

ADVENT 2023

Introduction from Commissioner Patti Niemand, World Secretary for Spiritual Life Development

I love Christmas for many reasons. I love the sights and sounds and smells of Christmas. I love putting up my Christmas tree and decorations, and I look forward to the celebrations that are traditionally held at Christmas time. But what I love the most about Christmas is the reminder about the glorious display of God's love for his people – the sending of his son Jesus.

I love The Message paraphrase of John 1:14:

'The Word became flesh and blood,
and moved into the neighbourhood.
We saw the glory with our own eyes,
the one-of-a-kind glory,
like Father, like Son,
Generous inside and out,
true from start to finish.'

This year, as we journey through the Advent season, we will pause each week to again remind ourselves about the HOPE, PEACE, JOY and LOVE that can be ours because of the miracle of that first Christmas: Jesus moving into our neighbourhood.

May that miracle become a reality for us this Advent as we allow Jesus to move in. To move into our homes, into our families, into our relationships and into our hearts.

Come Lord Jesus... You are welcome!

Commissioner Patti Niemand
World Secretary for Spiritual Life Development
International Headquarters

Let us pray as we rediscover the hope, peace, love and joy that is found in Christ:

Gracious Lord, may your blessings be upon all of us this Christmas season. May the good news of Jesus and his coming change our lives and give us hope for when he comes again in power.

Grant that we may find peace as we prepare for our Lord's birth. May there be peace in our cities, towns, villages and communities. We especially pray for the countries of our world that are experiencing war. Lord, let us remember that you only are the giver of lasting peace and that you are always with us.

We joyfully praise you, O Lord, for the fulfilment of your promise of a Saviour and what that means in our lives. Thank you for the gift of salvation through the birth of your son, Jesus and the joy which that brings.

Teach us to love, O Lord. May we always remember to put you first as we follow Christ's footsteps, that we may know your love and show it in our lives. As we prepare for our celebration of Jesus' birth, also fill our hearts with love for the world, that all may know your love and the one whom you have sent, your son, our Saviour.

AMEN

First week of Advent - H O P E

First Sunday of Advent

3 December

The Word

‘The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them light has shined.’ – Isaiah 9:2 *NRSV*

‘I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him. Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit.’ – Romans 15:13

Thought

Isaiah 9:2 reminds us that even in the darkest of times, a great light shines upon us. It’s a promise that speaks to the profound hope we find in God. This hope is not like any other; it’s a beacon that pierces through the shadows of despair, offering us a path out of the depths of darkness.

In Romans 15:13, the Apostle Paul's prayer emphasises that God is the source of hope. This hope isn't fleeting or dependent on our circumstances; it’s rooted in an unwavering trust in God. When we place our faith in him, we are filled with joy and peace that surpasses understanding.

This hope doesn’t just trickle in, it overflows; and it’s not born from our strength but through the power of the Holy Spirit. It’s a confident hope, a hope that knows that no matter the situation, God is in control and his plans are for our good.

As we navigate the ups and downs of life, we often encounter situations that seem bleak and hopeless. It could be personal struggles, global crises, or challenges that seem insurmountable. But in these moments, we can turn to the promises of Scripture.

In times of despair, let us remember that we are the bearers of the great light. Through our faith, we can extend hope to others. Just as Isaiah prophesied, we too can become beacons of hope in a land of deep darkness. Let our lives be a testament to the power of hope, and may we, like Paul, pray that God’s hope fills not only us but everyone we encounter.

Major Francis Ng

Secretary for Spiritual Life Development

Singapore, Malaysia, Myanmar and Thailand Territory

A Prayer for Hope

The hope I have in you, God, isn’t mere wishful thinking;
it’s a steadfast assurance that Your light will always pierce the darkness.
It’s the trust that Your plan is unfolding, even when I can’t see it.

The hope brings me into action. It's a reminder that I can be carrier of hope, sharing the light of Christ with a world that desperately needs it.

In Jesus' name,

AMEN

A question for reflection:

How does the hope of Christmas, represented by the birth of Jesus, inspire me to find hope even in adversity?

How can I share this hope with others?

Second Week in Advent - P E A C E

Second Sunday of Advent

10 December

The Word

'For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.' – Isaiah 9:6 *NRSV*

'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.' – John 14:27

Thought

In a world that seems to be in chaos, Christmas is a wonderful reminder that Jesus coming means we can live our lives in peace because he came to be our Prince of Peace.

In John 14:27, we see three major points that will help us understand the peace that Jesus offers. First, we see a difference between a peace from God and peace as the world understands it. Worldly peace is temporal but the peace that Jesus gives is permanent – in John 14:27 he says, 'Peace I leave with you', which indicates a lasting peace.

Second, we see that a life lived for Jesus means our troubled hearts can be stilled. Jesus does not want us to live lives that are burdened or heavy. Matthew 11:30 says 'For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.' We can hand our troubles over to Jesus who will still our troubled hearts.

Thirdly, we see that a life lived for Jesus can be a life lived without fear. Fear can affect our physical, mental and spiritual well-being. The peace that Jesus offers allows us to live each day confidently, resting in the knowledge that Jesus calms our fears and is our Prince of Peace.

Christmas is a reminder, that Jesus Christ calls us to live at peace with him by following his ways and also to live at peace with others.

Major Sunita Robert
Secretary for Spiritual Life Development
India Northern Territory

A Prayer for Peace

Dear Lord,
As we celebrate this Christmas season, may your peace descend upon us,
filling our hearts and homes with all that your birth represents.
Help us to share this peace with others and to remember the true
meaning of your gift to the world.
AMEN

A question for reflection:

How does the peace that Jesus offers, as described in the Bible, influence my own sense of inner peace and the way I approach challenges and conflicts in my life?

Third Week in Advent- J O Y

Third Sunday of Advent
17 December

The Word

‘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. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.’ – Luke 2:10-11 *ESV*

‘The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.’ – Galatians 5:22-23, 25 *NRSV*

Thought:

To the shepherds on that first Christmas, the angels brought ‘good news of great joy...for all the people’. The message of the angels, though concise, was comprehensive and full:

The Fact: ‘unto you is born this day’

The Place: ‘in the city of David’

The Why: ‘a Saviour’

The Who: ‘Christ the Lord’

The shepherds were amazed by this news and overwhelmed with joy that the Lord chose to share it with them. They ran to Bethlehem, they celebrated and they told everyone what they had heard. For most of the world, Christmas is still a time of joyful celebration. Time off work, enjoying family, giving gifts to loved ones, sharing meals and delighting in family traditions, familiar carols and beautiful decorations.

It can be easy to feel joyful in times of celebration, but what happens when the celebrations are over?

Once the carols end and the lights are turned off for another year, the good news of great joy is still for all people.

Our Saviour is still our Saviour. This is a message for all those who feel broken, who have problems and pain. For those who face challenges or find Christmas hard. You don’t need a Saviour if you have nothing to be saved from. In our brokenness, our problems and pain, the true meaning of Christmas, the arrival of our Messiah and Lord, can give us all lasting joy.

If we remain focused towards our source even when trials and tribulations come, we can experience the joy of the Lord. This joy is an inward kind of joy coming from above, a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22), and we have a responsibility to rejoice in the Lord, always.

As Christmas is rapidly approaching, we hope that we will take time to reflect on the true meaning of Christmas.

Major Andson Namathanga
Spiritual Life Development and Men's Fellowship Secretary
Malawi Territory

A Prayer for Joy

Dear God,
As we celebrate the birth of your son, Jesus Christ,
may the joy of Christmas fill our hearts and homes.
Help us to share this joy with others, and may it remind us
of the precious gift of your grace.
AMEN

A question for reflection

How does the story of Jesus' birth and the joy it brings challenge me to seek and embrace joy in the everyday moments of my life, recognising the potential for profound joy even in difficult circumstances?

Fourth Week in Advent - L O V E

Fourth Sunday of Advent
24 December

The Word

'For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing. You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.' – Deuteronomy 10:17-19 *NRSV*

'I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.' – John 13:34-35 *NRSV*

Thought:

Christmas is the season of love. It is a time when we give and receive love in an extra-special way. We treat ourselves with new clothes and expensive gifts. We treat our family with a vacation, gifts and parties. We extend our love to our relatives, neighbours and friends with fancy meals. We go to church and participate in all the Christmas events. Seeing baby Jesus in a manger fills our hearts with love for the infant who has changed our lives for ever.

Christmas time always seems to be filled with joy and love. Our eyes catch the brightness and shimmering lights of the season. Our ears fill with carols and jingles. But sometimes, amidst the shiny decorations, we may not see the tears of a stranger. Or the sorrow of a young child. The cries of the hungry or the teenager running away from abuse. We may not hear the scream of a person being beaten. We may fail to see the elderly person shiver, looking pale.

We may not see, we may not hear, we may not notice. All because the glamour of Christmas – as the world celebrates it – can block it all out.

Deuteronomy 10:17-19 reminds us that no one goes unnoticed by God. His love extends to all. What he is asking of us is that we extend our circle and make it wider, and that we reach out to others. He wants us to share our love beyond ourselves, our family, and our friends. Let's be reminded during this season that God wants us to demonstrate love by being the voice of the weak and to stand for justice. He wants us to share basic material possessions with those who are without.

Love for others is not a request and it is not a suggestion, but it is a command as given to us in John 13:34-35. Let's show that love with all those whom God brings our way this Christmas.

Lieut-Colonel Nilanthi Phillip
Secretary for Spiritual Life Development
Sri Lanka Territory

A Prayer for Love

Dear Lord Jesus,

Thank you for your unconditional love.

Help us to share the same Christ-like love with everyone this Christmas and every day.

AMEN

A question for reflection

How can I express love and generosity this Advent, not only in the giving of gifts but also in my interactions with family, friends and strangers during this special season?

The Word became flesh and blood,
and moved into the neighbourhood.
We saw the glory with our own eyes,
the one-of-a-kind glory,
like Father, like Son,
Generous inside and out,
true from start to finish.

John 1:14 *The Message*

A space to respond

What is the Lord saying to you in this Advent season?