
ENTERING THE NIGHT OF PEACE
REFLECTIONS FOR ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS 2025
CO-WRITTEN BY
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Dear friends,

Welcome to this year's Advent journey with Pax Christi USA.

In 2025, we have witnessed the continued increase in domestic gun violence and supply of US armament shipments to overseas wars; deployment of the National Guard to US cities under the pretext of combating crime; racialized raids, kidnappings, and detention carried out by ICE; and too many more systems of injustice to name. In short, we have no shortage of issues to collectively respond to with our prayer, study, and action.

We are grateful to young adult peacemakers and writers Cameron Bellm and Flora x. Tang for authoring this year's reflection booklet.

Cameron is a writer shaped by Ignatian spirituality and Catholic social teaching. She combines her love of language with a deeply-rooted spirituality to compose prayers, poems, essays, and devotionals linking our modern lives with our ancient faith. Her work has been featured in America, National Catholic Reporter, Outreach, Catholic Women Preach, Jesuit Media Lab and many other outlets. Her first book, *The Sacrament of Paying Attention: How Writers, Artists, and Mystics Can Lead Us into Sacred Human Communion*, will be published by Eerdmans in 2026. She lives in Seattle with her husband and two children.

Flora, a member of the Pax Christi USA Young Adult Caucus, is a doctoral candidate in theology and peace studies at the University of Notre Dame. Her work draws from her complex faith journey to and within Catholicism: from becoming Catholic at age 19 after living and serving with Catholic sisters, to deconstructing her faith while living in Palestine, to discovering her own queer Catholic expressions of faith. Her writings have appeared in the National Catholic Reporter and America, and she has published a book of poetry in her native language of Mandarin Chinese.

May we recommit ourselves to the radical promise of hope, deliverance, and mercy as we enter this liturgical season of light.

In peace,
Judy Coode and Michelle Sherman

The readings for November 30-December 6 are written by Flora x. Tang

First Sunday of Advent
November 30

Isaiah 2:1-5 | Romans 13:11-14 | Matthew 24:37-44

Our readings from the first Sunday of Advent impart to us a sense of rushed urgency. *Therefore, stay awake!* Christ's return and judgment could occur any minute, writes the Gospel of Matthew. The night is advanced, the day is at hand, writes the Book of Romans.

Our world today, especially around this time of the year, also imparts to us much anxiety-inducing urgency. Online and printed signage for Black Friday, Cyber Monday, and Christmas season sales—often featuring the words, *"Sale ends today!!"* or *"Only 48 hours left!!"*—remind us to make that big purchase today and not tomorrow. Work project and final project deadlines also redefine the penultimate months of the year as times of great urgency. We are told to keep working during every waking hour to meet yet another deadline and to maximize our productivity before the holiday season. Urgency is a sales tactic. Urgency is a strategy of the individualistic and capitalistic world around us to get us to do more, to produce more, and to purchase more, right now. For me at least, this urgency that the world gives us is one that produces much anxiety.

The urgency that we hear from today's readings at the beginning of this Advent season, however, is distinctly different from the urgency that the world imparts upon us. The urgency of Christ's apocalyptic message — *"the day is at hand"* — promises the impending coming of the reign of God that will shake up the earth. The urgent promise of the second coming of God is both a threat for the powerful and a hope for those who are suffering: the way things are today in the world will not be the way things will be in God's reign of peace. We, as Christ's followers, must remain vigilant and urgently prepare ourselves for — and help establish — this very Kingdom of God.

Christ's urgency is therefore the opposite of the self-serving urgency that today's "grind culture" offers us. Rather, the urgency and hope of the Advent season is a call to pray for others and love our neighbors with great urgency in a time of great uncertainty in our world. We do not know when God's second coming would be, our gospel reminds us.

But even more immediately, we also do not know what will happen next in our families, in our country, or in our world. We do not know when it would be too late for us to prevent yet another tragedy, war, authoritarian regime rise, or humanitarian crisis in the world. Amid these ongoing and impending crises in our world, Christ calls us during this season of Advent to love and to build peace with radical urgency, and to continue to stay awake and not look away from those who are suffering.

Last year, I watched a video of US-based anti-war activists, young and old, linking arms and holding hands as they clung onto a large ship that carried a shipment of weapons to be delivered from the US to Israel to be used for killing and destruction in Gaza. The peacebuilders clung their bodies onto the boat for hours to prevent the boat from leaving the dock. For they knew that the shipment of one fewer boatload of weapons — or perhaps even a delayed shipment — means the possibility perhaps one more life would be spared.

These peacebuilders embody the same urgency of saving lives, of resisting war, and of feeding the hungry in which our readings today call us all to participate. Works of mercy and acts of peacebuilding, while they should be part of our long-term aspirations, are not actions that can be delayed until tomorrow. Because people are dying of war today and weapons continue to be shipped abroad today and every day. We, like the activists who clung onto the boat to prevent its departure, must too take risks and embody the urgency of "beating our swords into plowshares and our spears into pruning hooks," as today's reading from Isaiah calls us all to work toward.

In our already anxious-inducing, deadline-driven world, how might Christ's message of urgency offer us not additional burdens to bear, but a different hope upon which to set our eyes?

How can we resist the self-serving urgency of capitalism and productivity this Advent season? Perhaps we can choose to take time to rest and to breathe, and to remind ourselves that productivity isn't everything.

On the other hand, how can we embrace the urgency of God's peacebuilding work on earth? How can we answer our call of urgently loving others and helping those in need stay alive? What would it look like if we tried to save lives, to prevent the shipment of destructive weapons, to fight for nonviolence, to love our families, and to protect the earth with such urgency as if "the day is at hand"?

Monday, December 1

Isaiah 4:2-6 | Matthew 8:5-11

During this first week of Advent, the readings from the Hebrew scriptures all come from the Book of Isaiah, hopeful reflections on the eschatological reign of God. Isaiah writes poetically and imaginatively about a new heaven and a new earth that looks distinctly different from the many forms of human suffering, conflicts, violence, and death that Isaiah sees around him – a world different, too, from the world we see around us today.

For Isaiah and for us, to imagine and await the reign of God with hope is not just another way for us to ignore or escape from today's painful reality of violence. Rather, our eschatological hope in God's transformative power to bring about peace on earth is precisely what inspires and fuels our prophetic actions for peace today. Today's reading from Isaiah 4 imagines a future where God's glory shelters and protects all who seek God's refuge. Meanwhile, our gospel story of the healing of the centurion's servant reminds us that one day, all forms of suffering and ailments shall be healed by our merciful God. By placing our hope in God's future of refuge, protection, and healing, we too commit ourselves to bringing about this future in the here and the now.

Tuesday, December 2

Isaiah 11:1-10 | Luke 10:21-24

"Then the wolf shall be a guest of the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid... There shall be no harm or ruin on all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be filled with knowledge of the LORD, as water covers the sea."

Take some time today to meditate with these images and words from Isaiah, who prophesizes in today's reading a future of universal peace and justice after the Messiah comes. This future of peace is one where those who are poor and "the land's afflicted" (Isaiah 11:4) shall finally receive God's justice, where those who are ruthless will face judgment, and where not only human beings but all of God's creation will live in God's peace.

What does it mean for you – as a peacemaker – to not only commit to building a future of peace between human persons or countries, but also a future of ecological peace and harmony? Oftentimes, violence against people who are poor goes hand in hand with violence against God's creation: weapons of mass destruction kill human lives and also permanently damage ecologies, unjust mining practices are issues of labor as they are issues of environmental injustice. What does further committing to nonviolence against the earth look like as part of our spiritual practice this Advent season? What does it mean for us to truly work toward a future of universal peace where we live in nonviolent harmony with all God's creation?

Wednesday, December 3

Isaiah 25:6-10a | Matthew 15:29-37

In war-torn places such as Gaza, Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, and beyond, a record number of people face extreme hunger and famine. In urban food deserts within the United States also, lack of access to nutritional and affordable food creates conditions of permanent hunger for many. Today's gospel recounts the familiar story of Jesus feeding a hungry crowd with loaves and fishes. All ate, and were satisfied.

Our reading from Isaiah likewise promises a future where God will destroy death forever, and where a feast of rich foods will be given to all God's people. If war and injustice are sources of death-dealing hunger around the world, then the life-giving peace of Jesus Christ is the very act of feeding the hungry and alleviating conditions that lead to the uneven distribution of food around the world today.

Oftentimes, we interpret biblical passages about Jesus feeding the crowd metaphorically: God quenches our spiritual thirst and nourishes our spiritual hunger. Today, I invite you to think about hunger in scripture literally as well. When Jesus feeds the hungry crowd and when Isaiah promises a feast for all, they are speaking not only to those who are spiritually seeking to be filled by God, but also all who are physically hungry. All who are poor, all who experience wartime famine, all who must choose between feeding themselves or feeding their loved ones, all the mothers who struggle creatively to feed their children… all will be fed, God promises to God's people. Isn't this good news?

Thursday, December 4

Isaiah 26:1-6 | Matthew 7:21, 24-27

God is our rock and our foundation. In both Jesus's parable and Isaiah's prophecy, those who listen to the word of God and act on them will not perish even in times of storm. Yet those who hoard power in "lofty cities" and earthly kingdoms – the empires of this earth – will one day surely become humbled.

As an avid gardener, I know that winter is a season where our perennial plants die back above the soil, but their roots underground remain more active than ever, drawing from the cold earth's nutrients to grow back the following spring. Today, if it's winter where you are, perhaps you'll get a chance to look outside at the dormant plants and remember that their roots are growing and reaching toward ever-deeper foundations. We, too, during this Advent season, recall our roots, our rock, and our foundation: God's love for us is the foundation for our love for one another, and God's everlasting peace is the source of our work for peace. Sometimes, it takes a slower season in life such as winter or Advent for us to remember to return to these foundations, to allow our roots in God's word to grow deeper. So that when it comes spring, nourished by God's word, we become energized once again to "grow our branches and fruits" and commit to active works of mercy. With God's love as our foundation, even during times of storm, during insurmountable challenges and ever-expanding structural forces of war, our faith in God's peace – like a house built on solid rock – will continue to sustain us and our community.

Friday, December 5

Isaiah 29:17-24 | Matthew 9:27-31

In the gospel today, Jesus heals the blind but instructs that his work of healing remain hidden for now. While Jesus had his own historical and theological reasons for why he prefers for his miracles to remain hidden from the public at the time, I couldn't help while reading this passage but think of the many "invisible" healthcare workers, women, and mothers who tend to the sick and injured in their communities, whose works of healing also almost always remain invisible and hidden. During the HIV/AIDS crisis in the US, when others shunned those who were sick and infected, many women (including queer women and Catholic women religious) took care of the sick and dressed their wounds. In war-torn areas around the world today, women continue to physically heal the

wounded. In our own homes, many women and mothers take on the invisible labor of tending to sick family members and caring for those who are elderly and disabled. These works of healing often remain "behind the scenes" and forgotten by others, but are in fact crucial to the task of peacemaking and to bringing about God's healing love here on earth.

As you reflect on the many motifs of healing in today's readings, take a moment to pray for all those women and men, healthcare workers, medics, mothers and fathers and siblings, and all who continue to participate — often in ways unnoticed by others — in the work of healing. In this season where daylight grows dark, may God's true light open our eyes to seeing and giving thanks for these hidden works of mercy.

Saturday, December 6

Isaiah 30:19-21, 23-26 | Matthew 9:35—10:1, 5a, 6-8

This December 6 marks exactly 10 years since I have been received into the Catholic Church. I have since reflected much on why I became Catholic, and more importantly, what continues to sustain my faith despite living in an often-failing church and a war-torn world. Today's reading from Isaiah seems to capture my answer quite well. Isaiah beautifully imagines God's love for God's people in and through every aspect of this created world. The growing wheat is a reflection of God's abundant love. Streams of running water physically embody God's tender sustenance of God's people. The light of the moon, the light of the sun, every mountain and hill, and every material element in this created world reflect and magnify the goodness of God. In fact, all of creation—including our human bodies—are sanctified as sites and sacraments ("living signs") of God's goodness and grace. This belief is often referred to as the "Catholic sacramental imagination."

For me, this sacramental imagination is not some naïve outlook on the world, but the very source of my faith as a Catholic peacebuilder. Despite the many forms of sin and evil around us, this created world is not depraved nor hopeless. No matter how grim it looks around us, we must not give up on loving this created world. Rather, our Catholic faith calls us to remember, even during the most unredeemable times, that all God's creations are sources and recipients of God's life-giving peace. Violence and death do not have the last word, my Catholic faith reminds me all these years. God's grace, abundant in the materiality of this created world, has the last word.

The reflections for December 7-20 are written by Cameron Bellm.

Second Sunday of Advent
December 7

Isaiah 11:1-10 | Romans 15:4-9 | Matthew 3:1-12

I'm so utterly taken by today's first reading, this beautiful passage from Isaiah in which we see the wolf and the lamb, the cow and the bear, peacefully coexisting as neighbors, as friends. This vision, in which there is no harm and no ruin, reminds me of the stirring first words Pope Leo XIV spoke upon his election this year. He greeted the millions watching around the world with the peace of Christ, a peace, he said, that was "unarmed and disarming, humble and persevering." How we needed those words on that day, and how much more we need them now, as wars and violence rage on, human rights abuses carry on unchecked, and the earth is more threatened than ever before.

Our psalm today assures that justice will flourish, that fullness of peace will reign. We could be forgiven, I think, for having to squint to see it.

What today's readings and Pope Leo's words call us to, I think, is the engagement of our sacred imagination. We have to boldly envision the world we want to bring into being. We have to speak it into existence, create it with the work of our hands and our own hearts, in communion with God, the author of peace.

Discouragement is a natural occasional stop along the road in the journey of speaking and acting prophetically, and it's okay to pass through it when we gaze upon all the suffering inflicted by our government and others, the inequality that gilds the spoons of the few and leaves the bowls of many empty. Our broken hearts hum at the same frequency as God's.

But we are continually invited to partner with God in setting things aright, in making the paths straight, not in some pie-in-the-sky hope that things will improve on their own, but in rolling up our sleeves and being part of the work of putting flesh on hope. We're the ones who are called to proclaim the kingdom with shelter along the border, with sanctuary for those fleeing deportation without due process. To

proclaim it with advocacy for just laws and budgets at the Capitol and on the ballots in our own towns. To proclaim it with calls for peace and ceasefire, for medical and material aid to suffering peoples.

Advent is a beautiful time to remember that the angel Gabriel's words to Mary are still true, thousands of years later: "Nothing is impossible with God." Trusting in Divine partnership, we must continue to lift our hands and lift our voices, speaking the same words of peace again and again, until they become part of the very fabric of our reality, ceaselessly calling us to treat the earth and one another as sacred and beloved.

Monday, December 8

Genesis 3:9-15, 20 | Ephesians 1:3-6, 11-12 | Luke 1:26-38

Every Advent, our Scripture readings usher us into a sacred space where the veil between heaven and earth is very thin. Prophetic dreams offer holy revelations, visits from angels abound, and the ordinary lives of the people who experience them are forever changed.

Each time I return to the story of the annunciation in Luke's gospel, I try to place myself within the complete shock of Mary, gazing upon the angel Gabriel, hearing this incredible and improbable invitation. Everything about this visit is so far beyond the bounds of her everyday life that it's hard to imagine how she took it in. What we do know is that, in spite of any fear she felt, she said yes.

In these busy December days, don't we all need a visit from an angel? Don't we all need a shattering of the ordinary, an invitation to participate in holy mystery? Don't we all need a moment of reassurance to follow the path God has laid out for us, even if the map is sometimes hard to read?

As we remember Mary's yes within the joyful hope of Advent, we know, too, the sorrow that Lent and Holy Week will bring. Like Mary, we are invited to take part in God's redemptive work, even when we know it will include sorrow and discouragement along with the joy and celebration.

Every Advent I like to pray with these questions: What would the angel say to me? What news does God have for me, what mission for my life? And how will I respond? For we, like Mary, are also being asked: How will we bear God into the world?

Tuesday, December 9
Feast of St. Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin

Isaiah 40:1-11 | Matthew 18:12-14

Years ago, when I wrote an e-book of prayers for the pandemic, my editor asked me to think about what the throughline was, the thread that held all the prayers together. I didn't hesitate for a moment. "Comfort," I said. I love that this word is so important for God to convey to us that God says it twice at the beginning of today's reading in Isaiah. Many are the times I've turned to this dog-eared page in my Bible, just to run my eyes over this word, again and again.

Even though Advent is a season of waiting in joyful hope and celebrating December's many feasts and festivities, I'm also always aware that Advent holds grief and sorrow for so many of us, whether it's missing loved ones who have passed, grieving difficult family relationships, or just gazing out at a world so far from the peace and justice of God.

But today's readings, and today's feast of Saint Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin, remind me that we know and love a God who draws near to us in our sorrow, who speaks to us in our native language, who sees our grief and longing and meets us right in the middle of it. Our God is a God who nurtures, a God who knows each one of us by name. Our God is a God who seeks after us and gathers us up, one by one, like a shepherd cradles a lamb. Amidst all the holiday hubbub, take some time today to envision yourself held in the arms of a loving God who would leave the 99 behind to find you and bring you home.

Wednesday, December 10

Isaiah 40:25-31 | Matthew 11:28-30

Here in Seattle, it's not uncommon to see a bald eagle in flight, far above the tree line. They are majestic creatures, gliding with complete freedom through the skies. It's hard to imagine a greater contrast than an animal confined to a yoke, bound to the earth, its work laid out before it in the fields.

And yet, this is the great paradox of the Christian life: we are earthbound and heaven-soaring, all at once. It is the love and tenderness of Jesus that makes the yoke of our burden also bear wings. We who hope in God renew our strength. We are oxen, and we are eagles.

Sometimes we will feel more like one, and sometimes more like the other. Both are a natural part of the spiritual life, two sides of the same holy coin. We are under a yoke, yes, but we also take flight with the interior freedom that is the indwelling of God. Where in your life do you feel this freedom, and where do you need a reminder of it?

Thursday, December 11

Isaiah 41:13-20 | Matthew 11:11-15

"The violent are taking it by force." These are disturbing words from Jesus in today's gospel, and we need only look around to see all the ways in which they still ring true, generations later, such as racial injustice, nuclear arms, mass incarceration, the death penalty, and housing and healthcare policies that deal deadly blows to countless suffering people, plus an epidemic of gun violence, cruel treatment of migrants and refugees, unjust labor practices, violence against the earth itself. This is only a bird's eye view of the violence that mars our country, our world, our planet.

And yet when I hear these grim, bracing words from Jesus, I think of their counterpoint. I think of St. Óscar Romero, beset by injustice and violence in El Salvador, who proclaimed nonetheless: "We have never preached violence, except the violence of the love that led Christ to be nailed to a cross. We preach only the violence that we must each do to ourselves to overcome selfishness and to eliminate the cruel inequalities among us. This is not the violence of the sword, the violence of hatred. It is the violence of love and fraternity, the violence that chooses to beat weapons into sickles for work."

Romero spoke these words during Advent 1977, but they are evergreen; we need to hear them anew every Advent. Jesus is speaking, after all, about the context of violence in which the voice of John the Baptist sounds like a clear bell. A prophet always arises, to speak the truth, to call us to partnership with God in setting the world to right. May our voices, too, ring out in the desert, as we set to work for the kingdom of God, as we invite others to join us in our sacred labor.

Friday, December 12
Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe

Zechariah 2:14-17 or Revelation 11:19a; 12:1-6a, 10ab
Luke 1:26-38 or Luke 1:39-47

Today we celebrate one of my favorite feasts, warmly lit with a mother's compassion and tenderness for her child. I love that Mary appeared to Juan Diego, an ordinary man in the midst of ordinary business, and spoke to him in his native language, Nahautl. I love that her presence was an interruption of his everyday trek over Tepeyac hill. I love that her words pierced through all of his fear and doubt: "Am I not here, who am your Mother?"

As we return in our readings today to the Annunciation, I can't help but reflect on the beauty of this feast day: the fact that it is Mary, who gave her own yes to an interruption and invitation from an angel, inviting Juan Diego to overcome his own hesitation and answer the call to participate in the work of God. Mary knows what it is to allow the Divine to change the course of her life. And she holds our hand as we, like Juan Diego, are also called to a life of partnership with God.

Mary keeps coming back to Tepeyac, more than willing to meet Juan Diego in his confusion and doubt. And the same is true for us today. Aren't we all rushing over our own Tepeyac this holiday season? There are gifts to buy, special meals to cook, holiday gatherings to plan. And yet the voice of our Mother calls to us, ordinary though we may feel. We have great callings to answer, perhaps not once and for all, but over and over again, right in the middle of our busy, everyday lives.

Our Lady of Guadalupe, in her tender address to Juan Diego, in her persistent reassurances to him, reminds us of the loving vision of God that drives our work of advocacy and peacemaking: that each person should be treated as beloved, seen, respected, and called by name. May we recommit ourselves daily to making it so.

Saturday, December 13

Sirach 48:1-4, 9-11 | Matthew 17:9a, 10-13

In today's gospel, the disciples begin to understand John the Baptist as a successor to the prophet Elijah, and there's a tremendous amount of consolation to be found in knowing that we, too, can trace our prophetic lineage. Who are the people whose candles always bear light into your life and work? The wall beside my bed is cluttered with icons of people who carried the torch passed from Elijah to John the Baptist into their own time and place. I count among my lineage Dorothy Day, Thea Bowman, Óscar Romero, Rutilio Grande, Dan Berrigan, Corita Kent, and Dorothy Stang. I draw from a deep well of encouragement, recalling all the people I know and don't know who are working toward a world that reflects the justice and equality of God, including those working in popular movements for labor equality, whom Pope Francis called "social poets." He used this term, he explained to them, "because you have the ability and the courage to create hope where there appears to be only waste and exclusion. Poetry means creativity, and you create hope."

I need the reminder, each day, that I do not stand alone before the work ahead of me, but I face it shoulder to shoulder with holy people who gave their yes to God over and over again, who inspire me to carry on, to keep at the work of social poetry, creating hope out of despair. Take some today to reflect on your own spiritual lineage, to turn for light and encouragement to those who came before you.

Third Sunday of Advent
Sunday, December 14

Isaiah 35:1-6a, 10 | James 5:7-10 | Matthew 11:2-11

John the Baptist wasn't sure. Was Jesus the awaited one, or was someone else coming? It's easy to understand his confusion. Yes, John had seen the Holy Spirit descend like a dove at Jesus' baptism, and he'd heard the voice from the heavens. Yes, he knew that Jesus had been healing people, cleansing lepers, restoring sight to the blind, and even raising a child from the dead. These are exactly the events that were prophesied in Isaiah.

And yet, nothing else had materially changed. The leaders of their religious tradition were skeptical of Jesus, all of the unjust social mores of the time stayed firmly in place, and Judea remained under the imperial thumb of Rome. John himself was still sitting in prison. How could he help but wonder? Wasn't something grander going to happen, on a larger scale, to make everyone sure once and for all that Jesus was the Messiah?

And yet Jesus redirects John the Baptist's attention, and ours, to the very concrete and specific good works that he is doing, works that touch individual human lives. I think his answer is an encouragement to all of us who are longing for change and justice on a large scale. That is a good and holy desire, a true north to which we must set all of our internal compasses, but we must also be assured of this: wherever we see good being done, injustice being alleviated, humans being treated with the the respect and dignity they deserve, we can be sure that we are seeing the kingdom of God with our own eyes.

Perhaps we haven't yet witnessed the blooms in the desert that Isaiah promises us, the full flowering of earth and humankind reflecting the reality of heaven, but this is the central tension of the kingdom of God: it is already here, within us and all around us, but it is also yet to come.

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me," today's gospel acclamation proclaims, "because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor." John the Baptist wants to know: who is the one to come, to speak the truth of this good news, to make it a tangible reality? Two thousand years later, for those of us traveling the way of Jesus, the answer echoes through the Scriptures: it is you. It is me.

Much as we wish for the kingdom to be established right here, right now, in its fullness, we must be patient, as our second reading counsels us. To make use of the example James gives us, my in-laws are farmers, and I can't tell you how much patience they have to practice: waiting for the rain to come, waiting for the rain to dry up, waiting for the temperature to rise, waiting for the temperature to drop. Farming is

never really finished; there is always something more to do, more care that the soil and the plants need. So, too, with advocacy and justice work.

While frustration and discouragement are natural human responses, I love that today, on Gaudete Sunday, the church makes space for joy in the waiting. I love that we light the only rose-colored candle not on the last Sunday before Christmas, but on the third Sunday, when we still have at least a week, and some years even two weeks, to keep waiting until the Nativity.

The work, and the waiting, feel very long sometimes. In those moments I remember Bishop Ken Unterer's beautiful prayer, "Prophets of a future not our own," which reminds me to take the long view, to take heart in the small part I am able to play in God's work on earth. "We may never see the end results," Bishop Ken says, "but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker. We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs. We are prophets of a future not our own."

Monday, December 15

Numbers 24:2-7, 15-17a | Matthew 21:23-27

I would love to see as Balaam sees in today's reading. Twice he proclaims that he "sees what the Almighty sees, enraptured, and with eyes unveiled." Perhaps we aren't privy to all of sacred history and knowledge unfolding in a single moment, but we can still pause to consider the importance of a clarifying vision, an inner knowing centered on the goodness of God that directs all of our steps.

Jesus sees with this vision in today's gospel reading, and he refuses to fall into a rhetorical trap that's been set for him. What time is there to argue when there's work to be done, the real work of healing the sick and dying, restoring to wholeness people who have been ostracized by their communities, and opening minds to the grander reality of a loving and compassionate God? Jesus must be on his way. So must we.

Within each one of us is a finely tuned compass that directs our efforts for a more just world. Reflect today, with gratitude, on those moments of enraptured and unveiled seeing that set your compass in motion.

Tuesday, December 16

Zephaniah 3:1-2, 9-13 | Matthew 21:28-32

"The Lord hears the cry of the poor." That's a gospel unto itself, isn't it? Today's psalm is almost unbearably tender, reminding us that God is close to the broken-hearted. So must we be. Something I've noticed in both Pope Francis' and Pope Leo's addresses on wars and disasters is that they always begin by expressing closeness to those who are suffering. That compassionate closeness is a necessary starting point.

How can we build that closeness with those who need our tenderness? By listening to them, by giving them our time and attention, by letting go of our preconceived notions about them and their needs. Jesus is the ultimate example of this, welcoming all, but most especially those who have been judged and discarded by their communities.

I was having a conversation with a friend recently about what it would mean to be like God. When he posed the question, I answered immediately: I think that to be like God is to be extraordinarily, almost profligately generous with mercy, compassion, and forgiveness, to be so unexpectedly and confoundingly gracious to others that it makes no sense. This is the God we know: one who welcomes all and never shuts the door. One who never turns anyone away. One who is close to the broken-hearted, one who hears the cry of the poor.

Wednesday, December 17

Genesis 49:2, 8-10 | Matthew 1:1-17

"My strength returns to me with my cup of coffee and the reading of the psalms," Dorothy Day said. We, too, return today to the beautiful prophecy of Psalm 72, which assures us, "Justice shall flourish in his time, and fullness of peace forever." If anyone was ever well acquainted with the absence of justice and peace, surely it was Dorothy Day, who dedicated her life to caring for the poor and advocating for systems and policies that valued and honored human dignity. I wonder, as I reflect on this psalm, what it was like for her to read it, decades ago, in a loud and crowded Catholic Worker house or farm.

I think Dorothy Day understood that we need a psalmic vision. We need to be able to look at the world around us like a double-exposed

photograph, in which our daily reality is overlaid by the world that God envisions and calls us to. We need to be able to see all the generations before us, lovingly laid out in today's gospel passage, as branches on a tree that reaches out for justice and peace, that stretches like a mighty oak up to the heavens. We need to see, too, that we have a place on this tree, that our names are part of this sacred genealogy, that we do not stand alone.

Thursday, December 18

Jeremiah 23:5-8 | Matthew 1:18-25

The angels are busy during Advent, making in-person visits and also appearing in dreams. In our readings about the Annunciation, we celebrate Mary's yes, but today we remember Joseph's yes too. I've often thought that this dream probably left Joseph with more questions than answers. How was he going to explain this to his family? How was he going to justify it to his religious community? How was he going to navigate a marriage with a partner already with child under mysterious, yet holy circumstances?

Each time I return to this story of Joseph's dream, I wonder if maybe that is the point: he's given just enough information, just enough guidance to take the next right step. Joseph's visit from the angel is not a one-time call, but an invitation to orient his life toward the goodness of Divine mystery. We need not think that difficulties or unanswered questions are signs that we are lost or alone. We know now what Joseph was only beginning to understand in today's reading: that we are always in the presence of Emmanuel. *God with us*.

It's true, we never know where our path will lead us, but we can still respond faithfully to God by saying yes at every step, by doing the next right thing. I don't think any of our yeses are ever the final one – more dreams will come, more angels will direct us, more corners of the map we follow will be illuminated in time. What's most important is that we keep going.

In long decades of ministry and advocacy, our initial "yes" can seem far away, occluded by the past. Take some time today to revisit your pivotal moments of saying yes, remembering and celebrating the experiences that led you into your good work.

Friday, December 19

Judges 13:2-7, 24-25a | Luke 1:5-25

Many are the annunciations of Advent. Today we hear about an angel's visit to Samson's mother in Judges, and then Gabriel's visit to Zechariah in the gospel, in which he foretells the birth of John the Baptist. When Zechariah expresses his disbelief about the pregnancy because of their old age, we can't help but remember Abraham and Sarah, who also received the same stunning news in Genesis.

As I reflect on these many pregnancy announcements, I wonder if the message they are sending us, across the generations, is that God is always birthing something new into being. But we should also take the angels at their word. What do they always impart to us? That we need not be afraid. That we should always be turning our eyes hopefully to a future that has not yet fully unfolded.

During Advent we look back to the angels' visits in the Hebrew scriptures. But we should also look forward and remember the angel at the tomb who announced Jesus' resurrection, a new type of birth that forever changed our concept of death. Hope, for God, is always something incarnate, always inextricably bound up in human experience. Let's not miss it.

Saturday, December 20

Isaiah 7:10-14 | Luke 1:26-38

What would it mean to be overshadowed by God? This word (*episkiazo*), used by the angel Gabriel to explain to Mary how she would come to be with child, is only used in three other instances. The first is at Jesus' baptism, when a great cloud covers the sky, the Holy Spirit descends, and God affirms that Jesus is his son. The second is at the transfiguration, when Peter, James, and John are dumbfounded by the glorious appearance of Jesus. They enter into a cloud of holiness so thick that it envelops them.

The third time the word is used, however, is in different circumstances. It appears in Acts of the Apostles, as people drag the sick out onto the streets, hoping that Peter's shadow will fall upon them and heal them. It's this use of the word that reminds me of our calling: we are now the bearers of the holy cloud of God's love. We are the ones who must extend God's mercy and compassion to others.

None of us will be overshadowed by the Holy Spirit in the same way Mary was. But the same spirit that brought forth our wonderful counselor and prince of peace is still at work in us. The same power and mystery extends to us, and, if we are willing, through us.

The reflections for December 21-28 are written by Flora x. Tang.

Fourth Sunday of Advent
December 21

Isaiah 7:10-14 | Romans 1:1-7 | Matthew 1:18-24

So often in scripture, we hear of stories of people who have been condemned for "tempting God" or "testing God": take for example the devil in the Gospel of Matthew who tested Jesus's power during his 40 days in the desert. God's power shall not be put to the test, the gospel story declares to us.

In today's first reading, however, the prophet Isaiah criticizes Ahaz the king for not asking God for a sign and not "tempting the Lord." For Ahaz, a powerful king known for his military might, the struggle he faces is not simply his lack of belief in God. Rather, Ahaz recognizes that if he were to ask God for a sign, God would most likely answer him; and that if God answers, he would have no other choice but to believe in the existence and power of God, and convert his ways toward God's ways of peace.

Ahaz's current social status and military power promises him a life of self-sufficiency. Putting his faith in God, including the very act of asking an invisible God for a sign, threatens this sense of self-sufficiency. Therefore in today's story Ahaz chooses not to ask God for a sign. He was, in the end, unwilling to become less than self-sufficient, unwilling to become dependent in any way on God or others, and unwilling to ask God for a sign so as to refuse the possibility of human

vulnerability. His self-sufficiency, sustained by his military power, was alone enough for him.

We who live in relative wealth (at least compared to much of the rest of the world) and live under the "protection" of military strength often also live under a pretense of self-sufficiency and independence. We may recognize the existence of God and others, but too often refuse to let their existence affect our lives in any concrete way. At the very least, we prioritize our lives marked by certainties over the possibility of being surprised by God and others.

Thankfully, the good news promised by both Isaiah and the gospel story today show us a different path. The familiar story of Mary and Joseph choosing to trust the plans of an angel is a story of saying yes to God's surprises. It is a story of saying yes to being dependent on one another — as Mary and Joseph together navigate this surprise pregnancy and marriage that goes against existing social norms — and being dependent on God's faithfulness. Mary and Joseph had said "yes" to the vulnerability and element of surprise that Ahaz has refused. In the end, it is also God's choice to be vulnerable, in the form of God's incarnation as a weak human child, that comes to deliver us all.

How will we, too, allow God to surprise us today? How will we remember and live out our inter-dependence in a world that so often promises us security through selfish independence? How do we remember the good news that we do not go through this world alone?

Monday, December 22

1 Samuel 1:24-28 | Luke 1:46-56

God has cast down the mighty from their thrones,
and God has lifted up the lowly.
God has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich God has sent away empty.

These words of Mary our Mother, spoken prophetically in the Magnificat prayer found in today's gospel readings, speak hope and light to us all in these dark days of December. God's love for God's people is a subversive love, where God promises the reversal of the many violent power structures of this world that deny food to those who are hungry and forget those who are poor. God's love, soon to

be manifest in the Incarnation of a tiny child born in Bethlehem, brings about a world where empire does not have the last word, but mercy does.

Let us, therefore, proclaim the goodness of the Lord.
We, too, remember God's promise of mercy,
And rejoice in a God who remembers our ancestors,
a God who remembers the cries of all God's people,
and a God who remembers you and me.
Holy, holy, holy, we say, is the name of our God.

Tuesday, December 23

Malachi 3:1-4, 23-24 | Luke 1:57-66

The birth of John the Baptist prepares the way for the birth of Jesus Christ. The ministry of John the Baptist, too, prepares people's hearts for the miracles and messages of Christ. In our reading from Malachi, we also hear about God's calling of Elijah to prepare people's hearts and to transform families and communities to "prepare the way" before God's coming. It is perhaps not a coincidence that these readings about these two holy figures in our church who prepare the way for others are proclaimed just two days before Christmas.

The stories of Elijah and John the Baptist — alongside stories of countless women and men in scripture who prepared the way for Jesus's life and ministry — remind us that the miracle of Christmas is not a miracle that occurred in isolation. Rather, it took generations of prophets, helpers, believers, doubters, community builders, and workers to prepare the way and prepare communities for the coming of Jesus Christ.

We, too, as peacebuilders and believers, are called to prepare the way for not only Jesus Christ, but also for one another in this shared, intergenerational movement for peace. Our work of peacebuilding did not begin with us: our ancestors in the movement have prepared the way. Our work of peacebuilding also will not end with us: we, too, now prepare the way for peacebuilders and justice-seekers for generations to come.

Who are you preparing the way for? As we ready our hearts for Christmas, how can we, like John the Baptist and Elijah, recognize our place in an intergenerational story of peacemakers that extends far beyond ourselves and our own lifetimes?

Wednesday, December 24
Christmas Eve

Morning: 2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16 | Luke 1:67-79

In my native language of Mandarin, Christmas Eve is referred to as the "Night of Peace." Typically, this translation refers to the stillness of the "silent night" of Christ's birth in a manger. However, if you have ever been anywhere near a labor and delivery room, you would know that stillness, silence, and peacefulness in the atmosphere are likely nowhere to be found!

I like to interpret Christmas Eve as the "night of peace" in a different way. The birth of Jesus and God's incarnation marks God's ultimate promise of peace in a turbulent world, both for the world 2,000 years ago and for the world today. God's peace promises neither stillness nor passivity, but deliverance of the oppressed and active mercy to those who are suffering. God's peace, like the scene in the manger at Christ's birth, is also a peace that promises ecological balance and right relations between all creatures.

This vision of peace is outlined beautifully by the Canticle of Zechariah, our Christmas Eve morning gospel reading. This Canticle, prayed by Catholics around the world each day during morning prayer, poetically reflects on God's mercy, goodness, and compassion. In a time of year marked by literal darkness, God's dawning light "shall break upon us." It shall "shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death," and it shall "guide our feet into the way of peace."

If your Christmas Eve is anything like mine, I'm sure it is also nowhere near a literal "Night of Peace": the hecticness of cooking, cleaning, hosting, gathering, getting yourself and your children ready for Mass, and last-minute present wrapping will most likely occupy your day. That is okay! Mary and Joseph's very first Christmas Eve was probably also like this. But if you do have a quick moment to yourself, I invite you to pray with the Canticle of Zechariah on this Christmas Eve, and reflect on God's lasting peace that transcends — and brings holy meaning to — the usual hecticness of our Christmas Eve.

Thursday, December 25
Nativity of the Lord - Christmas Day

Vigil: Isaiah 62:1-5 | Acts 13:16-17, 22-25
Matthew 1:1-25 or 1:18-25
Night: Isaiah 9:1-6 | Titus 2:11-14 | Luke 2:1-14
Dawn: Isaiah 62:11-12 | Titus 3:4-7 | Luke 2:15-20
Day: Isaiah 52:7-10 | Hebrews 1:1-6 | John 1:1-18 or 1:1-5, 9-14

Merry Christmas, my fellow peacebuilders, justice-seekers, and all who walk with me on this journey to build a better church and world!

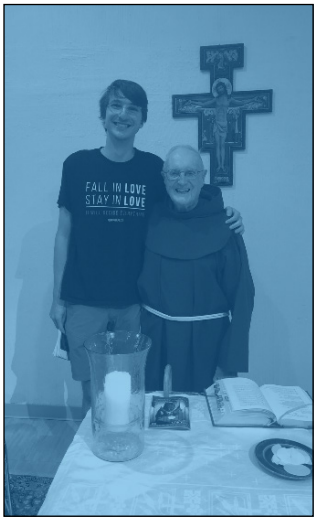
These past several years, iconographers, preachers, and those who write from contexts of war and human suffering have helped us highlight the meaning of Christmas in our troubled world: iconographers such as Kelly Latimore have depicted the infant Jesus as a migrant child at the border today; whereas Palestinian Lutheran pastor Munther Isaac have created a nativity scene of "Christ under the Rubble," calling the world's attention to the Holy Land, where if Jesus was born today, he too would have been born under the rubble. Christmas — and the very image of God incarnate as an infant child — calls our attention to "make room" in our hearts and in our living spaces for those who are also the weakest among us today, because they, in a special way, bear the image of the infant Jesus Christ who have come to dwell among us.

Today, I'd love to reflect with you on a different image of the weak and vulnerable present in our Christmas gospel reading. Matthew 1:1-17 is frequently skipped over as a reading and rarely preached on. This reading marks the beginning of the New Testament and contains the genealogy of Jesus Christ, listing Jesus's ancestors from Abraham and Isaac, to David and Solomon, to women such as Tamar and Rahab and Ruth, to lesser known figures like Jechoniah and Shealtiel, all the way to Jesus's parents Mary and Joseph and Jesus Christ himself.

The story of Jesus Christ's birth, Matthew 1 reminds us, did not begin on Christmas Day. It had already begun since the time of Abraham and Sarah, the very imperfect people with whom God first chose to be in covenant. These imperfect, sinful, lowly, and forgotten ancestors (all 42 generations of them!) of Jesus Christ are as much part of the Christmas story as the miraculous birth of Jesus Christ himself. This gospel

reminds us by placing these stories first in the entire gospel narrative. Unless you are a scripture scholar, most of us know very little of these 42 generations of ancestors whose very lives paved the way for Christ's incarnation. We can barely pronounce their names and know little of their stories. Yet today's gospel honors them. We, too, honor them.

The good news of Christmas is this: that all who are forgotten in the eyes of the world are remembered in the story of God.



My time as a member of Pax Christi USA has reminded me over and over again of this same good news of Christmas. The Peace Pairs program, which matches seasoned peacemakers with young adult peacemakers as a mutual co-learning program, puts into this very practice of remembering — and learning from — those who came before us in this shared work. In a society where the elderly are often cast to the side or entirely forgotten, Peace Pairs allows for their stories to be remembered and cherished by young adult peacemakers. Various memorial services of Pax Christi members who have passed, such as the one held in 2025 of Fr. Joe Nangle, OFM, (shown above with his Peace Pair Sebastian Klemmer) similarly calls us all to remember our ancestors and the ways they have formed us as nonviolent Christian peacemakers. Pax Christi memorial services for the victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki (like the one shown here in Bellingham, WA) likewise call to our collective memory the people whom the United States has often intentionally forgotten.

This Christmas season, drawing from the witness of the Gospel of Matthew and of Pax Christi USA, may we, too, remember all those who are forgotten in the eyes of the world. We remember that they, in a special way, lie at the heart of the mystery of the Incarnation and of the story of God.

Sunday, December 28
Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph

Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14 | Colossians 3:12-21 or 3:12-17
Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23

Many messages that we typically receive on this Feast Day of the Holy Family are not good news. Today's second reading from Colossians, for instance, contains the infamous passage commanding wives to be subordinate to their husbands. Scriptural passages like this have historically been used to justify patriarchal family structures or gender-based violence around the world. For many women sitting in the pews today, this epistle reading is far from the good news they came here to hear. Within the US Catholic Church, this feast day is also typically associated with homilies that promote the nuclear, procreative family as the only possible form of family in the Catholic tradition. Messages as such also do much harm to non-traditional families and single people, who do not hear this politicized "defense" of the nuclear family as God's good news for them.

The Gospel reading of today — a harrowing account of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph fleeing Herod's child-killing violence and then returning home only after Herod's death — remind us too of the many structures in our world today that endanger families, kill entire families, or separate families. Genocidal violence ends entire family lines; inhumane immigration policies separate both nuclear and extended families on account of their visa status. At the time of my writing, the Holy Family Church, the only Catholic parish in Gaza, was the site of an Israeli strike that killed three of its parishioners. The story of today's gospel reads more similar to these death-dealing accounts of violence that threatens entire families, and less like a form of Good News that God ought to promise us in this Christmas season.

Perhaps the good news of today is not that the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph is the singular model of nuclear family that we should all emulate. In fact, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph are not even a biological family in the traditional sense! The story of their Holy Family, in today's gospel, is marked instead by chaos, uncertainty, and them running around to flee danger to the best of their ability.

While the story focuses on the Holy Family itself, I cannot help but imagine all those (who did not appear in the story itself) who have become family to the Holy Family throughout these chaotic years: strangers who fed and housed the Holy Family along the way from Bethlehem to Egypt, Egyptian families who befriended them and helped with the care of infant Jesus, other refugee families who accompanied their migratory journey, and eventually, cousins and extended families in Joseph's hometown of Nazareth who opened their homes to the Holy Family and together raised the child Jesus until his adulthood.

Just as God became family to us through Jesus's incarnation, the neighbors, friends, and strangers of the Holy Family became family to them in their time of human need.

On this Feast Day of the Holy Family, we are invited therefore not to search for a one-size-fit-all model for the perfect family. Instead, we are invited by the story of the Holy Family to ask: *Who in my life has been family to me in my times of need? How do I become family for others?*

This past calendar year, as a person living in the US on temporary status, I have lived through many scary months of navigating the many sudden changes in this country's immigration policy. Many stressful days were spent figuring out what forms to fill out, what steps to take, and what the current laws are even saying. During those disorienting times, my friends, neighbors, and colleagues have stepped up to become family to me: friends with legal experience sat with me as I filled out forms, my neighbors and their children baked me bread on my most difficult days, and my colleagues kept themselves up to date on immigration news in order to know how best to support me. These people, though not my biological family, have become family to me during a chaotic time in my life.

May the Holy Family of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus— and the many more holy people who have become their family— bless all families who are navigating violence in the world today. And may their witness free us all to truly become family to one another.

The reflections for January 1-January 4 are written by Cameron Bellm.

Thursday, January 1
Solemnity of Mary, Holy Mother of God

Numbers 6:22-27 | Galatians 4:4-7 | Luke 2:16-21

Getting to know Mary has been one of the great joys of my adult life. But it took time to move forward from the pale, subservient version of Mary I often saw depicted in my childhood, always shown with downcast eyes, presented as a model of quiet obedience. What a delight it has been to become acquainted with a deeper, more accurate Mary, Mary of the Magnificat, Mary of endless courage and strength. This Mary is fiercely loving and fiercely dedicated to justice, fearlessly accepting the call to be part of the work of God, no matter the personal cost. In today's reading from the Hebrew scripture, we encounter God's blessing to the Israelites. A blessing. That is what Mary's example is to us.

In a world in which women are still marginalized and mistreated, we need the reminder of the centrality of Mary in the work of God. As the shepherds pay their visit to the newborn Christ, Mary's response is quiet yet profound: she keeps these things and ponders them in her heart. Mary is the first to invite us into a faith that is both contemplative and active.

The message that the shepherds hear, calling them to Bethlehem, also beckons us to listen and ponder where we are called to action. The Greek word for that message is not *Logos*, which we recall from the beginning of John's gospel, but *rema*, speech that has been uttered by a living voice, not once and for all, but in an ongoing, everyday manner.

It is a living voice that sets things into motion: God speaking the earth into being, the angels bringing news of new births, Jesus proclaiming the kingdom of God. That living voice is still speaking today, inviting us to co-create a world that reflects the goodness of God, and we are called to participate in this sacred speech that sets love and justice into action. May we listen today, with Mary's help, for how God is working in us, through us, and with us.

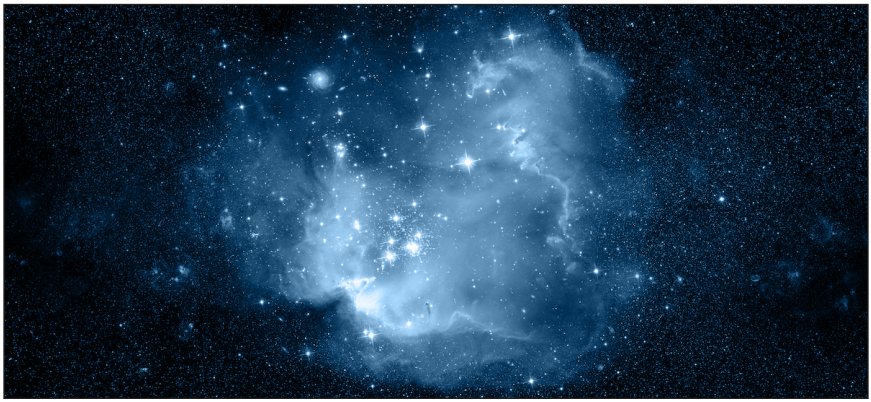
Sunday, January 4
Celebration of the Feast of Epiphany

Isaiah 60:1-6 | Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6 | Matthew 2:1-12

Epiphany will always be one of the most special feasts in the church calendar for me. Eight years ago, in the cold hush of an early Epiphany morning, our son was born. The star of Epiphany brings us tidings of light in the darkness, the warmth of the nativity in the chill of winter. I saw that light, felt that warmth eight years ago. I see it and feel it still.

We complete our journey through the Advent and Christmas season in the presence of the newborn child who was promised, the prophecy of ages made manifest. As we come to adore the Christ child, we should recall the beautiful words of Sister Peg Dolan, RSHM: "Each of us is a word of God spoken only once." Gazing into the eyes of our beloved and longed-for baby, it was easy for us to see that statement made flesh. What word would our son speak? How would his life reflect the goodness of God? What adventures would he embark upon, and where would his specific, once-in-a-millenia light shine?

But of course, the same questions apply to each one of us, no matter our age, no matter our place in life. The star guided the shepherds to Jesus. But we all carry that light within ourselves now, today and every day. An Epiphany is, etymologically speaking, a revelation. That is what each of us is: a never-before spoken and never-to-be-repeated message of God's love and compassion.



I turn also on this feast day from the sacred mystery of each human being to the holy mystery of the skies above us. My husband is an astronomer, and I'm lucky enough to get insider glimpses of the stars and galaxies his work brings into the light of discovery. The cosmos is full of beauty in a constant state of unfolding. So it is here on earth, each one of us bearers of the light blossoming with our own specific and brilliant light and color. On Epiphany, I like to imagine us as a bright and radiant galaxy of love, stretching across the earth.

Fittingly, after a season of readings about angels and dreams, we close our gospel reading today with one final prophetic dream, in which Joseph is warned to take his family home by another way to avoid the danger of Herod. Violence is thwarted, a bloodthirsty scheme comes to naught. Now begins the new life long awaited. Now begins the reign of Christ's peace. The word he speaks to us is truth and light. May we carry that word within us always, and speak it with our lives.

Join Pax Christi USA every Monday in Advent for an online prayer service

During Advent, Pax Christi USA will take about 30 minutes every Monday evening, 8 PM Eastern/5 PM Pacific, to pray together during this holy time of reflection and anticipation. Join us on Zoom -- find more information on our website, www.paxchristiusa.org.

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