

House of Bread

A Guided Advent Journey for Families



סחל תיב • Bethlehem • בית لحم

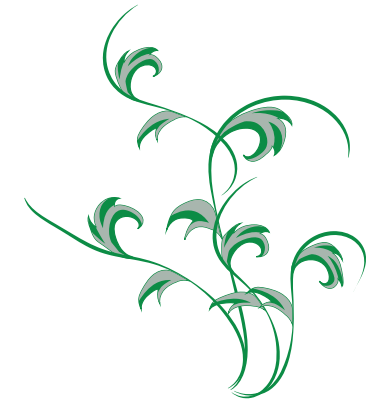
Prophecy Candle

Welcome to Week 1 of Advent 2020!

This week, we focus on



hope. We will look for hope in our homes, our families and our world. We will think about hope in another place, Bethlehem. The family activities for this week are designed to be done at your own pace and schedule.



Lovingly dedicated to the women of Bethlehem and their families.



A Prayer for Hope for all the children of God:

O Mystery as grand as the universe
O Mighty Force of all creation,
O Power beyond all our power,
You have come to us as an infant.
Vulnerable, fragile, beautiful.
You have come to us
in the midst of poverty,
powerlessness and longing.

Come again, O Promiser of Peace.
Come again, to the city of your birth
mired in fear, oppression and injustice.
Come again, where Children dream
of homes they have never seen.

Be born again among refugees.
Be born again in stables and homes.
Be born again in many cities and languages.
Be born again among nations.
Be born again in places of injustice.

Be born again a promise of hope,
a sign of love and joy to the world.
Be born again in our hearts,
that we too might be called
Makers of peace
and Children of God.

A Prayer for Hope when feeling despair:

“Dear God, please give me strength when
I am weak, love when I feel forsaken,
courage when I am afraid, wisdom when I
feel foolish, comfort when I am alone, hope
when I feel rejected, and peace when I am in
turmoil. Amen.”

Day 1 (November 29) - Advent Wreath Craft, Light one Candle

Reading Isaiah 40:3-5 Scripture:

A voice of one calling:

“In the wilderness prepare
the way for the Lord[a];
make straight in the desert
a highway for our God.[b]

4

Every valley shall be raised up,
every mountain and hill made low;
the rough ground shall become level,
the rugged places a plain.

5

And the glory of the Lord will be revealed,
and all people will see it together.

For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

Many people light advent wreaths as they wait for Christmas Day. The first candle is purple, and represents HOPE.

For families: What is something that gives you hope? Maybe a person or an animal you love? Draw a picture of something that makes you feel hopeful. This season of COVID has sometimes challenged our ability to feel hopeful. Where can hope be found for you, right here and now?



Day 2 (November 30th) - Wilderness Walk

Reading: Luke 3:1-6

3 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— **2** during the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. **3** He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. **4** As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet:

“A voice of one calling in the wilderness,
‘Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.

5 Every valley shall be filled in,
every mountain and hill made low.

The crooked roads shall become straight,
the rough ways smooth.

6 And all people will see God’s salvation.”[a]

For families: Read the passage above together, and go for a family walk. Think about what parts of the walk are easy (sidewalks and warm boots) and what parts are harder (is it cold outside or windy?) If you were lost outside in the cold, what would it feel like to hear a voice of hope? Take time for a walk this week. Read this passage from Luke beforehand. When you return, make some time to reflect on your walk in the wilderness, and jot down some notes here.

Day 3 (December 1st) - It's been done before

In the days of Mary and Joseph, times were uncertain, just as they are today. In order to fulfill the census, they traveled 80 or 90 miles through desert and over mountains, facing obstacles from Roman occupying forces and attacks by robbers and even by wild animals. They did this all while Mary was pregnant with Jesus, who has brought hope to billions of people since his birth. Jesus was born into a family forced to flee their homeland because of factors they could not control. In fact, he lived the first few years of his life in Egypt, as it was too dangerous for the Holy Family to stay in Palestine. Unfortunately, such disruptions to life are not anything new to humanity. As long as there has been war and conflict, families have had to uproot their lives to seek a better future for themselves and their children.

Reading: Matthew 2:13-23

The Escape to Egypt

13 When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him."

14 So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, **15** where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son."^[a]

16 When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. **17** Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

18

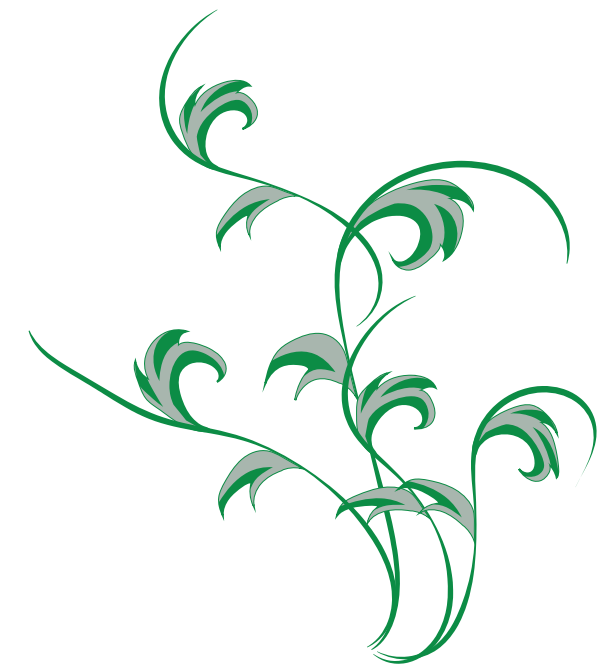
"A voice is heard in Ramah,
weeping and great mourning,
Rachel weeping for her children
and refusing to be comforted,
because they are no more."^[b]

Spotlight:

There are 3 refugee camps around Bethlehem which are home to thousands of Palestinians displaced by the crisis. Camp Aida has adapted to changes throughout the years and they have a very robust youth center where families can paint, do music and dance, and even do circus! Often refugees hold onto hope that tomorrow will be better, and they will be saved.

Activity:

Imagine you have to leave your home because of conflict. What would you take? How would you find hope throughout your journey and while you were away from home?



Day 4 (December 2nd): Finding Hope in the Dark

Listen - In the Bleak Midwinter

Reading: 2 Corinthians 12:9-10

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

When life is hard, or we see and experience suffering it is hard to find hope for a better tomorrow.

Activity:

Write down 10 things that provide you with hope:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)
- 5)
- 6)
- 7)
- 8)
- 9)
- 10)

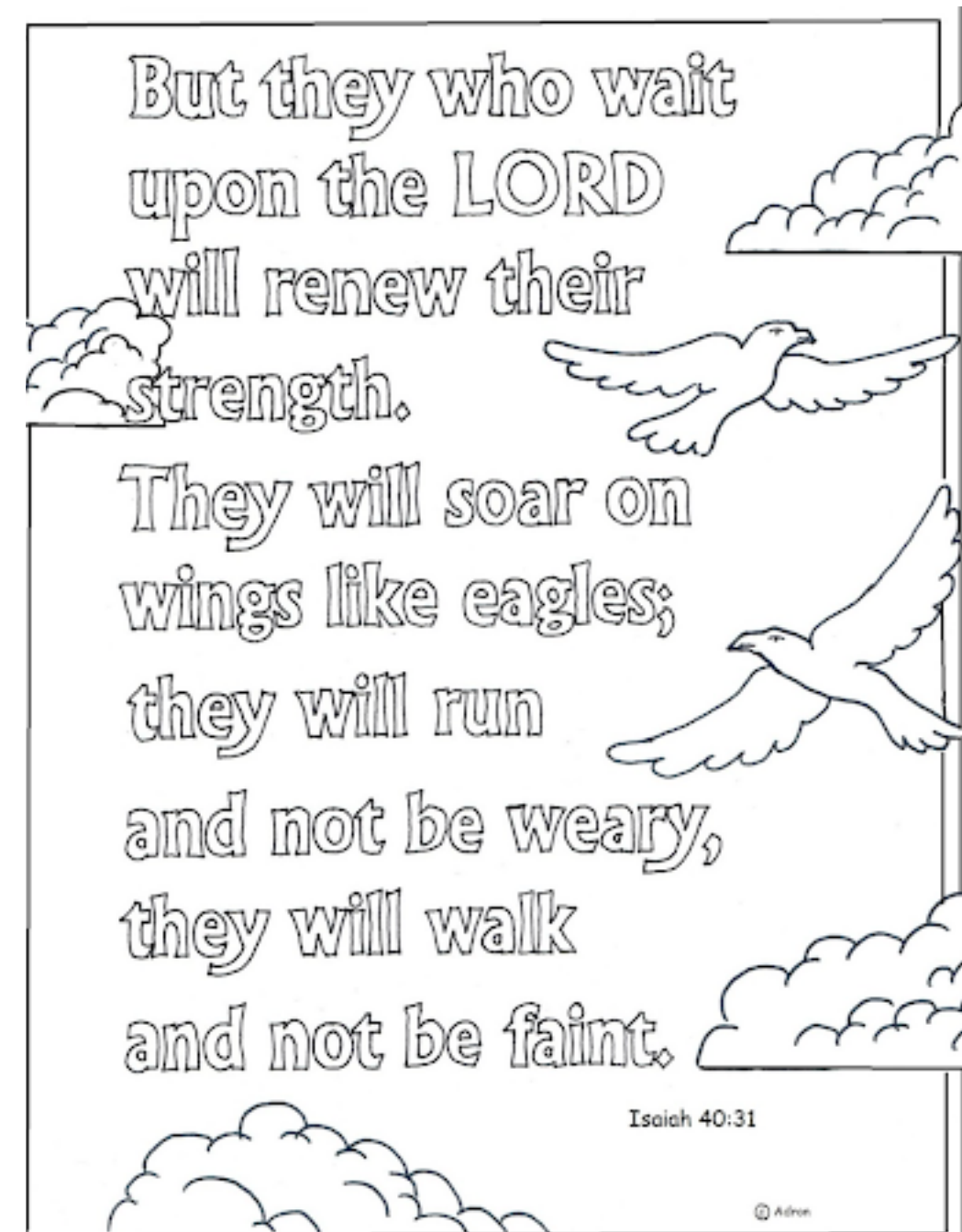
Day 5 (December 3rd)

Reading: Isaiah 40:31

but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

Activity:

Coloring page



Day 6 (December 4th)

Reading: Jeremiah 29:11

11 For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

Activity:

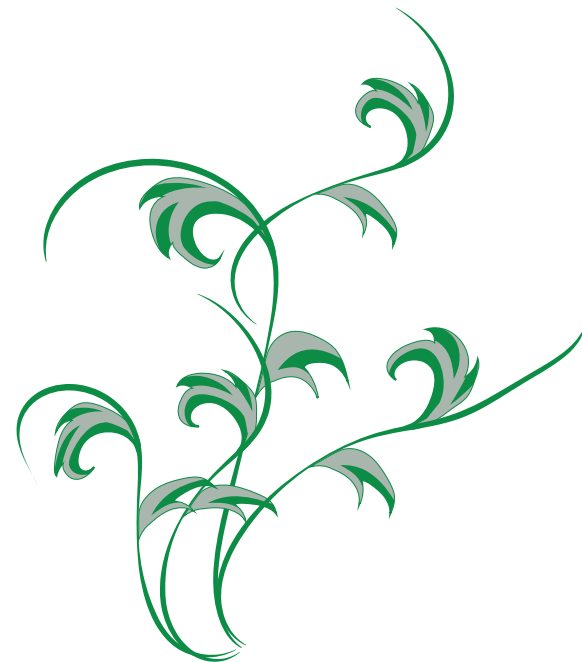
Movie - The Grinch who Stole Christmas?

Questions:

What was God's Plan for the Grinch?

What about this movie inspires hope?

How can we find hope like Cindy-loo Who?



Day 7 (December 5th): A Hope for Tomorrow

Reading:

So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."

Activity:

Baking Bread

Humanity has survived on bread for thousands of years. In the same way the Lord fills our spiritual needs, bread fills our physical needs. Even in this age people still struggle to feed their families. House of Bread in Bethlehem (part of the Makan Initiative) aims to feed, train and employ women who are struggling with this basic need for a variety of reasons, including domestic abuse, loss of income due to COVID, and others.

We can connect with our brothers and sisters in Bethlehem by spending time making your own bread! In Bethlehem, yeast (what makes bread puffy) is not easily available, so most families make delicious flat bread.



Flat Bread

Recipe:

2 cups (260 grams) all-purpose flour
1 1/2 teaspoons baking powder
1 teaspoon fine sea salt
2 tablespoons olive oil
1 teaspoon pure maple syrup or sugar
3/4 cup (175 ml) cold water
Vegetable oil for cooking

Make Dough

In a large bowl, whisk the flour, baking powder, and salt together until well blended. Make a well in the middle of the flour mixture, and then add olive oil, maple syrup, and most of the water (saving a few tablespoons to add later as necessary). Switch to a rubber spatula or spoon and stir the wet ingredients into the flour mixture. If the dough seems dry, add the remaining water. When the dough comes together, transfer to a floured work surface and knead 5 to 10 times until smooth. Cover with a clean dish cloth and leave for 10 minutes.

Cook Flatbreads

Divide the dough into six equal pieces. Dust each piece in flour and roll into a disc that's about 1/4-inch thick. (Rolling thinner will make thinner bread that's less soft in the middle. Rolling thicker will make thicker, fluffier bread.)

Add one to two tablespoons of oil to a skillet placed over medium heat. When the oil looks shimmery, add a flatbread (or more if they fit), and cook until golden brown on one side, flip and cook until golden brown on the second side, 1 to 2 minutes on each side.

Transfer cooked flatbread to a plate, cover with a clean dish towel to keep warm, and then continue with the remaining flatbreads. If the skillet looks dry, add a little more oil before continuing.

When eating your bread, think of the Hope that the birth of Jesus brought to Bethlehem, and the world. Try this mealtime prayer of Thanksgiving.

*"In a world where so many are hungry,
may we eat this food with humble hearts;
in a world where so many are lonely,
May we share this friendship with joyful
hearts."*



<http://www.liturgybeyondwords.com/blog/2015/11/21/coloring-pages>

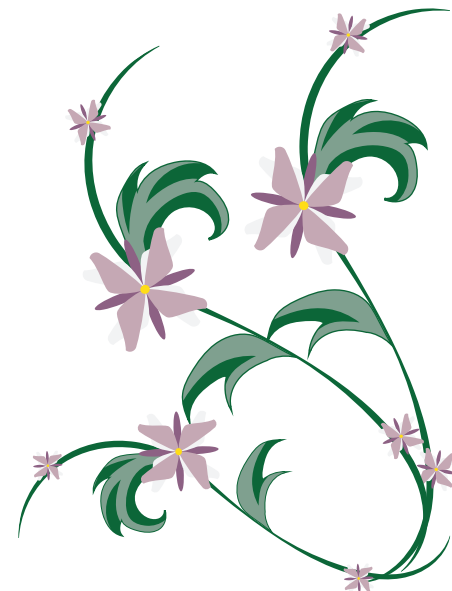
Day 8 (December 6) Start of week two - Bethlehem Candle



Faith - This week we are reminded of the fact that God is faithful to those who trust and have faith. Have you had a moment where you had to trust in good faith that life would work out the way it needed to? Think of a time that was unsettling, yet at the end of the experience God came through faithfully and delivered you from times of trial.

A prayer for faith:

This Advent-time
we remember Mary and Joseph,
giving thanks for their faithfulness,
courage and obedience,
stepping out into the unknown
in the strength of your Spirit,
playing their part
in the fulfillment of your plan
to bring your prodigal people
home again.
We pray that their example
might be the pattern of our lives,
that when your gentle whisper
breaks through the clamor of this world
and into our small corner,
we might be ready to listen,
and having listened, to act.



Day 9 (November 7th) - The historical context of Jesus' birth.

Reading: Psalm 39:7

And now, O Lord, for what do I wait? My hope is in you.

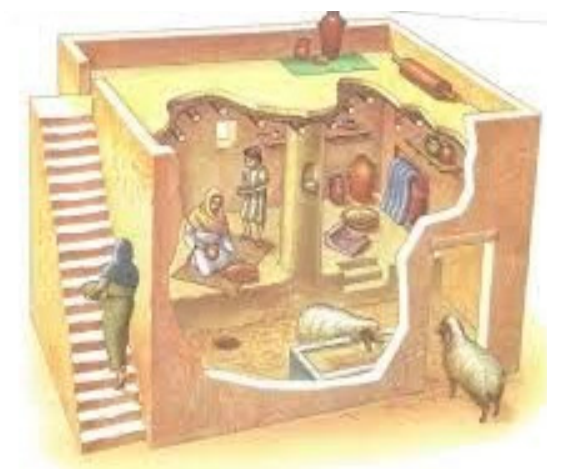
As we, as a society begin to re-learn our history and the ways some have been oppressed through systematic racism, we must also look at the Bible in the same way. Many Bible stories have been told in a distorted, Western way; for example, Jesus is portrayed as a white man, and Mary as a fully grown woman. Nowadays, it is well known that Jesus was a Palestinian Jew with darker skin, and Mary was around 14 when she gave birth to Jesus. We must apply critical thinking to the story of Jesus' birth.

In Bethlehem, large trees are not part of the natural ecological landscape! Buildings are built of beautiful stones, and in ancient Israel, the "stable" would be attached to the main house. Understanding the historical context of what Bethlehem actually looks like provides a richer connection to the story of Jesus.

Imagine your family is living in Bethlehem, another family comes to your house, the woman heavily pregnant and needing a safe place to give birth to her child. Lots of people are visiting the town, and the only place for her to stay is with the animals. In our modern stories, Mary is often depicted being shunned and not given any food or proper care. In fact, the people who lived where she was staying probably helped her through childbirth and provided all that they could to keep their guests comfortable. Middle Eastern culture is quite hospitable, and most hosts will go above and beyond to make their guests welcome.

Activity:

When you have faced a hard time, what small gestures of others have given you hope to continue through and become stronger.



Day 10 (December 8th) - Prayer - keeping faith

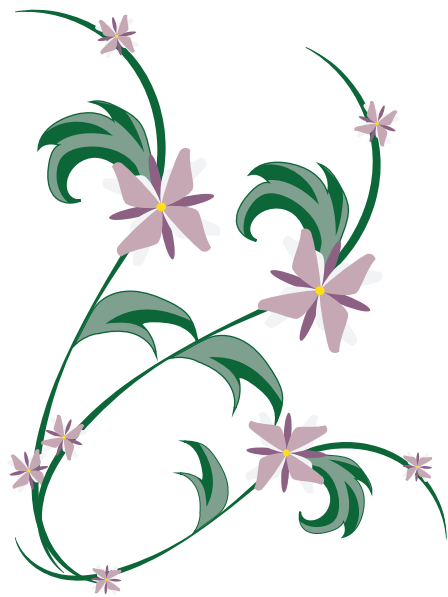
Reading: Hebrews 11:1-3

- 1 Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.
- 2 This is what the ancients were commended for.
- 3 By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

For families: Of our five senses (sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste), we often rely on sight the most; we see the trail we are hiking on, we see the snow outside and know to put on a coat. But there is much in our faith we cannot see. Close your eyes and let someone in your family read the passage below. Take some time to hear from each person in your family about something you believe, but don't see. Advent 2020 - There is so much that we can't see or know about the future. Sometimes we try to see what will happen. We try to picture it but we can't, and words fail as well.

Activity:

Read the above 2-3 times, and take some time to write about your experience reading this. How can something be made from things that are not visible?



Day 11 (December 9th)- Oh Little Town of Bethlehem

Reading: The Story of the Hymn

Here is the story of how the hymn "Oh, Little Town of Bethlehem" was written as recalled by the author, Phillips Brooks:

It was the sight of Bethlehem itself, one feels very sure, that gave Phillips Brooks the impulse to write this hymn. He was then rector of the Church of the Holy Trinity, in Philadelphia, and had spent a year's vacation traveling in Europe and the East. "After an early dinner, we took our horses and rode to Bethlehem," so he wrote home in Christmas week of **1865**. "It was only about two hours when we came to the town, situated on an eastern ridge of a range of hills, surrounded by its terraced gardens. It is a good-looking town, better built than any other we have seen in Palestine. . . . Before dark, we rode out of town to the field where they say the shepherds saw the star. It is a fenced piece of ground with a cave in it (all the Holy Places are caves here), in which, strangely enough, they put the shepherds. The story is absurd, but somewhere in those fields we rode through the shepherds must have been. . . . As we passed, the shepherds were still "keeping watch over their flocks or leading them home to fold." Mr. Brooks returned in September, **1866**, and it must have been while meditating at home over what he had seen that the carol took shape in his mind. The late Dr. Arthur Brooks assured the writer that it was not written until **1868**.

In the programme of the Christmas service of the Sunday-school of the Church of the Holy Trinity in that year the carol was first printed, and it was sung to the music written for it by Mr. Lewis H. Redner.

Activity:

When listening to the song, use the space below to draw what you imagine Bethlehem looks like, in the modern day or when Jesus was born.

Day 12 (December 10th) - What does faith look like to you?

Reading: Luke 1:46-56

46 And Mary said:

“My soul glorifies the Lord

47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

48 for he has been mindful

of the humble state of his servant.

From now on all generations will call me blessed,

49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me—

holy is his name.

50 His mercy extends to those who fear him,

from generation to generation.

51 He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;

he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.

52 He has brought down rulers from their thrones

but has lifted up the humble.

53 He has filled the hungry with good things

but has sent the rich away empty.

54 He has helped his servant Israel,

remembering to be merciful

55 to Abraham and his descendants forever,

just as he promised our ancestors.”

Our Scripture today reflects back to Mary’s faith in God. When the angel Gabriel visited her, Mary doubted that she was the one to bring the Savior to Earth! In order to be convinced, she went to see her cousin Elizabeth, who became pregnant when she was older because of her faith in God. In this scripture we see Mary coming to terms with her destiny, and how her faith in God found God’s favor. She echoes back to Abraham, called to leave his home and to travel into a land unknown. We can practice Lectio Divina, an ancient practice meant to reflect on the words God speaks to us in the moment. First read the scripture out loud, then sit for 1-5 minutes in reflection, then read the prayer again and contemplate what comes to mind. This can be repeated several times for a deep experience into faith.

*“Mary, Mother of God
And Mother of Mercy
Pray for us”*

Day 13 (December 11th) - Chanukkah

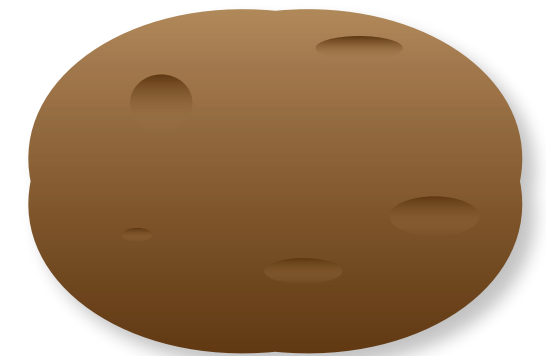
Today is the start of Chanukkah, which is a Jewish celebration of the rededication of the Temple, when Jews were again allowed to worship, after being excluded, and when a single day’s supply of oil for lamps miraculously lasted for eight days.

In the 160’s BC, Ancient Israel was under foreign control with lots of strict rules limiting the Jewish people from worshipping freely. The Jewish people knew that forbidding people to be who they are inside and limiting people’s access to worship destroys culture and takes away people’s sense of identity. In response, Jewish leaders rebelled against the oppressive government! They took control of the Temple to re-dedicate it to God. According to legend, when the Jews took back the temple, there was only enough oil to keep the lanterns lit for one night. They prayed and had faith that God would provide to keep them safe. By a miracle of faith, their lanterns stayed alight for 8 nights.

Today modern Jews light the menorah for 8 nights and give gifts to celebrate the victory of the temple! Another common practice is to eat food fried in oil (yum!) that gives thanks to the oil that kept the lanterns on. A popular (a delicious) recipe is for latkes, which are fried potato pancakes. Try out this recipe, while eating them recall the story of how God saved the Jewish people in the Temple for 8 long, cold nights.

Activity:

Making classic Latkes



Classic Latkes: The Easiest, Simplest Method

YIELD: Makes 12 (4-inch) latkes

Ingredients

1 1/2 pounds baking potatoes (3 to 4 potatoes)
1/2 medium yellow onion, peeled and quartered
1 large egg
2 tablespoons matzo meal or unseasoned dry breadcrumbs
1 teaspoon kosher salt
1/8 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1 cup canola oil or chicken schmaltz (rendered chicken fat), or a combination of both
Applesauce and sour cream, for serving

Equipment

Measuring cups and spoons
Knife and cutting board
Food processor with shredding blade
Cheesecloth or clean, thin kitchen towel
Wooden spoon
Mixing bowl
10- to 12-inch cast iron skillet
Fish spatula
Fork
Paper towels
2 rimmed baking sheets
Wire cooling rack

Instructions

Heat the oven and fit one baking sheet with paper towels and another with a cooling rack. Arrange a rack in the middle of the oven and heat to 200°F. Line 1 rimmed baking sheet with a double layer of paper towels. Fit a wire cooling rack into another baking sheet. Set both aside.

Prepare the potatoes. Scrub the potatoes well, but do not peel. Cut each potato in half crosswise.

Grate potatoes and onion with a food processor. Grate the potatoes and onion using the shredding disk of a food processor.

Make a cheesecloth tourniquet and squeeze liquid from potato and onion. Transfer the grated potato and onion onto a large triple layer of cheesecloth. Gather the corners and tie around the handle of a wooden spoon. Dangle the bundle over a large bowl, then twist and squeeze the potatoes and onion as hard as you can until no more liquid comes out of the potatoes and onion shreds.

Pour off the liquid, but keep the potato starch. Give the liquid a few minutes to allow the potato starch to settle and then pour off and discard the liquid but leave the potato starch.

Toss the latke ingredients together with your fingers. Add the potatoes, onion, eggs, matzo meal or breadcrumbs, salt, and pepper to the bowl of starch. Mix with your fingers, making sure that the potato starch breaks up and is evenly distributed with the rest of the ingredients. Set batter aside for 10 minutes.

Heat the oil. Place the oil or schmaltz (or a combination of the two) in a large skillet so that when melted there is a depth of 1/4 inch (for a 10-inch skillet you'll need 1 cup of melted oil/schmaltz). Heat over medium-high heat until a piece of the latke mixture sizzles immediately.

Form latkes one at a time. Scoop 1/4 cup of the mixture onto a fish or flat spatula. Flatten with your fingers to a 4-inch patty.

Fry the latkes until golden on both sides. Slide the latke into the hot oil, using a fork to nudge the latke into the pan. Repeat until the pan is full but the latkes aren't crowded. Cook until deeply golden-brown, 4 to 5 minutes per side, adjusting the heat if necessary.

Drain the latkes. Transfer the latkes to a paper towel-lined baking sheet to drain for 2 minutes.

Serve with applesauce and sour cream or keep warm in the oven. Serve immediately with applesauce and sour cream, or transfer the latkes to the wire cooling rack set in the baking sheet and keep warm in the oven for up to 30 minutes while you continue cooking the rest of the latkes.

thekitchn.com



Day 14 (December 12th) - Walk

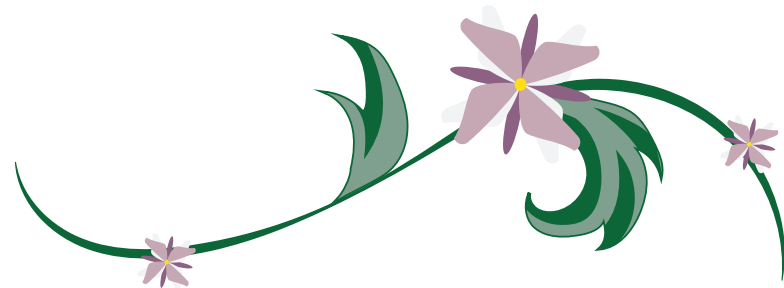
Reading: Corinthians 2:6-9

6 So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, **7** for we walk by faith, not by sight. **8** Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. **9** So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him.

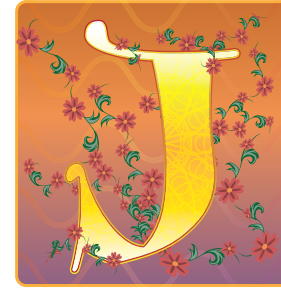
Activity:

Take some time today to enjoy God's Creation. While outside notice how God has created all of Earth to work together, birds being able to survive, thrive and fertilize the Earth. Even though it is in the middle of winter, there is still food! It is clear this year we are spending more time away from each other and the physical church, yet we are still part of the world and God's Creation. We might have possibly found that God connects with us beyond church walls. God is with us through good and bad times, whether we can actively see God in our life or not.

In your day today, spend time outdoors perhaps hiking, walking the dog or if you're lucky sledding. Notice God's presence and stay tuned to the fact we walk through life by faith not sight.



Day 15 (December 13th) - Third Candle - Joy - Shepherds Candle



oy - Today we celebrate Joy by lighting the pink candle. This candle connects us to the joy Jesus brought when he was born. We use pink as it symbolizes freshness and joy. This week we will look at Advent and Christmas Traditions from Anglicans, Armenian Orthodox and Lutherans living in Bethlehem today. Around 50% of the Christians in this area belong to a Orthodox Church, a majority of them Greek Orthodox but there are other branches, the rest is split among different Protestant denominations and Catholics.

Reading: Philippians 4:4-5

4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! **5** Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.

Activity:

Use today to find a moment of joy, perhaps some cleaning or decorating will bring the Christmas spirit.

Discuss with someone close to you how you have found joy in the past year, with family, friends or your church community!



Day 16 (December 14th) - Prayer - Psalm 25: 4-5 - Christmas in Armenia

Reading: Psalm 24: 4-5

4 Show me your ways, Lord,
teach me your paths.

5
Guide me in your truth and teach me,
for you are God my Savior,
and my hope is in you all day long.

Spotlight

As Orthodox Christians make up a majority of Christians in Bethlehem, it is important to remember they are not only our brothers and sisters in Christ, but are also an ancient denomination with beautiful and rich traditions. Orthodox Christianity is unique in the fact that it is not only a theologically unique branch of Christianity but also a cultural stronghold for those who practice it. There are several different sects of Orthodoxy such as Russian Orthodox, Armenian Orthodox and Greek Orthodox. Each share similar theological views but have captured the culture and spirit from where they originated from and that allows them to remain unique. Another interesting aspect of Orthodoxy is when Christmas is celebrated, while we celebrate on December 25th, they celebrate January 6th. The focus is not only on the physical birth of Christ, but also on the baptism he received. Orthodox ceremonies include a beautiful section of the liturgy (worship service) of commemorating Christ's baptism by baptizing a cross in Holy Water. Another tradition our brothers and sisters practice is blessing their house for the coming year, which is a tradition practiced around the world, though in recent years it's popularity has declined in America. Below is a short service to bless your home from The Book of Occasional Services.

The Blessing of a Home at Epiphany

V. God shall watch over your going out and your coming in.

R. From this time forth for ever more.

Let us pray.

O God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Light of the nations and the Glory of your people, bless (N & N) who dwell in this house. May it be for them a place of peace and health, that they may rejoice in the gifts and graces you have bestowed upon them and dedicate their talents for the good of those for whom your Christ came and gave his life, and who lives and reigns for ever and ever.

Amen.

People may mark the doorway with symbols in chalk blessed with this prayer:

Loving God, bless this chalk which you have created, that it may be helpful to your people; and grant that, through the invocation of your most Holy Name, we who use it in faith to write upon the door of our home the names of your holy ones Caspar, Melchior, and Balthazar, may receive health of body and protection of soul for all who dwell in or visit our home; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Traditionally, the chalking is done above the lintel and takes this form: 20+C+M+B+21 - The letters are the abbreviation for the Latin phrase "Christus mansionem benedicat" - "Christ bless this house" (A second meaning and mnemonic device is Caspar, Melchior, and Balthazar traditional names for the Magi). The + signs represent the cross, and 20-21 is the year.



Day 17 (December 15th) - A Lutheran Christmas

Reading: John 4: 7-12

7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. **8** Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. **9** In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. **10** In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. **11** Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. **12** No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

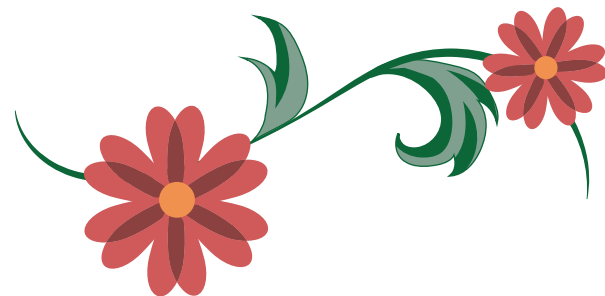
Spotlight

The main church in Bethlehem is the Church of the Nativity. It is shared by the Roman Catholic Church, Greek Orthodox Church, and the Armenian Apostolic Church. Lutherans also make up a large proportion of Bethlehem Christians, although they do not share in ownership of the Church of the Nativity. We can learn from them and see a glimpse of what Advent and Christmas look like for those in Bethlehem.

The Catholic Christmas Celebration starts with a large parade, beginning near Rachel's Tomb, and marching bands, carolers and various other groups join in along the route. At midnight, mass begins at the Church of the Nativity. Lutherans can celebrate with the parade, but will often opt to attend church at Christmas Lutheran Church. 13 days after, on January 6th another celebration with parades for the various Orthodox communities takes place.

Activity:

Check out Christmas Lutheran Church on Facebook to watch a live streamed service. Even though the service is in Arabic, you will see a lot of similarities to our Sunday worship.



Day 18 (December 16th) - Prayer for refugees / those oppressed

Reading: Psalm 137:4

4How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land?

5If I forget you, Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill.

6May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy.

Since the beginning of time, due to events out of peoples' control, families have had to leave their homes to find safety. We see this migration of people all over the world, but they want to hold on to their family and culture. Perhaps if you are of a certain descent you celebrate a holiday or other cultural event many of your friends may not take part in. When families are forced to leave their homes, often they want to return when it is safe for them.

Since 1948, the Jewish people have enjoyed international support in claiming a right to return to ancient Israel, even though there was not a large Jewish population there for 2,000 years. In those many centuries, other peoples, including particularly Palestinian Arabs, have flourished in this region, creating a rich culture, including the arts, beautiful crafts, and delicious food. The critical question that has traumatized the region and caused immeasurable death and suffering is, Should any one people native to this Holy Land, or any one religion in this land of many faiths, dominate and control any other? The area of what is thought of as ancient Israel or ancient Palestine is equally holy to Christians, Jews and Muslims.

There is clearly no easy solution to this grave problem, and there will probably not be one for quite a while. What we do know is that as Christians, we are called to love our neighbor as ourselves, to give freely and struggle for those in oppression. Often this involves considerable courage and the ability to listen to a side we have often ignored and to help anyone in need of basic human rights.

Day 19 (December 17th) - Music - An Arabic Christmas Carol

Below are lyrics to a popular carol, Laylat Al-Midad or, The Night of Christmas. This is sung around Christmas. Most residents of Bethlehem speak Arabic and English, a few also speak Hebrew and French. You can listen on-line if you search for it, or you can look at the lyrics below. Notice what is different from our traditional Christmas Carols, what is the focus? There is a bigger focus on “loving thy neighbor” and a desire for peace among all of God’s Children.

Refrain

On the night of Christmas ... Hatred will vanish
On the night of Christmas ... The Earth blooms
On the night of Christmas ... War is buried
On the night of Christmas ... Love is born

1. When we offer a glass of water to a thirsty person, we are in Christmas
When we clothe a naked person with a gown of love, we are in Christmas
When we wipe the tears from weeping eyes, we are in Christmas
When we cushion a hopeless heart with love, we are in Christmas

2. When I kiss a friend without hypocrisy, I am in Christmas
When the spirit of revenge dies in me, I am in Christmas
When hardness is gone from my heart, I am in Christmas
When my soul melts in the Being of God, I am in Christmas



Day 20 (December 18th) - Tour of the Church of the Nativity

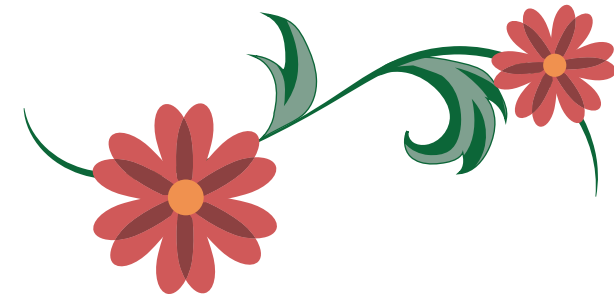
Reading: Jeremiah 23:5

“The days are coming,” declares the Lord,
“when I will raise up for David[a] a righteous Branch,
a King who will reign wisely
and do what is just and right in the land.”

Today we look at the accepted location of Jesus’ Birth. As stated earlier, it was unlikely Mary was left alone during Jesus’ birth, but what is likely is that the home she was staying in was attached to a natural cave. This was a very common and efficient use of the natural landscape, and some rural communities still do this!

In the year 330, Constantine, the first Christian Roman Emperor, sent his mother, Helena, to search for the exact place Jesus was born. Upon consulting Bethlehem locals, she declared a grotto (cave) to be the spot of Jesus’ birth! A church has stood there in various stages until the current church was established as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2012. How special it must be to worship in a place that millions of Christians throughout the centuries have held holy!

You can look at a couple tours explaining the history of the church and the current significance on Youtube, Drive Thru History and Our Daily Bread both have great videos on this Holy Site.



Day 21 (December 19th) - Walk

Reading: Luke 2: 4-5

4 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. **5** He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.

Activity:

Today we take our final walk into Bethlehem, just as Mary and Joseph did almost 2,000 years ago. Today, it may be a good idea to travel around and see some Christmas lights.



Day 22 (December 20th) - 4th Candle Christmas cookies



Peace - Today we light the candle of peace, this candle reminds us of the peace Jesus brought to the world, and the peace we find in God. Right now it is hard to see the peace Jesus brought, especially in the actual city of Bethlehem, which has been war torn for much of its history. You can see the peace Jesus brought in the people of Bethlehem though! The people of Bethlehem are some of the kindest people you will ever meet, bringing you into their home, going out of their way to ensure your safety and gladly sharing a meal with you. Today, we will bring part of that meal home while we make ma'amoul, a traditional date-filled cookie.

Verse:

Answer me when I call to you,
my righteous God.
Give me relief from my distress;
have mercy on me and hear my prayer.
How long will you people turn my glory into
shame?
How long will you love delusions and
seek false gods[b]?[c]
Know that the Lord has set apart his faithful
servant for himself;
the Lord hears when I call to him.

Tremble and[d] do not sin;
when you are on your beds,
search your hearts and be silent.
Offer the sacrifices of the righteous
and trust in the Lord.

Many, Lord, are asking, "Who will bring us
prosperity?"
Let the light of your face shine on us.
Fill my heart with joy
when their grain and new wine abound.

In peace I will lie down and sleep,
for you alone, Lord,
make me dwell in safety.



Ma'amoul Recipe

Ingredients

Spice Mix:

1/2 tablespoon ground cinnamon
1 1/4 teaspoons allspice
1/2 teaspoon ground mahlab
1/2 teaspoon ground nutmeg
1/4 teaspoon ground ginger
1/4 teaspoon ground anise
1/4 teaspoon ground fennel seed
1/4 teaspoon ground cloves

Date Filling:

3/4 pound date paste or pitted coarsely
chopped Medjool dates
2 tablespoons vegetable oil
1 1/2 teaspoons Spice Mix

Dough:

1 cup sugar
3/4 cup water
1/4 cup vegetable oil
3/4 cup clarified butter
4 cups all-purpose flour plus up to 4
tablespoons more for kneading
1/2 teaspoon instant yeast

Decoration:

1/4 cup powdered sugar

Instructions

Mix together the spices for the cake spice mix. You will only need 1 1/2 teaspoons of the spice mix for recipe; store the remaining spice mix in an airtight container at room temperature for up to 6 months.

To make the date filling, grind the dates and oil in a stand mixer fitted with a food grinding attachment (fine grind) or in a heavy-duty food processor. If using a stand mixer, alternate between adding

the dates and oil. If you're using a food processor, before you add any dates, rub oil on the blade and inside of the bowl. Once processed, oil your hands and knead the cake spice mix into the dates.

To make the dough, combine the sugar and water in a small saucepan over medium heat. Bring to a full, rolling boil (occasionally giving the pan a swirl); boil 1 minute and then turn off the heat. Cool 5 to 10 minutes.

Combine the oil and clarified butter in a separate small saucepan and cook over medium heat until the butter is just melted, about 2 minutes; cool slightly.

Put the flour in a large bowl and whisk in the yeast. Use a wooden spoon to gradually incorporate the oil mixture, then gradually incorporate the sugar syrup. Knead the dough until it comes together nicely into a shaggy dough, adding up to 4 tablespoons more flour as needed (when done, the dough will be soft and should look smooth, shiny, and slightly oily). Cover the dough, put it in the freezer to stiffen slightly, about 5 to 10 minutes, and then knead it again for a couple minutes.

Preheat the oven to 350F; line 2 large baking sheets with parchment paper or Silpat liners.

To shape the cookies with a ma'amoul mold, measure 1 slightly scant tablespoon of dough and roll it into a ball; slightly flatten it with your hands, then press it into the bottom and up the sides of the mold. Measure 1 teaspoon of the date mixture and roll it into a ball; slightly flatten it and

gently press it into the dough in the mold. Measure 1 slightly scant teaspoon of dough, roll it into a ball, slightly flatten it, then put it on top of the date mixture in the mold; use your fingers to press the dough on the top into the dough on the sides. To remove the cookie from the mold, hold the mold by the handle and tap the flat rim on a secure surface; the cookie will drop right out.

Arrange the cookies on the baking sheets about 1/2 to 1 inch (1 1/4 to 2 1/2 cm) apart (if you use 2 half-sheet pans, the cookies should all fit on 2 pans; if you use smaller pans you will need to cook them in 2 batches). Bake until light golden brown on the bottom, about 20 to 25 minutes, rotating the trays once.

Cool completely, and then dust with the powdered sugar. To store the cookies, package them layered between parchment paper in an airtight container.



Day 23 (December 21st) - What makes the wise men wise?

Reading: Matthew 2: 1-12

2 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi[a] from the east came to Jerusalem **2** and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

3 When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. **4** When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. **5** “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written:

6

“But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for out of you will come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel.”[b]”

7 Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared.**8** He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”

9 After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. **10** When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. **11** On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. **12** And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

The arrival of the Wise Men or Magi is an important part of the Christmas story. They were very wise and important men from neighboring countries. Although we don’t know for sure where they were from, contextual clues hint at locations ranging from Egypt to India and everywhere in between! We also don’t know how many magi there were, or if they came with a caravan of servants. We do know they brought gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. These gifts allude to the fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah 60:6 and also represent important aspects of Jesus’ life: the Gold representing kings, fitting because Jesus is Lord; the Frankincense, an incense that has been used for thousands of years, representing Jesus’ holiness; and the Myrrh a perfume used on dead bodies, a vision of what is to come in His life. Although we don’t celebrate their arrival until Epiphany on January 6th, we can still look forward to their visit! On the next page is a word search, to represent how the magi searched for Jesus.

Wise Men Word Search

Find the words on the list that are hidden in the puzzle. The words can be right to left, up and down or diagonally.

M	Y	R	R	H	R	B	Z	U	N	N	T	P	A	J
W	R	U	H	G	G	C	E	S	T	A	R	A	Q	E
R	Z	A	C	Z	Q	O	G	T	E	E	W	X	X	S
J	P	G	Y	W	K	Z	X	L	H	I	W	E	H	U
H	M	H	O	R	W	I	L	T	O	L	E	T	J	S
G	O	L	D	D	S	C	N	C	R	Z	E	W	E	M
B	L	N	J	S	T	T	J	G	S	K	T	H	B	K
X	E	F	C	H	A	B	I	E	H	Q	R	B	E	N
C	H	E	R	O	D	B	T	E	I	J	A	R	S	M
C	O	R	Q	P	W	R	G	J	P	E	V	E	X	Y
T	A	T	F	R	A	N	K	I	N	C	E	N	S	E
W	O	R	S	H	I	P	B	D	E	O	L	Y	B	B
I	U	G	P	O	U	H	I	L	P	Y	U	J	C	A
S	R	R	Q	S	A	I	U	I	A	M	B	M	Z	S
E	S	D	R	C	G	I	F	T	S	E	Z	P	A	Q

BETHLEHEM	HEROD	STAR
FRANKINCENSE	KING	TRAVEL
GIFTS	JESUS	WISE
GOLD	MYRRH	WORSHIP

Day 24 (December 22nd) - Stars and Shepherds

Reading: Luke 2: 8-20

8 And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. **9** And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. **10** And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. **11** For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. **12** And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." **13** And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

14 "Glory to God in the highest,

and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"[d]

15 When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us."

16 And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. **17** And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. **18** And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. **19** But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. **20** And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Today we think of the shepherds who came before the magi to greet the newborn King. The shepherds were often looked down upon by society and viewed as lower class. The fact they were some of the first to know of Jesus' birth brings home the fact that Jesus was born to bring peace and justice to all of humanity, not just those in power. Let us pray for those forgotten, looked down upon and oppressed.

O God, I place before You my weakness, my helplessness and the little esteem that people have of me. O Most Merciful God, You are Lord of the Oppressed and You are my Lord. Into whose hands will You entrust me? To a stranger who will ill-treat me? Or to an enemy whom you have empowered against me? Even if You so will, it will not matter to me so long as You are not angry with me There is no power or strength except through You.

Translated by M A Zaki Badawi from the collection of the Prophetic Hadith

Day 25 (December 23rd) - Sending off

Reading: Micah 5:2

"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
though you are small among the clans[a] of Judah,
out of you will come for me
one who will be ruler over Israel,
whose origins are from of old,
from ancient times."

This is the last day of our Advent journey, we have explored the truth of the nativity scenes and what Bethlehem is like today. We have lived and prayed for hope, joy, faith and peace. The birth of Jesus reminds us to stay brave in times of uncertainty and that God blesses the humble who strive to live out a Christ-like life. We will end with the first prayer we prayed, as we await the hope of the savior to fulfill his role as the Prince of Peace for all of God's Creation.

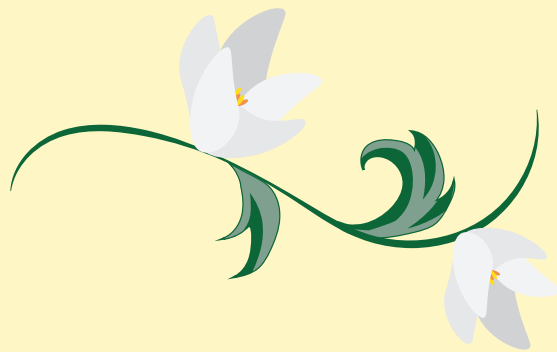
A Prayer for Hope for all the children of God:

O Mystery as grand as the universe
O Mighty Force of all creation,
O Power beyond all our power,
You have come to us as an infant.
Vulnerable, fragile, beautiful.
You have come to us
in the midst of poverty,
powerlessness and longing.

Come again, O Promiser of Peace.
Come again, to the city of your birth
mired in fear, oppression and injustice.
Come again, where Children dream
of homes they have never seen.

Be born again among refugees.
Be born again in stables and homes.
Be born again in many cities and languages.
Be born again among nations.
Be born again in places of injustice.
Be born again a promise of hope,
a sign of love and joy to the world.
Be born again in our hearts,
that we too might be called
Makers of peace
and Children of God.





Final Note

Thank you for going on this journey! This Advent Calendar has been a collaboration of several different groups to create a meaningful experience. Especially Megan Stern, who designed our cover, Kathy Christison for editing, Rev. Julie Hoplamazian for her insight into the Orthodox Church and the Episcopal Peace Fellowship for further support. As you know, profits collected from this project go directly to the Makan Initiative, which helps feed, train and employ women in Bethlehem. Your donation for this calendar will help women become self-sufficient and truly live out the Glory of God in a town that was home to the Prince of Peace.

