

Advent Resource Kit  
Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

Written by: The Rev. Diane Flynn '17



## Peace Be Upon You

In 2011, I had the privilege of traveling to Morocco with others from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary on a cultural mission trip to learn how Christian missionaries deliver the message of Jesus in a Muslim country. Suffice it to say it's very difficult! One of the first things I learned to say in Arabic was a friendly greeting. When we greet a person in America, we say "hello." But in the Middle East when you greet someone, you put your right hand over your heart and say, "*salam alaykum*" meaning, "Peace be upon you." The typical response to the greeting is for the other person to place their right hand over their heart and say, "*wa 'alaykumu s-salām*" meaning "and peace be upon you." Isn't it interesting that an area of the world that has been in turmoil with one another for centuries offers a peaceful greeting to the other?

Passing the peace to others was commonplace in ancient times. Many times, in the gospels Jesus is found passing the peace to his disciples when suddenly appearing to them following his resurrection. In many Protestant Reformed liturgies, passing the peace of Christ one to another comes after confession and absolution, on the heels of being reminded that our sins are forgiven. This, too, is no coincidence. Our forgiveness and reconciliation flow from Christ's forgiveness of us.

It is only out of gratitude over the enormous debt our Messiah has forgiven that we forgive our debtors (aka: sins). Receiving the precious gift of reconciliation from God enables us to give and receive reconciliation with those around us. Ultimately, God is the peacemaker. It is not simply "peace" that we pass to each other. It is the peace of Christ, the peace of our peacemaker; a peace that is not cheap. Christ's peace never skims the surface or glosses over the wrong that's been done. It's not a peace that plays nice, prevents hurt, or avoids conflict. It's not a peace that is insincere or ignores injustice. It's a peace that is honest and hard-won, that speaks truth and seeks justice, that costs something, and that takes time. It is a peace that offers reconciliation. May the peace of Christ be with you always!

*"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." – Matthew 5:9*

## Embracing the Gift of Joy

Have you ever met someone who exudes joy in everything they do? Yet for some joy seems elusive. To others, it seems to be a part of every breath they take and every move they make.

For my friend Jodi, joy was interwoven with every fiber of her being and she never hesitated to share her joy with others. It was genuine and pure. It was the kind of joy that seemed to be impenetrable and that celebrated when others had success because, for her, it was God at work.

Jodi's joy always reminded me of the joy that Mary, the mother of Jesus, expresses in her Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55). Mary's heart overflows with joy as she proclaims her gratitude to God for the extraordinary role she has been entrusted with and realizing that it is a joyful gift of grace. Her words resonate through generations, reminding us of the boundless hope we have in Christ and the joy it brings to our lives. Her joy is a profound and abiding one, rooted in her unwavering faith in God and the grace God offers.

The source of our joy can be the grace God gave to the world through the birth of Jesus, the Messiah. This moment of grace brought immeasurable joy to the world, and it continues to bless us today. Let us hold on to joy, rooted in the grace of God. Let's share it with those around us and let it illuminate our actions. Through Mary's example in the Magnificat, we see how joy can be a transformative force, bringing light to the darkest corners of our lives and communities.

*For you shall go out in joy and be led back in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. – Isaiah 55:12*