

Eternal God,

In this Christmastide, we are in awe before the mystery of your incarnation. We're honored to come into your presence this morning and eager to see the birth of Jesus played out a thousand ways in our lives. Thank you Lord for being Immanuel, God-with-us. Thank you for hearing us when we pray, and not only hearing us, but being attentive to us too – caring for us, loving us, bending down to us, listening to us. Thank you for salvation in Jesus Christ and the endless hope you offer us in him.

We pray that you usher hope and the light of Christ into all our lives this Christmas season. Be especially present to those wrestling with a loss of strength, or with illness, or with the long task of recovery. Incarnate God, be near to Betty Wiersma and Marian Heerema as they continue in their recovery. Be their constant strength and encouragement. And too Lord, we bring to you those families who this Christmas may be grieving the loss of someone they love so much. Bring deep grace into their lives, and by your Holy Spirit, may they feel your mighty and compassionate arms wrap around them.

On Christmas day, we heard the angels shout: "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!" Like them, we desire peace on this earth, a peace that is broader and deeper than the end of war. We pray for the restoration of this world, for the growth of your kingdom, for reconciliation, healing, and renewal. In all places Lord, make your incarnate presence known, and may we as your servants be bringers of shalom. Today, we pray specifically for workers in health care around the world, for peacekeepers in Central African Republic, and for families experiencing the pain of division or separation.

Almighty God, we also bring to you the quiet needs and thanksgivings in our own lives, and in our hearts. Along with the psalmist, we also ask that you teach us wisdom in our secret heart. Let us hear joy and gladness, create in us a clean heart, and put a new and right spirit within us. What a perfect time of year for transformation, Lord, and we appeal to your transformative grace to mold and shape us in paths of righteousness and discipleship.

All of this we bring to you through our Lord Jesus Christ. How amazing that we can come directly to you in prayer, thanks to Jesus. And because we don't always know how or when to pray, we thank you for Jesus who prays with us and for us. We pray the prayer he taught us:

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.**