

PAX CHRISTI USA COMMUNITY ADVENT SERVICE – week 4

Fourth week of Advent – [Readings are from Monday, Dec. 19](#)

Welcome

Opening song

Singer will be the only one unmuted but feel free to sing along wherever you are!

Lighting of candles on the Advent wreath

One of the participants in tonight's service will light the Advent candles on behalf of us all. We invite everyone on the call to light their own candles wherever they are.

First reading: From the book of Judges...

There was a certain man from Zorah, of the clan of the Danites, whose name was Manoah. His wife was barren and had borne no children. An angel of God appeared to the woman and said to her, "Though you are barren and have had no children, yet you will conceive and bear a son. Now, then, be careful to take no wine or strong drink and to eat nothing unclean. As for the son you will conceive and bear, no razor shall touch his head, for this boy is to be consecrated to God from the womb. It is he who will begin the deliverance of Israel from the power of the Philistines."

The woman went and told her husband, "One came to me in the appearance of an angel of God, terrible indeed. I did not ask where from, nor did this one tell me their name. But they said to me, 'You will be with child and will bear a son. So take neither wine nor strong drink, and eat nothing unclean. For the boy shall be consecrated to God from the womb, until the day of his death.'"

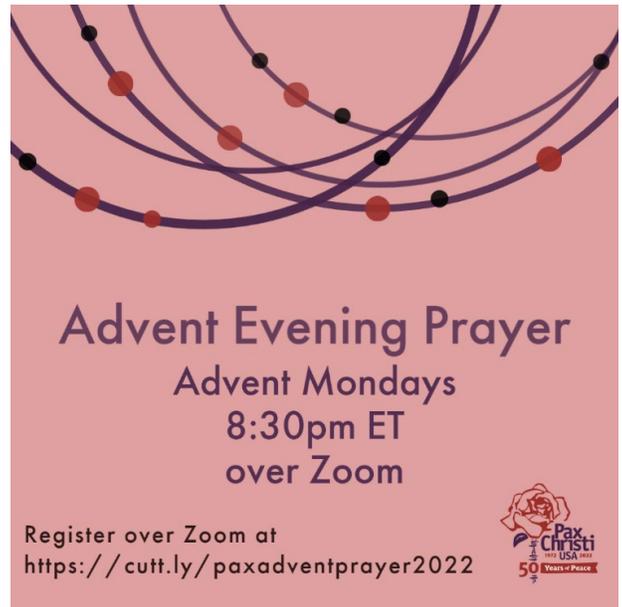
The woman bore a son and named him Samson. The boy grew up and God blessed him; the Spirit of God stirred him.

The word of God.
THANKS BE TO GOD.

Gospel reading: From the gospel of Luke...

In the days of Herod, King of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah of the priestly division of Abijah; his wife was from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. Both were righteous in the eyes of God, observing all the commandments and ordinances blamelessly. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren and both were advanced in years.

Once when he was serving as priest in his division's turn before God, according to the practice of the priestly service, he was chosen by lot to enter the sanctuary to burn incense. Then, when the whole assembly of the people was praying outside at the hour of the incense offering, the angel of God appeared to him, standing at the right of the altar of incense. Zechariah was troubled by what he saw, and fear came upon him.



But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, because your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall name him John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the sight of God. He will drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother’s womb, and he will turn many of the children of Israel to their God. He will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah to turn the hearts of parents toward children and the disobedient to the understanding of the righteous, to prepare a people fit for God.”

Then Zechariah said to the angel, “How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years.” And the angel said to him in reply, “I am Gabriel, who stand before God. I was sent to speak to you and to announce to you this good news. But now you will be speechless and unable to talk until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled at their proper time.”

Meanwhile the people were waiting for Zechariah and were amazed that he stayed so long in the sanctuary. But when he came out, he was unable to speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He was gesturing to them but remained mute.

Then, when his days of ministry were completed, he went home.

After this time his wife Elizabeth conceived, and she went into seclusion for five months, saying, “So has God done for me at a time when God has seen fit to take away my disgrace before others.”

The gospel of our God.
PRAISE TO YOU LORD JESUS CHRIST.

A reflection from this year’s Advent-Christmas reflection booklet, by Annie Killian, OP.

“Though you are barren and have had no children, yet you will conceive and bear a son.” (Jgs 13:3)

Today we meet two childless women, Elizabeth and Manoah’s wife, both of whom suffer the shame of being called barren. Through no fault of their own, they would have been viewed as unproductive members of their society because they could not contribute to the growth of their families. From the Gospel reading, we know that Zechariah and Elizabeth prayed to have this shame lifted – and God heard. These barren women remind me of the many people in our society today who are left out of our economy and deprived of dignified work, often due to the stigma associated with different physical abilities, a history of incarceration or addiction, or mental illness. Without employment and access to resources like housing and healthcare, these neighbors find themselves unable to provide for their families. We trust that God hears the cries of those who want their children and families to flourish. As peacemakers, we are called to build communities where all people have opportunities to contribute as they are able, to receive the support they need, and to be valued no matter what. Our work for justice bears fruit whenever our collective time, energy and treasure goes toward meeting basic needs, enhancing quality of life, and creating a more sustainable economy. May we become messengers of the Good News that God promises a future full of flourishing for the whole of Earth community..

Where do you see members of your community being made to feel barren or disgraced? How can you act to secure equitable access to housing, employment, education and healthcare for families at the margins of the U.S. economy?

Silent reflection

We invite you to quietly reflect on tonight's reading and the question: **Where do you see members of your community being made to feel barren or disgraced? How can you act to secure equitable access to housing, employment, education and healthcare for families at the margins of the U.S. economy?** After our prayer service is over, we encourage you—if you are with others—to share your answer to tonight's question. If you aren't with others but would like to share in a small group after tonight's prayer, we'll send everyone who stays on the call into breakout rooms with a few other people to share for about 15 minutes immediately following the prayer service.

(In preparation for the Prayers of the Faithful, feel free to enter into the chat any prayers you have that you want those of us on this call to lift up over the coming week.)

Prayers of the faithful

Our response is: God of peace, hear our prayer.

Closing prayer (by Howard Thurman)

When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the kings and princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flock,
The work of Christmas begins:
To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,
To release the prisoner,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among others,
To make music in the heart.

Amen.

(In 1-2 minutes everyone who wants to stay on the call will be sent to breakout rooms to discuss tonight's reading, reflection and Advent question. Breakout rooms will automatically close after 15 minutes.)