

PAX CHRISTI USA COMMUNITY ADVENT SERVICE – week 3

Third week of Advent – Readings are from Wednesday, Dec. 20

Welcome

As we have been traveling through Advent together, we have been observing the request of the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, Cardinal Pizzaballa, who asked that during this time of war, we “focus more on the spiritual meaning of Christmas” and forego any “unnecessarily festive activities.” We encourage one another to “advocate, pray, and contribute generously … for the relief of the victims of this war and for those in dire need,” as the Cardinal has asked.

Instead of opening with a song as we have done in the past, in honor of foregoing any particularly festive activities, we begin tonight in silence, holding tenderly all those who are in danger and grieving, and praying fervently for the Advent of peace in our world today.

—Silence—

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 Isaiah...

God spoke to Ahaz: Ask for a sign from your God; let it be deep as the nether world, or high as the sky!

But Ahaz answered, "I will not ask! I will not tempt my God!"

Then Isaiah said: Listen, O house of David! Is it not enough for you to weary each other, must you also weary my God? Therefore, God will give you this sign: the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall name him Emmanuel.

The word of God.

THANKS BE TO GOD.

Gospel reading: From the gospel of Luke...

In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming to her, he said, "Hail, full of grace! God is with you."



But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and God will give him the throne of David his ancestor, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his reign there will be no end."

But Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?"

And the angel said to her in reply, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God."

The gospel of our God.

PRAISE TO YOU LORD JESUS CHRIST.

A reflection from the 2014 Advent-Christmas reflection booklet, by Pax Christi USA Teacher of Peace Fr. Joe Nangle, ofm.

Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus ... God will give him the throne of David his ancestor, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his reign there will be no end. (Lk 1:31-33)

The Annunciation story in today's Gospel reminds us again of God's preferential option for the poor. An obscure village in an occupied country — far from the centers of 1st Century Roman imperialism — and a young unmarried woman provide the setting and the principal actor for the greatest event in human history. Liberation will come not from the great and powerful ones of the earth but through a poor Jewish girl and her Son whose "reign will have no end."

So it is twenty centuries later that people of the Gospel and many others of great good will cling to this same vision: economic and racial justice must finally emerge from "below," from the "little ones," in particular, from those whose rights are denied. And if the privileged of the world wish to join the struggle for equality and the right order of things, we shall necessarily have to place ourselves on the side of those who strive to overcome the oppressions which enslave them.

This is not the prevailing wisdom of our times. Yet, today's Gospel points to a logic which says that we who are not poor, oppressed, or marginalized can help in the struggle to overcome these evils by doing what Pope Francis urges in his wonderful Pastoral Letter, *The Joy of the Gospel*: "Our commitment does not consist ... in activities or programs of promotion and assistance ... Only on the basis of ... real and sincere closeness can we properly accompany the poor on their path to liberation." (*The Joy of the Gospel*, #199).

Silent reflection

We invite you to quietly reflect on tonight's reading and this question: **From whom and where do you see the liberation of God being born into our world today?**

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 justice, hear our prayer.

Closing prayer: A Prayer for Illumination, by Katie Reimer

God of Life,

We come to you with feelings of despair at all that is broken around us. Our world is suffering. Our Palestinian siblings are surrounded on every side by people and systems bent on their destruction. We sit here in the United States, feeling angry at the ways our own country is solidifying the annihilation of Palestine. Feeling helpless as we watch their suffering from afar. The sun has vanished. The moon refuses to shine. Hope is falling.

Open our hearts and minds to what you are doing in the midst of this brokenness. Help us to see the ways you are shaking the foundations of all that destroys life. Give us the stamina to stay awake, to watch and to wait for you. Grant us wisdom and courage to participate in the ways that you are moving to restore life. 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.)