

## Devotion Seventh Week of Easter, 2021

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I have been following with dismay the awful conflict in Israel. Old wounds, all the way back to the tribal divisions in the Old Testament, have once again opened. In spite of the fact that the Arabs and Jews there are really cousins as descendants of Abraham, they cannot seem to make room for each other in the same country.

I recently finished a study of Mary, the mother of Jesus. This study examined Mary in both the Islamic and Christian traditions, and it was striking to me that the Koran talks about Mary much more than the Bible. She is revered throughout the Koran. In fact, Joseph is not mentioned in that holy book, but Muslims consider Mary to have the highest status in paradise of any human – the highest rank a human can achieve. Muslims, as well as Catholic and Orthodox Christians venerate her and pray to her for intercession. She is called the *theotokos*, the mother of God come to earth, Jesus, and is shown with a halo like Jesus in many Orthodox icons. In addition to the common stories of Abraham and his life, Muslims honor Jesus as a special prophet sent by God. So I have trouble understanding why they are bound to make war against each other, year after year, century after century. Of course, I understand that a lot of it is about property, not religion. But it makes me sad that this country that God sent Abraham to settle, this country that contains the holiest places in our Christian religion, as well as the Al-Aqsa mosque over the Dome of the Rock, the third holiest site in Islam, is a center of violence. We recently studied a lesson in our PW Bible Study about God lamenting. I think God laments over his children who have turned his promised land into a land of bombings and death. I've included these words from Hosea 11 where God laments over his children in Israel. May we all pray for peace and understanding among these two groups of people who cannot seem to see each other as siblings in God's Holy Land.

When Israel was a child, I loved him,  
and out of Egypt I called my son.  
The more I called them,  
the more they went from me;  
they kept sacrificing to the Baals,  
and offering incense to idols.  
Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to  
walk,  
I took them up in my arms;  
but they did not know that I  
healed them.  
I led them with cords of human  
kindness,  
with bands of love.  
I was to them like those

who lift infants to their cheeks.  
I bent down to them and fed them.  
My people are bent on turning away  
from me.  
To the Most High they call,  
but he does not raise them up at all.  
How can I give you up, Ephraim?  
How can I hand you over, O Israel?  
My heart recoils within me;  
my compassion grows warm and ten-  
der.  
I will not execute my fierce anger;  
I will not again destroy Ephraim;  
for I am God and no mortal,  
the Holy One in your midst,  
and I will not come in wrath.

**Jeanne**