

## Uses of the Wall for Advent 2017



During this season of waiting and preparation, journeying and hoping we focus our prayers on all the walls that separate and divide us, tear our lives apart, keep us locked up or locked in. We use the traditional themes of the season: hope, peace, love, and joy as a framework to address the essential mystery of incarnation, God-with-us..

Each Sunday in Advent you are invited to use the prayers suggested and/or reflections as you break down, knock down, or transform a piece of the Wall. On Christmas Eve when the Prince of Peace is born, there should be no more walls, fences, or barriers to separate us from God who has already broken down the dividing wall (Ephesians 2:14).

“Only through the pain of a crucial childbirth will the agonies of human conflict and violence be addressed” says poet/theologian Janet Morley. This season of Advent involves facing our fears, being willingness to accept the dark so we can be reborn to do the work of peacemaking. We are all called to remember not only the risk of His birth but the call to let love risk being born in us

The Risk of Birth, Christmas, 1973”

This is no time for a child to be born,  
with the earth betrayed by war & hate  
and a comet slashing the sky to warn  
that time runs out & the sun burns late

That was no time for a child to be born,  
in a land in the crushing grip of Rome;  
honor & truth were trampled by scorn –  
yet here did the Savior make his home.

When is the time for love to be born?  
The inn is full on planet earth,  
and by a comet the sky is torn –  
yet Love still takes the risk of birth.  
Madeleine L'Engle

### First Sunday: Hope



He came down so we could have hope  
Fill us and give us hope enough  
to knock down the walls and barriers  
that divide and separate us  
Let us travel to Bethlehem  
where God is born anew each day

### Reflection

Hope on the slopes of hills, facing the dusk and the cannon of time  
close to the gardens of broken shadows  
we do what the prisoners do  
and what the jobless do  
we cultivate hope.

from Under Siege by Mahmoud Darwish

In God's garden of broken shadows facing night and cannons of time we are commanded to "cultivate hope." How? How do we dare speak of hope when all around us are signs of dispossession, destruction, and continued catastrophes? Saint Augustine said, "Hope has two daughters---anger and courage. Anger at the way things are and courage to make sure they do not stay that way. " Hope is a mother who gives life and mourns when that life is threatened or violated. Her daughters are righteous rage and the courage to stand where God stands or where Jesus leads. To cultivate hope we must adopt Hope's daughters as our own.

From Rev. Loren McGrail

## **Second Sunday: Peace**



He came down so we could have peace  
Fill us and give us peace enough  
to knock down the walls and barriers  
that divide and separate us  
Let us travel to Bethlehem  
where God is born anew each day

## Reflection

As a descendant of one of Bethlehem's oldest Christian families, I was taught that Christianity's message of is one of love, peace and justice. That's the message we celebrate here every Christmas...

To those who choose to stand on the oppressor's side, I ask them to remember our origins as Christians, and to resurrect the universal message of hope born in a grotto in Bethlehem 2,000 years ago. Only when human dignity is respected and equal rights are granted, only when the Israeli occupation is over and Palestinians are able to achieve their full potential on their own land, will we be able to say that peace has returned to the land of peace.

From Mayor of Bethlehem, Anton Salma

## Third Sunday: Love



He came down so we could have love  
Fill us and give us love enough  
to knock down the walls and barriers  
that divide and separate us  
Let us travel to Bethlehem  
where God is born anew each day

## Reflection on Mary's Magnificat

Mary invites us all to find our song and sing it so we can prepare the way for the birth of love and justice. Mary says we should expect that this birth will turn our lives upside down and inside out. She also asks us to pray for a world without war or conflict or violence. She asks us to hold our leaders accountable for their actions and inactions---their thoughts and their deeds, their votes of support and their votes against dignity and freedom. She asks us to oppose and reject their stranglehold of economic, social, and political power. She asks us to feed the hungry by lifting their sieges, shaking off their occupation. She asks us to dream



about the way the world would look if things were reversed, if the Beloved Community could be made manifest. She asks us to dream it in the past tense as if it were already taking place. Finally, Mary, the mother of Jesus, asks us to affirm God being born not only in her real womb but in the womb of human suffering. She asks us to imagine, to sing, and work to make it so.

From sermon *Singing Yes* by Rev. Loren McGrail

### **Fourth Sunday: Joy**



He came down so we could have joy  
Fill us and give us joy enough  
to knock down the walls and barriers  
that divide and separate us  
Let us travel to Bethlehem  
where God is born anew each day

## Reflection

The annual lighting of the Bethlehem Christmas tree marks the opening of the festive season in Israel and Palestine. The giant Christmas tree in Manger Square is lit and churches throughout the area ring their bells. The bells are followed by fireworks, speeches, and music..

Christians and Muslims alike celebrate this joyous season. Even under the shadows of political tensions and violence the tree is lit. In 2015, then mayor Vera Baboun, who is a Christian from Bethlehem, said, The bells ring to reflect the mosaic of the city:--they reflect the joy, the existence, the danger that we're living in---everything."

## Christmas Eve



He came down so we could have hope, peace, love and joy  
Fill us and give us enough of all  
to knock down the walls and barriers  
that divide and separate us  
Let us welcome you in Bethlehem  
Let us fling wide the gates  
and welcome you in our hearts  
so we may be born anew  
with you

## Reflection from Lebanese Song: Leilat al-Milad (Night of the Birth)

Verses:

When we offer a drink to a thirsty person, then we are in Christmas  
When we clothe a naked person with a cloak or dress of love, then we are in Christmas  
When we wipe out tears from they eyes of those who weep, then we are in Christmas  
When we warm up or put a mattress for somebody and the hearts are filled with hope,  
then we are in Christmas

When I kiss my companion or friend without cheating, then I will be in Christmas  
When my hearts has no grudge, then I will be in Christmas  
When my soul melts in God's being, then I will be in Christmas

### **Refrain**

During Christmas night no more hate  
During Christmas night the soil flourishes  
During Christmas night war is buried  
During Christmas night love grows

## **Christmas Day**



From God's fullness,  
we all receive room.  
Life and light  
divine access and grace-filled flesh  
belong to us all.  
We give thanks for the Word  
who assures us that the light  
will never be overcome by darkness.  
May this light widen our vision.  
May we become welcoming fires  
in empire's shadows.

May we see how the story  
of God-with-us  
invites our participation.  
May we live Christmas  
all year long.

Rev. Loren McGrail