

ADVENT LITURGICAL RESOURCES FOR USE WITH KAIROS PALESTINE CHRISTMAS ALERT 2014

By Rev. Diane Dulin

United Church of Christ clergy and Kairos USA Director of Church Participation

THE ADVENT RESOURCES published by Kairos Palestine of Bethlehem provide rich and substantive material for reflection on the true situation facing Palestine this year at Christmas. It is not enough to sing traditional Christmas songs, nor even to read once again the well-loved Biblical passages that provide spiritual sustenance for our journey toward Christmas. The Palestinian Christian community echoes the critical urgency of New Testament language when providing an ALERT for our worship, prayer, consideration and action.

Please find the KAIROS PALESTINE CHRISTMAS ALERT at the [Kairos Palestine website](#). Divided into four sections to match the four weeks of Advent, the essays provide insight regarding incarcerated prisoners and fatherless children (week 1), the refugee experience in varied Palestinian forms (week 2), family separations caused by limitations in travel and residence (week 3), and international solidarity and activism with and for the Palestinian people (week 4).

Use the following resources as they are helpful to you, but please use them in concert with the CHRISTMAS ALERT. The relevance of this timely ALERT is clear when considering first century Palestine under Roman occupation alongside 21st century Israeli occupation. Palestine today is bound just as firmly to systematic oppression, institutionalized racism, rampant human rights abuses and chronic daily hardship. **The worship resources for each week refer to the essays of the CHRISTMAS ALERT, utilize at least one Lectionary option for the given week of Advent, and include a liturgical prayer for use as appropriate in your setting.**

As you utilize these resources, attend to the action items provided by Kairos Palestine General Coordinator Rifat Odeh Kassis (page 7 of the ALERT). Additionally, as you design and utilize your own additional resources, kindly share them with Kairos Palestine and Kairos USA. We are all strengthened by informing one another of our devoted efforts in prayer, worship, activism and solidarity.

Advent Week One: “Where are you, God?”

The first essay provided for Week One begins with the statement “From the birthplace of Jesus, stories are born.” Each year during Advent we prepare to tell the story of Jesus’ birth. In our

time and place there is need to tell the story of what has been born in Palestine not just long ago, but also in these days, both for good and ill.

The Ecumenical Revised Common Lectionary provides as a selection for the First Sunday the prophet's urgent cry to God from Isaiah 64: 1-9. Yearning for God's powerful intervention, the prophet cries out, "O that thou wouldst rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains might quake at thy presence – as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil – to make thy name known to thy adversaries, and that the nations might tremble at thy presence!" (v 1-2) This powerful expression of longing for God to take action articulates the urgent Advent cry for deliverance.

The essays provided for this week speak of incarcerated prisoners, wounded families, fatherless children, isolated mothers. The heartbreaking story of Riyad Dakhallah Li'mour may cause tears to well up. The untimely journey to Bethlehem of Mary and Joseph, the rugged conditions of Jesus' birth, the governmental imposition that required registration and taxation, also bring into vivid focus the tangible experience of a very real family. The first week of Advent calls us to be a community of truth-telling, reality-facing Christian witness. There is urgency to consider this current year in the land of our Savior's birth. As highlighted by the first week's essays, there is need to recognize the Palestinian families who cannot worship or dwell together for multiple reasons – including the incarceration of one or more of their family members.

A prayer of longing during Advent

God of the ancient holy family of Palestine, hear our prayers.

Bring comfort and solace to those who dwell in prison in Palestine Israel.

Safeguard precious family memories.

Expedite visits and gifts offered in love.

Bring release to the captives unjustly held and hurt.

Draw us into genuine solidarity with those who mourn in darkness.

Allow our prayers to soften the blows that fall upon the prisoners.

Let the season of Advent deepen our urgent determination to seek justice and to sustain hope.

Show us the beauty of families who never forget their loved ones.

Allow celebration for all babies born in these days.

And weave us together as one, we pray in your holy name. Amen.

Advent Week Two: “Messengers of Hope”

Hope is a recurrent theme of Advent. We cannot live without hope. Advent wants to teach us again and again how to hope with deep faith that is more than a wish. Rather, this deep hope is a lasting commitment.

The essays provided for Week Two of Advent highlight the experiences of refugees: generations of refugees, sometimes dwelling in a camp, and other times displaced and relocated not just once but multiple times. The story of Rif’a Hammad and her granddaughter May Hammash, both of whom live in Dheisheh refugee camp, reminds us of difficult realities that continue to pervade Palestinian experience without tangible promise of rescue. As May (age 21) writes, “When you grow up [in a refugee camp], the daily life and events remind you of refugeehood. There is no way out ...”

Yet, from realistic appraisal to engaged faith come comfort and also determination. This week’s lectionary includes words of the psalmist that are rich in metaphor but also grounded in a vision of union: “Let me hear what God the LORD will speak, for God will speak to God’s people, to God’s saints, to those who turn to God in their hearts. Surely God’s salvation is at hand for those who fear him, that glory may dwell in our land. Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other. Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from the sky.” (Psalm 85:8-11)

This vision calls out for our willing partnership to bring justice to the land of Palestine. Although the work is hard and the horizon seems dark, the coming of God’s intention will be sweet, beautiful and healing. As May expresses from her experience growing up and living in Dheisheh, “Hopefully, one day I will be free to decide where to live.”

A prayer of determined hope during Advent

O God, you know how our homespun or far-flung exiles have come to be displaced.

Some of us live in Palestine, but we see our homes only from a distance or in our minds.

Others live far away, and it is only the stories that draw pictures of home.

Still others travel daily through gates, fences, walls and checkpoints to reach the hearth that welcomes us back.

Allow our Global Church, the one Body of Christ, to draw close and pull together the ones who feel faraway and forgotten.

Use this Advent time of waiting, watching and hoping to draw strong lines of unity among all those who feel cut off by jagged disruptions, distant memories or foreign exile. Amen.

Advent Week Three: “Crying in the Wilderness”

The essays for Week Three describe legalistic nightmares that tear families apart and replace simple pleasures of family love with complicated efforts to build a life. The separation between members of the same family is one of the most brutal facts of the military occupation of Palestine. During the season of Advent, our focus upon the Holy Family must break beyond scenes of lovely Christmas cards and verses of favorite Christmas hymns to tell stories of real families who cannot live together because of rigid, racist laws. The Kairos Palestine CHRISTMAS ALERT provides accounts documenting longstanding efforts families make to remain united and strong. The Christian community plays a significant role in many of these efforts, including the work described for The Society of St. Yves (Catholic Center for Human Rights) and the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

Lectionary lessons describing the ministry of John the Baptist tell the story of one who prepared the way for Jesus by going out into the wilderness. John attracted a following at the shore of the Jordan River, and offered a baptism of repentance and forgiveness. “I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness,” John proclaimed. “Make straight the way of the Lord...” (John 1:23) Today we might say, “Make straight the way home for families cast into a wilderness of separation.”

Rationalizations for separating families take many forms. At their base, the reasons come down to a preference for dictating an ethnic identity for all the land of Palestine. This reasoning moves closer to apartheid when walls, checkpoints and military rule draw the family map of those whose lives are circumscribed, controlled and crushed because of ethnicity.

In the first days of Jesus’ life, his family was forced to flee Bethlehem for his safety. But at least they were able to make their flight to safety together. Today in Palestine, many families lack this opportunity.

A prayer for unity during Advent

There are families in pain all around the world, O God. No location is exempt.

Open our eyes to recognize forces that tear families apart.

Teach us to reject efforts to manipulate families out of homes, shared stories, and the simple pleasure of companionship.

Let the season of Advent continue blessing us with deep longing and fresh hope.

Give us strong commitment for the sake of children and adults, men and women, neighbors and strangers.

**Mold our prayers and thoughts to match your purposes.
We give you thanks for the ones who call to us, even from the wilderness.
For when we hear truth spoken out of pain, new wisdom blesses the journey of our faith.
Amen.**

Advent Week Four: “Birthing a Promise, Building a Movement”

The final set of resources provided by CHRISTMAS ALERT 2014 provides a fitting completion to the United Nations Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian people. Varied Palestinian voices answer the question “What do you ask your sisters and brothers worldwide to do?” Speaking to us directly and specifically, these voices articulate the needs, hopes, and requests of Palestinians today. They tell us what solidarity looks like. They invite us to take action.

According to Kairos Palestine Project Coordinator Nora Carmi, the Kairos Palestine document’s appeal to a deep understanding of Christian faith, hope and love is far more than a document. It has become a global movement. Our Advent preparation in solidarity with Palestine leads us to the gifted place of our Savior’s birth. We join the miracle, the struggle, the determination, the steadfastness and the reliance upon God that make us one as Christ’s Body.

All Advent lectionaries eventually bring us to Mary. Luke 1:37 bears the fruit of her faith and reflection when she affirms, “With God nothing will be impossible.” Luke 1:48 sings with her confident witness, “... God has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden. For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed ...” May the fruit of our Advent worship, reflection, prayer and action bring blessing for the child of Mary, the descendants of the Holy Land where Jesus was born, and the global community of God’s people given new life through Jesus Christ and his church.

A prayer for a new promise, freshly claimed

O God of mystery and miracles, bring new wonder into our world through a fresh movement of your spirit and new manifestation of your promises.

Allow the joy of Mary to propel us forward without discouragement.

Show us how to join in the labor pangs of those who bring a new world into being.

Give us words to say and courageous actions to take on behalf of your new creation.

Bless the people of your Holy Land, and empower all who pray for them in every way those prayers may be expressed.

Through the struggles and sufferings of your people everywhere, bring new promise and assurance of your saving love for all. Amen.

Christ is born and revealed.

Blessed is the revelation of Christ.