



## December Membership Resource

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# A Social Justice Warrior's Guide to Christmas

## About This Resource

I (Kristin) thought I knew the Christmas story. Angels, shepherds, wise men, a star ... a heartwarming, wholesome tale of a sweet baby born on a silent night. However, when in seminary I sat down to actually study the Christmas story, I quickly realized that it is one of the most political, subversive, and *relevant* stories I've ever read. Maybe Charlie Brown may have been onto something when, in a fit of frustration, he shouts, "Isn't there anyone who knows what Christmas is all about?" As it turns out, I sure didn't.

We created this resource with the hope that you too will find new meaning and relevance within this story you've likely heard all your life. Our guess is that you'll be surprised by the radical nature of these Gospel texts, even if you always pay close attention during the Advent Scripture readings every year during worship. In the midst of the "big commercial racket" of Christmas (as Lucy would say), we hope that these reflections will bring life, light, and peace to your Advent season.

This resource is divided into four parts, with the intention of giving you one reflection each week. However, you could also combine these reflections, if you want to use them for a Sunday school class lesson or reconvene your JustFaith group, or you can use them for individual meditation. The first reflection frames the Christmas story within the larger biblical narrative and is more meditative than the rest. The second, third, and fourth dive into the Christmas texts themselves. If you enjoy this resource, you might also appreciate our [GoodNewsPeople](#) program, which breaks down basic biblical teachings in a way that is practical and inspiring. (Note: GoodNewsPeople was designed for a Roman Catholic audience and contains Catholic references. But for what it's worth, I'm a United Methodist pastor, and I absolutely think its materials are consistent with Protestant teachings).

JustFaith Ministries wishes you a hope-filled Advent and a joyful Christmas. We give thanks that you are part of our community, and we remain in solidarity with you as we work together to create a more just and peaceful world.

## Links:

- O Come, O Come, Emmanuel: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iO7ySn-Swwc>
- CCDA Reflection by Lisa Rodriguez-Watson: <https://ccda.org/hope-reflections-from-isaiah-11/>
- Three Kings Day Latin American Traditions: <https://tinyurl.com/r9gdk5s>

## Week 1: O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

*This session will guide you through a meditation on the song “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.” You can choose to sing along with the instrumental version below (pausing between verses), or you can simply read the lyrics as you listen.*

Play O Come, O Come, Emmanuel <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iO7ySn-Swwc>. Pause between verses.

**Sing verse 1:** *O come, O come, Emmanuel,  
and ransom captive Israel  
that mourns in lonely exile here  
until the Son of God appear.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
shall come to thee, O Israel.*

**Reader 1:** “An angel from the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, don’t be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because the child she carries was conceived by the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you will call him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” Now all of this took place so that what the Lord had spoken through the prophet would be fulfilled:

*Look! A virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son,  
And they will call him, Emmanuel, which means “God with us.”*  
(Matthew 1)

**Reader 2:** Matthew’s gospel begins and ends with this central point about who Jesus is and what he came to do. Christ is Emmanuel, God with us, and even when he leaves his disciples in his bodily form, he says to them, *Remember, I am with you always.*

As Christians, our story is not one of “victory” in the typical sense of the word. Israel, God’s chosen people, was held captive time and time again. They were sold into slavery, forced out as refugees, endured famine and sickness, and lived as strangers in many foreign lands.

Human suffering did not end with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ: many Christians today experience persecution not all that different from what Israel encountered so many centuries ago.

The first verse of Come, O Come Emmanuel claims that it was into this world of hurt and brokenness that our God was born, promising to be with us even in the midst of captivity, exile, and loneliness. God is with us, active and present in our human world!

Together, let us join in singing verse 2.

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**Sing Verse 2:** *O come, thou Wisdom from on high,  
and order all things far and nigh;  
to us the path of knowledge show;  
and cause us in her ways to go.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
shall come to thee, O Israel.*

**Reader 3:** A shoot will grow up from the stump of Jesse;  
a branch will sprout from his roots.  
The Lord's spirit will rest upon him,  
a spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
a spirit of planning and strength,  
a spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord. (Isaiah 11)

**Reader 4:** In these verses, wisdom, knowledge, and understanding are mentioned before power and strength. Jesus taught that those with wisdom, knowledge, and understanding were usually not the Pharisees, who were the educated religious teachers. Rather, Jesus points to the the poor, the outsiders, and the humble as the *real* teachers: the widow who gave her only coins, Mary, who sat at Jesus's feet, the tax collector who fell to his knees, the bleeding woman who dared to touch the hem of Jesus's cloak.

“O come, thou Wisdom from on high, and order all things far and nigh; to us the path of knowledge show, and cause us in her ways to go.”

If we truly seek the wisdom of Jesus Christ this Advent season, let us sit at the feet of those with whom Jesus would have spent his time.

Together, let us join in singing verse 3.

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**Sing verse 3:** *O come, O come, great Lord of might,  
who to thy tribes on Sinai's height  
in ancient times once gave the law  
in cloud and majesty and awe.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
shall come to thee, O Israel.*

**Reader 5:** Moses said to God, "Please show me your glorious presence."  
The Lord responded, "I'll make all my goodness pass in front of you, and I'll proclaim before you the name, 'The Lord.' I will be kind to whomever I wish to be kind, and I will have compassion to whomever I wish to be compassionate. But you can't see my face because no one can see me and live. Here is a place near me where you will stand beside the rock. As my glorious presence passes by, I'll set you in a gap in the rock, and I'll cover you with my hand until I've passed by. Then I'll take away my hand, and you will see my back, but my face won't be visible" (Exodus 13).

**Reader 6:** Our Lord is the sacrificial Lamb, the Prince of Peace, and the baby in the manger. At the same time, our Lord is also the Great Holy Mystery we can't even begin to understand. Moses couldn't see the Lord's face and live, and when he descended from the mountain, the people saw that his body was glowing just from being in God's presence. St. Augustine wrote that if you get to thinking you understand God, that thing you think you understand is probably NOT God.

This Advent season, let us stand stand before God's majesty in awe.

Together, let us join in singing verse 4.

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**Sing verse 4:** *O come, thou Root of Jesse's tree,  
an ensign of thy people be;  
before thee rulers silent fall;  
all peoples on thy mercy call.  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
shall come to thee, O Israel.*

**Reader 7:** A shoot will grow up from the stump of Jesse;  
a branch will sprout[a] from his roots. (Isaiah 11)

**Reader 8:** “Picture the seeming lifelessness of a stump that with the defiance of hope, is sending up a shoot. Life is springing from what appears to be dead. Emerging from the roots, the tendrils of life that grow in dark, unseen spaces deep below the surface, comes a fruit-bearing branch of life. Hope often has its roots in what is unseen, and in the belief that what IS seen isn’t the whole story.

Isaiah pushes our hope further as he names Jesse, rather than David, in the verse. The royal, Davidic line held so much expectation and promise. But Jesse? Why would the Branch come from the stump of Jesse? Perhaps because we need to be reminded that it is not only the powerful, the “royal,” and the expected leaders who hold promise and bear fruit. The forgotten fathers also have a place in history and an important part to play in the transformation of the nations. The Jesses in our lives need to be named and recognized because they, too, bear fruit. They force us to hope and pray and wait, maybe even a little more deeply than the Davids in our midst.

Let this Advent season and this week of Hope remind us that, because of the presence of Christ, life springs from death. Hope comes forth from disappointment. Peace is born in the midst of chaos. Promise is held in the forgotten fathers of our communities. The impossible becomes possible through the coming and knowledge of the Christ.”<sup>1</sup>

And so, with renewed hope and gratitude, let us sing once again the refrain:

*Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel shall come to thee, oh Israel!*

## Week 2: Mary’s Song

**Scripture:** Luke 1:5-80, focusing on Luke 1:46-56 (Mary’s Song)

**Context:** During the Advent Season of 2018, a Twitter post humorously critiqued the song “Mary Did You Know?”. The post read: “Mary freaking knew, that her baby boy would one day rule the nations. Mary freaking knew, that her baby boy was Lord of all creation. Yes, she

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<sup>1</sup> Reflection by *Lisa Rodriguez-Watson*, *Leadership Development and Training Director at CCDA*. November 28, 2016. <https://ccda.org/hope-reflections-from-isaiah-11/>

knew! Read Luke 1 you fool!” After all, when Mary, who is unwed, pregnant, and unaccompanied, makes the dangerous journey to visit Elizabeth (the fact that Luke bothers to include a conversation between two women is radical for the time!), she proclaims *exactly* what she knew about her son and what he came to do.

**Instructions:** What *did* Mary know? As you read Mary’s song, which is also known as the *Magnificat*, underline what God has done through the sending of Jesus:

Mary said, With all my heart I glorify the Lord!  
In the depths of who I am I rejoice in God my savior.  
He has looked with favor on the low status of his servant.  
Look! From now on, everyone will consider me highly favored  
Holy is his name.  
He shows mercy to everyone,  
from one generation to the next,  
who honors him as God.  
He has shown strength with his arm.  
He has scattered those with arrogant thoughts and proud inclinations.  
He has pulled the powerful down from their thrones  
and lifted up the lowly.  
He has filled the hungry with good things  
and sent the rich away empty-handed.  
He has come to the aid of his servant Israel,  
remembering his mercy,  
just as he promised to our ancestors,  
to Abraham and to Abraham’s descendants forever.”

### **A few things to think about:**

**Mary calls herself *blessed*:** This word is often associated with comfort and ease, but Mary’s blessedness comes from taking part in God’s plan. “Blessed are the poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God,” Jesus later says. How does *Mary* teach us what *blessedness* really means?

**Leveling out of hierarchies** – Throughout Luke’s Gospel, Jesus is constantly proclaiming equity. “He has pulled the powerful down from their thrones and lifted up the lowly.” For Luke, there is little distinction between spiritual freedom and socio-economic freedom: The Word Made Flesh doesn’t just give the hungry *spiritual* food: he gives them *real* bread as well. Also, at first glance, it might seem as though the rich and powerful are punished. But

perhaps the oppressors are held captive by their riches just as much as the poor are held captive by poverty.<sup>2</sup>

**Mary is the one speaking** – Women didn't have a very loud voice in the first century. The fact that Mary's perspective is recorded is a huge statement about who is considered important to God. Not only does Mary demonstrate prophetic wisdom, but she is also the one whom the angel visits to inform her of both her own and Elizabeth's pregnancies. A lengthy conversation is recorded between two *women* – Elizabeth and Mary, which shows that women have an equal place in the Kingdom of God.

### Question for reflection:

- This Advent season, how can I participate in Mary's vision of who Jesus is and what he came to do?
- Who do I look to for wisdom? Do I seek the guidance of the "Marys" of this world?

**Prayer:** We thank you, O God, that you show us your mercy through the birth of your Son. May your Kingdom come, that the lowly may be lifted up, and the hungry may be filled with good things. Guide us in living out your dream for this world, as told by your servant Mary.

## Week 3: Luke's Story

**Scripture:** Luke 2:1-21 and Matthew 1:18-2:2, focusing on Luke's version of the Christmas story.

**Context:** If you had a friend of a different religion who had never heard the Christmas story before, how would you tell it? Chances are, you would probably say something along these lines: There was an unmarried couple who journeyed from Nazareth to Bethlehem on a donkey. When they got there, all the inns were already booked, so they had their baby in a stable. Then shepherds visited; then three wise men. The baby was named Jesus, who is the Son of God.

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<sup>2</sup> Ernesto Cardenal records a conversation in his book *El Evangelio en Solentiname* (translated by me, Kristin): "[Mary's song is] a song of the poor. The people of Nicaragua had been a fan of reciting it, it's a favorite prayer of the poor and often the more superstitious peasants wear it as an amulet. When in olden times Somoza demanded that the peasants always have with them proof that they had voted for him, the people humoristically called this document the 'Magnificat'" (Editorial Trotta, 2006).



However, contrary to popular misconceptions, The Gospels of Luke and Matthew tell very different stories about the birth of Jesus. Christians have typically combined the two stories together to make one longer, harmonized account, which is the version that is usually told in Christmas pageants and drive-through nativity scenes. It is possible that both stories factually happened in history, but, more importantly, Luke and Matthew each included unique details to make a statement about *who Jesus was* and *what he would mean for our world*.

Today we will read both passages, and then we'll focus specifically on Luke. In next week's session, we'll look at Matthew's story.

## The Birth Story

**Instructions:** As you read the two birth stories below, mark the differences and similarities you see. (For example, you might circle the differences and underline similarities)

<b>Luke 2:1-21</b>	<b>Matthew 1:18-2:2</b>
<p>In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. <b>2</b> This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. <b>3</b> All went to their own towns to be registered. <b>4</b> Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. <b>5</b> He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. <b>6</b> While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. <b>7</b> And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.</p> <p><b>8</b> In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. <b>9</b> Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. <b>10</b> But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: <b>11</b> to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the</p>	<p><b>18</b> Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. <b>19</b> Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. <b>20</b> But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. <b>21</b> She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." <b>22</b> All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:</p> <p>"Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,"</p> <p>which means, "God is with us." <b>24</b> When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, <b>25</b> but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.</p> <p><b>2:1</b> In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East</p>

Messiah,[a] the Lord. **12** This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” **13** And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

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

**15** When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” **16** So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. **17** When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; **18** and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. **19** But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. **20** The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. **21** After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

came to Jerusalem, asking, “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews?... For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.” **3** When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; **4** and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. **5** They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

‘And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.’”

**7** Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. **8** Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.” **9** When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. **10** When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. **11** On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. **12** And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

### Why do you think....

- In Luke’s Gospel, Jesus is presumably born in a stable. In Matthew’s Gospel, only a house is mentioned?
- Luke records the shepherds’ visit, while Matthew records the Wise Men’s visit?
- In Luke, Mary is told of Jesus’s birth, but in Matthew it just seems to be Joseph?
- Only Matthew records the killing of the children?

### *A few things to note about Luke’s story:*

### **Luke's focus on outsiders and the marginalized:**

In Luke, the birth is announced not to the wise men, but to *shepherds*, who were a very low class in society. Jesus not only pays special attention to the marginalized, but he identifies with them. Our Lord is born in a manger, an animal feeding trough. There is no room for him in the inn, and he and his family are not offered hospitality. They are the forgotten, the uncelebrated, the un-welcomed.

### **The political dimension of Luke's gospel:**

The Pax Romana, or the *Roman Peace*, insisted that Caesar was the savior who would bring peace to all, as long as they remained loyal to him. Luke's language invokes irony, comparing Caesar Augustus to the *real* prince of peace.

- Caesar's palace would have been on a hill, where all could see. Meanwhile, the King of Kings is born in a stable.
- From a stepped-on, disposable people came the Savior of the world. Jesus was born under the reign of foreign oppression, and his community residing within its borders was not free. Most were not Roman citizens, they had limited rights, they could be forced into servitude by the Romans, and they certainly were required to pay Roman taxes. Most were in extreme poverty.
- While Caesar enforced "peace" through military might and much fanfare, the peace of Christ is hardly noticeable, yet everlasting and true.

### **Questions for reflection:**

- Jesus was born among the poor. Is it possible that Jesus might still have a special relationship with those who are oppressed? Where have you last experienced the presence of Christ among the marginalized?
- What does it mean to be a peacemaker: in our personal lives, in our communities, in our world? How do we go about seeking peace: through the way of Caesar, or the way of Jesus?

### **Prayer:**

Your Gospel, O God, proclaims that the light shines in the darkness, and that the darkness cannot – and will not – overcome the light. We give you thanks for the hope of Christmas: that in the midst of repression, freedom was born; in the midst of poverty, a king came into this world; in the midst of a young family's chaos emerged the dawn of everlasting peace.

Open our eyes to the light, that we might notice your presence in the darkness of this world. Empower us to live into the light, that we might bring your peace and justice to the darkest corners of our planet. Shine light into our hearts, that we might reflect love and joy onto everyone we encounter this Advent season. Amen.

## Week 4: Matthew's story

### Context:

This text is usually read on Epiphany Sunday, the week of January 6th. An “epiphany” is “a sudden revelation or insight,” according to the Oxford English Dictionary. In this case, the “Epiphany” is the realization that the fragile baby in the manger is Christ our Lord. This moment occurs when the magi (who we frequently call “the three kings,” despite that we don’t know how many there were), follow the star to find the baby Jesus; falling down on their knees to worship the messiah.

In many parts of Latin America, Epiphany is an even bigger celebration than Christmas. You can read more about Latin American traditions at this website: <https://tinyurl.com/r9gdk5s>, and maybe even celebrate with friends and family.

**Scripture:** Matthew 2:1-23 (Optional background reading: Exodus 1:6-4:17)

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi[a] from the east came to Jerusalem **2** and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

**3** When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. **4** When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. **5** “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written:

“But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,  
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;  
for out of you will come a ruler  
who will shepherd my people Israel.”

**7** Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. **8** He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”

**9** After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. **10** When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. **11** On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. **12** And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

### The Escape to Egypt

**13** When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”

**14** So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, **15** where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called my son.”

**16** When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. **17** Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

“A voice is heard in Ramah,  
weeping and great mourning,  
Rachel weeping for her children  
and refusing to be comforted,  
because they are no more.”

### **The Return to Nazareth**

**19** After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt **20** and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child’s life are dead.”

**21** So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. **22** But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, **23** and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene.

### **Some things to note about Matthew’s story:**

**Parallels to the Exodus story:** In the Exodus story, God’s people escape their slavery in Egypt, but here the Holy Family flees *into* Egypt. This story also contains another despotic ruler who, like Pharaoh, orders the mass killing of babies out of fear that his power will be threatened.

Throughout the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus is depicted as the new Moses, leading all people out of the slavery of sin and death and into love and freedom. Meanwhile, families in the world today flee from tyranny with children on their backs. In this story, God identifies with refugees who live in terror and displacement.

#### **Jesus’s names:**

- Emmanuel: In the Old Testament, this name, meaning “God with us,” was given symbolically to a child during a wartime situation (see Isaiah 7-8). In this way, Jesus’s

name *Emmanuel* is a fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy. However, it also alludes to the coming of the Holy Spirit, who is God's presence with us. The last verse of Matthew's gospel reads: "... And surely I am with you always, even until the end of the age."

- Jesus: In Hebrew, this name means "Yahweh will liberate." Even Jesus's name is dangerous, in that Caesar claims to be the one who liberates.

**"Rachel weeping for her children":** Matthew is here quoting Jeremiah, who in turn references Rachel's death in childbirth in the Book of Genesis. Rachel's weeping echoes throughout Scripture. She weeps not only for her own children, but for her people in general. Perhaps Rachel's tears still fall even today, as forgotten children die from malnutrition, child soldiers are still recruited, and children are forced into human trafficking. Lament is central to the biblical story, but our Lord Emmanuel, which means God with us, is present throughout.

**Herod:** Cowardice, fear, and hunger for power is not unique to this particular ruler. Every era has its Herods, whose insecurities lead to genocide and repression. However, it could be argued that there is a little "Herodness" in all of us, which is manifested in our greed at the expense of others, as well as our striving for control and self-promotion.

**Nazareth:** In the end, the Holy Family lands in a small town not known for anything special. "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" the people say. God appears among the mundane, the ignored, the seemingly unimportant.

### Questions for reflection:

- Where do you see God at work today in the liberation of God's people?
- Where do Rachel's tears flow this Advent season?
- How do we rebel against the Herods of our day, both in our society and within ourselves?
- Where are the "Nazareths" of your life? When did you last see God show up in the mundane aspects of your daily routine?

### Closing Prayer: An Advent Statement of Faith

We believe in the Holy Word,  
who is God,  
and who was with God since the beginning,  
breathing life into dust,  
shining invincible light into the darkness.

We believe in the Word made flesh

who dwelled among us,  
a fragile baby in need of love—  
but who is Love in its fullest form.

We believe in the Word with us,  
now and until the end of the age,  
creating even still,  
bringing life to dead and lonely places.

We believe in the Living Word  
who draws us together —  
wealthy kings, a teenage girl, poor shepherds,  
those of all languages, cultures, and nations —  
through his body.

Glory to God in the highest,  
and peace to all of God's people  
in heaven and on earth.

Amen.

**Works Consulted:**

Borg, Marcus J. *The First Christmas: What the Gospels Really Teach About Jesus's Birth*. HarperOne. 2007.

Cardenal, Ernesto. *El Evangelio En Solentiname*. Editorial Trotta. 2006