



“Welcome, Jesus. Here we are – we who awaken your deepest motivations of commitment and love.  
We are amazed by your love, we believe in your power and we wait to see your glory in this time”.

**Advent**  
**2015**

## Presentation

For the past several weeks, the consumeristic system has been offering Christmas in the marketplace. It would seem that the Christmas celebration will only happen if people have the economic means to buy it. This is an imported Christmas, plastic and decorative, that invites one to spend on disposable products and unhealthy foods. Meanwhile, Jesus comes stereotyped in the image of a beautiful white baby, surrounded by a family placed artificially in a romantic scene.

Sadly, the Christian tradition of Christmas has given up more than enough space to this commercial celebration and it has come to be the only celebration the new generations know. Therefore, the prophetic tradition of Advent must continue to reaffirm itself each year in order to prepare the celebration of the Christian Christmas as a glorious event in which the world receives the visitation of God through the fragility of a baby, a child of an impoverished family who struggles for their daily existence. It is in this daily struggle for subsistence that God is manifested

Since early times, the first Christian communities dedicated a special time to prepare for Christmas. That was a time of prayer, reflection and practices that set people on the right path toward the great annual celebration of Jesus' birth. With time, the meaning of Advent unfolded to also include the joyful expectation of the second coming of Jesus.

## The Advent Wreath

This is a symbol that marks the progress of the season of Advent. Through the wreath, the four weeks of Advent are marked until arriving at Christmas Day. Its circular shape symbolizes the eternity of God, without beginning or end. The branches are green, the color of hope and life. Four candles are placed on the wreath: three purple and one pink, plus a white one in the center. The candles are lit Sunday after Sunday; they show us how the darkness dissipates and our lives become illuminated by the nearness of Christ's presence.



\* Names of our girls and boys on the cover: Sophia, Benjamín, Darlyn, Máximo, Ethan, Dulce María, Emmanuel, Javier and Natalia.

## Our proposal

The objective of the Advent reflections prepared by the Protestant Center for Pastoral Studies in Central America (CEDEPCA) is to reaffirm the prophetic tradition of Advent and to announce to the world that God is present in our midst. Furthermore, we seek to support the devotional moments of the sisters and brothers who wait for Christmas with actions, prayer and Biblical reflections.

The materials that we have prepared may be used in a family environment, with specific reflection groups, for community reflections in the church or in other appropriate spaces. Our greatest hope is that during this time of Advent we may enrich our lives and thereby proclaim to this needy world the hope in the birth of the Son of God. At the same time, we also want to insist on and vehemently call for the Day of the Eternal Salvation of the Lord for this world.

For this year, we have decided to take the opportunity to consider once again the interesting contributions of the group that collaborated in preparing the reflection of Advent 2012.

Once again we want to thank and recognize the contributions of Neli Miranda, Emerson Morales, Marcia Towers and Arnoldo Aguilar, who graciously prepared these reflections. The Biblical texts cited in this document have been translated into English from the *Dios Habla Hoy* version of the Holy Scriptures [which is used by our CEDEPCA team].

¡With joy and hope!

From CEDEPCA

Licda. Judith Castañeda  
General Coordinator  
CEDEPCA

## THE REIGN OF GOD IS NEAR

First week of Advent (beginning November 29)

### ➤ Introduction:

*One voice:* Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and of your steadfast love, for they have been from of old. Psalm 25:6

### ➤ Invocation:

*One voice:* Make us to know your ways, O Lord; teach us your paths.

*All voices:* Lead us in your truth and teach us, for you are the God of our salvation.

*One voice:* We light this first candle on the Advent wreath as a sign of joy and hope for the arrival of God in this world.

*All voices:* Lead us in your truth and teach us, for you are the God of our salvation.



### ➤ Biblical Readings:

Zechariah 14:4-9; Psalm 25:1-10; 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13; Luke 21:25-36. *Read one or more of the assigned readings. It is suggested that one of the readings be the Gospel Reading. After each reading, a time of silence may be kept or an appropriate song may be sung.*

### ➤ Our reality

Currently we live in a system of life based on the accumulation of wealth and power. The rich and powerful lord it over and oppress persons who are poor and weak. The anxiety and longing to possess wealth and power justify all possible mechanisms for dominating people. There is plundering of natural resources, human trafficking, imposition of long work-days, and miserable salaries that keep people hungry. These situations keep entire peoples exhausted and hopeless about improving their lives. Meantime, nation states are incapable of responding to the necessities of their peoples; the governments in power only serve their own interests and steal taxes. There is no justice for everyone; justice is bought and sold with bribery. It would seem that the utopia of a world of peace and justice grows more distant every day...

*Time for sharing*

## ➤ Biblical perspective

The prophet Zechariah tells about the afflictions of a people, the people of Israel, who are invaded and abused by the powerful nations that surround them. The armies enter the city of Jerusalem, raid the houses, rape the women, and enslave the inhabitants. In the face of these abuses, the prophet Zechariah carries a message of hope to the people: God is on the side of the people and will frustrate the evil of the oppressors. On that day, says the prophet, God will disrupt the path of the evildoers and defend the oppressed. “The LORD will reign over the whole earth. On that day there will be one LORD, and his name will be the only name.” Then the people will have safety and wellbeing because God is on the side of the people.

Luke’s Gospel tells us about the moment when Jesus predicts difficult times for the inhabitants of the earth. There will be confusion and even nature will give great signs that will cause persons to feel great terror, says Jesus. Nevertheless, he also announces good news: in the midst of the confusion and panic, he will manifest himself to the world. But he will not come in the weakness of the flesh, but in the glory of his exaltation. He will come as King and will bring the fullness of his reign.

Jesus knows that his followers will be afraid in the face of such events. For this reason he exhorts them: “When these things begin to happen, take heart, hold your heads high, for you will soon be free.”

It is not easy to have spirit and hope when things are going badly: when the powerful take the lives of our loved ones and abuse people who are poor and helpless; when the little we possess is ripped from our hands; when we see people dying of hunger all around us. It is not easy... Nonetheless, as believers in Christ, every day and especially in this time of Advent, we hold our heads high and once again we insist vehemently and announce the liberation of this world. When Jesus asks us to hold up our heads, he asks us to look up, to not allow ourselves to be crushed by evil, to open our hearts to hope. When we look up and hold our heads high, we can see what is happening around us; we can see solutions; we can begin actions that call for and make his Reign present.

No one knows the day or the hour in which our Lord will return for the final liberation of this world. Nevertheless, during this Advent season, we are called to announce with joy and hope his coming in this new Christmas. Meanwhile, we keep ourselves in an attitude of active waiting, with our heads held high, with our vision full of hope, and with actions that will favor justice and equity in this world. May this new Advent be one of preparation and proclamation of his Eternal Reign! AMEN.

## ➤ Questions to deepen our reflection

What does it mean in our own context to hold one’s head high?  
Have we grown accustomed to living in this unjust world?  
Do we maintain hope in the coming of the Lord of this world?  
Do we wait actively?  
How do we demonstrate our active waiting for the Reign of God in this world?

➤ **Activity for the week**

- Let us participate in our faith communities; let's join our sisters and brothers in order to announce our hope in the coming of the Lord of this world.
- Let's seek to be in solidarity with our brothers and sisters who are in difficult situations. Let's announce to them the good news of Jesus' visitation to the world in this Christmas and the hope of his Eternal Reign. Let's carry a sign that accompanies our announcement; it could be a gift appropriate to the needs of the person being visited.

➤ **Final prayer and closing**

*One voice:* We give thanks to God for uniting us in this moment of prayer and reflection, and we ask that we be allowed to maintain our hope and joy until the day of Christ's coming.

*All voices:* **Let us lift up** our heads, **let us raise** our gaze and actively **await** your coming, O Lord!

*One voice:* ¡Ven, Ven Señor, no tardes! (Come, Come Lord, do not delay!)

*All voices:* ¡Ven, Ven, que te esperamos! (Come, Come, we await you!)



## PREPARE THE WAY OF THE LORD

Second week of Advent (beginning December 6)

### ➤ Introduction:

*One voice:* Blessings on the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has turned his face towards his people and has set them free! Luke 1:68

### ➤ Invocation:

*One voice:* A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God."

*All voices:* **We fill in** the valleys, **we flatten** every hill and mountain, and **we level** the rough and uneven ground, O Lord, so that we can go out to greet your arrival!

*One voice:* We light the second candle in the Advent Wreath, made of elements taken from God's creation, and with this light we announce your coming and illuminate our paths to go out to meet you.



*All voices:* Illumine our lives, O Lord!

### ➤ Biblical Readings:

Isaiah 40:1-5 and 21-26; Canticle of Zechariah, Luke 1:68-79; Philippians 1:1-11; Luke 3:1-6.  
*Read one or more of the assigned readings. It is suggested that one of the readings be the Gospel Reading. After each reading, a time of silence may be kept or an appropriate song may be sung.*

### ➤ Our reality

Our Central America is a region of large cloud forests and reservoirs of water, great biodiversity and large extensions of fertile land to plant and harvest. However, there is little ecological awareness among the majority of the population. The rivers where our grandmothers and grandfathers swam and fished are now contaminated. Due to the chemicals used in the crops, the fruits and vegetables are larger now, but they have fewer nutrients than they did fifty years ago. There are more and more droughts and floods, whereas previously the rainy season was more predictable. The cancer rates have increased and this is related to the toxins that surround us.

The capitalist system has influenced us with consumeristic tendencies. Every year there are more cars, more cell phones, and an unlimited use of plastic bags and plastic bottles for shopping. Items that previously lasted a lifetime are now disposable. It is difficult to imagine that our great-grandparents didn't use any of these things! These "improvements" that the system sells us come with a cost. All of the materials used to produce these things must come from the earth and must be

processed many times with toxic chemicals. Once they are used, they must be discarded, thereby producing more and more garbage that goes into the backyards of the poorest populations.

God's creation has been kidnapped by human beings themselves. We have taken possession of God's creation: of our sisters and brothers, of the plants, of the animals, of everything that is created by God. We live in slavery!

How do our lifestyles threaten God's creation?

How do we liberate ourselves from these practices and run towards an encounter with our Creator?

### *Time for sharing*

#### ➤ **Biblical perspective**

"Comfort, comfort my people." This is how the prophet Isaiah begins his announcement of hope to his people who had been suffering in captivity under the power and pride of the Babylonian empire. The people expressed their pain and hopelessness with laments and prayers, and the Lord responded to their clamor and sent his Word and promise of restoration. "Prepare a way for the Lord!" cries a voice – and this is how the people's departure for their homeland begins. The end of their suffering has arrived and they return joyfully to their land. God has come to liberate God's people.

God comes to bring light and life to the whole creation. God not only frees all human beings, but also the entire creation. We should stop and listen, because all of creation itself is crying out and desiring liberation from the slavery in which it finds itself. During this Advent, the whole creation comes closer to God, seeking refuge and light in a lost world.

John the Baptist takes up the cry of the prophet Isaiah: "Prepare the way of the Lord! Clear a path in the desert! Make a straight road for the Lord our God. Fill in the valleys; flatten every hill and mountain. Level the rough and rugged ground. Then the glory of the Lord will appear for all to see. The Lord has promised this!"

In our industrialized world, the valleys are filled with all of the garbage from everything we consume. The mountains and hills are leveled in order to extract sand or gold. And the rough and rugged roads are straightened to help products speed more rapidly along the highways toward the markets. Could this be the salvation that God sends us? Absolutely not!

Before filling our valleys with garbage, let's remember our neighbors who suffer from that pollution. Before leveling the mountains for mining or for construction, let's remember how those activities contaminate the rivers and kill animals, plants and people. Before straightening the highways, let's remember that the trees we cut down are the source of life for birds and for persons.

Let us work for the salvation that God sends through the precious birth of Jesus! May the valleys be raised up and the mountains made low, and may we seek the life in abundance together, not just for a few people, but rather for all of creation.



➤ **Questions to deepen our reflection**

1. What actions are we taking, individually and collectively, to care for creation?
2. Read the activity for this week. What change, individual or collective, can you commit yourselves to making during this season in order to co-live with creation?

➤ **Activity for the week**

To prepare the way of the Lord:

1. Analyze your own house. Does it have a small piece of earth or planting pot in which you plant something? Are there detergents, bleach, aerosols, pesticides, chemical fertilizers, herbicides in your house? Are you familiar with the ingredients, with what they mean and with the harm they can cause to the environment? What decorations or meals will you use during this season that you can replace with a more ecological version? Then, research the ecological alternatives that are available in your area to substitute these products.
2. Analyze your neighborhood or community. Are there any abandoned or vacant lots that are not serving any useful purpose? How much trash and garbage is there? Plan a Christmas project to convert one of these spaces into a small park or a natural lung with trees and decorative, medicinal and edible plants. You could also create a plan for cleaning up the community, and for the use, care and recycling of trash and garbage.
3. Analyze your church. Is it possible to recycle any materials that are used during this season? What possibilities exist for beginning a paper recycling center during this season? Could natural plants in pots be used, rather than plastic or cut plants?

➤ **Final prayer and closing**

*One voice:* We give thanks to God for this time of prayer and reflection, and we pray especially for God's Creation that we have endangered.

*All voices:* O God, artisan of creation, free our hearts from all selfishness and apathy so that we may be your hands that care for your Creation, while we await our final liberation in your Second Coming.

*One voice:* ¡Ven, Ven Señor, no tardes! (Come, Come Lord, do not delay!)

*All voices:* ¡Ven, Ven, que te esperamos! (Come, Come, we await you!)

## REJOICE! REJOICE!

### Third week of Advent (beginning December 13)

#### ➤ Introduction:

*One voice:* Rejoice always in the Lord; Rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near.      Philippians 4:4-5

#### ➤ Invocation:

*One voice:* O Lord, show us your love, and save us!

*All voices:* Love and truth will come together; peace and justice will kiss. Truth will sprout from the ground and justice will look down from the sky above. Psalm 85:10-11(paraphrase)

*One voice:* We light the third candle in the Advent wreath as a symbol of the joy that delicately illumines our hearts when we recognize that the Lord is near.

*All voices:* God of life, give us your Spirit so that we may discover your presence in each moment, in each human encounter, in each daily miracle. May we not allow discouragement or fear to defeat us! May we not lose the hope of finding you each day walking by our side!



#### ➤ Biblical Readings:

Zephaniah 3:14-20; Psalm 85; Philippians 4:4-9; Luke 3:7-18. *Read one or more of the assigned readings. It is suggested that one of the readings be the Gospel Reading. After each reading, a time of silence may be kept or an appropriate song may be sung.*

#### ➤ Our reality

Currently there are many governments in the world that annually invest a large percentage of the public funds for the acquisition of weapons – weapons that are increasingly lethal. Along with this, we continue seeing how the corrupt governments of the most impoverished nations sell national soil on a daily basis to the highest bidder, seeking only to increase the balances in their personal bank accounts, hidden away in tax paradises, all the while mocking the face of Justice who is bound by her hands and feet. There are not enough fingers and toes on the hands and feet of an entire people to count the victims of inhumane abuses in our countries—victims who will continue to be victimized as long as the judges persist in offering their judgements and sentences for sale – sometimes with financing!

How can we be joyful and live in peace in the midst of this reality?

➤ **Biblical perspective**

The ministry of the prophet Zephaniah takes place during a phase of corruption and religious decadence in the kingdom of Judah. The governors, Manasseh and Amon, converted Judah into a faithful servant of the Assyrian empire. With this alliance, the country achieved a certain level of material prosperity, but at the cost of forgetting Yahweh and corrupting justice.

Zephaniah denounces the corruption of the city and responsible classes: princes, prophets, judges and priests. In the midst of this corruption, the Lord pronounces a sentence of condemnation. Following the solemn trial, there is an announcement of the restoration that the Kingdom of the Lord will bring, so the prophet exhorts the people to rejoice. The exhortation to sing with joy is repeated three times because of the presence of God in their midst. There is joy and jubilation because the Lord brings salvation, demolishing the throne of the powerful and exalting the humble. Fear should be uprooted. Joy and celebration should prepare the path to peace!

Peace and joy is also the message of Paul to his sisters and brothers in Philippi. “Rejoice always in the Lord; I say again: Rejoice!” And the reason: because “The Lord is near.” This is hopeful news for a people who are waiting for their Lord with great longing. How do we prepare ourselves to receive the Lord?

John the Baptist appears to renew the tradition of the prophets after four centuries of silence; and just like Zephaniah and the other prophets, John the Baptist denounces the sin of the people and announces the day of imminent judgement: “The axe is ready to cut the trees down at their roots. Any tree that doesn’t produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into a fire.”

No one wants to interfere with the judgement of God! This is why John the Baptist speaks of recovering the meaning of Justice. “What should we do?” the people ask John. The answer is clear and simple: “Behave in such a way that it is clearly visible that you have returned to the Lord...” John the Baptist also gives certain very concrete “recommendations” for each group that comes seeking salvation: “If you have two coats, give one to someone who doesn’t have any. If you have food, share it with someone who has none. Don’t make people pay more than they owe. Don’t bully people, don’t extort money from anyone by threats or false charges, and be content with your pay...”

In this new Advent we announce the joy of a new Christmas while we maintain the hope of a great final Day of Salvation. However, each day we have an Advent arrival in our lives, of the Lord who calls us to joy and happiness. How can we have joy and happiness in our reality?

There is joy and celebration in the world when people share resources with those who don’t have them; when persons refrain from intimidating and behaving violently toward their sisters and brothers and live in justice and peace. These actions are joyful signs of the Reign of God and they call on the Day of Salvation. It is impossible to be joyful and to celebrate when one’s conscience is not at peace with God. Only by opening one’s heart to the Holy Spirit and doing what the Spirit demands can we

obtain the peace and the joy that no one and nothing can take away. This new Christmas, may there be joy and celebration in our families, in our communities and in the whole world!

➤ **Questions to deepen our reflection**

1. “What should we do?” people asked John the Baptist. What would John’s response be to us in these times?
2. What are some of the fears that we should uproot in order to make room for joy?

➤ **Activity for the week**

This week I will write three cards. The first will be addressed to God in thanksgiving for those things, people and moments that have made me laugh and rejoice in this marvelous experience that we call life. The second will be addressed to a person who is going through difficult times; I will offer that person my solidarity, my support, and my company in the search for joy and peace. And the third one will be for a person whom I want to thank for his or her friendship and for what she/he has done for me.

➤ **Final prayer and closing**

One voice:                      We give thanks to God for this time of communion, reflection and especially for the women and men who infect the world with the joy of walking toward the fullness of the Reign of God.

*All voices:*                      Our God and Savior, we ask for your help to be able to find signs of your walk among us in these difficult times. We want to be faithful to you, to announce with our whole lives the good news of the Gospel. Give us the courage to give our lives for one another, the courage to exchange the logic of consumerism and superficial joys for the joy of giving and receiving. Give us the strength we need to announce and live the values of your Reign here and now.

One voice:                      *¡Ven, Ven Señor, no tardes!*      (Come, Come Lord, do not delay!)

*All voices:*                      *¡Ven, Ven, que te esperamos!*      (Come, Come, we await you!)

## A WOMAN SHALL CONCEIVE AND GIVE BIRTH TO A SON

Fourth week of Advent (beginning Sunday December 20)

### ➤ Introduction:

*One voice:* This ruler will lead and care for his people by the power and glorious name of the Lord his God. His people will live securely, and the whole earth will know his true greatness.. *Micah 5:4*

### ➤ Invocation:

*One voice:* Lord, we rejoice in you with our whole heart because you give us new strengths. We are joyful!

*All voices:* Because you have given us Jesus Christ, your only Son, born of Mary, to be the Savior and Redeemer of this world.

*One voice:* We light the fourth candle in the Advent wreath as a symbol of joy for the birth of our Lord Jesus and as a commitment of admiration and care for the girls and boys who are born each day in our world.

*All voices:* O God, you who have poured out upon us the light of your Son, allow this light to always burn in our hearts and to always shine in our lives.



### ➤ Biblical Readings:

Micah 5:2-4; Psalm 80; Hebrews 10:5-10; Luke 1:39-56. *Read one or more of the assigned readings. It is suggested that one of the readings be the Gospel Reading. After each reading, a time of silence may be kept or an appropriate song may be sung.*

### ➤ Our reality

We live in such a dehumanized world that we no longer have the capacity to be amazed by the birth of a new life. We are indifferent to the act of giving birth; we fail to take care to provide appropriate spaces for births. Every single day, thousands of baby girls and boys are born into the world in inappropriate conditions, while many women who can't pay for a private hospital are mistreated along with their newborn babies in the public hospitals when it is time to give birth. A new birth no longer means anything to us! The maternity and childbirth processes have come to be so common that they have lost their dimension of the Sacrament of Life and Hope.

It has also been forgotten that pregnancy is linked to life, to the future and to new possibilities in the world. On the contrary, today many girls and young women are raped and become pregnant by their own fathers, grandfathers, brothers, uncles, etc. while other women are abused and impregnated

against their will. Begetting, conceiving and giving birth have become acts mediated, not by life and hope, but by violence. What is the hope for the world today?

### *Time for sharing*

#### ➤ **Biblical perspective**

Today the prophet Micah speaks to us of the hope of a people, based on the image of a pregnant woman. The prophet announces the birth of the Messiah in a humble city. The pregnant woman is the sign of pain and hope. On the one hand, the people are in desperation; nevertheless, the time will come to give birth, the time of liberation. The birth of a child is announced as a sign of the salvation and liberation of the country: “Therefore the Lord shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has brought forth.” Here the dimension of hope is emphasized that points toward the future in which the people will be reunited, and then, “The King will rise up to shepherd his people with power and the majesty of the Lord your God, and they will be able to live in peace.”

How much hope do we have in our girls and boys who are born today?

The Christmas celebration is clothed by the act of maternity and giving birth; and by the joy of a woman and her husband who are expecting their first-born. Today in the biblical scene, we are only presented with Mary, the mother of Jesus. She has gone to share the joy of maternity with her cousin, Elisabeth, who is also pregnant. The encounter of the two pregnant women, full of life, produces such joy that the Holy Spirit is present in their midst. Elisabeth is filled with so much joy that she, along with the baby in her womb, leaps with joy, and both are filled with the Holy Spirit. Meanwhile, Mary bursts forth with an expression of praises to God for the marvelous wonders that he has done; she also praises God for his plan of salvation for God’s people. Mary exalts God as the powerful One whose power is exercised, above all, in the aid he offers to persons who are needy and humble, while pride is omitted from God’s plans. In this song, Mary prophesies the radical transformation that begins with the coming of the Savior, her son Jesus.

This last Sunday in Advent, we are invited to join Mary and Elisabeth and to celebrate their motherhood as a Sacrament of Life and Hope. They are the blessed mothers who await the births of their sons with great joy and hope.

Jesus the Son of God, who is born at Christmas is the poor, fragile newborn child, for whom we must care tenderly. Because in this fragility the glory of God manifests itself to the world. May the joy of the Christ Child be born in our lives, families and communities. May the daily births of thousands of girls and boys in the world bring us hope; may they open for us doors to the future and possibilities for a better world. May pregnant women live in fullness and enjoy their pregnancies in order to give birth to new lives and new hopes for the world.

#### ➤ **Questions to deepen our reflection**

1. How do we care for the pregnant women in our community?
2. How much care and attention do we give to the fragility of life of newborn babies?



3. What does the image of a newborn baby mean to us?
4. How can we prepare ourselves individually and as a community to receive the Son of God this Christmas?

➤ **Activity for the week**

- Prepare a basket with foods or other gifts and add a small card that announces the birth of Jesus. We can share the basket with a family that has many children; with a pregnant woman with whom we celebrate her pregnancy; with a single mother, victim of violence, imprisoned or suffering loss of some kind.
- Prepare a celebration for the girls and boys in your family or community. Tell them about the birth of the Son of God in the world, and remind them that they are the hope of the world.

➤ **Final prayer and closing**

*One voice:* We give thanks to God for this moment of prayer and reflection. We pray especially for all women who are giving birth today and for their daughters and sons who bring us joy, life, and hope.

*All voices:* God, we give you thanks for making us participants in your creation through the gift of engendering, conceiving and giving birth to daughters and sons. Allow us to experience continual amazement at your works, at daily births, and above all, at the birth of Jesus, your Son, who is born on Christmas.

*One voice:* *Para esta tierra sin luz, nace el Señor; Para vencer las tinieblas, nace el Señor. \**  
For this land without light, the Lord is born; To overcome the darkness, the Lord is born.

*All voices:* *Para cambiar nuestro mundo ¡Todos los días nace el Señor! \**  
In order to change our world, the Lord is born every single day!

\* Verse from hymn "Todos los días nace el Señor (Every day the Lord is born)" by J.A. Espinosa. "Celebremos Juntos" Hymnal, San José, Costa Rica. SEBILA 1989.

# DO NOT BE AFRAID! TODAY A SAVIOR HAS BEEN BORN!

Christmas Day (December 25)

## ➤ Introduction:

*One voice:* Do not be afraid! Listen, I bring you glorious news of great joy which is for all the people. Luke 2:8

## ➤ Invocation:

*One voice:* This very day, in David's town, a Savior has been born for you! Luke 2:11

*All voices:* Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us. Luke 2:15

*One voice:* We light the Christmas Day candle to signal our joy for the birth of Jesus in the world, and as a sign that darkness has been overcome by the light of Jesus' presence among us.

*All voices:* Glory to God in the highest heaven! Peace on earth among those whom God favors! Luke 2:14 (paraphrase)



## ➤ Biblical Readings:

Isaiah 62:6-12; Psalm 97; Titus 3:4-7; Luke 2:1-20 *Read one or more of the assigned readings. It is suggested that one of the readings be the Gospel Reading. After each reading, a time of silence may be kept or an appropriate song may be sung.*

## ➤ Our reality

How does the world greet the dawn each day? What are the news stories that reach us? How difficult it is to have hope that we are walking toward a better world, especially when the information industry generates and feeds a state of pessimism and uncertainty that impregnates people's lives in our times. In this sense, we have come to think that watching or hearing news is a synonym with "knowing about tragedies." We have gradually become a society that magnifies tragedy and pain, so we have become accustomed to "see the glass as half empty" in all aspects of life. Because of this, many persons find it very complicated to think positively and to believe that things can be better. Can we have a different reading of the events in our times? In the face of so much news about evil, is it our challenge to awaken hope day and night?

*Time for sharing*

### ➤ Biblical perspective

Divine intervention in human reality presents itself to the people of God in the midst of hopelessness and crisis. The prophet Isaiah (62:6-12) presents a nuptial poem that announces the surprising contrast that Jerusalem is experiencing: in the midst of her condition of marginalization and ridicule, he is untiring in announcing that Yahweh, her Savior, is coming to meet her. The days of abandonment, of pain and anguish will be overcome because her Savior, the one who reigns over the earth, the one who establishes justice and judgement (Ps. 97:1-2) will reverse her history. This event is coming soon, but until it arrives, it is just that ‘the whole earth should rejoice!’ All the coastlands should rejoice! Wait with passion for the time of God’s glorious manifestation. The prophet joyfully announces: “Tell the city of Zion that her Savior has arrived.”

Today good news also arrives for our people. The Lord has come! Let us read the Good News.

Today our Hope is nourished by good news: A Savior is born!

The birth of Jesus, the Son of God, takes place in the midst of uncertainty and fear, and in a context in which good news has been forgotten. The story in Luke 2:1-14 reveals the birth of the Savior and the first fruits of those called by him, the shepherds. The first fruits are not mediated by any publisher; rather, they go directly to poor and humble people. Nonetheless, the shepherds are evidence of uncertainty, even though they live in a context in which the collective imagination is calling for a messianic manifestation. In this uncertain climate, facing a strange divine possibility, fear keeps watch. The Gospel writer Luke indicates that, in the face of such a divine manifestation, the shepherds “were very afraid.” But the evangelist himself introduces the perfect counterweight to this evil; God himself breaks through in the midst of uncertainty and fear. All is not lost! Drowning in pessimism does not come from God. A messenger from heaven comes to awaken hope using these gentle words: “Do not be afraid! Because I bring you good news of great joy which is for all the people.”

Divine providence makes the “good news of great joy...for all the people” possible. The Savior is born in God’s creation; joy and praise can therefore overcome uncertainty and fear. Naïveté for some, alienation for others; but for the people of the earth, it is “hope for a better time.” Christ the Lord has been born among and for us, thus demonstrating God’s commitment to life: our own lives and the lives of our sisters and brothers. Today a Savior is born to save the lives of those who suffer and weep without consolation because of bad news.

Of course, we can await and promote better times. Before such an intervention, we can do no less than join the angelical chorus and exclaim: Glory to God in the highest heaven! Peace on earth among those whom God favors!

Welcome, Divine Child, Son of God! Just as the shepherds did, today we run to Bethlehem to adore you and to offer our best gifts.

➤ **Questions to deepen our reflection**

- How do we celebrate with commitment the birth of the Savior among us?
- How can we be agents of Good News, the Gospel of God, in an environment of so much uncertainty and fear?
- How much do we do to ensure that the Good News carries salvation to people who are most in need?

➤ **Activity for the week**

- Let us commit ourselves to ensuring that, this week, our relationships are full of messages of peace and good news toward our sisters and brothers around us.
- Let's visit persons who are going through difficult times in their lives. Let's take them the good news about the visitation of God's Son to our world. Let's take a message of encouragement and of hope, accompanying our words with our own gifts as signs of hope and joy.

➤ **Final prayer and closing**

*One voice:* We thank the Lord for freely deciding to seek us out in the midst of our hopelessness. God has believed in us and has believed that things can get better.

*All voices:* We praise you, Lord, because while the great, powerful and wise of this world promote the ruin of humanity and obscure the beauty of life, you are born day by day from the reality of a humble manger to favor joy, peace, and good will among all of your people. Allow us, Lord, to open our eyes and contribute to this reality by seeking justice and mercy for everyone.

*One voice:* Welcome Jesus. Here we are – we who awaken your deepest motivations of commitment and love. We are amazed by your love, we believe in your power and we wait to see your glory in this time.

*All voices:* Rejoice in the Lord, everyone, and praise God's holy name!

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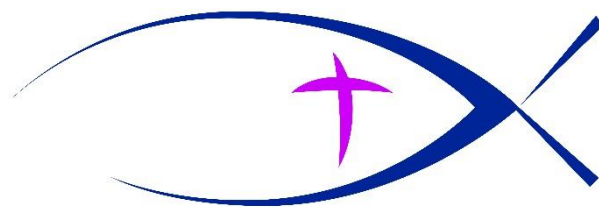
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