

Working towards a Just Peace for Palestine

2023 Advent Worship Resource

—by UNJPPI Worship Sub Group

Note: Please feel free to adapt the service to fit your community's context and preferences.

In the creation of this content, the members of the Worship Sub Group have shared their passion for and belief in the Palestinian people and the need for a just peace. We come from different backgrounds, some with close personal ties to the people and their land and others who have no direct experiences. What we have in common is a belief that the people of Palestine deserve justice and that, on the 75 anniversary of the Nakba, they have been asked to wait too long.

All of our work on this liturgy was completed before the events of October 7th and the subsequent violence. Still, I believe our work holds. While the violence on both sides is unconscionable and cannot be justified in any way, it is violence that can trace its roots back to the long delay in the realization of Palestine's desire to establish an independent state and in the historical injustice suffered by the Palestinian people.

Introduction to “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” by the hymn writer Juanita Austin

(alternative words)

I love this ancient hymn with its haunting melody and sense of longing. The original words come from the 9th century and reflect the Babylonian captivity of the Israelite people, and their longing for a saving Messiah.

In our world today, 108.4 million people (as of 2022) are living as refugees and millions more are internally displaced. Our whole world is in need of God's grace, peace and wisdom. We need to participate in God's gifts as we actively live our faith, making welcome our own heart's call. It can be sung to the tune “Veni Emmanuel” #1 Voices United.

ADVENT 1 - December 3, 2023

The Lighting of the Advent Candles

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel (alternative words)

1. O come, O come, Emmanuel
Refresh us at your life-giving well.
All people long to feel your grace,
Pour out your Spirit on every place.

***Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel,
shall come to thee wherever you may dwell.***

2. O come to us, our Everlasting Home,
Your people lost and broken, roam,
And seek a place of welcome and peace,
From war and violence, may they know release.

***Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel,
shall come to thee wherever you may dwell.***

3. O come Beloved, hear your peoples' plea -
The wounded soul, the homeless refugee.
May 'Welcome' be our own heart's call,
'Till there be room and justice for us all.

***Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel,
shall come to thee wherever you may dwell.***

Words by Juanita L. Austin – Nov. 29 2017 used with permission

Tune: Veni Emmanuel (see Voices United hymnbook #1)

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Hope...as we start our journey through Advent, we start with Hope. It can be amazing what hope can do...

I can remember making all kinds of excuses to stay at home and not go to school. But that isn't the case with everyone. For Mohammed (not his real name), hope is going to school. A returned Ecumenical Accompanier talks about what going to school is like if you are a Palestinian living in Jerusalem...

On one occasion we watched a 17-year-old, whom I'll call Mohammed to protect his identity, being searched – the usual bag check, body search, lift your t-shirt and ID check. After about a 10-15 minute wait, he asked if he could have his ID back. The soldiers hissed at him, while one grabbed him by the throat and another had their weapon at the ready. A couple of minutes after his complaint and minor scuffle, he was allowed to go. We caught up with him and spoke with him using a shopkeeper as a translator. What seemed to upset Mohammed the most was not the body search or the hand on his throat but rather they hissed at him like he was an animal – refusing to acknowledge his humanity. Afterward we spoke with his vice-principal who confirmed the boy's name and that he was a student at that school. The UN requires this additional corroboration in order to count incidents like this in their statistics.

For Mohammed, getting to school is a marathon. Everyday. But he hopes.

Light the Candle

As we light this candle, we pray that we be part of making his hope real.

Prayer for a Just Peace

Holy sacred loving spirit,
move us to a place of courage and action
where our calls for justice match the boundless hope of youth
who seek an education at high cost.
We pray this advent prayer with hearts open.
Amen

Prayers of the People/Pastoral Prayers

Awesome and Holy God of Mystery,

We sometimes forget that the earth and all that is contained within it belongs to you. We pray for an ever present reminder that each one of us as individuals, together with all of our human and creation siblings are precious to you. Open our eyes and hearts to the sacred within everyone we meet. We are all the blessed work of the Potter's hand.

We pray for a world where everyone sees.

We pray for perseverance in times of struggle. Give to us courage to name what we see, to endure and persist until mercy and justice succeed. As you work for those who wait for you, help us to wait actively, drawing on your holy strength for patience, courage, mercy, and hope.

We pray for a world where compassion is the driving force.

Where there is scorn among neighbours, we pray for peace built on deep respect and understanding. We pray for the breaking of barriers that human beings have placed before their siblings, and in their place let us build with you a nation of neighbours committed to the wellbeing of all.

We pray that everyone might have an unshakably secure sense of home.

Restore us. Remove our fear, insecurity, greed, and distorted views. We pray to trade these for spiritual gifts, that we might be ready for the revelation of God with Us. Let this be our motivation and our hope, as the Light of the World draws near.

Amen.

ADVENT 2 - December 10, 2023

We Gather to Worship in Community

The Lighting of the Advent Candles

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel (alternative words)

1. O come, O come, Emmanuel
Refresh us at your life-giving well.
All people long to feel your grace,
Pour out your Spirit on every place.

***Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel,
shall come to thee wherever you may dwell.***

2. O come to us, our Everlasting Home,
Your people lost and broken, roam,
And seek a place of welcome and peace,
From war and violence, may they know release.

***Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel,
shall come to thee wherever you may dwell.***

3. O come Beloved, hear your peoples' plea -
The wounded soul, the homeless refugee.
May 'Welcome' be our own heart's call,
'Till there be room and justice for us all.

***Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel,
shall come to thee wherever you may dwell.***

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Tune: Veni Emmanuel (see Voices United hymnbook #1)

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Peace comes next...as we continue our journey through Advent, we move to peace. but what does peace look like for Palestinians living under military occupation.

A returned Ecumenical Accompanier shares experiences from the oPt...

Masafer Yatta. This is about a 35 sq km area in the south end of the West Bank that Israel wanted to turn into "Military Firing Zone 918". Palestinians had tried to take the legal and peaceful approach by fighting this in court. It seemed that International Law was on their side with the Geneva Convention and Rome Statutes regarding the forced displacement of a population under occupation. However, the Israel Superior Court ruled that their laws override International Laws and cleared the way to cleanse Masafer Yatta of its Palestinian population. This will represent the largest forced transfer of Palestinians since 1967. Under International Law, this is considered a War Crime and Crime Against Humanity. And to add insult to injury, anyone who was part of the court case to save Masafer Yatta is required to pay 20,000 shekels in court costs. For many Palestinians that would be about a year's wages. And yet the world remains silent.

To tell the story of one individual in Masafer Yatta, we visited a community called Isfey at-Tahta and spoke with a woman named Eman. Eman is 39 years old and has 8 children, the youngest of which was a month old when we visited. As we had our discussion, the recurring question that kept coming back was "What can you do to help me stay in my village?". We'd talk about the reports that would eventually go to the UN and after a few minutes, she would come back to the original question again. I think she knew that no matter how many reports we write, once the bulldozers come, there will be nothing to stop them. She also added that "I will die in my village". While I understand the depth of her emotion, for the sake of her children, I hope she doesn't mean it.

Residents' access to electricity, water, food and education, as well as freedom of movement and medical access, are limited, and many have been forced to leave their homes.

Where is peace for Eman? The peace of sitting at her on table in her own home. The peace of mind, of body, of spirit?

Light the Candle

As we light this candle, we pray that we find our courage and demand justice with peace in the oPt.

Prayer for a Just Peace

Peace loving One,
move us from our complacency and
show us the way to work for peace for Palestinians under military occupation.
Let us call out for justice and peace.
Amen

Prayers of the People/Pastoral Prayers

God of compassion, limitless love, and justice, we pray for comfort for your children living under oppressive regimes. Give them strength. You command us to comfort your people; and so let us be a voice of solidarity and support for our siblings whose human dignity is denied. When we are counted among the dehumanized, give us strength to be comfort for one another. Let us cry for justice.

We pray for healing and restoration for Jerusalem. May all Abrahamic faiths work together to preserve and steward this holy site, as an act of our own faith and as recognition of the sacredness of the faith of another. Equality and justice for all makes Jerusalem shine and reveals the brilliance of your glory for all the world to see.

Lifting up our voice with strength, we proclaim your revelation, here with us. We simultaneously wait for you in the future, and recognize your companionship with us in the present. We hold your divine attendance with us alongside recognition of your divine presence with relatives of another faith, who are among your beloved children all the same.

Speak peace to your people. We pray that your peace might rest in the hearts of all, so that we turn to you. In so doing, we pray to respond with justice and care for all of your sacred children, who are not limited to any single nation.

We pray today in full belief of your steadfast love, faithfulness, righteousness, and justice.

Let us lean into your promises of plenty yielded from the land – the olive trees will flourish again after the extension of their branches from one blood brother to another – this will prepare the path of God.

Thank you for your patience with us, may it prompt us to be hasty in our compassion, humility, gratitude, and justice.

Give all of your children a desire to embrace repentance. We pray for a turning from blindness toward compassion for our siblings. In turning to you, your eternal peace is promised.

As the Light of the World draws ever closer, make all of your people channels of your peace.

Amen.

ADVENT 3 - December 17, 2023

We Gather to Worship in Community

The Lighting of the Advent Candles

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel (alternative words)

1. O come, O come, Emmanuel
Refresh us at your life-giving well.
All people long to feel your grace,
Pour out your Spirit on every place.

***Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel,
shall come to thee wherever you may dwell.***

2. O come to us, our Everlasting Home,
Your people lost and broken, roam,
And seek a place of welcome and peace,
From war and violence, may they know release.

***Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel,
shall come to thee wherever you may dwell.***

3. O come Beloved, hear your peoples' plea -
The wounded soul, the homeless refugee.
May 'Welcome' be our own heart's call,
'Till there be room and justice for us all.

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Joy...as we continue our journey through Advent, we move from hope to joy, joy, the realization of hope, the outcome of peace...the wonder that lights our lives.

Of the many joys I have in my life, joy in my home is one of them. It is a repository of stories..of time spent together with others and time of contemplation, times of laughter and times of sadness. But the joy of the threshold remains..

A returned Ecumenical Accompanier tells of losing home and how that happened for one Palestinian living in Jerusalem...

Noura Gaith Sub Laban's family had been living in the same apartment in the Muslim quarter of Old Jerusalem at the corner of Al-Khaliddiyya and Al-Saraya Ascent for generations. It was the only home she had ever known. She said that she never feels lonely there as she always feels the comforting presence of her mother's spirit. Noura had protected status in this home through an agreement that predated Israel's 1967 occupation of Jerusalem.

But Noura had some medical problems and landed in the hospital. She couldn't manage the stairs that accessed her 2nd story home. Israel has laws that indicate if Palestinians are out of their home for a certain period of time, they are deemed to no longer live there and their homes will be seized and given to settlers. This law does not apply to Jewish Israelis.

Noura appealed to the court without success and her eviction from her home was set for June 2023. Despite peaceful protests and the presence of EAs, on 11 July at 6 am, 20 armed police officers stormed the home to remove 74 year old Mustafah Sub Laban and 6 peaceful protestors. Noura was not there as she had been hospitalized the previous evening. When Noura returned to what had been her home, she was not able to re-enter to even get her prescription medicine. All furniture and possessions were to be taken by a settler family. Under state law, the Sub Laban family was charged 48,500 NIS (about \$18,000 Can) to cover the legal and security costs associated with taking their home from them.

There are no remaining Palestinians on this particular street in the Muslim quarter of Old Jerusalem.

For Noura, her home was her joy. East Jerusalem her home. Where does she find joy now?

Light the Candle

As we light this candle, we pray that we work to bring joy back to Noura and those like her.

Prayer for a Just Peace

Holy sacred loving spirit,
move us to a place of courage and action
where our calls for justice echo with our outrage
at homes and possessions stolen, hearts broken and joy extinguished.
We pray this advent prayer with hearts filled with conviction.
Amen

Prayers of the People/Pastoral Prayers

God of promise and hope, may your joy be with all of us, so that our joy may be complete and we might have what is needed to pursue freedom.

Today let us see the year of your favour, where all who mourn their home; their children, siblings and parents; their family history; are comforted.

We believe and pray for good news for the oppressed, and healing for the broken hearted. Free your children held captive by oppression, on either side of its deceptive grip. We pray for and believe in the release of your children captive to siege, and those captive to trauma that muffles your voice. Liberation is given as an expression of your great love to both the oppressed and the oppressors.

Equip the bystanders with courage and righteousness to be protectors of human rights, opponents of antisemitism and opponents of violence against Palestinians.

It is in mercy and compassion, generosity and siblinghood, that your glory is revealed and proclaimed.

We pray for your recompense for all of your children robbed and wronged; in Palestine and Israel; and wherever oppression exists. We invest our joy in the belief that through your children you will raise up, rebuild, repair and heal. We hold fast to the great things you have done, and the great good that you promise.

The lowly shall be lifted up, and the mighty lowered, until everyone sees their equality in your eyes, and deals with one another accordingly.

Joy is ours, both today and in the future.

Amen.

ADVENT 4 - December 24, 2023

We Gather to Worship in Community

The Lighting of the Advent Candles

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel (alternative words)

1. O come, O come, Emmanuel
Refresh us at your life-giving well.
All people long to feel your grace,
Pour out your Spirit on every place.

***Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel,
shall come to thee wherever you may dwell.***

2. O come to us, our Everlasting Home,
Your people lost and broken, roam,
And seek a place of welcome and peace,
From war and violence, may they know release.

***Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel,
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3. O come Beloved, hear your peoples' plea -
The wounded soul, the homeless refugee.
May 'Welcome' be our own heart's call,
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Love...we started our Advent journey with Hope, moved to Joy then Peace...now we talk about love. What is love like under occupation?

A parent's love for their child is universal. As a racialized society, we are aware of the caution that racialized parents and children have to live with. Just to keep their children safe.

In the Occupied Palestinian Territories, caution isn't enough. 2022 was the deadliest year for children in the oPt. Israeli forces had killed at least 50 Palestinian children in the West Bank in 2022. And 2023 is set to be worse.

Mahmoud al-Sadi was just 17 years old. A beloved son. On his way to school on the morning of November 21st. His path was blocked by Israeli forces who were engaged in a routine incursion into the Jenin Refugee Camp. Mahmoud turned to leave, to walk back home, when an Israeli soldier in a military vehicle 140 meters away shot him in the abdomen with live ammunition. It was 8:30 in the morning. Mahmoud's classmates transferred him to Ibn Sina hospital in a private car but it was too late. Mahmoud was pronounced dead around 9 am the same day.

For Mahmoud, getting to school was deadly. And the love he had for his family and friends and the love they had for him still his.

Light the Candle

As we light this candle, we ask for the courage to challenge the murder of children, to call the shattering of love what it is - murder.

Prayer for a Just Peace

God, who loves us like a parent,
help us to feel the the fear and the pain of parents
who live with the fear that their child will be another victim of
a violent occupation that has lasted too long.
Guide us to name and call out these violations.
Amen

Prayers of the People/Pastoral Prayers

God of Love, you are with us.

Let your home with us be made by your people committing to love one another as an expression of love for you, such that everyone might insist on for others what they need and wish for themselves.

May rest from our enemies come about by the opening of eyes to see one another with new sight; with the love that you instill in us from your own powerful love. We pray for peace for all of your children, that all may live undisturbed to live lives that merge with your dream of peace.

We echo the prayer of Hannah and Mary, that the powerful be brought down. Give us not a spirit of vengeance, but one of commitment in love to equality. We pray for the powerful and the lowly to be brought to a place where it is plain that all are on the same level. Then, we may be prepared to build a new heaven and a new earth.

Heal where hurt is great. Give strength that your children who live with trauma and oppression, especially over many generations, might not be overcome by evil in an effort not to be broken by it.

Keep us steady in the darkness, knowing that you dwell there with us; and keep us focused on looking for the Light, and committed to living in its brilliance.

This Christmas, we pray to celebrate the birth of the Prince of Peace by being equipped to bring about liberation for all.

Let us bask in the glow of the stars, and your presence with us.

We pray for the endurance to proclaim your steadfast love forever and your faithfulness to all the generations. Bless us to be examples of that faithfulness and love.

Amen.