Cradle of Our Faith

An Advent Devotional Series
Inspired by the Christian Communities
of the Middle East

by Churches for Middle East Peace

CHURCHES FOR
MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Dear friends and partners,

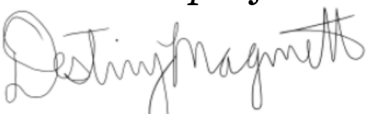
This year's Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) Advent Devotional series came to be through the grace and beauty of God's timing. While visiting St. Andrew's Episcopal Church in Seattle,WA earlier this year, I was approached by someone who I would come to know as Kester Limner, an incredible artist, who shared with me samples of her work and an opportunity to collaborate on something meaningful toward CMEP's mission and ministry.

When we began to discuss the Advent season, it became clear that the Lord was at work. What has resulted is this devotional series which we hope you will find collectively educational, spiritually reflective, and, thanks to our partnership with Kester, visually beautiful. In the pages ahead, you will be introduced to the expansive presence of Christian communities from across the Middle East. From Armenia to Egypt, Lebanon & Syria to Palestine, the goal of this series is to showcase the breadth of Christian presence and witness in this region from the time of Jesus's birth until today.

As Christian communities face ongoing threats and decline, listening to and learning from their witness, keeping them in our prayers, and working to protect the Christian presence in this region are each paramount to what it means to live out the message of the Advent season. In addition to the pages ahead, we invite you to learn more about CMEP's work to honor and preserve the Christian heritage of the region including our 2026 Global Declaration for the Future of Christianity in the Middle East and the forthcoming book A Faithful Remnant (Cascade Books) written by our executive director, Rev. Dr. Mae Elise Cannon, and Ambassador Warren Clark Fellow, Andrew Wickersham.

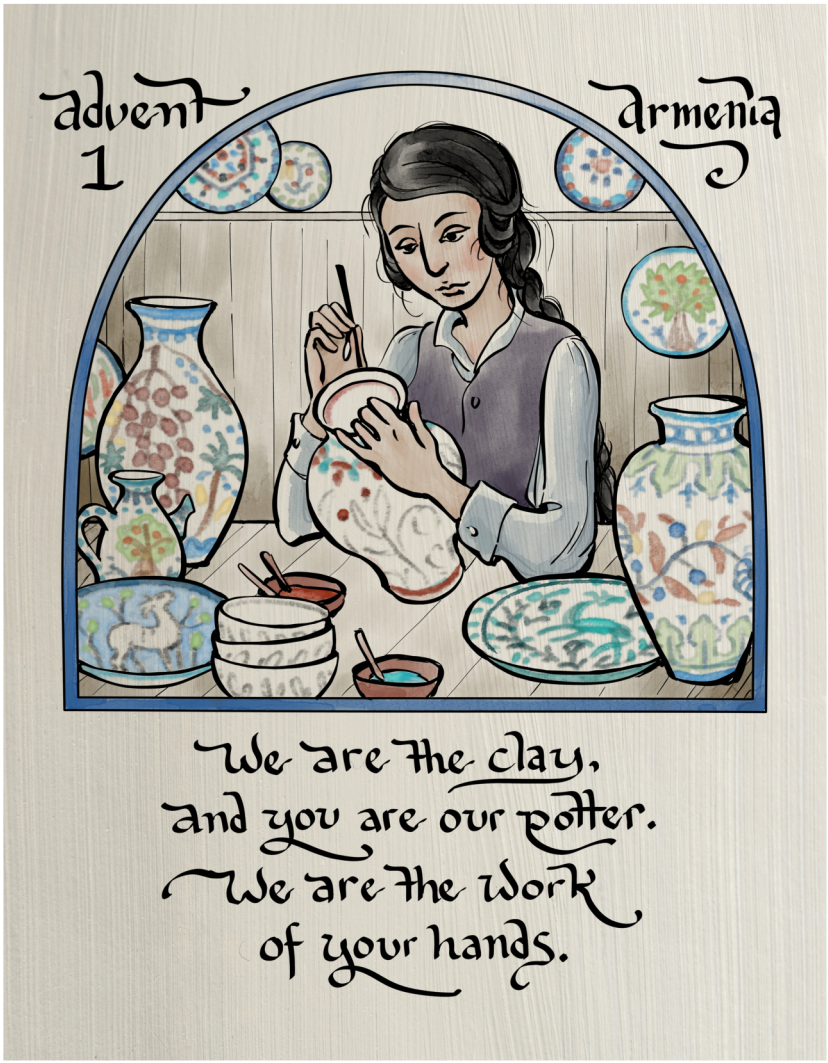
In the meantime, may this devotional series be a beautiful and meaningful way to keep these communities close at hand during this holy season of waiting and beyond.

With the Hope of Advent,



Destiny Magnett
CMEP Programs & Outreach Manager

First Sunday of Advent



Armenia

In 301 CE, Armenia became the first nation to declare Christianity its state religion, and the Armenian Apostolic Church remains central to Armenian life and identity today. This artwork is based on a 1920s photograph of an Armenian woman painting pottery in Jerusalem, where Armenian ceramic artists, many of them refugees, brought their craft and helped restore the Dome of the Rock. In their hands, clay became a work of beauty that carried both memory and hope into their new home.

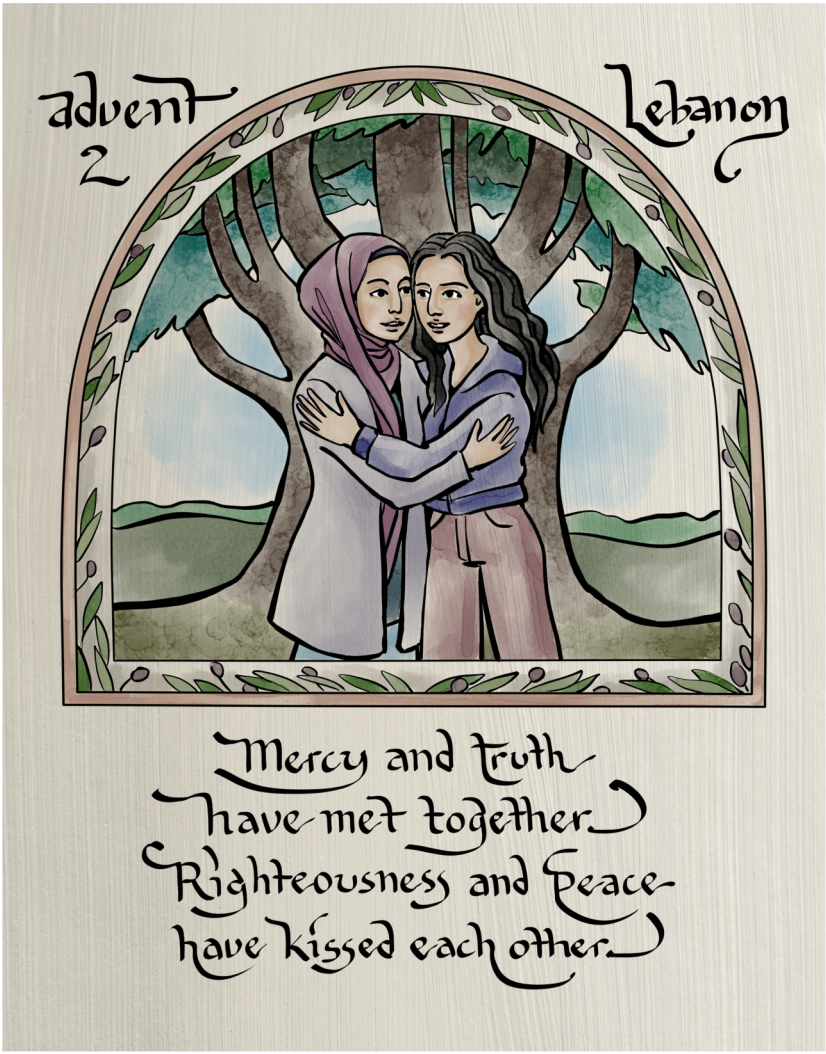
Today, the historic Armenian monasteries of Gandzasar and Dadivank in Artsakh, are being damaged and altered, threatening Armenian Christian heritage. These historic complexes remain places of worship and enduring witnesses to Armenian Christian life. Their continued witness reminds us that faith, like a carefully made work of art, can be carried through generations and hardship. As we begin Advent this season, we remember the prophet Isaiah's promise: "We are the clay, and you are our potter; we are the work of your hands" (Isaiah 64:8).

Prayer

God our Potter,
You shape us with care,
And hold us in the work of your hands.
Hold close the people
of the Armenian Quarter and Artsakh
and Armenian communities throughout the world.
Protect their sacred places and living traditions.
Strengthen those who bear witness to their history,
and bring comfort and hope to all who grieve.
Shape us to honor truth, seek peace,
and prepare the way for Christ.
Amen.

Reflection Question:
How do historic places of worship and sacred traditions shape our faith and connect us to the broader Christian community?

Second Sunday of Advent



Lebanon

Lebanon's Christian story dates back to the earliest days of our faith. Cities like Tyre and Sidon were part of ancient Phoenicia and appear throughout the Bible. The Hebrew Scriptures evoke Lebanon's cedars as signs of strength and beauty (Psalm 92:12, 104:16, Ezekiel 31:3), while the Gospels describe Jesus traveling through the region of Tyre and Sidon where he met a Canaanite woman, called a Syrophoenician in Mark's Gospel (Mark 7:26), who asked him to heal her daughter. Jesus praised her faith, and her story remains a powerful encounter retold throughout history. The New Testament also tells of Paul finding disciples in Tyre, where he stayed with the early Christian community. Today, Lebanon is home to many Christian traditions, including Maronite, Greek Orthodox, Armenian, and other communities. Christians make up about one-third of the population, and the Taif Agreement provides for equal Christian and Muslim representation in parliament. Across centuries of change, Christian communities have maintained their faith traditions alongside their Muslim neighbors. In today's artwork, a Muslim woman and a Christian woman embracing underneath a cedar of Lebanon. Their embrace echoes the Psalmist's words: "Mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other." In Advent, we pray for that meeting of mercy and truth among all who call Lebanon home.

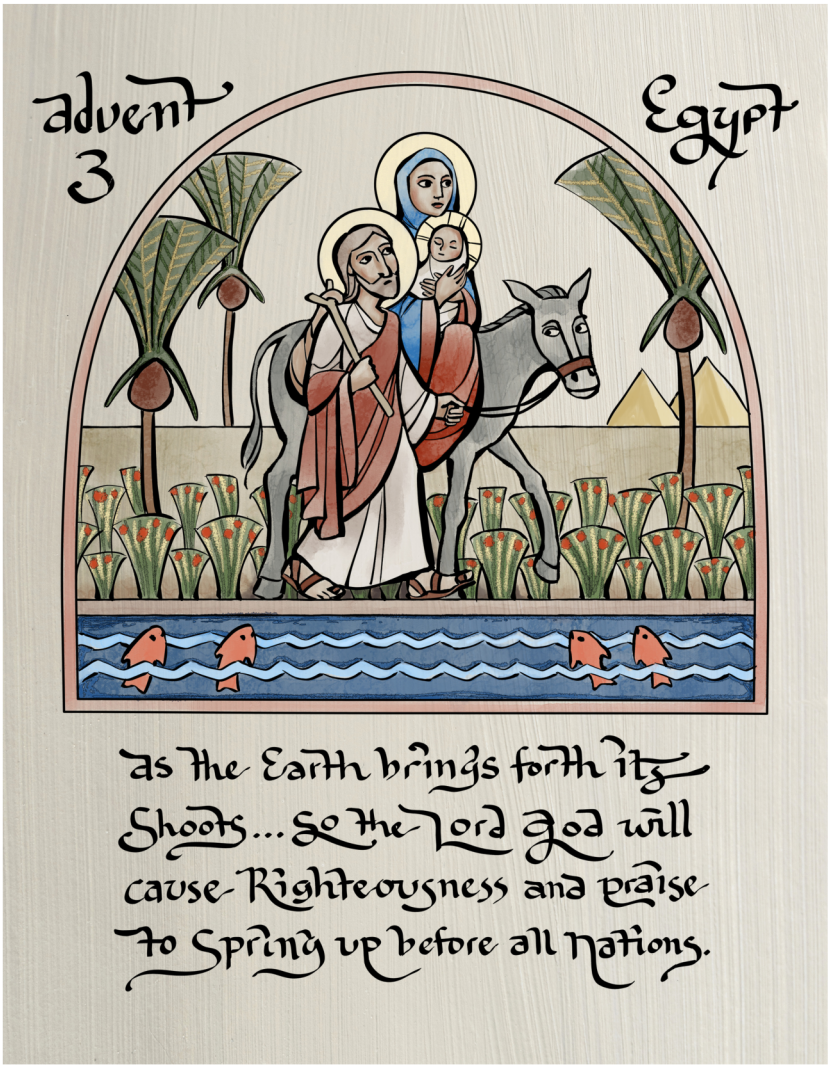
Prayer

God of mercy and truth,
God who calls us to love our neighbors,
Bless the people of Lebanon
And the ancient Christian communities there.
We pray for those who have fled their homes,
displaced from the land they know,
as they cry out for safety and security in a new place.
Where fear divides, cultivate friendship.
Where mistrust takes hold, nurture understanding.
Where injustice persists, let righteousness rise.
May neighbors of different faiths
meet one another with compassion and respect,
and may their differences become a source of strength
rather than division.
Amen.

Reflection Question:

When have you experienced a moment of unexpected connection with someone whose faith, background, or perspective differs from your own? What made that connection possible?

Third Sunday of Advent



Egypt

In Matthew's Gospel, an angel warns Joseph in a dream that Herod is seeking to take a young Jesus's life. Joseph takes Mary and Jesus and flees by night to Egypt, where the family finds refuge until it is safe to return. Egypt becomes a special place in our Christian story: what was once a place of slavery and danger has now become a land of shelter for the Holy Family in a time of immense danger. A critical place in Jesus's own early life. The artwork shows Joseph guiding the donkey, Mary holding the child, and green plants rising beside the Nile; a picture of a family on the move. Egypt is also home to one of Christianity's oldest communities. According to Coptic tradition, Mark the Evangelist brought the Gospel to Alexandria in the first century and founded the church there. By the third century, Alexandria was a major center of Christian learning, associated with teachers such as Clement and Origen. In the fourth century, the city's bishop, Alexander, took part in the Council of Nicaea, convened by Emperor Constantine in 325; Alexander's young deacon Athanasius would become one of the era's most influential defenders of Christian teaching. In the fifth century, Cyril of Alexandria played a central role in the Council of Ephesus. Across these generations, Egyptian Christians helped shape debates about the faith that reached churches throughout the wider Christian world, and developed creeds that are spoken in churches around the world today.

The Coptic Orthodox Church traces its beginnings to this apostolic witness, and Coptic Christians have carried their faith and traditions through many centuries of change. The artwork's green shoots call to mind Isaiah's words: "As the earth brings forth its shoots… so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations" (Isaiah 61:11). In Advent, the Holy Family's journey reminds us that God's hope travels with those forced from their homes.

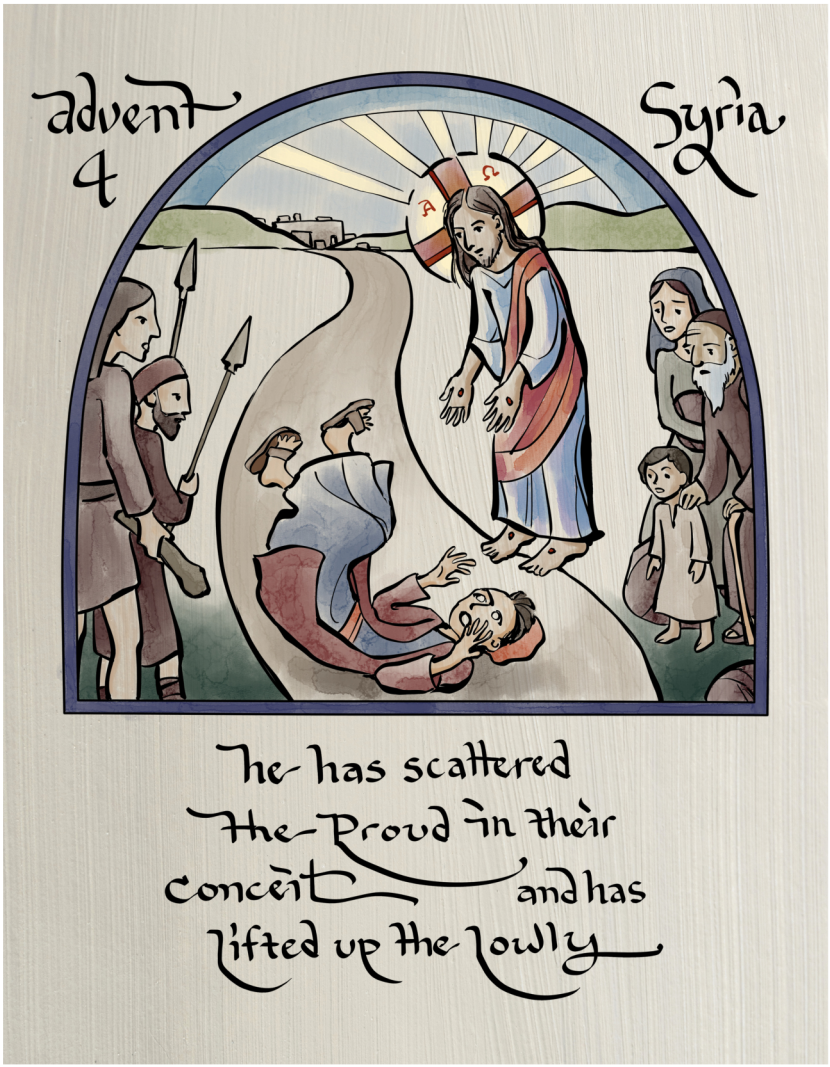
Prayer

God who guided the Holy Family to safety,
You know what it means to flee from danger,
To seek shelter in a foreign land,
And to trust in the hope of returning home.
Be near to all who are forced to leave their homes,
and to all who welcome and protect them.
Bless Egypt's Coptic and other Christian communities
and all who seek refuge there.
God of refuge and renewal,
Remind us that no journey is beyond your presence
and no place is beyond the reach of your hope.
Amen.

Reflection Question:

If we understand the Holy Family as refugees, how might that change the way we think about our responsibilities toward displaced people today?

Fourth Sunday of Advent



Syria

The artwork recalls Saul's encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus. In Acts, Saul falls to the ground, and the city he had been traveling to to persecute Christians was now a city that welcomed him in, and where he was eventually baptized. Acts also tells us that Jesus' followers were first called 'Christians' in Antioch, then part of Syria (Acts 11:26). Today, Syria's Christian communities include Eastern Orthodox, Syriac Orthodox, Melkite Greek Catholic, Maronite, Armenian, and Protestant traditions. The Christian community has been largely affected by the civil war; more than 120 churches and places of worship were destroyed. Along with other minority groups, such as Druze, Alawites, and Kurds, Christians are particularly vulnerable to extremist groups and violence. Since 2011, many have fled leading to a drastic decline of the number of Christians remaining in the country. Though their numbers are declining, their presence is still woven into the life of cities and towns including Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, and others. Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus holds a powerful Advent hope: that violence can be interrupted and a community can make room for someone who once threatened it.

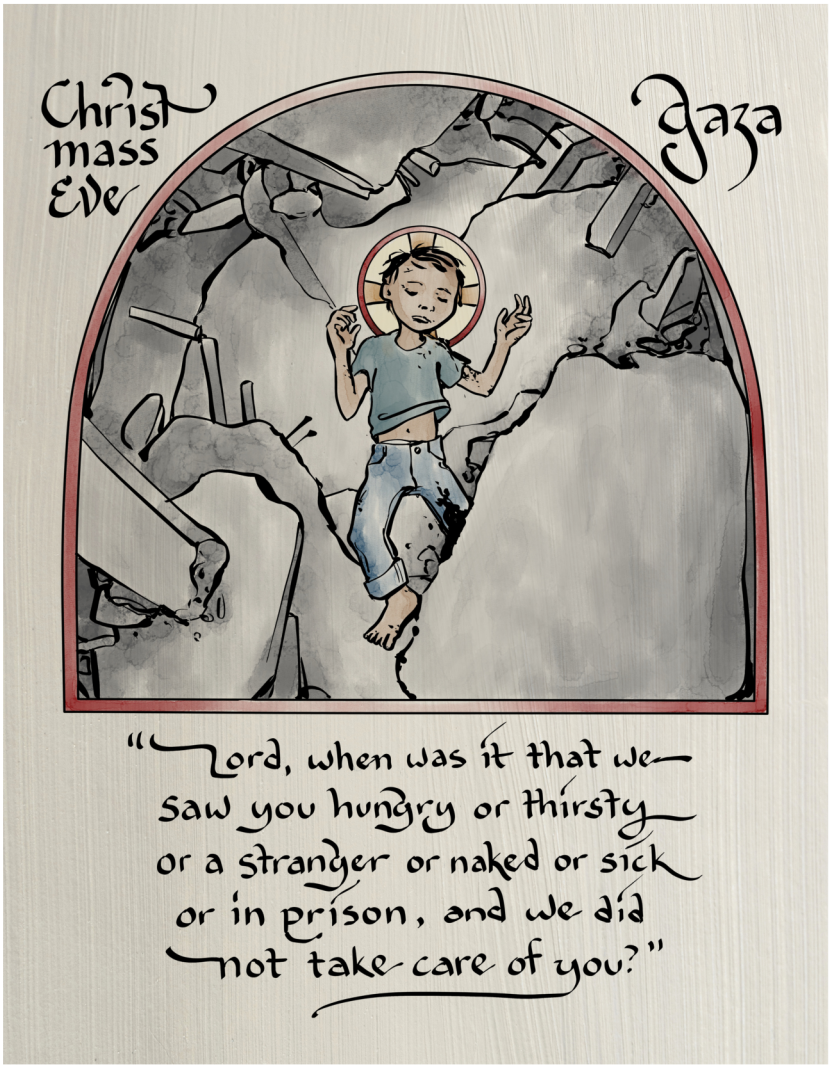
Prayer

God of the Damascus road,
You who interrupted Saul's journey
And turned a persecutor into a follower of Christ,
Interrupt the paths of violence that continue
to wound Syria.
Be near to Syrian Christian communities
Who are fleeing violence and deteriorating
living conditions.
Protect those who have been displaced
And are far from their homes.
Strengthen those who welcome in new neighbors,
And preserve their traditions.
Turn hearts from violence,
Scatter the power of the proud,
And allow peace to sweep through.
In the name of Christ, who calls us toward
transformation and peace,
Amen.

Reflection Question:

Paul's encounter with Christ transformed him from a persecutor of Christians into a follower of Christ. What might it look like for us to experience transformation in the ways we respond to conflict or people we see as our opponents?

Christmas Eve



Gaza

“If Jesus were to be born today, he would be born under the rubble in Gaza.” These words from Palestinian pastor Rev. Dr. Munther Isaac remind us that Christmas is not about Santa, gifts, lights, or trees, but about how this child “miraculously survived a massacre, and was born among the occupied and marginalized”. This artwork brings the Christmas story into the suffering of Gaza’s children today. The Holy Family sought refuge in a place far from home; in Gaza, families continue to long for safety, shelter, and the chance to live in peace. Before the 1948 Nakba, Palestinian Christians were estimated to make up 12.5% of historic Palestine’s population. Today, they account for an estimated 1.2% across historic Palestine and about 1% in the occupied Palestinian territories. This dramatic decline is inseparable from the Nakba and the decades of displacement, land confiscation, and systemic oppression Palestinians have faced. Bethlehem, the birthplace of Christ, is today strangled by illegal settlements, military checkpoints, and the ever-looming wall. The Christian village of Taybeh, in the West Bank, has been repeatedly terrorized by violent settler attacks. This Christmas, the manger reminds us that God comes close to the vulnerable. Jesus says, “whatever you did to the least of these, you did to me” (Matthew 25:40).

Prayer

Christ in the rubble,
Infant Jesus born among the vulnerable and marginalized,
You entered a world marked by occupation, violence, and fear.
Be near to the children in Gaza, to the parents grieving children they could not protect,
And to all who long for safety and peace.
Where homes have been destroyed, bring shelter.
Where there is hunger, bring nourishment.
Where there is grief, hold the brokenhearted.
Where there is violence, make a way for peace.
May we recognize your face in every child who suffers at the hands of empire.
For you have taught us that whatever we do for the least of these, we do for you.
May your peace come to Gaza, the West Bank, and to all the earth
And may your justice roll down like a river.
In the name of the Christ child,
Amen.

Reflection Question:

What does it mean to celebrate the birth of Christ while children and families in Gaza are living through extreme violence and displacement? How might this reality shape the way we understand the Christmas story?

Christmas Day

Beit Sahour + Bethlehem

The Gospel of Luke tells us that the first announcement of Jesus' birth came not to kings or rulers, but to shepherds keeping watch over their flocks by night. In the fields outside Bethlehem, an angel appeared with a message that would change the world: "Do not be afraid, for see - I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people" (Luke 2:10). The shepherds were ordinary people, working through the night on the margins of their society. Yet they were among the first to witness the good news of God's arrival among us. The artwork locates this encounter in the landscape of Beit Sahour and Bethlehem, where the shepherds' story has been remembered for generations. Today, Bethlehem and its surrounding communities continue to face the realities of occupation, movement restrictions, economic hardship, and displacement. For Palestinian Christians, celebrating Christmas in the birthplace of Jesus carries both profound joy and deep sorrow. The biblical settings where this story unfolded remains a home to living and active Christian communities whose histories and futures matter. The angel's proclamation "Do not be afraid!" gives us hope that the God we worship does not ignore suffering, but speaks and enters into it with us. The good news of Christ's birth is good news for all people. This Christmas, let us remember this proclamation and the people who remain in the shepherd's fields to tell their stories today.

Prayer

God of great joy,
On this holy day,
We give thanks for the gift of Christ,
Who came to us in humility and love.
As the angels proclaimed the good news to the shepherds,
Proclaim your peace in Bethlehem
and throughout Palestine.
Where fear has taken hold, speak your words:
Do not be afraid.
May the good news of Christ's birth
be good news for all people:
For the vulnerable and powerful,
For the displaced and those who welcome them,
And for all who long to live in dignity and peace.
May the light that shone over Bethlehem
Shine across the world.
In the name of the Christ child,
Whose birth we celebrate today.
Amen.

Reflection Question:

Throughout Advent, we have reflected on Christian communities across the Middle East and considered themes of refuge, embrace, transformation, and peace. What has this journey taught you about the global Christian community and what it means to follow Christ, and how might you carry those lessons into the year ahead?

Acknowledgements

About the artist Kester Limner

Kester Limner is a Seattle-based illustrator and sculptor. Using techniques from cartooning, folk art, and religious iconography, Kester's emotionally resonant ceramic or ink figures invite the viewer to participate in liminal and sacred moments.
To see more of Kester's artwork, please visit kesterlimner.com.

About the author Hannah Beard

Hannah Beard is a second-year Master of Divinity student at Princeton Theological Seminary, where she focuses on liberation theology and the Christian call to pursue justice, particularly in Palestine. This academic year, she is working with Churches for Middle East Peace and is interested in how Christian faith can shape the way we respond to injustice and work toward a more peaceful future in the Holy Land.

About Churches for Middle East Peace

CMEP is a coalition of more than 35 national Church communions and organizations in Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, and Evangelical traditions. Efforts center on encouraging US policies that actively promote a comprehensive resolution to conflicts in the Middle East with a focus on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, and also mobilizing US Christians to embrace a holistic perspective and to be advocates of equality, human rights, security, and justice for Israelis, Palestinians, and all people of the Middle East.

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