



# **Advent** People in Uncertain Times

A BREAD FOR THE WORLD DEVOTIONAL





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# About Us

At **Bread for the World**, our mission is to educate and equip people to advocate for policies and programs that can help end hunger. Our faith in Christ is the foundation of our efforts and compels us to love our neighbors near and far. There are more than 700 million people experiencing hunger around the world every day. Not only are people in need of food, but there's a global hunger for justice, equity, and security.

This is why our work is grounded in the **hope** that Christ's arrival brings and is inspired by God's redemptive love.



# Join Us

**How do we as Christians – as a community focused on advocacy – show up in a period of uncertainty?** Our Advent devotional wrestles with this question. Advent, as a season of waiting and uncertainty, is an especially appropriate time to reflect on this question.

Each weekly devotional message approaches this question through the lens of the traditional **Advent themes of peace, love, joy, and hope.**

**Michael Wear** urges us to move toward God so that we might experience God's peace and take it into the world. **Rev. Lori Tapia** invites us to love our neighbors when political polarization makes it challenging. **Rev. Heather Taylor** shares a model for finding joy in darkness. And **Rev. Dr. Karen Georgia Thompson** reminds us that we can find hope in God's presence with us.

This devotional is appropriate for both individuals and groups. It is structured with scripture that comes from the Revised Common Lectionary, a reflection, a prayer, and a prompt for deeper reflection and discussion.

One practice that is helpful in times of uncertainty is to slow down and ground ourselves in our bodies. Take your time as you read. While the reflections are short, there is a lot packed into each of them. Every person may engage with each devotional in different ways. In group settings, you might consider building in time for stillness in silence or with musical accompaniment, discussion of the question provided or other pieces of the devotional, and prayer with the text provided and/or prayer specifically for one another.

On behalf of Bread for the World staff, we wish you a meaningful and joy-filled Advent.



## - Rev. Nancy Neal

**Rev. Nancy Neal** is the Minister for Spiritual Formation and Wellness at Bread for the World, where she works to create a culture grounded in Christian practice. She is an ordained PC(USA) pastor and has spent her career working to alleviate social inequalities. See her detailed biography at <https://www.bread.org/bio/nancy-neal/>.

## Scripture

Isaiah 2:1-5 and Psalm 122

*The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. In days to come the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it.*

*Many peoples shall come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.*

*O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!*

– Isaiah 2:1-5 (NRSV)

## Reflection

Peace comes from the Lord. He causes the nations to change their foreign policies. While they once invested in tools to kill and destroy, they will now invest in tools to grow and nurture. The people ascend the mountain of the Lord, and everything changes!

As we begin this Advent journey, I want to pose this question:

**Who are we waiting for?** Really, in our heart of hearts, who or what do we think is going to intervene to bring us from where we are to where we want to go? Who are we looking to in order to teach us how to navigate our present circumstances and get to the place where we hope to arrive?

Keep your eyes on the prize. Look to the hills from where your help comes. Over and over, we are oriented in scripture toward the mountain of the Lord.

You will notice that God's people ascend the mountain, but they do not remain there. They receive instructions and are sent out to walk in the light of the Lord. They ascend the mountain seeking the Lord, and there they are changed into people of peace who walk in his light and bring that light with them.

Oh, how our world needs God's light!

This Advent, we wait on the Lord, who can teach us and change us into people of peace.



## Digging Deeper

In a world that so desperately longs for peace, how can we be peacemakers instead of peacekeepers?



## Prayer


Lord, we seek your face in this season.  
The nations rage.  
People are suffering.  
And we know we have fallen short.  
We wait on you, God.

Would you teach us your ways?  
Would you help us to become  
more like Jesus?  
Would you allow us to ascend  
the mountain and be changed?

Then, Lord, send us out to delight  
in your will and walk in your ways.  
To bring your peace with us to all  
the places we go, to all the people  
we meet, so that it might spread  
and bless those we come across.

To the glory of your name!

Amen.



**Michael Wear** is a member of Bread for the World's board of directors and CEO of Center for Christianity and Public Life, a nonpartisan nonprofit civic organization with the mission to contend for the credibility of Christian resources in public life, for the good of the public.

## Scripture

Romans 15:5-13,  
Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19

*May the God of steadfastness  
and encouragement grant  
you to live in harmony with  
one another, in accordance  
with Christ Jesus.*

– Romans 15:5 (NRSV)

*Give the king your justice,  
O God, and your righteousness  
to a king's son.*

*May he judge your people  
with righteousness, and  
your poor with justice.*

– Psalm 72:1-2 (NRSV)

## Reflection

As Advent people in uncertain times, the call to love becomes both a hope and a challenge. The words of Paul in Romans invite us to live in harmony, “so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Harmony is not just about being of one mind; it is a matter of attitude. The motivating power of harmony is love, an attitude embodied in “being love.” This is a radical call in polarized political climates where marginalization, oppression, violence, and persecution are on the rise. Still, attitude influences action, and action changes the circumstances.

Psalm 72 presents a vision of just leadership: the poor are defended, the oppressed find deliverance, and abundance is shared like rain upon mown grass. These passages challenge our polarized world, where neighbors are too often strangers, and those who hunger are too easily overlooked.

As a Latina raised in a U.S./Mexico border community, I learned early that love bridges divides and creates possibilities where only separation seemed to reign. Jesus’ call to feed the hungry is not merely a personal act; it is collective action rooted in justice, requiring us to “be love” across boundaries of politics, language, and race.

In this season of waiting, love must move us from intention to action. Love must flow through us in advocacy, hospitality, and boldly speaking the truth. Love, expressed through our tables, prayers, voices, votes, and accompaniment, becomes an agent of God’s healing and justice, especially for those hungry, exiled, or ignored. When progress seems slow, love keeps us hoping and fortifies our faith to continue advocating.

To “be love” in uncertainty means refusing to let fear or indifference direct our choices. It means showing up and embodying Christ’s love in communities, around tables, at physical and societal borders, in war zones, and in places of power, carrying a persistent hope that love prevails. As we await the fulfillment of God’s promise, may our love serve as bridgework for justice and nourishment for those in need.

## Digging Deeper

In a political climate that is polarized, how might we show up with love to build bridges?

## Prayer

God of abundant love, in Christ,  
you call us into one body,  
united by your Spirit and charged to  
serve all hungry in body, heart, or spirit.

Awaken us in this Advent season  
to the power of love that heals wounds,  
upends injustice, and makes strangers family.

Give us courage to cross divides  
and wisdom to see your image in  
every neighbor.

Empower us, O Lord,  
to be bridge-builders and bread-bearers,  
so that your reign of justice and peace may break forth,  
especially for those who hunger.

Let your unfailing love be the root of our words  
and the fruit of our deeds.

Amen.



**Rev. Lori Tapia** is a member of Bread for the World's board of directors and the first Mexican American woman to serve as National Hispanic Pastor for the Disciples of Christ (Christian Church).



## Scripture

Luke 1:46b-55,  
Psalm 46:5-10

*"My soul magnifies the Lord,  
and my spirit rejoices in God  
my Savior, for he has looked  
with favor on the lowliness  
of his servant. Surely, from  
now on all generations  
will call me blessed."*

– Luke 1:46b-48 (NRSV)

*God is in the midst of the  
city; it shall not be moved;  
God will help it when  
the morning dawns.*

– Psalm 46:5 (NRSV)

## Reflection

Mary's Magnificat in Luke 1 is a renowned song of praise in the Advent season. It is a direct response to God's prophetic word to her in a profoundly dark time.

She bursts with praise not long after Gabriel informs her that she would give birth to a son named Jesus, who would be the Son of the Most High God, inherit the throne of David, and reign forever. This timely word went against all odds – that is, everything her natural eyes and mind could reasonably comprehend in her present circumstances.

She was a virgin – physically incapable of bearing a child – living under the rule of Herod the Great, who would cease at nothing to maintain power. Yet she was told she would give birth to a new king who would reign forever. Mary not only believed this extraordinarily good news but praised God in response, recognizing that God's presence was in her midst and abided in her humility.

Christ's birth is not only a witness of God's glory, but also a reflection of our Creator's desire to send light, hope, and transformative power in the darkest of times *through us as conduits* if we remain humble and believe God's Word.

Neither our physical limitations nor the rulers of this world are what ultimately determine whether God's people or our world will experience an extraordinary breakthrough. Rather God's favor and our humble disposition are the determinants of how God's peace, justice, and love will manifest in and through us and prevail in uncertain times.

## Digging Deeper

How might we respond with joy to God's promise of good news and seek justice in uncertain times?



## Prayer

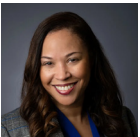
God of peace and justice,  
help us to exercise our faith,  
take comfort in your Word and believe  
your promises in these uncertain times.

Equip us to resist the temptation  
to respond to evil and darkness  
with unrighteous anger or pride.

Empower us to be peacemakers,  
embody the joy of the Lord rooted  
in our faith, and pierce the darkness  
with your abundant love.

In Jesus' name.

Amen.



**Rev. Heather Taylor** serves as managing director for Bread for the World.

## Scripture

Matthew 1:18-25,  
Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

*All this took place to fulfill  
what had been spoken by  
the Lord through the prophet:  
"Look, the virgin shall conceive  
and bear a son, and they  
shall name him Emmanuel,"  
which means, "God is with us."*

– Matthew 1:22-23 (NRSV)

## Reflection

Advent is a time and season of expectation. Great expectation. The coming of the Christ child brings mystery, hope, and signs of God's presence at work in the world.

The context in which these events took place reflected hardship for the people and for these parents. Theirs was no easy undertaking, especially when faced with an unexpected pregnancy. And yet, the hope in the story is understood in what we know, which was unknown to them: This child would change the world as they knew it.

The child's name had profound meaning then and now: Emmanuel, God with us. In these words, we find the embodiment of hope for challenging times. God is with us. The birth to come says that God is active in the world, present and prevailing in times of trouble and despair.

The Christ child entered a world where Roman occupation was causing undue distress. The poor, the orphans, and the widows – the least of these – were in great need. Taxes to support the Empire were wearing on the people, and the religious elite were focused on their power rather than the needs and suffering of the people.

The prophetic word was a promise given and received. A son would be born, to be named Jesus, one who would save the people. The advent of this child is hope incarnate, hope for the people who received and benefited from Jesus' ministry.

This season of Advent finds us holding hope for those in need. The poor need help more than ever, but government funding and support is shrinking. People and organizations are left struggling to meet the needs of the poor, to meet the needs of hungry children, to ensure that economic justice prevails for those in need.

Advent is a reminder that God is with us. We carry with us this hope that God is present and does not leave us. As people of faith, we bring with us the truth that God's presence with us makes the difference in the world. We are the hope that is needed in this moment. We become the presence of God revealed, responding to the needs of people and communities. We bring the hope that is needed to address the mission to end hunger in the world. We experience and live out this hope because we receive and believe in Emmanuel – God with us.

## Digging Deeper

How can we show up with hope, as hope, in the moment when our mission to end hunger seems even more challenging?

## Prayer

Dear God,

during this Advent season,  
restore us.

Return us to the knowledge  
of your strength and power.

Call us back to you  
as we seek to find ways to be responsive  
to the needs of the poor.

O God; let your face shine,  
that we all may be saved,  
and experience  
your love and your grace.

Guide us as we live with hope in you.

Amen.



**Rev. Dr. Karen Georgia Thompson** is a member of Bread for the World's board of directors and the first woman to serve as the general minister and president of the United Church of Christ.

