



ADVENT 2019

WE WALK TOWARDS
YOUR ENCOUNTER,
LORD





Advent 2019 is a production of the Protestant Center
for Pastoral Studies in Central America: CEDEPCA.

Biblical contributions: Violeta Rocha

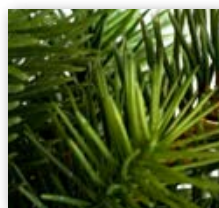
Editing: Arnoldo Aguilar, Judith Castañeda, Elizabeth Carrera

Design and Layout: Arnoldo Aguilar

Translation: Leslie Vogel

Guatemala, November 2019

IN ADVENT, WE WALK TOWARDS YOUR ENCOUNTER, LORD



Luke, the evangelist, tells us that soon after the ascension of Jesus, those who were there together with him stood looking up into heaven to see such a special event. He adds that two mysterious persons wearing white clothing came up to them and asked an unsettling question: “Why do you stand there looking up toward heaven?” (Acts 1:11 NRSV).

The rest of the story expands the idea. Here we take up this question again with a renewed perspective that allows us to reflect on our attitude of faith. Today, “standing there looking up toward heaven” is still a questionable way to build the Reign of God. While heaven and its connotations may well be important elements in the revelation of the Reign of God, our faith in Jesus Christ encourages and motivates us to get moving by seeing and acting on earth - in our world.

This year, the CEDEPCA team approaches the time of Advent with celebration and great joy. “We walk towards your encounter, Lord” because it’s not enough to stand looking up into heaven, expectant about what may happen. “We walk towards your encounter, Lord” in the certainty that you have taken the initiative to pronounce yourself as Emmanuel (God with us).

“We walk towards your encounter, Lord” with the courage required of us by the path before us; because there still is a great deal more to do under your light of love and justice.

Since 1992, CEDEPCA undertook the publication of Advent, and for 27 years has presented this sign of hope. This edition of Advent 2019 invites us to celebrate walking, to prepare ourselves by walking, and to meet Jesus while walking, recognizing that the road is our place in life with our sisters and brothers.

It is our desire that, through celebrating Advent, filled with joy and hope, we will confirm our active vocation, committed to the project of Jesus: the Reign of God for all.

On the way.

Msc. Arnolando Aguilar B.

Coordination, Biblical-Theological Formation

Licda. Judith Castañeda

General Coordinator, CEDEPCA



THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION OF ADVENT



Advent (Lat. Adventus: advent, coming, arrival) is the celebration that has been defined since the first centuries of Christianity as a liturgical time in which the church has always prepared itself for Christmas Day or the birth (Nativity) of Jesus. It is a practice that invites people to share, pray and reflect during the four weeks leading up to Christmas, and to finish with a special celebration on Christmas Day. Advent is a time of hope-action (active hope) that implies: commitment to humanity and to nature, struggle for justice, constant work to build the Reign of God here on earth, joy, festivity and celebration. Above all, it is a moment of tenderness, affection and love, because through our solidarity with other human beings and their needs, we remember the solidarity that God lives out with humanity through God's son, Jesus.

The Advent wreath

An Advent wreath is used to mark the passage of time during the weeks of Advent and to accompany the reflections and prayers. This symbol is a wreath made up of green foliage. The circular shape symbolizes eternal life. The green represents hope and life. In the foliage four candles are inserted, to choose between:

the purple that evokes repentance, the yellow that evokes faith in Jesus, the green that evokes hope, the pink that evokes joy and the red that evokes God's love. The practice is to light a new candle each week. On Christmas, after lighting the four candles in the wreath, a white candle is lit in the center of the wreath. This evokes the purity and arrival of Jesus. The light and warmth of the candles represent the proximity of the birth of Jesus, the light of the world.

The Advent themes

The reflections and prayers are divided into five moments: four weeks of Advent and Christmas Day. Each moment contains a specific theme taken from readings for the day offered by the common lectionary, a biblical reading, a closeup of the current reality, reflection and prayer.

We thank the valuable contribution of Violeta Rocha in writing these reflections for each one of the five moments of this edition of Advent.

We hope that each space of Advent time will be a community experience of meditation, hope and commitment, grounded in the mystery of Jesus: God with us.

1st Week of Advent

Isaiah 2:1-5, Psalm 122, Romans 13:11-14, Matthew 24:36-44

FOR MY SISTERS AND COMPANIONS, I WISH TO SAY: PEACE BE WITHIN YOU... I WILL SEEK YOUR GOOD

(PSALM 122:8-9)



Introduction:

We give you thanks, God, for permitting us to celebrate Advent once again. Thank you, because today we can resume and renew our attitude of awaiting your coming. We light the first Advent candle invoking your light among us during this time of Advent.

Reading from Psalm 122

Call to reflection:

One voice:

We come with joy, Advent, because we set our steps on a new path, directing ourselves toward you, on this way that you open for us so that we may live as one people.

All voices:

Yes, we walk together in the certainty that, upon encountering ourselves with you, we find ourselves with the peace, the rest, and the love that your people need today.

One voice:

We light the first candle on the Advent wreath, announcing that God lights a new path for us, now of conversion, now of joy, now of peace for all persons.

All voices:

Now is the time to awaken from our slumber and to clothe ourselves with light because our salvation is near.

Our reality

We need peace so much! It is so urgent for each person, for each society, for each country.

We experience a lack of peace with justice on a daily basis, from the family setting to arenas of governmental and global politics that have an impact on each person, family, community and nation.

The business of arms sales has become one of the top items in the economies of certain countries, ensuring a constant supply of weapons to other countries and groups in conflict. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute tells us that, in the last five years, the volume of transfers of the primary weapons systems increased about 14%, compared to the period from 2006 to 2011.

The most recent occurrences of shootings in schools, bars, and supermarkets, as well as the assassinations of human rights and environmental rights defenders, reveal to us

that few desires exist for good or for wellness, much less for peace.

The desires that we experience toward others are often guided by this fatalistic tendency and the repetition of violence. The Psalmist reminds us that in the reality in which we live, to desire peace and good is one way of going against the flow, counter culture. It is the maximum challenge, not only to desire but to build. The final word has not been spoken, nor is it all over yet! Life is ahead of us and all around us!

Reflection

(Rom. 13:11-14; Mt. 24:36-44)

With a careful reading of the texts of Romans and the gospel according to Matthew, two actions seem to stand out. The first is that of “recognizing the moment in which we are living”; the second is the “action of being prepared at all times.”

Many times, we take for granted that we have the capability of recognizing or reading the signs of the times. So much so, that it seems to be simply a question of “looking,” without deepening this action that leads to discernment.

For the apostle Paul, recognizing the moment in which we are living is a way of awaking from our sleep; things aren’t so bad because it is the will of God. The call to awaken from sleep is a suggestive metaphor that exhorts us to recognize the crucial moments in which we are living. It is also a call to be prepared, to be vigilant, because sleepiness often helps us avoid reality.

While the allusions to the late night refer us to the darkness, they also indicate to us that daytime will come soon and, with it, light.

Therefore, we must wake up and clothe ourselves with light (I am setting the metaphor of armor to one side). This will move us toward mutual love and doing good for our neighbor, as indicated by vv. 8-10.

The actions of recognizing, preparing ourselves and being alert all cause us to join together to announce the One who is light; and although our eyes and heart experience pain in the face of so much cruelty, we become mobilized as a community in order to join forces and ideas, to link our arms and wills together for good.

Questions to deepen the reflection

- What darkneses have we confronted and overcome as a community of light?
- Share an experience in which recognizing reality caused you contradictions, prior to taking actions of faith.

Activity for the week

Choose a news item, a commentary, a testimony, an action, (including one with no words), where you have seen the light of God.

2nd Week of Advent

Isaiah 11:1-10, Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19; Romans 15:4-13, Matthew 3:1-12

THE EARTH WILL BE FULL OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD! (ISAIAH 11:9b)



Introducción:

Once again we turn to the call of the spirit to celebrate our encounter with God on the way to Advent. We start with the word of the prophet Isaiah in order to imagine with him a new time of equity, of joy, and of peace: a time that provokes us to hope each day.

Reading from Isaiah 11:1-10

Call to reflection:

One voice:

The spirit of the Lord causes a new shoot to sprout up amidst the anguish of the peoples; a sprout whose presence will be wisdom, power and salvation. Jesus is the branch of justice who comes to announce to us and to share with us a new era.

All voices:

His place will be among the poor; he will walk by our side, consoling and encouraging us in the face of injustice in order to recover abundant life.

One voice:

We light the second candle on the Advent wreath as a sign of our hope in this new

period of time which the Son of God brings to the world. He, who is the light, shines and will continue to shine for each person.

All voices:

We also prepare ourselves to provide for and to share this new time period. We share the longing for the restoration of all things.

Our reality

We know how difficult it is to change the opinion(s) of those who have identified with one vision or another regarding the events taking place in our countries. Above all, we have “Fake News,” the manipulative effect on feelings and opinions due to “post-truth,” and the superficiality of certain communications media. Our countries seem to be overflowing with uncertainties and the resurgence of different fundamentalisms that turn different peoples’ struggles into a type of caricature. Discrediting people is one of the resources most utilized to disparage those who struggle for social justice; it is used in an attempt to erase their leadership and their consciences.

Filling the earth with the knowledge of God becomes a challenge to confront these other forces that drown out hope and to confront

all that contaminates life by eliminating it. Filling our countries with the knowledge of God is neither a colonizing nor a proselytizing task. The text of Isaiah invites us to “read the reality” with a spirit of wisdom, intelligence, courage, prudence and respect. This kind of knowledge leads us to take daily actions towards the building of peace with justice.

Reflection

(Mt. 3:1-12)

John the Baptist, a relative of Jesus, was approximately six months older than Jesus. John the Baptist’s message was so important for the faith communities that he appears in all four gospels.

John’s call is to prepare the way, to make the paths straight! It is a strong, encouraging message, one that tells us that even that which is twisted can be straightened out, and that the way is being prepared for everyone. How important roads and paths are, even though they are often not what we thought they would be, says a Colombian song.

This cry in the desert calls us to prepare the way of Jesus, and to make it straight. It causes us to ask ourselves in this time of active waiting: “What are our paths and roads like?” With whom do we walk? What vital life experiences make up our beings on such a journey? When we become aware that our decisions leave footprints in our journey through life, and also the actions and decisions of others contribute to putting obstacles in our way, be they individual, familial, or national.

During this time of waiting, we are invited to recover the cry that reminds us that the Reign

has come close to us through Jesus.

Let us make roads and pathways safe for women, for children, and for older adults, with the full certainty that the knowledge of God, which is justice, will straighten the paths and will cause us to converge in other forms of coexistence, respect and equity.

Questions to deepen the reflection

- What pathways are twisted in our context, community, country?
- What are the difficulties or obstacles to encountering one another in the pursuit of straightening the pathways?

Activity for the week

Symbols are very important for better understanding of some ideas and situations. Choose a space in your home or other place where you can make a path, in which you place some signs of the actions that you hope will accomplish fundamental changes along this pathway.

3rd Week of Advent

Isaiah 35:1-10, Psalm 146:5-10 or Luke 1:47-55, James 5:7-10, Matthew 11:2-11

BE STRONG, DO NOT FEAR! HERE IS YOUR GOD.

(ISAIAH 35:1-10)



Introduction:

We move forward in our preparation to encounter ourselves with Jesus, but not without first encountering ourselves with our own reality in order to recognize just how challenging the pathway is. We are moved by our faith in the faithfulness of God, who never abandons God's people.

Reading from Isaiah 35:1-10

Call to reflection:

One voice:

Beyond the burning desert, where it seems life will never bloom, streams of water still break forth because God comes to God's people. Let us praise God with shouts of joy.

All voices:

May those who hope in God make a great effort and blossom! Out of their weakness and blindness, the people will see the glory of the Creator.

One voice:

We light the third candle on the Advent wreath, embracing indescribable joy,

because Christ the Savior is born among us.

All voices:

Amen! Let us exchange our customary sadness for the gift of joy, for the time to come promises us the gift of living.

Our reality

In recent times, we have suffered the impact of the reality of migration, the multitudinous caravans from Honduras and El Salvador, that begin the journey to the North with courage and hope, in a similar fashion as do the migrants in the Mediterranean and other parts of the planet.

We are saddened by the premature deaths of children, women and men who will not easily be buried in their places of origin. We are saddened by the harshness of a massive grief that repeatedly hides its indignation in the face of so much indifference.

How many forces must we join together so that our countries no longer expel so many people due to lack of safety or security, and due to unemployment, violence, and the exclusion of persons who are different? Migration is a human characteristic; it is the potentiality to be free to make decisions, and no one is illegal because

of that situation. These persons emigrate with their fears and also with their strengths, and the huge question is: “Where is God in this transit that has become a matter of life and death for countries such as ours and for those experiencing war or other circumstances?” Isaiah tells us that “God is there...God will come with recompense and will save you.” In this affirmation, certainly each one of us plays a vital role.

Reflection

(Lk 1:46-55; Isa 35:1-10)

We can find such theological depth in the song of Mary, or the Magnificat, even Martin Luther dedicated special attention to it. Similarly, we find depth in the community readings of the Bible in Latin America.

In the face of the reality we shared above, the words of Mary, this young mother who was also a migrant in Egypt, have a prophetic and hope-giving message.

God sees the humble and recognizes them: those whom few want to see. God shows mercy and does great things for and with them. God practices justice! The song says that God “brings down the powerful” and “lifts up the lowly,” and fills the hungry with good things.

This song is in keeping with Is. 35:1-10, where there is also good news of joy. In a world plagued with bad news, the prophet tells us that “the wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom, and like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly.” (v.1-2). The whole creation shall also receive justice, and the invitation is to “strengthen the weak hands and make firm the feeble knees.” (v.3).

As we get older, we realize the importance of having strong, firm hands and knees. Sometimes we are forced, as the popular saying goes, to draw strength from weakness.

That is where God is, says Isaiah; God does great things, Mary reminds us. Let’s join together and do that which turns the logic of this world upside down. As small as it may seem to us, it will still be something rather than nothing.

Questions to deepen the reflection

- Do we have some xenophobic attitude that we have been unable to overcome?
- Is there any expression in the Song of Mary that disturbs you or generates questions about taking a position against situations of injustice?

Activity for the week

Take a piece of blank paper and draw two columns. In the first, write the names of persons who migrated and about whom you have had some news. In the other column, write the names of those who migrated and didn’t succeed, or whose fate you don’t know. You can include names from stories that others have told to you. Pray for these migrating persons.

4th Week of Advent

Isaiah 7:10-16, Psalm 82:1-8, Romans 1:1-7, Matthew 1:18-25

RESCUE THE WEAK AND THE NEEDY; DELIVER THEM FROM THE POWER OF THE WICKED!

(PSALM 82:1-8)



Introduction:

From the voices of the prophets, crossing time and cultures, signs and announcements come forth that promise to change the direction of history. The unimaginable will occur. God will open up space to live among human beings, to reveal God's heart, and to create a single community of the daughters and sons of God.

Reading from Isaiah 7:10-16

Call to reflection:

One voice:

That which was announced has been fulfilled. The great project of Salvation is a marvelous reality in the life of Jesus. We are living it in this current century and we still confirm the generosity of God.

All voices:

You wanted to walk among us, and for that we give you thanks, Jesus, because walking in this way is hope for your people.

One voice:

We light the fourth candle of the Advent wreath, evoking the presence of Jesus: hope and salvation in our contexts.

All voices:

Good God, guide our thoughts and our actions so that we may walk with commitment in your light.

Our reality

Greta Thunberg, the teenage Swedish activist who has set out to save the world, has drawn the attention of the world with her passionate commitment to the defense of nature. It has been said that, in addition to being young, she lives with Asperger syndrome, and that she has persistently maintained her position in front of organizations and institutions that should ensure policies that care for creation. Like her, we have seen via social media the examples of youth and adolescents planting trees and collecting trash in rivers and beaches. We also see the participation of high school and university students who, together with different sectors of society, participate in ecological walks and marches that every year raise up an issue that generates awareness and responsibility in the people, at least in El Salvador and Guatemala.

Salvation by the God of persons with disabilities also reaches God's creation. How easily we forget that we are part of that creation and that the lives of everyone on the planet must

also that nature continues to live. The God who comes to humanity decided to live as a human being and invites us to see ourselves as part of the whole to which God's salvation comes.

Reflection

(Mt. 1:18-25; Rom. 1:1-7)

The reading from Matthew brings us closer to the birth of Jesus, a Jewish boy who, from his mother's womb, is exposed to the possible effects of his mother being repudiated. The image that this evangelist presents us of Joseph is of someone who dreams, who has visions just as did Joseph of the Old Testament. He receives the announcement from the angel that this child being carried by Mary will save the people from their sins, and thus will be called Jesus. Just as the prophet said, his name shall be called Emmanuel: "God with us."

"To save" and "God with us" constitute key expressions in this text. It is a huge task, even an overwhelming one, we might say: "He will save his people from their sins."

What are the sins of this people? Why do the people need to be saved? These are questions that can suddenly arise with the reading of this text. We could make a long list, assuming all the "mea culpa." Nevertheless, from the perspective of the Jesus of the Gospels, love redeems a multitude of failings. The insistence of Jesus during his ministry was on a radical following of the values of the Reign of God, grounded in the love of one's neighbor and in the capacity to create bridges - not to cut them off nor to impede them.

The task of salvation also concerns us. According to Paul, we have received the grace of being called by Jesus Christ, because we have been

loved by God and called to be saints by vocation (Rom. 1,5-7). What does this calling imply about collaborating with God in this salvation project? It is clear to us that many times we are challenged by those who have proposed transforming the society, protecting nature and mutually caring for one another. Their actions reveal (the fact that) we are constantly evangelized, if we allow ourselves to be touched by the lives of these women, youth, and men who want to save this world, to save the planet.

God with us is an affirmation of faith; we can't assume the meaning of Emmanuel any other way. In each expression of the defense of communitarian life and of the creation, we are taking on that presence of God in the world, defending the weak, and doing justice to those who destroy hope.

Question to deepen the reflection

- What do we need in order to take on the defense of the weak with greater enthusiasm and conviction, despite the power of the detractors?

Activity for the week

Freely create a personalized Christmas card for a specific person or group, in which you express a desire/wish, gratitude, encouragement or commitment to the struggle for and defense of life in which that person or group is engaged.

Celebration of Christmas

Isaiah 62:6-12, Psalm 97, Titus 3:4-7, Luke 2:(1-7), 8-20

YOU WHO CALL ON GOD, GIVE YOURSELVES NO REST!

(ISAIAH 62:6-12)



Introduction:

Our Advent walk reaches its highest point today. Perseverance and active waiting bless us with the living encounter with Jesus being born among us. It is a time of great joy and celebration, for the Savior has been born among us.

Reading from Isaiah 62:6-12

Call to reflection:

One voice:

We celebrate the consummation of the saving acts of God in Jesus Christ: the God who insists, persists, resists and never desists.

All voices:

Walking and continuing to walk will bring results, just as it did for those shepherds who received the announcement to follow the light and who found themselves with Jesus.

One voice:

We light the last candle on the Advent wreath with the hope that it will be the first in the rest of our lives: that Jesus will be

born again each day in our living, in order to widen and expand a Reign where there is room for all of us.

All voices:

Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace for all persons! May the good news be life for our people in our time.

Our reality

“Insist, persist, resist and never desist.” Such a conviction sounds very good, encourages peoples’ hearts, and pushes us forward, even though it is exhausting more often than not. It could be that this insistence, persistence, resistance and never desisting can lead us to unexpected or roadblock situations that exhaust our strength and/or close off any exit route.

Nevertheless, they can be processes that lead to routes of dialogue when that is possible and when the dialogue is horizontal. Or they can be processes that lead to our learning about negotiation resources with criteria of equity and of concrete agreements upon which someone can then follow through.

This process of never desisting, of never giving up on the proposals or goals that are set out, is a matter of attitude and of community. We say that it is an issue of attitude because we put all of our effort into it, all of our capabilities and even our limitations are compensated for by the knowledge of others.

We live in a reality in our contexts in which we are constantly called to insist, persist, resist and never desist. Grounded in our faith, let us join with Isaiah to say that we will not cease nor rest from invoking the name of God in all of these struggles and life projects.

Reflection

(Lk. 2:1-7; 8-20)

The story in Luke tells us that Mary gives birth in Bethlehem in Judea, during the moments that a census was being carried out. This child who was born in Bethlehem has been present in the messianic expectations of the people for generations. Waiting had been persistent and resilient for a people who never desisted in their waiting and hoping, yet they also had great difficulties in believing that Jesus was the messiah. He is the prince of peace (Is. 9:6); the great expectation of the people is that peace will come, along with a radical change in their situation. Thus, in Luke 2:14, the song of the angels to the shepherds reiterates: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men!" (KJ21)

In other versions, we find other translations, probably ones with which we are more familiar: "Glory to God in the highest heaven! Peace on earth among those whom God favors" (NRSV); or the Jerusalem Bible that translates: "...to those in whom God is pleased".

What is evident is that the word translated for "men" refers to the human being, and that is where the emphasis of the announcement falls: peace for humanity, for human beings who are beloved by God, only by God's infinite grace.

The God who arrives as boy and man is a God who insists, persists, resists and never desists, so that God's Shalom may become a reality among all of us. Let us join forces with God in this search for and building of peace with justice.

Questions to deepen the reflection

- ¿As a group, as a family, as a faith community, have you experienced this action of insisting, persisting, resisting and never desisting?
- Discuss this and give thanks for it.

Activity for the week

Write this affirmation or that of the Isaiah text, if you wish, on a sheet of colored paper. Design it, decorate it, decide what size it will be and where to place it so that in this time in which God visits us, it will be motivation for joy, inspiration, and commitment.

GIVE A GIFT WITH CREATIVITY, WITHOUT VIOLENCE, NOR DISCRIMINATION, NOR ECOLOGICAL HARM

When giving gifts, consider sharing that which expresses, more than an economic value, our appreciation for the lives of persons and of the planet.

Avoid gifts that encourage violence, discrimination, war, a sedentary lifestyle or damage to the environment, with the understanding that we are all responsible for building a culture of peace among and respect for both human beings and the natural environment.

Let's give and gift with creativity, stimulating life, sister/brotherhood, peace, care for the planet, and thus, hope for a better world.

If the greatest gift that humanity has received was given in a common manger, perhaps we can find a way to give with this same inspiration.





Education
that *transforms*

CEDEPCA: 8th Avenue 7-57, Zone 2, Guatemala City, Guatemala www.cedepca.org
cedepca@cedepca.org Telephone: (+502) 2254-1093



CEDEPCA is a member of
actalianza

