



Advent Reflections 2009

Advent is a time of waiting, not sitting back waiting, but a time of anticipating and preparing for what is coming. This season we are all like Mary, waiting for the fulfillment of hope, the coming of God incarnate. And like Mary and Joseph we are sitting idly by, we have things to do.

We hope that these selections of Scripture, reflections by members of CMEP's Board of Directors and staff, prayers and questions for meditation will help you not only center on the promise and hope of Christ's birth, but also on our shared work and hope for peace in the Middle East. With the connection between our faith and this part of God's creation so intertwined it is important that we acknowledge and celebrate our call to this work for peace that is rooted in our faith.

Using this Resource

This resource was written for both personal and congregation use. For this reason CMEP is making these reflections available to you prior to Advent as well as sending the reflections individually during Advent.

We encourage you to pass these reflections along to others you know who are working for peace in the Middle East. You can either send this PDF document or refer them to www.cmep.org.

Another way to use this resource is to help you raise your concerns for peace and the people of the Holy Land in your own congregation in your own way or words.

- Offer a prayer for peace during the prayers of the people or ask your pastor to add this to a corporate prayer.
- Put a note in the bulletin or an article in the newsletter about peace in the Holy Land.
- Add a prayer for peace in the Holy Land to your Christmas cards.



CMEP would love to have your feedback on this resource as well as learn how you were able to use it this season. You may send any comments or feedback to Doris Warrell at doris@cmep.org.

First Sunday of Advent

The Peace of Jerusalem

At the risk of his life, Jeremiah prophesied that Jerusalem would be overrun by the Babylonians. Yet God did not leave the people without hope. Jeremiah foresaw the coming of a ruler in the line of David – a “righteous Branch” – who would bring peace to a rebuilt and glorious Jerusalem. Jeremiah’s prophesy helped form the developing belief in the coming of the Messiah.

Christians believe that this Messiah is Jesus. The promise of a renewed Jerusalem becomes the hope of a perfected people of God, described as “the Holy City, the new Jerusalem which comes down out of heaven from God.” (Revelations 21:2). And God’s chosen community is expanded to encompass “a great multitude that no one could count from every nation, tribe, people and language” (Revelations 7:9).

But what, then, is in store for temporal Jerusalem? Is it also promised peace?

The great work of the Messiah is to remove the barriers between humankind and God and among people. It is a work of reconciliation and of the righting of relationships which we call justice.

In Jerusalem, Israel, and the Palestinian territories today, we find three faith communities – Jews, Muslims and Christians – and two nationalities – Israelis and Palestinians. Tragically, they are not at peace and they are not in right relationship with each other.

The Messiah is at work to bring these diverse, divided and often hostile peoples together – in peace, justice and security. When we allow ourselves to be instruments in God’s hands to advance this work of reconciliation and justice, we are participating in the fulfillment of “the gracious promise” of God to Israel, Judah, the Palestinian people and all the peoples of the earth.

-Martin Shupack, Church World Service

For Meditation

What are the fruits of right relationships? Where can they be found? What do people do to have such wonderful rewards? Seeing and knowing this how can we individually and together incorporate one more action, attitude or learning into our lives that will bear such fruit?

'The days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will fulfill the gracious promise I made to the house of Israel and to the house of Judah.

In those days and at that time I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David's line; he will do what is just and right in the land.

In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. This is the name by which it will be called:

The LORD Our Righteousness.'

-Jeremiah 33:14-16 (NIV)

Prayer

Show me the way God,
for at times the path is full of
barriers and challenges.

Show me the way Jesus,
for this was also your road
that you prepare me to travel.

Show me the way Spirit,
because with a true heart I
want to call all people
Children of God.

Amen.

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene— during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the desert. He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. As is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet:

"A voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him. Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low.

The crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways smooth. And all mankind will see God's salvation."

-Luke 3:1-6 (NIV)

Prayer

Oh God,
My voice is yours,
Give me the courage to use it.

Oh God,
My will is yours.
Help me to bend it to your call.

And be with me when I fail to do either.

Amen.



Second Sunday of Advent

PREPARE THE WAY

Only when John, the son of Zechariah, filled with the Word of God, began to preach the Word of God was he noticed, and heard by some. He preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The people in the desert heard him; Jesus heard him. The powerful, the leaders of Empire, high priests of the Temple did not heed the Word being proclaimed. One of the leaders did hear and killed the messenger.

The same Word of God calling for repentance is being proclaimed by the poor and oppressed of our world. The imprisoned, ignored and oppressed people of Gaza, of Darfur, are speaking in the desert of powerlessness and hopelessness. The leaders of empire continue to assert their power, or to ignore and support other leaders in their ignorance and arrogance.

Advent is a time when believers in the Jesus announced by John are reminded that the Word of God is calling them to proclaim the same baptism of repentance. Clergy and laity alike will indeed be noticed when Empire is criticized, non-violence proclaimed, and military solutions to conflict challenged. The hope of repentance by our leaders will grow in response to our own repentance.

We prepare the way of the Lord and make straight his paths when we take the time and make the effort to seek the truth of conflicts rather than repeat the sound bites of media entertainers.

We fill in the valleys and level the mountains when we call our Congress people to accountability for their ideology-driven decisions and support them in their justice and peace initiatives.

The crooked roads shall become straight and rough ways smooth when we serve and speak for the powerless, the immigrant, the jobless, the homeless, the abandoned and impoverished women and children of our own country, and our world.

Then we will be heard, noticed and criticized for being too political, less patriotic, unrealistic in the ways of the world and just plain naïve.

Then all men and women including ourselves, will see God's salvation; then we will celebrate Advent.

-John Sullivan, MM, Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

For Meditation

What are the circumstances that cause you to silence your own voice when you have the opportunities to speak to people in power? Remember a time when you did speak, and name what gave you the will to not only to want to speak, but actually do it.



Third Sunday of Advent

Something to Be Joyful For

The news I hear always seems to be bad ...job losses, increasing hunger, more settlements in Palestine, flooding. I could fill this entire page with the weight of sorrows and lists of reasons that do not justify rejoicing.

Many times I turn to a prayer of Julian of Norwich, which in part is “All shall be well and shall be well and all manner of thing shall be well.” This brings me comfort and becomes an active reminder that I am a servant of Christ.

It is through the sincere acknowledgement of the sorrow and pain I see in our world that I more fully recognize the truly great gifts God gives. The love I have for my neighbors both close and far, the ministry that God has given to do good, do no harm and to deepen our relationship with God, and the awareness of God’s love present and active in our lives...these are reasons to rejoice in the Lord.

In the letter to the Philippians, and in many places in Scripture, we are told to rejoice, but not in just anything, rejoice in the Lord. As we count the days until Christmas some people may feel the pressures of holiday expectations, but at the core of these days is the anticipation of salvation. Like a race car preparing for the start of a race the engine roars as we look for a sign that God is with us always and we are ready to go, to act on God’s call. These are reasons to rejoice in the Lord.

And regardless of the success or failure of our efforts, we can act with the calm and gentleness of the Spirit and rejoice for Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again. These are reasons to rejoice in the Lord.

-Rev. Doris E. Warrell, Deacon, Dumbarton United Methodist Church

For Meditation

How do you cultivate the peace of God so that it “guards your hearts and your minds in Jesus Christ?” Daily reading of Scripture? Writing a gratitude journal? Using prayer beads? Fasting? How can this practice be deepened so that when the sorrows of the world, especially those coming from the Israeli/Palestinian conflict are felt, you can rejoice through the peace of God? Does it need done more regularly? Is something new or additional needed?

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

-Philippians 4:4-7 (NIV)

Prayer

When I am tired of doing what God has called me to do,

When my efforts seem in vain,

When I feel I am the only one trying,

I will have a glad heart and rejoice in the Lord.

For You, oh God, have called me by name, given me the gift of thought and action, and have blessed me with a community, the Church, that is the body of Christ.

Indeed, You are great and wonderful, and I will rejoice!

Amen.

A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham: Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar, Perez the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram, Ram the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon, Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of King David. David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife, Solomon the father of Rehoboam, Rehoboam the father of Abijah, Abijah the father of Asa, Asa the father of Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat the father of Jehoram, Jehoram the father of Uzziah, Uzziah the father of Jotham, Jotham the father of Ahaz, Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, Manasseh the father of Amon, Amon the father of Josiah, and Josiah the father of Jeconiah and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon. After the exile to Babylon: Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel, Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, Abiud the father of Eliakim, Eliakim the father of Azor, Azor the father of Zadok, Zadok the father of Akim, Akim the father of Eliud, Eliud the father of Eleazar,...

Scripture continued following reflection.



Fourth Sunday of Advent

Forefeast of the Nativity of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ

In this scripture reading describing Christ's birth, Matthew first gives Christ's genealogy. This listing of names reminds us of the importance of connections, especially the deep connections we have with both the Jewish people and the Christians who live in the Holy Land today.

Abraham was the father of the Hebrews, and David was Israel's greatest king. Christ was descended from them through his mother Mary. Today Christians in the Holy Land live among the Jewish people in Israel and in the West Bank under the Israeli occupation. These verses remind us of the original connection between our two faiths and the importance of maintaining that bond from both religious and practical standpoints. Our Christian heritage includes Jewish people, and the fate of Christianity in the Holy Land greatly depends on their government. Our prayer for peace should include healing the frayed connection between our two peoples.

We must also pray for the strength and patience of the Christians in the Holy Land today who represent our connection to the land where Christ was born and are the living witness of our faith there. Because of the difficulties caused by living under occupation, many Christians are leaving. We pray for peace so that they may stay in their homes and jobs and continue to be the living stones in the land of Christ's birth.

-Marilyn Rouvelas, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America

Scripture Continued

... Eleazar the father of Matthan, Matthan the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.

-Matthew 1:1-16 (NIV)

Prayer

Holy God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, ever faithful to your promises and ever close to your Church: the earth rejoices in hope of the Savior's coming and looks forward with longing to his return at the end of time. Prepare our hearts and remove the sin that hinders us from feeling the joy and hope that his presence will bestow. May we rediscover Your image within our hearts and live in its peace for all days. Unto You be all honor and glory now and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

-Greek Orthodox Prayer of Preparation for the Nativity

For Meditation

Am I praying for healing *in the hearts* of all the people in this conflict? Does that prayer include asking that all parties will be able to forgive as Christ asked us to do? Do I understand and respect the common, positive religious connections the Abrahamic religions share?



In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to his own town to register.

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "*Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.*" Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.*"

-Luke 2:1-14 (NIV)



Christmas

I have made the trip between Nazareth and Bethlehem many times. The route that Mary and Joseph travelled has changed little in two millennia. Even much of the landscape remains the same: a few broad plains and miles of terraced hillsides.

By foot and donkey it is a journey of a week. By car, in good times, it is less than three hours. But the route passes from Nazareth in Israel, south for several miles, then enters the West Bank. And these are not good times. For many the journey is impossible now. Israeli military orders bar most Israeli citizens from entering the West Bank. The orders also prevent all but a few Palestinians from entering Israel. With few exceptions, the journey is only possible for foreign visitors, especially the Holy Land tourists who pass up and down the ancient highway in large, luxurious buses.

On a tour there may be little time to reflect, as the guide offers an almost continuous narrative. Mary and Joseph would have had much time for thought as they passed through the lonely stretches. Even today solitary travelers have time for reflection, prompted in part by disturbing sights along the way: refugee camps, the barbed wire perimeters of Israeli settlements, glimpses of the separation barrier that cuts in and out of the West Bank.

For Mary and Joseph and for us many of the thoughts along the way must be anxious and fearful. Times are uncertain. Powerful forces extend their influence, changing ordinary lives and engendering bitterness. Violence is never far away.

Yet at journey's end is the angels' message: "Fear not. God is with us. God's rule is peace." Looking north from Bethlehem to Jerusalem, I hear the angels' message merge with the words of Isaiah: "Comfort ye, my people. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem and cry unto her that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned."

We are called to do God's work in the world. We must speak comfort, pardon, and peace to all of God's people in the Holy Land.

-Jim Fine, Friends Committee on National Legislation

Prayer

May the celebration of this season carry me through what God calls me to do, and may the joy that I find in Jesus be ever in my heart to share with the world. Amen

For Meditation

How has this year's journey to Christmas changed me? And in what ways am I open to the ongoing work of God in all aspects of my life?

