

Advent and Christmas in Bethlehem 2009

Christmas celebrations will take place in a very difficult climate for all peoples in the Holy Land but many individuals and groups refuse to give up hope and are searching for non-violent ways to work for human rights and a just and peaceful future for both peoples.

Please try some of these ideas:

- include prayers for justice, peace and security for Israel and Palestine in your Advent and Christmas services
- during Advent send Christmas messages and prayers for peace to our Pax Christi friends in Bethlehem - encourage young people, schools and youth groups to take part. Please email messages, in English, before 25th December 2009 (Western Christmas) or January 4th 2010 (Eastern Christmas) to aei@p-ol.com . All messages can be read at www.paxchristi.net or www.aeicenter.org . Please include name, group, town and country with your messages.
- make an Advent Prayer Tree/Corner and include cards on which people can write their messages and leave on a prayer tree or in a prayer bowl - which can then be sent to Bethlehem (star shaped gift tags make good message cards).
- look for ways in which your Advent Services and Christmas crib could raise awareness of how the people of Bethlehem are living now - perhaps build a Wall around or through the crib and discuss who would be inside or outside. See Amos Trust olive wood cribs with wall through.
- reflect on people today attempting to make journeys in Palestine -Israeli people cannot travel between Nazareth (in Israel) and Bethlehem (in Palestine). No Palestinians can travel freely in the West Bank or Gaza.
- presents of 'Bethlehem Baskets' could include Palestinian Olive oil, soap, dates, almonds ... (see www.zaytoun.org Tel: 0781 4477188) and olive wood carvings which can also go on the Christmas tree (see www.paxchristi.org.uk Tel: 020 8203 4884)
- for Advent reflection see "Another World is Possible - Another World is Here" by Valerie Flessati and Bruce Kent (£5.99 from Pax Christi)
- alternative carols: Amos Trust www.amostrust.org/resources/index.php for songs, pack, olive wood crib with Wall, new DVD and book about Bethlehem projects: Christian Aid www.christianaid.org.uk/issues/conflict/middleeast/index.aspx CAFOD www.cafod.org.uk/where_we_work/middle_east/palestinian_territories

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.

Further details: Ann Farr: annfarr@phonecoop.coop Te: 02476 679 398