VOA NEWS

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This is VOA news. I'm Marissa Melton.

The heads of the Catholic and Anglican Churches sent a special message Wednesday to the people of South Sudan expressing hopes for peace, prosperity and implementation of a peace deal as Christians around the world celebrated the Christmas holiday.

In a joint letter, Pope Francis and the archbishop of Canterbury sent prayers for "a renewed commitment to the path of reconciliation and fraternity" among South Sudan's political leaders.

Earlier this month, President Salva Kiir and rebel leader Riek Machar agreed to form a transitional unity government by a February deadline after they failed to meet two earlier target dates for implementing a 2018 peace deal.

Pope Francis also gave his traditional Christmas address from the balcony of St. Peter's Basilica where he spoke about those suffering from the effects of conflicts in the Middle East and Africa and the additional challenges they face when making a decision to migrate.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has been promising U.S. President Donald Trump a special gift for Christmas. AP's Jackie Quinn has more.

After North Korea's leader warned he would take action if sanctions are not eased by the end of the year. The speculation is that the "Christmas gift" he has promised to the U.S. would likely be a new missile test, perhaps a missile capable of delivering a nuclear warhead.

When asked how the U.S. will respond, President Trump said maybe Kim Jong Un is planning "a nice present" like a "beautiful vase" rather than a missile launch.

A U.N. spokesman says the world body has a Christmas message for Pyongyang. It should "work for peace and stability on the Korean peninsula" and resume disarmament talks with the United States.

Jackie Quinn, Washington.

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The leaders of China and Japan held a bilateral meeting on Wednesday. Reuters' Emer McCarthy has that story.

Chinese Premier Li Keqiang and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe have vowed to strengthen their relationship at a bilateral meeting in Chengdu on Wednesday.

Li said in the meeting that he hopes the relationship between the two countries could get back on track and progress in the future. Abe hopeful ongoing discussions will lead to a visit by Xi.

Wednesday's meeting came on the sidelines of a trilateral summit with South Korea, which provided a chance for the leaders of Japan and South Korea to meet for the first time in more than a year and stressed the need to improve ties after the quote, "worst period" of tensions between their countries in decades.

That's Reuters' Emer McCarthy.

The U.S. Navy is paying tribute to two of the battleships lost during the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. AP's Ed Donahue has that story.

The USS Arizona and the USS Oklahoma were two of the biggest casualties of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941.

Acting Secretary of the Navy Thomas Modly says two new nuclear fast-attack submarines will be designated USS Oklahoma, SSN-802, and the USS Arizona, SSN-803.

In a statement, Modly says it is fondest wish that the citizens of the great states of Arizona and Oklahoma will understand and celebrate the Navy's desire to memorialize the 1, 177 heroes who perished on the USS Arizona and the 429 more on the USS Oklahoma.

I'm Ed Donahue.

The Christmas messages by Britain's Queen Elizabeth emphasizes the need for forgiveness, reconciliation and small steps while admitting it has been a difficult year. AP correspondent Julie Walker.

While discussing current conflicts, Queen Elizabeth's message invokes the anniversary of D-day, the moon-landing as well as Prince Harry and wife Meghan's son, Archie.

"... it is often the small steps - not the giant leaps - that bring about the most lasting change."

The peace and reconciliation come at a cost.

"The path, of course, is not always smooth and may at times this year have felt quite bumpy."

It's been a bumpy year for England and the monarchy, including Prince Andrew's friendship with Jeffrey Epstein, the scrutiny over Meghan and Brexit.

I'm Julie Walker.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan paid a surprise visit to Tunisia on Wednesday to discuss cooperation for a possible cease-fire in neighboring Libya. Turkey supports the internationally recognized government.

Erdoğan also reaffirmed Ankara's willingness to send troops to Libya if it receives such a request.

And there were more protests in Hong Kong today. Police fired tear gas and used pepper spray to disperse crowds at shopping malls and nearby streets.

Marissa Melton, VOA news.