

*At the end of the prayers and readings, join hands and say the blessing together:*

Help us to make room for you, Jesus, as we get ready for Christmas. Bless us, and all our family and friends who are not here today. May peace fill our hearts, our home, and our world. We ask this in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

*You might like to end with some music. Sing a traditional carol or a modern hymn suitable for Advent.:*

Away in a Manger  
Silent Night  
Infant holy, Infant lowly  
O Little town of Bethlehem  
The Angel Gabriel from heaven  
came  
O come, O come Emmanuel  
Long ago prophets knew  
Creator of the stars of night  
Go tell it on the mountain  
Holy Virgin by God's decree

Awake from your slumber (*Daniel Schutte SJ*)  
Christ be our light (*Bernadette Farrell*)  
Wait for the Lord (*Taizé chant*)  
We are waiting to welcome Jesus (*Bernadette Farrell*)  
Peace Child (*Bernadette Farrell*)  
He came down that we might  
have love (*Cameroons, Wild Goose*)

*And don't forget to blow out the candle.*

## What to do next

Look at the leaflet **Pax Christi Bethlehem Advent Project** for some activities for children and families to do together, such as making an Advent calendar, and sending messages to people in Bethlehem.



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## ADVENT PRAYERS AROUND THE HOLY FAMILY CRIB SET

*Notes for adults are in italic text.*

*Someone can start the prayer time by reading out loud:*

Let's think about this time of Advent when we wait for the arrival of Jesus. We wait with Christian people all over the world. These weeks of Advent give us time to prepare and think about Jesus and all that he will bring to the world.

*Lay out a cloth on which to set the figures and candle. Light the candle and say:*

God of life and love, we gather together, waiting for all the joys of this holy season. This light reminds us of your life and light that comes to us in Jesus.

*Place figure of Mary on the cloth and say:*

This is Mary who lived in a village called Nazareth 2000 years ago. Because of her great goodness God chose her to be the Mother of Jesus. Mary trusted God and said yes.



*Place the figure of Joseph on the cloth and say:*

This is Joseph, the husband of Mary. He was a carpenter and engaged to be married to Mary when God asked him to be the father of Jesus on earth. Joseph trusted God and said yes.

Place the manger and figure of Jesus on the cloth and say:

This is Jesus, Son of God, who came to earth to bring peace, love and joy to all people. He was born in a simple place. A manger was his bed.

## Reading about the birth of Jesus (based on Luke 2:1-7)

The Roman Emperor, Caesar Augustus, (whose lands included the country of Israel) gave the order that a census was to be taken over the whole of the Roman Empire. Everyone was to return to the town that his or her family had come from, so that their names could be registered and they could be counted.

This meant that Joseph and Mary had to leave their village of Nazareth in Galilee and travel to Bethlehem in Judea. By this time Mary was expecting her baby and although the child was due to be born quite soon, they had to leave their home and make the uncomfortable journey to Bethlehem.

They arrived in Bethlehem to find that it was full of other travellers like themselves, and there was no room for them to stay in any of the inns. Luckily they were able to find a stable in which they could shelter. Soon afterwards the time came for the baby to be born, and so Mary wrapped him round with strips of cloth and laid him in the manger (which was the box of hay for the animals to eat).



That same night, shortly after Jesus was born, some shepherds were looking after their sheep on the nearby hillside, when a bright

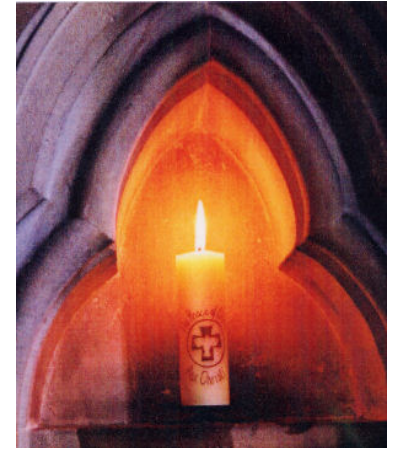
**Dear God,**  
We thank you for giving us  
your peace.  
Help us to spread peace  
at home and at school  
by loving and caring  
for one another.

Help us to spread peace  
by listening to one another,  
even when we don't agree.  
Help us to spread peace  
by sharing our time  
with those who are lonely and  
who need a friend.

Help us to spread peace  
by thinking and praying  
for children who have no food -  
or who are frightened  
and live in fear.

Let us pray every day for peace  
for our families, for our friends  
and for ourselves.

*Pax Christi*



**Lord of Light**  
Shine on us  
Let us share  
In your love

King of Kings  
Open our eyes  
Help us tell  
Your Good News

Prince of Peace  
Be our light  
Show us how to  
Love one another

Emmanuel  
Shine on us  
Light our candle  
In this still night.

*Holli Ball, Pax Christi adapted*

## Prayers and readings

*Choose the prayer or poem that will mean most to your children, and that will help them think about Jesus and what he brings to the world.*

### **A star is moving**

moving in the sky,  
moving towards Bethlehem,  
towards peace,  
the peace of a baby asleep  
in his mother's arms.

He is God who became human.  
The world is changed  
because Love is born.  
Love is moving,  
moving in the world,  
slowly, surely,  
unexpected places...  
God is found  
in a place unexpected.



Love, no fear, no evil, just love.  
Bow in worship...  
the star is still,  
at peace in this place.

*Doreen Evered, Pax Christi*

**Lord Jesus, born in Bethlehem,**  
we pray for the children of the  
Middle East  
who look up at night to see the  
same stars  
on which you gazed  
with hope and wonder.

May all who share the same sky  
learn to share the same land,  
making peace and seeking justice.

Fill our hearts with compassion  
this Christmas,  
and make of us people  
who bring good news  
in our homes,  
in the lands of your birth  
and in every place where  
children play  
under the mercy of heaven.  
Amen.

*Child of Bethlehem,  
Christian Aid*

*The star in the picture marks the spot  
in Bethlehem's Church of the Nativity  
where it is thought Jesus was born.*

light lit up the dark sky and an angel, a messenger from God, appeared. The shepherds were terrified, but the angel said, "Don't be afraid. God has sent me with good news for you, which will bring great joy to everyone who hears it. This day in Bethlehem, the city of David, a child called Jesus was born, and he is the one whose birth has been waited for - Christ the Lord. And this is what will prove it to you. Go to the stable and you will find the baby wrapped warmly in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger."



As the angel finished speaking, the night sky was filled with the sight and sound of many angels who praised God and sang, "Glory to God in the highest, and peace to God's people on earth."



The shepherds were very excited by what they had heard and seen and decided to go into Bethlehem to see if what the angels had told them was true. So they hurried off, and there, as the angel had told them they would, they found Mary and Joseph, with the newly born baby lying in the manger. The shepherds told them what had happened and everyone was amazed at their story. Mary listened to what they said, remembered their words and thought about them often.

Then the shepherds returned to the flocks of sheep which they had left on the hillside, praising and thanking God for all that they had seen.

**This is the Gospel of the Lord.**

## Thinking about Bethlehem today



The old Hebrew name *bêth lehem*, means "house of bread", probably because it was once a good place for producing grain. Bethlehem was also the birth place of King David (1 Sam 16:1).

Mary and Joseph had to travel to Bethlehem, where Jesus was born, because of the orders of the Roman army which had invaded Judea.

Today Bethlehem is in the West Bank - land occupied by Israel since 1967 but which belongs to Palestinians. So 2000 years since the first Christmas, that land of Jesus is still a place where people live under oppression and harsh treatment. The Christians and Muslims who live in Bethlehem today are called Bethlehemites.



This area is called the Holy Land, because it is special to Jews, Christians and Muslims.

Sadly there has been conflict for many years between the people of Israel and the people of Palestine.



Now a huge wall has been built around Bethlehem. Israel believes that this wall will keep it safe but it has created a barrier between people.

Many families in Bethlehem have lost their land, their olive trees, their homes because of the wall. Fewer tourists visit Bethlehem so local people have lost jobs which supported them and their families.

Pax Christi works with groups in Israel and Palestine who want peace, who want to bring people together.

Pax Christi also supports workers in Bethlehem, like Elias in the photograph. His family has lived and worked in Bethlehem for more than 90 years. They made the Holy Family crib set by carving it from the wood of an olive tree.

