

What if. . .

Image by [Vicki Hamilton](#) from [Pixabay](#)

During Advent, on Christmas day, and now, as the Christmas Season ends with the feast of [Epiphany](#), we welcomed the familiar stories of Incarnation, Emmanuel - God With Us. We revisited the Annunciation, Joseph's dream, the Visitation, the difficult journey to Bethlehem, the Birth of Jesus in a humble place, adored by shepherds and greeted with angels' song. After this week's wondrous Epiphany story, we reluctantly move on once more into Ordinary Time.



As I revisit all these treasured stories, I ask myself, "What if. . ."? What if Mary had said "I'm too young," and Elizabeth had said, "I'm too old"? What if shepherds hadn't believed in angels, and Magi hadn't linked science with faith and improbably followed an unusual star? (I note that the Gospel calls these sojourners from the east Magi, not kings, and never provides their gender. Hm-m-m.) There would have been no Christmas if these what-ifs had been realized, if God had not trusted in human beings to accomplish God's desires for God's Creation. Fortunately for us, these women and men said 'Yes' to angels, dreams, and stars, that is, to God's invitation.

In their time, there were power-hungry kings. There was poverty, greed, physical and spiritual hunger, and longing for deliverance. But human beings like you and me, when given a choice, threw in their lot with the God they trusted and loved. In our time, there are still cruel power-hungry tyrants. There is rampant violence and there are deep divisions. Hunger, racism, economic inequality and gouging of God's beautiful and bountiful creation for profit are realities. God's invitation to bring Christ into our personal, communal, and public lives comes now to us, perhaps not in dreams and stars or angel messengers, but it comes from deep within our hearts, and from vulnerable voices calling out to us. May we, like our ancestors, not turn away or provide excuses, but give an unconditional 'Yes' to God who trusts in us and loves us.

Sr. Marie Lucey, OSF
Associate Director

Suggested Action:

Bring a small light into the violent darkness in the Holy Land by continuing to urge President Biden to heed the call of Pope Francis: "No to violence, yes to peace," and call for a sustained cease fire. Stop sending weapons to Israel, but work for release of hostages. White House comment desk: 202-246-1111.

Suggested Petition:

That we may listen closely for God's invitations in the multiple ways God speaks to us and respond Yes, let us pray.

Prayer: 11th Century Latin Hymn

Lord of light, shine on us; Lord of peace, dwell in us;
Lord of might, protect us; Lord of love enfold us;
Lord of wisdom, enlighten us.

Then, Lord, let us go out as your witnesses, in obedience to your command;
to share the good news of your mighty love for us
in the gift of your son, our savior, Jesus Christ.
Amen

Join us January 5, 2024 for our 3rd Annual Faith in Democracy Vigil

As people of faith, we are called to act as peacemakers and bridge-builders. We will begin 2024 by calling on all Americans to respect and improve democracy as the best way to nonviolently resolve political differences in our country.

On **Friday, January 5, 2024 at 4-5pm ET (1-2pm PT)** Franciscan Action Network and Faith in Peace Concerts will co-host the 3rd annual [Faith in Democracy interfaith prayer vigil](#) with our cosponsors, which will bring together faith leaders from several traditions to reflect on how our sacred texts and culture can guide us as we begin this crucial year. [Find information on our speakers and musicians here](#). The **event will be hybrid**, held in person on the grounds of the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C. and live streamed on [FAN's YouTube channel](#) for those across the country. **Please register to join us** to pray, sing, and reaffirm our commitment to live out our Franciscan values in 2024.



January 8: Anti-Trafficking Prayer Service

In January, the anti-trafficking Josephine Bakhita Prayer Service will highlight the January 11 Awareness Day Against Human Trafficking, which is a key part of the National Human Trafficking Prevention month. While trafficking prevention month seeks to raise awareness on human trafficking generally, the January 8 service will focus on the intersection between online exploitation/sextrafficking of young children and human trafficking.

No need to register, simply [click here to join](#) on **January 8 at 2pm ET/11am PT**.



Urge Congress to Safeguard Asylum

Immigrant advocates continue to be concerned that asylum is under imminent threat. While it did not come to a vote before the holiday break, lawmakers are considering a deal to pass foreign aid assistance in exchange for extreme, permanent changes to U.S. immigration and asylum law. This tradeoff would destroy asylum protections for people seeking safety and would increase chaos at the US-Mexico border.

Continued calls and emails to members of Congress are needed, urging them NOT to trade asylum for emergency foreign aid. **Contact with Democrats is especially important.** The USCCB Justice for Immigrants Campaign has [this email action alert](#). Welcome With Dignity offers the script below for making phone calls. If you don't know your Senator's phone number, call the Capitol Switchboard at 202-224-3121 and ask to be transferred to your Senator's office.



Sample Script: Hello, my name is (NAME) and I am alarmed by efforts to gut asylum protections in exchange for funding for Ukraine, Israel, and Taiwan. I urge Senator (NAME) to reject any proposal that would take away the right to seek asylum or make it harder to seek protection. It is unacceptable to agree to anti-immigrant proposals that undermine our values as a country. (Can add: As a person of faith I urge you to protect the right to seek asylum.)

Feel free to make the wording your own as long as the ask is clear: protect the right to seek asylum.

Thank you for your Generosity!

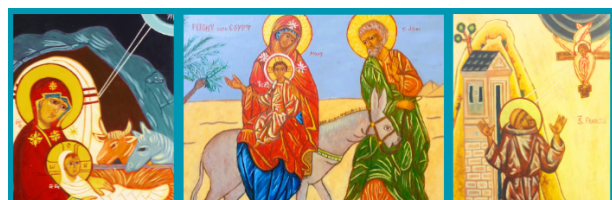
The staff of FAN would like to thank you for your generosity throughout the end of 2023. From Giving Tuesday and right to the last day of the year, your continued support of our collective work lifted our spirits. We are humbled and excited to begin anew the necessary work of advocating for peace, human dignity, and creation care this year.

If you have not yet had a chance, we gratefully accept donations all year on our website. Make a [one-time gift](#) or consider becoming a [monthly sustaining donor](#) to support FAN's work, which channels and unites the cries of our Franciscan hearts for peace and justice.



Journeying Together from the Crib to the Cross

Begin 2024 journeying together with your Franciscan sisters and brothers at this unique [Franciscan Federation virtual retreat](#) designed to inspire, connect, and transform.



The speakers include Murray Bodo OFM, Eunice Park, and Darleen Pryds, each of whom will bring their Franciscan wisdom to the themes of Greccio (the crib), journeying, and Francis' Stigmata (the cross) on this special day of reflection and sharing. Attendees will discover together, how events that occurred 800 years ago continue to transform us today.

There are **two dates to choose from**: January 14, 2024 from 1pm–5pm ET (10am-2pm PT) OR February 4, 2024 from 3pm–7pm ET (12pm-4pm PT). [Click here to register for either date.](#)

Franciscan Justice Circle Updates

The transition to a new year provides us the space to consider how we'd like to live the next 52 weeks. As you consider your intentions, if coming together with others in your area to engage in social and environmental justice rooted in Franciscan spirituality arises, we invite you to learn more about [Franciscan Justice Circles](#) (FJC). With over 20 Circles throughout the country and expanding on college campuses, you will be in good company. Check out our video [Circles of Change](#) to find out more!



Upcoming Franciscan Justice Circle meetings:

Mid-Hudson Valley FJC: Tues. Jan. 2 at 12:00pm EST on zoom

Kansas FJC: Tues. Jan. 2 at 7:00pm CST on zoom

Connecticut-Rhode Island FJC: Wed. Jan. 3 at 7:00pm EST on zoom

Virtual FJC: Thurs. Jan. 4 at 11:00am PST / 2:00pm EST on zoom

Central Indiana FJC: Fri. Jan. 5 at 1:00pm EST on zoom

Please reach out to [FAN staff](#) to find out more information and explore connecting with a FJC.