

Advent

2025

and on earth peace among those whom God favors

Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those
whom God favors!

Luke 2:14 NRSV



Protestant Center for Pastoral
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JESUS IS BORN, PEACE ON EARTH



What a joy it is to be able to resume the time of Advent in order to think anew about hope despite the dark plot of events that the whole world is suffering today. That contrast between one thing and the other is, precisely, what drives the celebration of Advent. To speak of the coming of the light, to announce the arrival of a new time, to prepare the heart for something better are but some ways to bring new life to our faith in the Savior of the world.

Jesus, the word incarnate, is the ancient but always novel news. His incursion into dark human history has no other motive than to rescue hope that the Reign of God and God's justice will find ways to open space among humanity. Therefore, this Advent guide invites us to recognize the mystery of that which is proclaimed in the highest, but also to recognize the impact among those of us who inhabit the earth: "Peace on earth for the persons who practice the good will of God."

While, in many scenarios, the discourse of peace is trivialized, we are interested in the perspectives of those who suffer injustice, who have nothing left but to cling to hope. That is where we find the reason for being in this Advent proposal, so that peace can become more than words and can become the work in which we are engaged.

Therefore, we focus our gaze on the difficult situation of the population of Palestine, the geographic and historic environment in which the mystery of

the birth of Jesus, our Savior, took place. These people, like many others, have suffered abuse and violence for years. The world is divided in opinions about this sad situation, while pain, hunger, plundering and forced migration have become the daily life of these people. The cries of the victims, from the greatest to the smallest, including the Christian populations in that place, constitute a challenge for Christian ethics and solidarity.

Advent invites us to remember the coming of our Savior into the hearts of persons who are suffering; it reminds us of the marvelous reality of God who has come near to us, who is among us, who knows how to walk our journeys with us. Alleluia! God descends! As if to meld himself into an embrace of our faith and to encourage our tasks in the challenging context in which we live. The coming of the Son of God inspires us to this: walking together, in the sweet company of the one who has promised, "I will be your God and you will be my people." We hope that this Advent journey will inspire us to participate in the salvific actions of God through solidary spirituality that works so that there will be peace on earth for persons who practice the good will of God. In hope.

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The Christian Tradition of Advent

Advent (Lat. *Adventus*: advent, coming, arrival) is the liturgical celebration in which, since the first centuries of Christianity, the church prepared for Christmas Day or the Nativity of Jesus. It is a practice that invites us to share, pray and reflect during the four weeks leading up to Christmas and ending with a special celebration on Christmas Day.

With the Protestant Reformation, different opinions regarding Christmas arose. However, "Luther's preaching about Christmas was incredibly extensive, considering that every year he preached on the birth of Christ from the time of Advent at the end of November, until the day of Epiphany or the celebration of the three wise men at the beginning of January. He did this for 30 years!"¹

But Advent is a time to respond to the gift of God in Christ Jesus. It is a time of hope-action (active waiting) which implies commitment to humanity and nature; fighting for justice; constant work to build the kingdom of God here on earth; joy, parties, and celebration. Above all, it is a time of tenderness, affection and love, because through our solidarity with other human beings in their needs, we remember the solidarity that God has had with humanity through God's son Jesus.

THE ADVENT WREATH

To mark the passing of the weeks of Advent and to accompany the reflections and prayers, an "Advent wreath" or other similar liturgical instrument can be used. This symbol consists of a wreath of green foliage. The circular shape symbolizes eternal life; the color green represents hope and life.

Five candles are inserted in the foliage: a purple one, which evokes repentance; a yellow one, which evokes faith in Jesus; a green one, which evokes hope; a pink one, which evokes joy; and a red one, which evokes the love of God. Other traditions use three purple (the color of conversion, preparation, waiting) or red candles, and one pink (color of joy) that is lit on the third Sunday of Advent.

The liturgy consists of lighting a new candle each week. At Christmas, after lighting the four candles in the wreath, a white candle is lit in the center of the wreath, which 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.

In each instance, the wreath and the candles are an instrument, a symbol, and not an end in themselves. The true richness of the Advent celebration is in our turning towards Jesus, in a warm, renewing and hopeful encounter.

¹ David Riaño, "4 Meditations on Christmas, based on the Christmas sermons of Martin Luther" in Biteproject (23 December 2020). Accessed 23 September 2023. <https://biteproject.com/martin-lutero-navidad/#:~:text=Dicen%20que%20Mart%C3%ADn%20Lutero%20pod%C3%ADa,lo%20que%20deseaba%20haber%20dicho>. Resource available only in Spanish.

THE THEMES OF ADVENT

Reflections and prayers have been written for the four weeks of Advent and for Christmas Day. Each week you will find an introduction to the theme, a Bible reading, a look at “our reality”, a reflection, questions, follow-up activities, and finally, a prayer. We thank Hunter Farrell, Eileen Shanley-Roberts, Efraín Barrera, Cristal Silva-McCormick and Emlyn Ott for preparing the reflections for this 2025 edition. We hope that each entry will lead individuals, families, and communities into meditation and commitment based on the mystery of Jesus, God with us.

The Ministry of Advent

Taking a journey in solitude, without the warmth and words of a companion, makes the path longer and more uncertain. To journey, to accompany one another, adds vigor and certainty to our steps in faith. Therefore, now more than ever, an intentional Advent practice within community is necessary. Such a practice, like Jesus’ ministry, is born in the midst of the difficult history of one’s neighbor to bring peace and hope.

The time of Advent is a good time to reflect on the true meaning of the arrival of Jesus in our history, putting aside the Christmas consumerism so prevalent at the end of the year. Pastorally it is appropriate to call the people of God to revive the spirit of Advent, to recover the mystery of the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ and seeing those mysteries as a paradigm of Christian life in our time.

The celebration of Advent then, invites us to participate in community that moves in a direction that is contrary

to the hedonistic frenzy of the marketplace. We are invited to form a community expectant of the Savior, one that practices justice, conversion, generosity and love.

From another perspective, observing Advent in community is key to the renewal of hope, especially in the adverse context that we live in our region. “Hope against hope,” despite the injustice of a system plagued by corruption, the people of God are called to affirm life as prophetic action. Jesus Christ, who comes to humanity, dignifies life with a mysterious empathy that encourages the building of a better society.

In this way, the celebration of Advent is an experience of accompaniment that enlivens hope and empowers the church to become a visible sign of God’s grace.

BE ALERT, ALIGNING OUR ACTIONS WITH GOD



Dr. Hunter Farrell

First week of Advent: November 30, 2025

Reading Matthew 24:36-44

INTRODUCTION

In Advent, we take on the present time, we renew our faith and we recover hope. The good news of Jesus who is born among humanity invites us to imagine that, however lacking it may be, this continues to be the stage upon which God's love and mercy are revealed.

Advent doesn't just mean looking back to admire God's actions; it is also a time for us to participate in these divine interventions that, time after time, and despite everything, open space in history. May the celebration of Advent this year fill us with joy in believing, in hoping, and also in participating in the building of a world of peace and harmony, as has been the desire of our Savior.

READING FROM MATTHEW 24:36-44

CALL TO REFLECTION

One voice:

Beloved God, here we are, coming to you from different situations; some comforting, others perturbing, but here we are. Willing to walk in the faith and hope of your coming.

All voices:

God Savior, you know us. Nothing is hidden from you; you know how much this world desperately needs to hear good news of great joy for all the people.

One voice:

We light the first Advent candle and invoke your holy light in the midst of those who would defeat us. God of life, come, because the darkness threatens us every day.

All voices:

Amen! Our Advent walk encourages us to find ourselves with Jesus. Blessed be the one who comes in the name of God!



OUR REALITY

We live in tense times; in the contexts near to us and in contexts far from us, situations of pain and injustice are suffered, marked by the strength and power of violence. This current century, in addition to bringing many advances, also brings us many setbacks. These regressions are particularly manifested in the victims of politics and economies of exploitation and extermination. Victims with first and last names have seen how the light of life is snuffed out in front of them, with the aggravating circumstance that their suffering is justified by some ideology or specific interest. In the face of that: Where are Christian faith, ethics, justice? How can we keep talking about the gospel and the reign of God when, in general, the church is indifferent to this crude reality?

REFLECTION

The smudged video footage went viral in a matter of hours: as three ICE agents stood on a rooftop 30 feet above street level and trained their weapons on a group of unarmed, peaceful protesters in Chicago, a young minister in clergy collar, blonde-haired and slight of build, stood calmly with outstretched arms and prayed for the ICE agents and all the people detained inside the facility. He implored the agents to repent and to come to their senses and then prayed for the safety of all those detained inside the holding facility. Suddenly, without warning, an ICE agent shoots pepper pellets into Rev. Black's face and the pastor falls immediately to the ground. The agents are heard laughing as fellow-protesters circled around Black to shield him from further attack. In a national context where each day's news cycle seems to carry us further into menacing, uncharted waters, several elements of Rev. Black's witness invite reflection:

Black's courageous face-off with armed government agents was not a one-time occurrence: he had shown up at the weekly protest and prayer vigil on the same corner for weeks. His encounter was the result of "a long obedience in the same direction" (Eugene Petersen)—an intentional, disciplined spiritual practice to align his actions with the actions of the God of Life, who desires repentance and blessing for ICE agents and safety and freedom and flourishing for detainees.

The young Chicago pastor did not stand alone: Black's spiritual discipline of leading his congregation into solidarity with unhoused neighbors led naturally to the spiritual practice of showing up weekly on the same street corner over many months in solidarity with people detained by ICE. These practices wove him into the fabric of a community of resistance. In Black's most vulnerable moment, community members quickly moved to put their own bodies between him and the armed ICE agents.

Earlier in his spiritual journey, the pastor might not have had the temerity to

stand at the front of the chanting crowd, facing off against armed government forces. But by the time the challenge presented itself, he was ready because he had disciplined himself to become spiritually alert and street smart.

Our lectionary text on the signs of the end times echoes the parable of the ten virgins and the parable of the Talents in urging believers to be spiritually alert and to be attentive to Christ's return. This means developing the core strength of a spiritual discipline that rejects anxious false teachings and keeps a laser focus on the question, How would Jesus respond to this challenge?

On recent trips to Palestine, I was deeply humbled by the spiritual alertness of local Palestinian Christians: mothers of detained children who refuse to give up hope; pastors and teachers continuing to urge disciplined non-violence in the face of oppression and humiliation when I would have long before lost my patience and even my moral scruples.

Palestinian Christians are teaching me that this core strength of spiritual attentiveness—of seeking God's desires despite what they face—is not a one time, Hollywood scene, but a daily discipline. Like going to the gym, I strengthen my spiritual muscles by daily putting myself into uncomfortable situations in solidarity with the oppressed. I can't do this alone; I must allow the Spirit to weave my life into the lives of those our society is exploiting. By refusing to allow my focus to be diverted from the cause of the poor and oppressed, I strengthen my preparedness for the coming tests to our faith.

QUESTIONS TO CONTINUE THE REFLECTION

Are you ready to take a stand for justice for Palestinians? For immigrants? For the unhoused? What spiritual disciplines might help you develop the core strength needed to stand in solidarity, despite the discomfort or the awkwardness?

How might you step into spaces where you can deepen relationships with those most exploited by our economy and government and woven into the lives of the poor?

ACTIVITY FOR THE WEEK

Share a time of prayer and reflection with friends, family, or sisters from your church to pray for migrants and Palestinians who suffer violence.

PRAYER

God of life, we give you thanks for this season of Advent that invites us to participate in the manifestation of your salvation for all persons, especially our siblings who desperately need justice and peace. In this hopeful time, help us to be alert and aware, in order to walk in your light. Amen.



HOPE OVERCOMES FEAR

2

Rev. Dr. Eileen Shanley-Roberts
Second week of Advent: December 7, 2025
Reading Romans 15:4-13

INTRODUCTION

"Do not be afraid! for I bring you good news!" were the pleasing words of the angelical being upon announcing the birth of Jesus the Savior. That fear reminds us of the critical conditions today that generate worries, insecurity, desperation and impotence. Our societies are victims of fear when considering the inhuman actions that people take on without restrictions. There is no way to experience freedom or human fullness under a regime of fear; relationships become icy, legal rights atrophy, joy is repressed. Can there be good news today that can liberate us from fear?

READING FROM ROMANS 15:4-13

CALL TO REFLECTION

One voice:

Dark gazes observe our walk. Look, oh God at our fears! heed our cry. May the good news of the Savior's coming bring hope and joy back to us again.

All voices:

We celebrate the goodness of God! The light visits us; amidst the threat of darkness, Christ Jesus walks with us.

One voice:

We light the second Advent candle, picking joy back up again, acting with faith in a new time in which justice reigns for everyone.

All voices:

Amen. May this candle unite us in one faith, one hope, one effort until peace becomes real for those who are captives to fear.



OUR REALITY

It is not at all easy to swim against the current. That is the experience of those who have opened their hearts with empathy to console and accompany their suffering neighbors. Many of those hearts have been persecuted unto death; others suffer a crisis in their faith, while others fall backwards, weakened by powerlessness.

There is no exception in the Christian faith, in the visible and invisible church. Silence, comfort and indifference have stolen the prophetic protagonism that gives meaning and a reason for being on the earth. The challenge that the world poses to the Christian faith is very demanding; unconcerned injustice challenges the paradigm of love that the church proclaims.

REFLECTION

Paul's letter to the Romans admonishes us to "Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God." It is a striking message for advent, when we are preparing ourselves for the coming of Christ. Welcoming others, Jesus and the holy family included, is a core part of our Christian identity.

I live about halfway between Chicago and Waukegan, Illinois, two communities that may be the epicenter of the current persecution of immigrants in the US. Each day I see footage of new atrocities and often hear in the background the voices of close friends who work on the front lines with immigrants, both documented and undocumented, trying to protect our community members. How do they keep going? How do they find the strength to continue this work?

It is tempting to just give up. The challenges often seem too great and the price of continuing to fight for justice seems too high, especially when we risk physical harm and incarceration. It is tempting to be like the Pharisees and Sadducees, deny the reality of what is happening around us, and say that those in authority will do what is right. History teaches us that those in power rarely prioritize the needs of the poor and oppressed. It is equally tempting to give into fear and hide. We know the cruelty of the wicked and do not want to risk harm to ourselves, our families, and friends. Sometimes, especially in threatened communities, leaving the house is an act of courage and faith. In times like this, we need Jesus more than ever. We need Jesus to sustain us.

For most of us working in these environments, we rely on our faith to guide our actions. Without faith in God, continuing to fight for justice and peace would seem impossible, but because of faith, because we can go back and look at what has been written in the past and see God's work in the world, we know that God has never abandoned us, even when the wicked wield power.

The salvation story is the story of God's steadfast love for us in the face of oppression and persecution. It is why God sent Jesus to be born among us.

Because we know these stories, we do find hope. We can work for peace. We will find joy. We can help our neighbors to know that they are not invisible. We can bear witness that compassion can conquer cruelty. Through our faith we can overcome fear. We can experience Paul's prayer that we live together in harmony with one another, and with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ saying come, Lord Jesus, come!

QUESTIONS TO CONTINUE THE REFLECTION

What sustains your sense of hope during these troubled times?

How do you prepare your heart to welcome into the community those whose customs and beliefs are different than your own?

ACTIVITY FOR THE WEEK

We live in a broken world where it can be hard to feel hope. As we await the coming of Jesus, the source of our hope, we strive to share our experience. This week, each day, do one thing to support a sense of hope among those who suffer, the poor and oppressed of the world.

PRAYER

God of hope, in this Advent season, we appropriate the promise of the good news of salvation as an incentive before today's suffering. May your Holy Spirit guide us to walk with Jesus, and with our neighbor, nourishing hope and peace in every place.



May the God
of steadfastness
and encouragement
grant you to live in
harmony with one
another, in accordance
with Christ Jesus, so
that together you may
with one voice glorify
the God and Father
of our Lord Jesus
Christ.

Romans 15:5-6 NRSV

LIFE WILL FLOURISH

3

Lic. Efraín Barrera

Third week of Advent: December 14, 2025

Reading Isaiah 35:1-10

INTRODUCTION

Unhappily, we must accept the reality of power dwelling within many authorities, trading centers, personalities, and structures that are unscrupulous experts in the destruction of life, of peoples, of nature, and of hope. We are referring to those who not only destroy but who oppose those who struggle for life in peace.

It is the drama that we see throughout the scriptures, where the Creator has demonstrated, over and over again, an insistence on the restoration of an obstinate people that is bent on destruction. Restoration is a manifestation of divine grace, in such a way that, in the most hostile environments of life, that is where divine grace flourishes against all odds. That is precisely what Advent faith inspires: that, in the midst of guarantees of destruction, life prevails.

READING FROM ISAIAH 35:1-10

CALL TO REFLECTION

One voice:

God of restoration, in you we discover that life will always prevail over all forces of destruction and despair.

All voices:

Save us, oh God! that the coming of Jesus may perfect our faith, leading us to a spirituality committed to the restoration of all persons.

One voice:

May the light of the third Advent candle enter us, a light that inspires our actions and our strength in the face of the powers that destroy this world.

All voices:

Amen. This is the God who walks with God's people, who knows our dry paths, who now directs us to delicate pastures, to waters of repose and to spaces of rest for the soul.

OUR REALITY

Currently humanity is confronting a variety of problems resulting from the bad political decisions of those who govern the world, our lack of solidarity with those who suffer, our mistreatment of nature and more. Although these problems affect all of humanity, they have more impact on persons who are vulnerable and excluded. It is true that bad political decisions have caused wars, injustices, poverty, violence and damage to nature. But, above all, they have caused us to lose our sensitivity to the needs that other persons suffer.

In the midst of this devastating panorama, the church has an unavoidable challenge: to practice and to share Christian hope in times of crises and disasters. The Advent season is a propitious moment to stop and reflect on our Christian behavior and to take on the responsibility of promoting solidarity and commitment to nature and to persons who suffer.

REFLECTION

The story that we study is found in the book of Isaiah 35:1–10. It is a song of hope in the middle of the desert. This poetic text emerged in a time of violence in which the people of Israel suffered an invasion and national despair and, from that reality, the prophet announces the restoration of life where there was only destruction.

In the season of Advent, when the Church awaits the coming of the Messiah, this oracle takes on a deep ethical and political resonance. We can say that, amid the horror of violence in the world, especially those of children, the prophet's message becomes a powerful cry: God does not abandon the suffering people because God's promise of life remains open. It is the God of Psalms 146 who brings justice to those who have been wronged.

Isaiah 35 is located at the end of the first block of Isaiah (chs. 1–39). After chapters of judgment and condemnation (Isaiah 28–34), this poem functions as an epilogue of hope and a prelude to salvation that are well developed in chapters 40–55. Historically, the people lived through the siege of the Assyrian empire and then came the trauma of the Babylonian exile. The city of Jerusalem was devastated, and the people, without a temple or land, doubted the liberating power of Yahweh. In this context, the disciples of the prophet announce a radical transformation: nature, sick bodies and desolate roads will flourish again.

We can divide the text into four parts: a) The desert blooms and nature rejoices (v1-2), b) Exhortation to the weak: "Be strong, do not fear!" (v. 3-4), c) Healing of bodies and transformation of landscapes (v. 5-7) and d) "Holy path" along which the redeemed return to Zion (v. 8-10).

In the first section, the “desert” and the “arid land” symbolize the experience of the devastated people. In addition to being ecological, flourishing also has a metaphorical dimension: where there was death, life returns; where there was despair, joy springs forth. Nature participates in the joy of liberation, showing a cosmic and ecological salvation. From a contemporary reading, we can say that the rubble of war, the dry lands of refugees, the bombed ruins, or different places where violence prevails are also today’s deserts that cry out to flourish. Isaiah announces that life resists and endures, even under the rubble.

In the second section, the prophet addresses the tired people, those who no longer believe in the future. “God comes with retribution... and will save you.” The God that Isaiah presents does not legitimize the violence of the strong against the weak, but rather manifests its “saving” action, which involves liberating, healing, and rescuing. We find a valuable prophetic word for our times, when some churches justify violence in the name of God. The prophet announces a divine presence that sustains and defends victims, not empires.

In the third section, the messianic dimension of the text appears. Salvation is neither spiritualistic nor disembodied: it touches wounded and suffering bodies. God does not only act from churches; God also acts in the places of pain, in every place where harm is felt and laments spring forth.

Advent, then, is not passive waiting: it is a commitment to that same integral healing of the world. Finally, the path symbolizes the return from exile and also the conversion of the heart. It is not an invitation to think about heaven, but rather the reconstruction of an earth where justice and peace reign. Only the “redeemed,” that is, those who walk in truth and solidarity, can travel it.

The salvation that Isaiah announces is eco-messianic: it embraces the human being and creation. In Advent, this text invites us to actively wait, to prepare the way of the Lord with concrete gestures of reconciliation, defense of life and prophetic denunciation of all injustice. We must not remain indifferent to the suffering of others.

The text of Isaiah 35 is a song of hope in the midst of horror. It proclaims that history does not end in pain, but with life that flourishes again. Advent reminds us that the coming of God does not occur in palaces or temples, but in the manglers of the crucified peoples. As in Palestinian communities, and as in any corner of Latin America, this text resounds like a promise and a denunciation: “The ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads” (Isaiah 35:10).

As long as peoples who walk towards justice exist, God will continue to be born. The desert, although full of ashes, will flourish.

QUESTIONS TO CONTINUE THE REFLECTION

How does Isaiah's announcement "the desert will flourish" call us today, as a church, to be signs of hope among people suffering from war, hunger or displacement?

If Advent prepares us for the coming of the God of life and peace, what personal and community changes do we need to make so that our faith does not remain indifferent to injustice and the pain of the innocent?

ACTIVITY FOR THE WEEK

"Make deserts bloom". Spend 10 minutes learning about and praying for the victims of the wars in Gaza, Ukraine, countries in Africa or from some other Latin American region. Light a candle as a sign of hope. Recognize that faith must not ignore human suffering. You can also intercede and visit some fragile, sick or lonely persons. Call, visit or help hope to be reborn.

PRAYER

God of life, we join our hearts in prayer for this Advent celebration to transform into sensitivity and commitment. Sensitivity to understand and walk with persons who don't walk, who don't see, who don't hear, who suffer different crises and disasters. Commitment to take up concrete actions that contribute to improving the way of life of our neighbors. In the name of Jesus, may this be a renewing Advent. Amen.



SALVATION IS COMING!

4

Rev. Dr. Cristal Silva-McCormick
Fourth week of Advent: December 21, 2025
Reading from Psalms 80:1-7, 17-19

INTRODUCTION

In the fourth week of Advent, while we prepare for our encounter with Jesus the Savior, we emphasize, precisely, the salvific action of the one sent by God to liberate the people who suffer under any form of oppression and captivity. "To save" is the messianic purpose recognized by Jesus, as his own name indicates, to liberate a people devastated by sin.

After so many centuries, the conditions of our current time continue to awaken the groans for full salvation. Long religious traditions go before us, monumental philosophical criteria, and extraordinary civilizing discourses; nevertheless, salvation never completely arrives for all persons. That is what encourages us to review our spirituality, because we will not experience full salvation until our hearts incarnate the needs suffered by those who don't see even a minimum gesture of salvation.

READING FROM PSALMS 80:1-7, 17-19

CALL TO REFLECTION

One voice:

God of our salvation, hear the cry of those who hope in you, attend to the cry of our sisters and brothers who hope for you.

All voices:

We remember those, in this moment, in many places, who don't have any other hope, that your great generosity may reach them with acts of liberation.

One Voice:

We light the fourth candle of Advent, imploring your intervention in our story. The world needs that peace that no person, no power, no human intention has been able to provide.

All voices:

Alleluia, Alleluia! What a blessed time our God has allowed us. Even in the face of our challenges, we are encouraged to walk with God to build a better world.



OUR REALITY

The facts and events that make the news, in the ocean of information that accosts us every day, primarily emphasize the ills and evils that affect persons and entire peoples. We can barely imagine what the news industry would be without the events that narrate human suffering. Deep down, the impact of this flow of stories and information is to make present the vulnerability of life and the lack of security for the multitudes of receptors. From there we build imaginaries of fear that inform us not only about the bad in the world, but also about the deep need to be saved from all that threatens us.

Salvation, a longed-for word, a utopian state, a challenging promise. No one owns salvation; well, before so many actions that threaten life today, salvation is a great need for all persons, especially for those who survive amidst the worst conditions.

REFLECTION

That is the phrase that comes to mind when I read these verses, especially during the season of Advent, as we wait for the birth of the child who is our salvation: Jesus.

Many times, in the church, when we think about salvation, we imagine that Jesus saving us means that He is our ticket to heaven. And sure, there is joy in the promise of eternal life, but the birth of our Savior reminds us that salvation is much more than that, more than an idea or a goal of getting to heaven. Salvation, sisters and brothers, is an invitation to long for God as the psalmist does. It is an invitation to open our hearts to God, again and again, in every stage of our lives: "Awaken your power; come and save us."

Why? Because that longing—even our doubts—are a sign that we continue to cling to faith and the promises of God, that something new is about to be born, just as Mary waited, amid pain and trials, for the birth of something new.

During Advent, we live in the tension between the "already" and the "not yet." Christ has already come, but we continue to wait for the fullness of his kingdom. We look back to the manger, where the Prince of Peace entered a world broken by injustice and fear, and we look forward to the day when He will make all things new. Waiting for Advent is not passive; It is a holy longing, an active hope. It calls us to prepare space not only in the heart, but also in the world, for the arrival of God's healing and justice.

These verses from the Psalms remind us that even—or perhaps especially—when we face great challenges or suffering, when we feel that God is absent, our sincere cries for restoration are part of what it means to participate in salvation. Why? Because regretting and longing are acts of faith. They are declarations that the pain and injustice of the world do not have the last word, and that we continue to believe in a God who repairs, redeems and restores.

The discomfort we feel in the face of violence, hatred, injustice and everything that afflicts the world is a sign that we know that things are not as they should be. Our longing for the kingdom of God—for salvation, not only our own salvation but that of all creation—is a show of faith in the promise that God will make all things right (just) and new.

This Advent, we wait between sighs and with an aching heart. Every cry for peace, every act of compassion, every gesture of love, is our way of joining in that holy reparation. We shout while we wait, like the psalmist in the passage. We shout because we know our Savior is coming.

We are waiting. And although waiting sometimes hurts, it is sacred, because we wait with living hope.

QUESTIONS TO CONTINUE THE REFLECTION

Can you identify a person, family, or community that is in need of immediate salvation?

What acts of salvation can you identify at this time in your own context, church, or family?

ACTIVITY FOR THE WEEK

This week, make room for God's healing and justice with a simple action that bring a little peace or light into your life and someone else's life.

It can be calling or visiting someone you know is lonely, forgiving an offense, offering your time to someone who needs it, or simply stopping for a moment to listen with your heart. Do it as an act of waiting in Advent, as a way of saying, "I am preparing space for Christ to be born here."

But remember: we don't do it alone. God invites us to wait in community. It is in the company of others where we learn to sustain hope, to bear the sorrows and to celebrate the light that is coming. When we walk together, the wait becomes lighter and God's love becomes more visible.

PRAYER

God of life, thank you for your tender care and timely intervention; now we can await and celebrate the salvation in Jesus that comes to each of us. We ask for your help that we may become involved in the building of a present and a future that are worthy for our sisters and our brothers. Amen.



Restore us,
O God;
let your face shine,
that we may
be saved.

Psalms 80:3 NRSV

DANCING TO THE SOUND OF PEACE

5

Rev. Dr. Emlyn Ott
Christmas Eve celebration: December 24, 2025
Reading Luke 2:1-14

INTRODUCTION

Silent night, holy night, the night that saw a light like none other before or since; the night in which Jesus the Savior was born. As is known, a mystery as deep as it is disconcerting, this birth sought a physical and symbolic place among the marginalized persons of the earth: first century Palestine.

From there, the message of God was disseminated for the entire world, with the slogan of peace, so that this earth shall be a place where life, love and liberty flourish. Where does such a declaration come from? Jesus is the message, the verb become human, the inspiring example, who encourages us to dream with Him. That is why, in this Advent, we await Jesus with joy; Jesus, being born and making himself present among his people, moving us to follow his example, especially among the persons who suffer violence. This special night, we make that expectation, that hope, our own. Glory to God in the highest and on earth, peace for all persons!

READING FROM LUKE 2:1-14

CALL TO REFLECTION

One voice

With joy, we reach this special moment in our celebration of Advent: the celebration of Christmas. Amidst mystery and awe, we open our hearts before Jesus, who is born and lives among his people.

All voices:

Glory to God in the highest! God has visited God's people, stripping the powerful of their wealth, and welcoming persons in need in order to bring them true peace.

One voice:

We light the Christmas candle; may it stand out before everyone. There is light in this place, there is hope in this place, there is faith in this place, to move our hearts and our hands according to the justice and the love of God.

All voices:

We give thanks for the deep mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who live in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our steps on the path of peace.



OUR REALITY

The celebration of the year has arrived! In many countries Christmas is celebrated in different ways; it is a time awaited by old and young. The narratives about Christmas have tinged the celebration with terms like “magic, illusion, fantasy” - in other words, a personal experience to enjoy.

And it makes sense. Rejoicing is one of the distinctive elements of the spirit that accompanies the celebration of Christmas. From the biblical context, the news of Jesus’ birth was a prophetic announcement of great joy for all people. But this aspect doesn’t exhaust the underlying message of the birth of Jesus, his incursion into history, and his decided liberating action for persons. The joy of Christmas responds to hope: Hope in what? Hope in a change, a transformation, the longed-for restoration; that the world will be different, that no one will suffer hunger, that there will no longer be children suffering violence, that there will be no more absurd politics that promote war as a pretext for selfish interests.

That is the nativity of the Savior, to which this Advent has called us, and which invites us to a re-encounter with Jesus being born in our reality so that, with our complicity, it will change into something better, more joyful and more just. Merry Christmas! A joyous new time for every person.

REFLECTION

Just a few short days ago, on December 21st, we celebrated the shortest day of the year—the winter solstice. That very night marks the beginning of winter. It is amid those long nights that we share the story of Jesus’ birth. Joseph and Mary were in Bethlehem, complying with the government’s decree that “all the inhabited world were to be registered” (Luke 2:1).

As the shepherds (and sheep) kept watch, the angel of the Lord came before them. God’s presence, amid confusion and fear, broke into the world with good news “for all people.” And the message was “Glory to God in the highest, and peace to all God’s people” (Luke 2:14).

At this time in our world, “all the inhabited world” is experiencing the firm grip of confusion, chaos, fear, and war. To some, there has been very little experience of peace. We hear about the reality of suffering. That news points out the truth and fabrications of what is going on. Hope or frustration circles around our understandings of “what could” or “should have been.”

Centuries after Jesus’ birth, there is increasing polarization between those who live in privilege and those who cannot find shelter or food. Some are afraid for their lives. Over sixty-five million migrant people globally are trying to escape war, civil unrest, economic woes, hunger, and poverty. What “should have” and “could have been” was Jesus’ project shared with the world. It was the good news that was shared with the shepherds (and the sheep) in the depths of Palestine.

Can we share that story of hope and promise from the perspective of the shepherds and the sheep? Movement is an integral part of the story. This section of Luke tells the story about God’s movement into this world of chaos, fear and confusion.

That movement is more than about the end of darkness or the presence of joy. It is an example of how we get to live as a community of believers. As Miguel De La Torre reminds us, "Jesus is not a thought. Jesus is a way to live."

We live in a complex and frightening world. Every time we engage the story told each Christmas Eve, we come face to face with the challenge to live the "Jesus-way." The most challenging time for us in our world today is to continue to hear the music of the future possibilities and pray for the courage to dance to that tune every day.

Imagine the delight, wonder and hope of those shepherds, present as the angel came among them. They got to experience the melody of Jesus' birth. They experienced the music of God's future in the midst of those fields as they were watching their flocks.

We each get to dance. We each get to live differently because God broke into our world and history. God broke our silence and agony. That is why we hope, and live with that promise, every day.

The celebration of the birth of Christ is not just a festival that brings joy and memories. It is a reminder that it is a daily event of dancing, so that amid great heartbreak, our lives are reshaped and focused on living into the promise that God has offered us. The celebration of the birth of Jesus is a challenge to the way that we live every moment and every day.

QUESTIONS TO CONTINUE THE REFLECTION

What are your favorite memories of Christmas Eve worship and hearing these texts each year? Given what is happening in our world today, how do you hear God's message differently today?

God has the habit of defying expectations. The lowly shepherds were the first to hear the words "and on earth peace for everyone." How does that impact your way of looking at the promise offered in the birth of Jesus?

ACTIVITY FOR THE WEEK

At home or in church (perhaps during a candlelight service), light a candle for one person who needs physical, emotional or spiritual help, and pray that Christ will be born in that person and in their context today.

Engage in a simple action this week that demonstrates your solidarity with another human being: walk with a neighbor, call a relative or friend, someone who needs companionship, or volunteer in a church or community group.

BLESSING

May the Word that Mary brought to birth
Carry you into new and abundant life.
May the Word that Joseph cradled in his arms
Offer you love and strength.
May the Word that the angels proclaimed in song
Bring harmony to our world.
May the Word that the shepherds heard
Shape your heart into a living, breathing faith.
Amen.

PRAYER

On Christmas Eve, we return to the deepest meaning of the birth of Jesus, not just to admire his marvels, but to place our lives at the service of his liberating and salvific project. With full consciousness, we pray from our interior that each Christian person will bring the presence of Jesus where there is only darkness and fear, hunger or affliction. Amen.

Biblical Reflection Contributors

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Give creatively, without violence, discrimination, or ecological damage

In time of gifts, let us consider sharing what expresses, more than economic value, our appreciation for the lives of people and the planet.

Let us avoid gifts that incite violence, discrimination, war, sedentary lifestyle or damage to the environment, in the understanding that we are all responsible for building a culture of peace and respect among human beings and towards nature.

Let us give with creativity, stimulating life, fraternity, peace, care for the planet, and thus, hope in a better world.

If the greatest gift humanity has ever received was given from a common manger, maybe we will find a way to give under that same inspiration.





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