

Not Lighting the Second Advent Candle in 2023

An invitation to stand with all those suffering in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory

How can we help our fellow Christians in the Holy Land this year? One way is for us to offer prayers of solidarity in our worship.

This Advent and Christmas (2023) all the lights that are normally illuminated to adorn the birthplace of Jesus (Bethlehem) will remain unlit. This action is in memory of all those who have been wounded and killed during the devastating, current conflict. The Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem have asked for the traditional festive services in the Holy Land to be sombre in nature, reflecting the ongoing war.

Endorsed by our General Assembly Moderator, Revd Dr Tessa Henry-Robinson, we are inviting United Reformed Churches across Scotland, Wales and England to act in solidarity



with our siblings in the Holy Land by not lighting the Advent Candle on the second Sunday in Advent (10 December).

The suggestion, in other words, is for congregations to leave their second candle unlit all the way through Advent, including Christmas Day. The Second Sunday candle is often known as the 'Bethlehem Candle', hence the special significance for this action. The unlit candle can serve as a constant reminder that we stand in solidarity with all those who are suffering in the Holy Land.

You do not have to change your current liturgy, but you may wish to add the liturgy below (feel free to modify to suit your context), underlining why this candle will remain unlit.

Action

On Christmas Day, we invite you to take a photo or short video of support, showing your Advent candles, with the second 'Bethlehem Candle' unlit, and email it to commitmentforlife@urc.org.uk

We will make sure that your pictures or videos of support are sent to local Church communities in the Holy Land so that our siblings in Christ can witness your actions over the festive season.

For further information email Kevin Snyman, Programme Officer, URC Global Justice & Partnerships: kevin.snyman@urc.org.uk

Additional resources

Not lighting the second candle during Advent could lead to many questions. Congregations may wish to learn more about how the United Reformed Church and ecumenical partners are reacting to the harrowing devastation they see daily in their latest news feeds. For up-to-date information on the denomination's response to the conflict, see here:

<https://bit.ly/urcisraelgazaresponse>

Through its global justice programme, Commitment for Life, the URC has for many years partnered with Christian Aid projects in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories. For those URC local churches who are already supporting Commitment for Life, you will be contributing to the rebuilding of the region during and beyond the conflict. For those churches which might like to consider how they could become a Commitment for Life partner, as part of your response to the devastation, you can learn more here: <https://bit.ly/urccfliopt>

Additional Advent Liturgy for the Second Sunday in Advent

Jesus said, I am the light and the truth and the way.

But why does the Light not shine in Bethlehem tonight?

Why do children cry for their parents, families for one another, and doctors for patients?

Why do our cries to you, Jesus, seem to fall on deafened ears?

Are you listening?

Do you lie under the rubble, ears filled with brick and dust?

When will you arise?

When will you stop the sirens?

When will you stop the kidnappings?

When will you stop the occupation?

When will you stop tanks rolling, guns blazing, soldiers marching, hospitals imploding, politicians posturing?

Our siblings in Bethlehem and Gaza and Kibbutzim cry for peace while their leaders campaign for war, in the vain hope that violence will very soon bring peace to the Land that once was Holy.

We choose not to light this Bethlehem candle, O God; until the ceasefire is final; until the guns are silent enough for the oppressed to be heard; until the land is shared equitably and finally becomes the Land that truly is Holy.

Create for all, O God, a home that is just and generous, flowing with milk and honey. May it become an Ark of awe-inspiring abundance that is shared equally among Jews and Christians and Muslims, and every living creature throughout the world.

And so, we choose not to light the second candle in our Advent Wreath in solidarity with all who strive for peace until the lights once again shine bright in Bethlehem.

And so we pray, 'Come, Immanuel, God-with-us, come be with your suffering people now.'

Amen