

A Service of Lament for Children Killed in Israel and Palestine on the Commemoration of the Holy Innocents and Martyrs



A reading from Jeremiah-Jeremiah 31: 15-17

¹⁵ This is what the LORD says:

“A voice is heard in Ramah,
mourning and great weeping,
Rachel weeping for her children
and refusing to be comforted,
because they are no more.”

¹⁶ This is what the LORD says:

“Restrain your voice from weeping
and your eyes from tears,
for your work will be rewarded,”
declares the LORD.

“They will return from the land of the enemy.
¹⁷ So there is hope for your descendants,”
declares the LORD.

“Your children will return to their own land.



A prayer of confession and lament and promise

Join me in a prayer of lament:

God of shared tears, God of shared hope, today we remember the innocents who have suffered and died in the contested land that we still call holy:

We confess that we who seek to follow you yet long for a simple narrative. We confess our reluctance to examine the guilt of past assumptions. As our forbearers believed then and taught us that there was a “land without a people,” we pray you would teach us to see all the people and show us your way forward. We remember that Rahab, a Canaanite woman in a land of promise, became one of your own, and that Ruth, the foreigner from Moab became the grandmother of your flawed servant David. We confess that we, too, are flawed. We confess that we often see the differences of tribe or color before we recognize our common humanity.

On this day, gracious and loving God, we acknowledge the magnitude of death and destruction emerging from the notion that your promised land belongs only to a certain people, and now generations have suffered great consequences, whether unintended or sought. Today, we confess our complicity in decisions that have perpetuated this violence. We confess our own acceptance of the divisions created which have kept us from truly loving our neighbor as ourselves.

We pray that you would teach us and show us a new way. Strengthen our common witness. You are the one who breaks down the dividing walls of hostility. Christ Jesus, you are our way, our truth, our light. Creator, you made the world and declared it to be good. We confess that we have wandered away, and not been seeking the way clearly to your intent for all creation.

People of God, let us inhale and say “God, we grow weary of waiting.”

Let us exhale as we say “God, keep us from despair.”

The promise

In the mercy of the mighty God who called us out of darkness and into the light, Jesus Christ was given. In him, we are given new life: redemption and the forgiveness of sins. He was a man of sorrows, well acquainted with grief. He beholds our tears, and we are held in tender mercy as we await the dawn from on high. As we hold this space today for all who have died in the terror of war, may the resurrected one help us to see also what has died within us as we have witnessed the slaughter of innocents in our time. May we be born anew to a living hope. Amen.



The Gospel: Matthew 2:13-18

¹³ When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”

¹⁴ So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, ¹⁵ where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called my son.”^[a]

¹⁶ When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. ¹⁷ Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

¹⁸ “A voice is heard in Ramah,
weeping and great mourning,
Rachel weeping for her children
and refusing to be comforted,
because they are no more.”^[b]

Introduction to the reading of the names:

On October 7, 2023, thousands of Hamas fighters and others from Gaza launched a heinous attack on southern areas of Israel that border Gaza. Their goal was to kill, to maim, to terrorize, and to take hostages. When this act of rage and retaliation was over, nearly 1,200 civilians and soldiers had been killed including over 3 dozen children. Over the 14 months since, Israel has responded with an invasion and siege of Gaza that has killed over 44,000 people, including over 11,000 children.

While governments and nations around the world have sought to parse which side is most to blame, we as followers of Christ are called look on all deaths and suffering on all sides as wrong and tragic, to proclaim that there can be no agenda apart from unconditional end to conflict and freeing of hostages, and to have our greatest concern for the most vulnerable.

The three Abrahamic faiths – Islam, Judaism, and Christianity – all in so many words ascribe to the truth often credited to the words of Elie Wiesel – that each person is a universe. Too often, death on a scale the likes of which we’ve seen in this conflict has a way of numbing us to the extraordinary value of every human life, and the magnitude of loss that each death brings.

As we gather to recall the Holy Innocents killed by order of Herod in the first century, another act of profound evil for which the magnitude of loss obscures the individual value of each tiny infant, we will be reading the names of 40 children killed on October 7 in Israel, as well as the names of 185 infants killed in Gaza since that day. We read a total of 225 names as this is the number of congregations in the Nebraska Synod. 225 names, each a universe, one for each of the congregations in the synod.



Reading of the names

The list of 225 names is attached as a separate document so that you may read it and reflect and pray upon it

Prayer of the day

We remember today, O God, the slaughter of the innocent children of Bethlehem by order of King Herod following Jesus' birth.

We also remember today, O God, the slaughter of innocent children in Gaza and Israel in our own time, as well as families that must flee for fear of death in our own time.

Receive into the arms of your mercy all innocent victims.

By your great might, frustrate the designs of evil tyrants.

Turn the hearts of leaders toward compassion and toward seeking understanding not power.

Establish your rule of justice, love, and peace, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

Closing Song: Let your Peace Rain Upon Us (Yarabba Ssalami), Hymn 989 All Creation Sings

ARABIC

Yarabba ssalami
amter alayna ssalam,
yarabba ssalami,
im la' qulubana ssalam.

ENGLISH

Let your peace rain upon us,
O living God of peace.
Let your peace rain upon us,
Lord, fill our hearts with your peace.

Let your Peace Rain Upon Us. Text: Palestinian traditional; tr. Mark Swanson, b. 1955, and Mark Sedio, b. 1954 English text © 2020 Augsburg Fortress. Music: Palestinian traditional. All rights reserved.
Reprinted with permission under One License A-723476. All rights reserved.

This service was produced by the Nebraska Synod Holy Land Accompaniment (NSHLA) team with gratitude to Pastor Kathy Gerking, Pastor Bill Pavuk and Pastor Megan Morrow for writing pieces of this service of lament, Deacon Timothy Siburg for recording the hymn, Bishop Scott Johnson for reading the lessons, Nebraska Synod staff for reading the names and Amy Buch for producing the recording. For more information on how you can become involved with NSHLA, contact gretchen@nebraskasynod.org

You are invited and encouraged to use and share this service as you see fit.

The icon Christ in the Rubble was produced by Kelly Lattimore and is available for free download here: <https://kellylatimoreicons.com/products/christ-in-the-rubble>.