

Peace

SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT



Let us continue to pray for peace without losing heart, to knock with a humble and insistent spirit at the ever-open door of God's heart and at the doors of humankind.

Pope Francis, *International Prayer Meeting for Peace*, September 2023



Pause and pray

'Come, Lord Jesus.'

Light a candle

As we light this second candle on our Advent wreath, we pray for the many places in the world that are in special need of peace at this time. We pray that we too may be filled with your deep peace. Amen.

Hear Scripture

Leader: Ask the participants to sit comfortably, feet flat on the floor, hands in laps, shoulders relaxed. Explain that you (or someone in the group) will read the scripture readings and they are asked to listen closely to the words and think about what they are saying to them.

Baruch 5:1-9

A reading from the prophet Baruch

Take off the garment of your sorrow and affliction, O Jerusalem,
and put on forever the beauty of the glory from God.

Put on the robe of the righteousness that comes from God;
put on your head the diadem of the glory of the Everlasting;
for God will show your splendor everywhere under heaven.

For God will give you evermore the name,
"Righteous Peace, Godly Glory."

Arise, O Jerusalem, stand upon the height;
look toward the east,
and see your children gathered from west and east
at the word of the Holy One,
rejoicing that God has remembered them.



For they went out from you on foot,
led away by their enemies;
but God will bring them back to you,
carried in glory, as on a royal throne.

For God has ordered that every high mountain and the everlasting hills be made low
and the valleys filled up, to make level ground,
so that Israel may walk safely in the glory of God.

The woods and every fragrant tree
have shaded Israel at God's command.

For God will lead Israel with joy,
in the light of his glory,
with the mercy and righteousness that come from him.

Philippians 1:3-6, 8-11

A reading from the Philippians

I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.

For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus. And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

Luke 3:1-6

A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Luke:

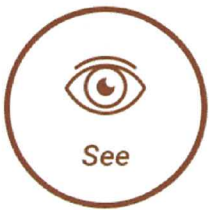
In the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar's reign, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judaea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of the lands of Ituraea and Trachonitis, Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, during the pontificate of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah, in the wilderness. He went through the whole Jordan district proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the sayings of the prophet Isaiah:

A voice cries in the wilderness;
Prepare a way for the Lord,
make his paths straight.
Every valley will be filled in,
every mountain and hill be laid low,
winding ways will be straightened
and rough roads made smooth.
And all mankind shall see the salvation of God.



Ukraine stories

Nina, far right, with Vera and her grandson Ruslan. Photo: Shimbator for CRS



The ongoing conflict in Ukraine has forced many families to seek refuge in neighbouring countries such as Moldova.

Lyudmila and Yuri, a retired couple from Ukraine, fled when the conflict escalated. Initially they sheltered in a refugee centre but they struggled with the noise and lack of privacy, which was particularly difficult for Yuri, who has a disability. Through Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and Caritas Moldova's shelter program, Lyudmila and Yuri were provided with assistance to rent an apartment.

"Our goal is to give people that space so they can cook their own meals, have their own bathroom, and have private time with family," explains CRS Project Officer Irina Osoianu.

Nina and her husband Adrian welcomed several Ukrainian refugees, including Vera and her grandson Ruslan, into their home, providing them with a safe space and assistance. With the help of CRS, Nina was able to make essential repairs to her house, making it a comfortable place for Vera and other refugees.

Nina's generous spirit supported Vera through a cancer diagnosis, helping her with medical appointments and treatment. The relationship between the families highlight the profound impact of community and compassion during times of crisis.

"It's really ok to open your doors to a stranger," said Adrian.

Fleeing the Russian invasion, Yana and her family arrived in Moldova. They were warmly welcomed by Vera, who opened her home to them, embodying the generous spirit seen across Moldova. Over time, Yana's family and Vera's became close, sharing daily life and holidays together. Yana's heart remains tied to Ukraine, longing for the day they can return home.

"People were incredibly generous, often hosting families for free," said Project Manager, Svetlana Cires.

The efforts of organisations like CRS and Caritas Moldova are crucial in providing not just physical shelter but also hope and a sense of normalcy to displaced families. The international community's support remains vital as these families navigate the uncertainties of their future.



Have you noticed how specific this week's readings are, especially about times and places? The prophet Baruch is clearly familiar with Jerusalem, imagining people standing on the heights and looking east. Those very heights still figure in our news, often tragically. The letter to the Philippians is addressed to a community that St Paul knows very well. He remembers them and prays for them as individuals, grateful for who they are and what they have done. This is not general advice. He asks people to love each other, something that doesn't happen in the abstract.

Finally, Luke's Gospel tells us that John the Baptist rose to prominence in the specific time of Tiberius, Pontius Pilate, Herod, Annas and Caiaphas, all of whom will play a role in the story that follows. Luke pins down the very moment when the world begins to change.

Similarly, we have all heard about the horrors in Ukraine. It is different to read the experiences Caritas Australia brings to our attention this week. These are the stories of Lyudmila, Yuri, Vera, Ruslan, Nina, Adrian and Yana. They could be our neighbours. For Christians, they are our neighbours. **Peace** starts from knowing what it is like to live in someone else's shoes.

There is a message here as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus once again. God is alive and active in the nitty gritty of our lives, not in some vague and imprecise way. We are called to be attentive to all the small gestures of love God makes to us, day by day. Above all, where are the voices crying in our wilderness like John the Baptist? Perhaps they are the most poor and vulnerable. **Peace** grows from the soil of reality.



- Is there something that keeps you from feeling at peace in your relationships with family or friends? It might be time to ask for forgiveness.
- Pray St Francis of Assisi's prayer. Spend some time with God reflecting on how you can be an instrument of God's peace.
- Consider a [regular monthly donation](#) to Caritas Australia, as a gift for someone you know, knowing that you are bringing peace to someone who needs it.



Peaceful God,

Show us your peace in the quiet, often unseen moments of our days; a gentle breeze, the morning sunrise and the calmness of a stranger.

May all in our human family who live with unrest, especially those in Ukraine and Russia feel your hand of peace.

Make us instruments of peace in our homes, in our school and in our world.

Amen