



# Global Mission Sunday

February 4, 2024

## Sermon by ELCIC National Bishop Susan Johnson

*Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany*

*Isaiah 40:21–31*

*Psalm 147:1–11, 20c*

*1 Corinthians 9:16–23*

*Mark 1:29–39*

### **Isaiah 40:31**

***“but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.”***

Grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus. And greetings from your siblings in Christ from coast to coast to coast. For our sermon today I am using the first lesson from Isaiah specifically the last verse: *but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.*

This is the Sunday we set aside as Global Mission Sunday. It is a time for us to remember Christians around the world but especially our partners. Nationally our partners are the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Argentina and Uruguay, and the Lutheran Church of Peru. Each of the synods also has companion church relationships that include Guyana, Cameroon, Columbia, Argentina and Peru as well as the Holy Land.

This year we are focusing on the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land. Ever since October 7 and horrific attacks carried out by Hamas against Israel and the subsequent war on Gaza, we have been focused on the Middle East. Yes, we still remember the many other wars that are taking place in the world in Yemen, Sudan, Ukraine and on and on. But with the war on Gaza taking place and affecting our partner church, it has become a particular focus.

There isn't a Lutheran church in Gaza. Before the start of the war there were only 1,200 Christians in Gaza. But our partners have friends and relatives in Gaza and have experienced losses of family and other loved ones. Worse, they have been able to watch live videos of some of these atrocities happening.

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They also have experienced increased unrest and violence as well as restricted movement in the West Bank where the ELCJHL has congregations in Bethlehem, Beit Sahour, Beit Jala, and Ramallah.

In recognition of the hardships in the region, the churches of the Holy Land restricted celebrations of Christmas to only religious services. No Christmas tree in manger square, no Christmas pageants or parties, no other special gatherings.

There has been a major loss of income in the region due to its dependence on tourism. What does this mean? Salaries can't be paid. Families can't pay tuition fees. There are no offerings. It is hard to feed a family. These realities affect the ELCJHL and its congregations, schools, and ministries.

It continues to be a very difficult and challenging time and we have no idea of how long it will last.

In the midst of this very harsh reality, why did I choose this verse from Isaiah—*but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint*—after all, that verse is so hopeful and upbeat?

Because that verse reflects the essence of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land. In the midst of all their troubles, they continue to live in hope and faith. I was recently talking with Bishop Ibrahim Azar about the very muted Christmas they had experienced. I asked him how it had gone and he said to me how hard it was, "but Christ was born again in our hearts."

Christ was born again in our hearts.

If the ELCJHL can be faithful and continue ministry in their extremely difficult circumstances—keeping congregations and schools open and serving those in need, then we can continue with faith and hope in the midst of the challenges we face!

Global Mission Sunday is a time for us to remember. But it can also be a time to act. You can write to the Prime Minister to call for a ceasefire. You can make a donation to Global Mission. You can support our current appeal to help the ELCJHL in their time of financial need. You can pray for peace in Gaza, in the Middle East and indeed around the world.

This season of epiphany we began by remembering the wise ones who came to the Holy Land to worship the babe of Bethlehem. Today and everyday, let us not forget the Christians who struggle to stay in that holy land and proclaim the good news.

*Amen.*