

Pax Christi USA
Weekly Advent prayer service
December 23, 2024, fourth week of Advent

WELCOME

We remember Pax Christi members and friends who have died recently, especially [Sister Ida Berresheim, CSJ](#), a long time volunteer with Annunciation House in El Paso; [Donna Toliver Grimes](#); and [Fr. Joe Nangle, OFM](#). May they and all the souls of the faithful departed rest in peace.

Opening song

Lighting of candles on the Advent wreath

First reading

[A reading from the book of Micah](#)

Thus says the Lord: You, Bethlehem-Ephratha, too small to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel; whose origin is from of old, from ancient times.

Therefore the Lord will give them up, until the time when she who is to give birth has borne, and the rest of his kindred shall return to the children of Israel.

He shall stand firm and shepherd his flock by the strength of the Lord, in the majestic name of the Lord, his God; and they shall remain, for now his greatness shall reach to the ends of the earth; he shall be peace.

The word of God.

Gospel reading

[A reading from the gospel of Luke](#)

Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.

When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled."

The Gospel of our God.



Reflection

Tonight we'll share an excerpt from [an address Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa OFM gave to the German Bishops' Conference on September 25, 2024:](#)

*From Cardinal Pizzaballa: "... The Church will not be able to solve the major political problems of the Middle East and the Holy Land. But ... she is not giving up on remaining in the Holy Land, speaking a word of truth and reconciliation and promoting an action of help and closeness to all. I am convinced that we must direct our steps along such a path. For the prophecy of peace to become a reality, it is essential to educate ourselves to respect, encounter, dialog and forgiveness. Everyone, Jews, Muslims and Christians, must first and foremost be credible witnesses of hope because they are convinced of God's goodness towards all people. One cannot live without hope. Today there is more fear than hope. Fear is confronted with the weapons of faith and prayer. This is the time for hope. I believe that the antidote to violence and despair, wherever it comes from, is to create hope, to educate for hope and peace. Schools and universities have a key role to play here: this is where we must begin to educate people for peace and nonviolence, i.e. to believe, to know and appreciate each other and, above all, to meet each other, which unfortunately is not happening at the moment. Rather, the direction is the opposite: to distance ourselves from each other. Being prophets of peace means focusing our attention on the drama of both peoples, Israeli and Palestinian. We must learn to love both, to see them as neighbors and friends. Only in this way will walls fall and new bridges be built, capable of, [as Pope Francis says in *Fratelli Tutti*,] 'a love that transcends the boundaries of geography and space.'" (Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, No. 1).*

Silent reflection

- With whom and where do you need to build bridges today?

Prayers of the faithful - Our response is, "God of justice, hear our prayer."

- Use the chat box on Zoom to share prayers that you want us to lift up over the coming week.

Closing prayer - written by Rose Marie Berger

*God of Comfort, send your Spirit to encompass
all those whose lives
are torn apart by violence and death in Israel and
Palestine.
You are the Advocate of the oppressed
and the One whose eye is on the sparrow.
Let arms reach out in healing, rather than
aggression.
Let hearts mourn rather than militarize.*

*God of Justice, give strength to those whose long
work for a just peace might seem fruitless now.
Strengthen their resolve.
Do not let them feel alone. Show us how to*

*support their work and bolster their courage.
Guide religious leaders to model unity and
reconciliation across lines of division.
Guide political leaders to listen with their
hearts as they seek peace and pursue it. Help
all people choose the rigorous path of just
peace and disavow violence.*

*God of Love,
we lift up Palestine and Israel — its people, its
land, its creatures. War is a monster that
consumes everything in its path.
Peace is a gift shared at meals of memory with
Christians, Muslims, and Jews.*

Let us burn incense, not children. Let us break bread, not bodies.

*Let us plant olive groves, not cemeteries.
We beg for love and compassion to prevail
on all your holy mountains.*

*God of Hope, we lift up the cities of the region:
Gaza City and Tel Aviv,
Ramallah and Ashkelon, Deir El Balah and Sderot,
so long divided, yet so filled with life and creativity.
Come again to breathe peace on your peoples
that all may recognize you.*

*God of Mercy,
even now work on the hearts of combatants
to choose life over death, reconciliation over
retaliation, restoration over destruction. Help us
resist antisemitism in all its forms, especially in
our own churches. All people, Israelis and
Palestinians, deserve to live in peace and unafraid,*

Amen

Closing song

After the service, those who would like may stay on and meet in breakout rooms for about 15 minutes to discuss the reflection and today's Advent questions.



with a right to determine their future together.

*God of the Nations, let not one more child or elder
be sacrificed on altars of political expediency.
Keep safe all people from unjust leaders who
would exploit vulnerability for their own distorted
ends.*

*Give wise discernment to those making decisions
to pursue peace.*

*Provide them insight into fostering well-being,
freedom, and thriving for all.*

*Teach all of us to resolve injustices with
righteousness, not rockets.*

*Guard our hearts against retaliation, and give us
hearts for love alone.*

*Strengthen our faith in you, O God of All Flesh,
even when we don't have clear answers,
so that we may still offer ourselves nonviolently
for the cause of peace.*

Pax Christi USA

415 Michigan Avenue NE, Suite 340

Washington DC 20017

www.paxchristiusa.org

202-635-2741 info@paxchristiusa.org