

First Sunday of Advent

Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.
—Isaiah 2:4 NRSV

Explore

variety of colored beads, memory wire or elastic cord, pliers, scissors, index card

Peace Beads

Prayer beads have been used in many cultures and by many faiths since ancient times as a way of remembering specific reasons for prayer. Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, and Hinduism, and other religions, have their unique purposes associated with this concrete symbol used with prayer. The Muslim's prayer beads consist of a string of ninety-nine beads. As each bead is moved along the string, they recite "beautiful" names or attributes of Allah. The Hindu mala is perhaps the oldest known form of prayer beads. The rosary is the one most familiar in Christianity. Each bead represents a prayer and is moved as the prayer is said.

As a way of remembering your own prayers for peace, make peace beads to be worn on the wrist. (An option is to make longer ones to be worn around the neck.) Provide a variety of colorful beads of different shapes and sizes and memory wire or elastic cord purchased from a hobby and craft supply store. Have students select five to seven beads that are different and identify a cause for peace for each bead. Examples of causes might be issues at home, at school, the neighborhood, the congregation, the environment, world situations, friends in the military, or other people with responsibilities, and a bead for the student's own inner peace. Have each student make a personal reference card identifying the purposes for each bead until they are committed to memory. Add the beads to the memory wire and make a loop at each end or add beads to elastic cord and tie the ends with a secure knot. Allow room for the beads to move.

Extract

Bible,
Book of Mormon

Isaiah 2:1–5
II Nephi 8:18–21

God Teaches Peace

Today's passage from Isaiah was written addressing the political situation in eighth century BCE in Judah, the Southern Kingdom. The Northern Kingdom, Israel, would soon be conquered by Assyria, so Judah was forming alliances with Egypt for protection. Isaiah's message to King Hezekiah of Judah was to trust God, not humans. Read Isaiah 2:1–5.

The words look forward to the future and a new beginning for all people. They express a vision of peace where nations come seeking God's instruction, learning that God's way will destroy the weapons of war. The same message is given in II Nephi 8:18–21. Students may or may not live in a community where farming tools—plowshares and pruning hooks—have significance, but there are tools familiar to them that can be substituted. Ask: "How would you change instruments of war into tools for peace in your community?"

Today, on this First Sunday of Advent, we have opportunities for new beginnings. We anticipate the birth of Christ and the new Christian year. Ask: "How can I promote peace this year?"

Experience

Praying the Psalms, Praying for Peace

Praying the scriptures goes back to the Middle Ages when men and women of the Benedictine order would select a scripture passage that was suggestive of reflective prayer—reflective by thinking about one's self in relation to God, others, and the world. Several different voices might read the same passage aloud varying the rhythm, intensity, and tone. The room's atmosphere would be enhanced by candlelight and melodic chanting of songs. They probably paused between readings to meditate, to ponder on the meaning of what was

read, frequently selecting a short phrase or a particular word that caught their attention to repeat in their mind over and over as they meditated in silence. Frequently the selected word or phrase would become the object of prayer or conversation with God. They might pray something like this: “God, why have you brought this word to my attention? What are you saying to me? What do you want me to hear and do?” Later, after their silent conversations with God, they would share with the others participating. The sharing of experience created something like a support group to help each individual continue to explore any new found meaning. Finally, they would return to silence and contemplate, write, journal, paint, or work in some other art medium exploring what they would do with their new understanding.

Bible, candles, matches, pens, markers, paper, CD player, CD of meditative music

Today’s lectionary psalm, Psalm 122, is considered a pilgrimage psalm. A pilgrimage is a journey from where you are to some place of great significance. This is a psalm of joy, hope, and celebration of a peace centered in Jerusalem, one of the most fought over cities in world history, which today continues to be a center of conflict. The Advent season is the beginning of our personal pilgrimage for the new year as we return to the birth of the Prince of Peace and move out from there. Take a few minutes to read and understand the directions below, then pray Psalm 122. (Light candles and darken the room.)

Psalm 122

1. Have several individuals read Psalm 122 aloud. You may read from where you are sitting or try an antiphonal approach by having a different person read from each corner of the room. This step is called **lectio** in Latin and means “reading.”
2. Quietly think about the passage. Look for a word or phrase that stands out for you and meditate on it. Does the word peace stand out? This step is called **meditatio** and means “meditation.”
3. Dialogue with God. Pray and let God speak to you. This step is called **oratio** and means “speak” through prayer and conversation with others sharing the experience. After a few minutes, share your thinking about this experience with others in your group.
4. The final step is called **contemplatio** and means “contemplate.” Now return to active silence by expressing your thoughts on the paper provided. Write, compose a poem, illustrate, or if you feel inspired to do something larger than the page allows, diagram what you plan to do on another piece of paper. Listen to meditative music while completing this task.

Expand

Come, Let Us Walk in the Light of the LORD!

Send students off with this challenge.

*We are individually differently designed by God, yet we are all challenged
as it says in Isaiah 2:5 to “walk in the light of the LORD!”
Walking in that light is a lifelong learning experience.
The light came to us as the first Christmas gift,
our individual gift, our collective gift as inhabitants of this world.
The light of Jesus Christ brought love, joy, hope, and peace.
Let us live Christ’s way.
Let us pray for peace in the world.*

Isaiah 2:5

Lectionary scriptures—Isaiah 2:1–5; Psalm 122; Romans 13:11–14; Matthew 24:36–44/24:43–51 IV ; II Nephi 8:18–21; Doctrine and Covenants 152:4d