of great joy that will be for all the people.

- Luke 2:10

Finding Joy in Bethlehem

Two years ago I concluded a three-month trip to the West Bank by spending Christmas in Bethlehem. It was the first time I had been away from my family on Christmas and I anticipated a sad, lonely holiday. Instead, it was one of the most joyful events of my life.

In Bethlehem, Christmas is a joyful time for people of all faiths who find themselves in the city. Despite daily hardships, people string Christmas lights all over the city making the normally dark streets glow. A stage is set up in Nativity Square with children from all over the world coming together to sing Christmas carols. Normally sleepy gift shops are bustling, selling olive wood nativity sets to international pilgrims visiting for the occasion. Friends I had met during my trip were there, including international volunteers, Palestinian Christians and Muslims.

Jesus' birth means different things to different people, but in this little town of Bethlehem, Christmas brings everyone together to celebrate a joyous occasion in a place where joy is often hard to find.

- Alexandra Stevens, current CMEP Intern, member
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)