

## Pastoral Prayer

12/11/11

Most gracious God, today we come rejoicing, to worship and praise your most holy name. Once again we hear the story of our salvation, promised by prophets and incarnated in the Babe of Bethlehem. Be with us today and in the week ahead as we prepare our hearts and homes to receive the Christ Child once again. But as we focus on the magic of this Christmas season, help us also to see beyond it, to Christ's promised Second Coming. May we prepare room in our lives to be ready at any time for that great and glorious day, when our world will be redeemed by the One who came to dwell among us. On that day may we truly shout for joy!

We pray today for your redeeming love to enfold all of our struggling world like a warm, cozy blanket. Bring a balm of healing to those who are mourning the loss of loved ones today and throughout this Advent season. Help them to feel the closeness of your Spirit's love surrounding them as they grieve. May your Spirit's strength support all those who are struggling with serious illness at this season of the year, particularly those living with HIV/AIDS. We ask for healing of mind, body and spirit for all who are sick. Guide our physicians in their work of healing, and help our researchers find cures for diseases we currently call incurable. We know God that with you the impossible becomes possible. Help us to have faith, patience and courage as we await your gift of healing.

We pray also today for all those situations in our world that seem impervious to your Spirit's healing power: for the Middle East, particularly for resolution of the conflicts between Israel and Palestine, and within Syria, Egypt, Libya, Yemen and so many other nations of that part of the world. As we pray for the men and women of our armed forces who remain stationed in Afghanistan and other places around the world, we also rejoice and give thanks that those stationed in Iraq are coming home this Christmas. May this be a particularly happy reunion for them with their families, as they celebrate the season together!

All these prayers we lift in joyful expectation to you, O Lord, who answers prayer and who sent us a Savior, the child of Bethlehem, the Prince of Peace, who taught us to pray together his prayer, saying:

"Our Father, who art ..."