



SEEKING PEACE  
— IN THIS —  
ADVENT SEASON

A BREAD FOR THE WORLD DEVOTIONAL



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

03 About Us

---

04 Join Us

---

05 **Week 1** | Remembering God's Promises

---

07 **Week 2** | Preparing by Being

---

09 **Week 3** | Rejoicing in God's Promise of Peace

---

11 **Week 4** | Proclaiming God's Justice

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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

As a community focused on advocacy, the promise of the peace of Emmanuel – God with us – grounds us, brings us joy, and prepares us for the work that is before us. That is why we chose the theme *Seeking Peace in this Advent Season*. We hope that peace may be a balm for our souls on the heels of an election, continued hunger and violent conflict in the world, and the beginning of a new liturgical year.

## **Each weekly devotional message approaches peace with a different invitation:**

**Lisa Sharon Harper** invites us to find peace in remembering God's promises.

**Eddie Kaufholz** invites us to pause and be still as a way of preparing for Christ's coming. **Kimberly Mazyck** invites us to find joy as we turn over our burdens to God.

And **Rev. Fr. Nicholas Anton** invites us to let the proclamation of God's justice change us from the inside out.

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. Trust yourself and your body.

At the end of each reflection, we intentionally invite you to a series of spiritual practices to provide grounding in a time of transition in politics and in the world around us.

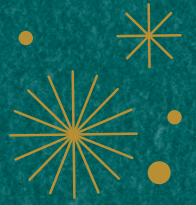
On behalf of Bread for the World staff, we wish you a meaningful and joy-filled Advent.



### **- 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/>.

## REMEMBERING GOD'S PROMISES



## Scripture

*The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.*

—Jeremiah 33:14-15 (NRSVUE)

*Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long.*

—Psalm 25:4-5 (NRSVUE)



## Reflection

Advent is the time of waiting. We wait for light to cut the darkness of destruction and desolation and dystopian despair. It is the context before the revelation of Emmanuel, God with us. It is what we practice to ground ourselves in the floating space where chaos rules and light is a faint memory.

In those days, we draw on the memory of God's promises like anchors for souls threatened by the treachery of midnight squalls. As enemies plot David's shame, he remembers God's mercy. The prophet Jeremiah remembers God's justice in the middle of the Babylonian exile. Decades later, as a company of priests exited that very same exile, they wrote down their creation story from their own context. They were told by their oppressors that they were created for the chaos of domination. Seventy years into the exile there was barely a soul alive old enough to remember life in the era of freedom. So, the priests did what we do in times of darkness; they remembered.

They remembered that Elohim is positioned over the chaos of the deep. They remembered that with mere breath Elohim spoke four words and cut seven decades of despair. They remembered that they, too, were created in the image of God—dignified and sovereign. They remembered.

And Jeremiah and David both remembered: The way of God bears the promises of God. Justice and goodness, steadfast love and mercy, truth and humility are the midwives of *shalom*.

What about God do we need to remember in these dark days? What ways of God must we walk to midwife light into our dark world?



**Lisa Sharon Harper** is the founder and president of Freedom Road, a justice-motivated consulting group. She is also the author of multiple award-winning books concerning the intersection of faith, society, and politics. Her public theology has inspired re-formation in the church and earned her many accolades. See her website at <https://lisasharonharper.com/>.



## Invitation to Advent Practice

The invitation this week is to  
remember God's promises.

*Take a few minutes and reflect on the questions:*

- 01 What about God do we need to remember in these dark days?
- 02 What ways of God must we walk to midwife light into our dark world?
- 03 How might you bring this practice of remembering to your life in the coming week?

## Prayer

O God our help in ages past, our hope for years to come,

As we wait for your light to cut into the darkness,

we plant ourselves in the tradition of remembering.

Remembering your promises of justice and goodness.

Remembering your steadfast love and mercy.

Remembering your truth and humility.

As we remember, make us midwives so that the world might know your love as we wait for your shalom.

In the name of the One who is with us always, we pray,

Amen





# PREPARING BY BEING



## Scripture

*But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like washers' soap; he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the Lord in righteousness.*  
—Malachi 3:2-3 (NRSVUE)

*...as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah, "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'"*  
—Luke 3:4-6 (NRSVUE)



## Reflection

About a year ago, I developed an interest in Transcendental Meditation (TM, if you're in the know) and enrolled in a "Basics of TM" course. It was enlightening.

Sure, there were the woo-woo, vaguely spiritual elements of meditation that piqued my curiosity about the practice. Yet, despite all the new and curious elements of this course, nothing was more impactful to me than what my TM teacher instructed me repeatedly: "You don't have to do anything. The meditation will happen. Simply be present. Be where you are."

This week, I've revisited the lesson of "preparation" as reflected in Malachi 3:1-4 and Luke 3:1-6. Both passages speak of a messenger preparing the way for the Lord — Malachi prophesies purification and righteousness, while John the Baptist, in Luke, calls for repentance and readiness for Jesus. The message in both is clear: spiritual preparation is key.

As Advent begins, I find myself thinking about how to best prepare for Jesus' coming. Should I cut back on the December party, travel, bah humbug, chaos and focus on what matters? This is a fair question, but it isn't the main thing.

The main thing is to listen to John the Baptist, who was sent to cut through our clutter and tell us that Jesus is coming! Christmas is coming! There's nothing we can or need to do to make that any more or less true. It's going to happen. It has happened.

What I posit that we need to do to prepare is, well, nothing. "You don't have to do anything — just be where you are."

So today I will find 20 minutes to sit in the quiet, with my feet squarely on the floor, not doing anything, but allowing that reality, that love, that long-expected Jesus to envelop me. And maybe, just maybe, I'll be still enough, doing nothing enough, prepared enough, to catch a glimpse of the glory of Christmas.



**Eddie Kaufholz** is a member of the Communications team at Bread for the World. He has served in the past at International Justice Mission and as a pastor at a church, leading creative teams, solving problems, and making content. See his detailed biography at <https://www.bread.org/bio/eddie-kaufholz/>.



## Invitation to Advent Practice

The invitation this week  
is to just be.

*Take a few moments to reflect on these questions:*

01

What does it look like for you to cut through the clutter of the season and focus on Jesus' coming?

02

In the hustle and bustle of this season, in a world full of gloom, what would it mean for "just being" to be enough?

03

How might you incorporate a practice of "just being" into your days this week?

## Prayer

O God of Stillness,

The world tells that we have to do enough  
to deserve your grace,  
to know your peace,  
to accomplish your justice in the world.

In this Advent season, we are tempted  
to make sure the house is decorated,  
the perfect presents are purchased and  
wrapped, that the outfits are right for  
Christmas Eve, that the meal is enough.

Stop us in our tracks.

Give us the grace to pause,  
to do nothing.

So that we might allow that reality,  
that love, that long-expected Jesus  
to work on us, so that we  
are prepared for the coming of  
the Prince of Peace.

In Christ's name we pray,  
Amen





# REJOICING IN GOD'S PROMISE OF PEACE



## Scripture

*The Lord, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing as on a day of festival.*

—Zephaniah 3:17-18a (NRSVUE)

*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

—Philippians 4:4-7 (NRSVUE)



## Reflection

As a child, I was always excited when it was time to light the solitary pink candle on the Advent wreath.

This year, as we enter the third week of Advent, I am particularly aware of God's presence and promise despite the events in the past few months: executions, elections, ongoing conflict in Sudan, Ukraine and near the birthplace of Jesus in Israel and Palestine. The prophet Zephaniah reminds us that God is in our midst and turning our enemies away. I know that I must surrender my anxiety and worries to God and remember that God is always with me. It is during this time of Advent that as we wait, we prepare ourselves for the most joyful promise of all, God's promise to send Christ to the world.

On a recent visit to Montgomery, Alabama, as I was reflecting on the work and lives of civil rights activists, I was struck by the joy displayed by the activists despite the injustices and violence they experienced. In their faith, they knew — as Zephaniah shared — that they had no reason to fear and they would be renewed in God's love. They led their protests and action with songs filled with love, joy, and faith in God.

In Paul's letter to the Philippians, Paul writes, "Rejoice in the Lord always." As we prepare for Emmanuel in this Advent season, I will rejoice in the Lord. I will share my kindness and joy with others so that we all might be encouraged, so that we may transform each other during this time of anticipation of God's promise to us.



**Kimberly Mazyck** is the associate director of the Initiative on Catholic Social Thought and Public Life at Georgetown University. Before ISCT, Kimberly served with the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur and Catholic Relief Services in a variety of roles. For more information on her work, see <https://catholicsocialthought.georgetown.edu/people>.



## Invitation to Advent Practice

The invitation this week  
is rejoicing.

*Take a few moments to reflect on these questions:*

01

What does it feel like for God's peace to guard our hearts even as we face the realities of this, our broken world?

02

How might we, like civil rights activists, allow ourselves to be filled with love, joy, and faith in God, despite the injustices and violence in the world around us?

03

What brings you joy in the Lord?  
How will you incorporate this practice of finding and sharing joy during the coming week?

## Prayer

O God, giver of joy,

It is so easy to let our attention be captured  
by anxiety and worry,  
getting fixated on the news  
or on getting everything done in time.

As we light this third pink candle of joy,  
help us to pause our minds,  
to pause our worry,  
to pause our anger,  
to pause our fear.

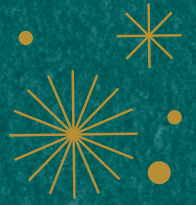
Turn our attention to the joy we find in you.  
Turn our attention to the bundle of joy  
who is coming to save the world!  
Help us to rejoice in you always.

In the name of Christ our Savior, we pray,  
Amen





# PROCLAIMING GOD'S JUSTICE



## Scripture

*But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days.*  
—Micah 5:2 (NRSVUE)

*He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty. He has come to the aid of his child Israel, in remembrance of his mercy...*  
—Luke 1:52-54 (NRSVUE)



## Reflection

Proclaiming God's justice — what in his teaching the Lord described as good news to the poor ... freedom to the oppressed (Luke 4:18) — contextualizes peace as manifest through our relationship with and in Christ. This is the authentic communal response for the common good. Otherwise, justice can assume many other forms, including revenge and retaliation. Outside of the perspective or path of Christ, an eye-for-an-eye justice may seem reasonable or rational; but it is actually a self-centered and self-focused response. In the light of Christ, the way of retribution is not justice, but selfishness.

The incarnation pericopes of Micah 5:2-5 and Luke 1:39-55 reveal to us that justice and peace do not, in fact, depend on what has been done to us but rather on where we turn our focus in times of need or pain. The prophet Micah explains that in our Savior we are fed, secure, and at peace. The evangelist Luke describes how the Mother of God responds to St. Elizabeth's praise with great humility, explaining how such praise is reserved for the glorification or magnification of God, rather than of ourselves and our interests. It is through and in God alone that rules are balanced, humility abounds, and peace ultimately prevails.

In brief, to proclaim God's justice is to let go of self-love and fully embrace divine love. It means patience and forgiveness for those who act against us; it implies giving to those who ask; it involves receiving from those who offer; it gives priority to dialogue rather than to discord; it seeks to offer one's time, talent, and treasure without the least expectation of return. True justice comes when we are at peace in the incarnate Lord, our God and Savior Jesus Christ. Because, in this way, we can begin to transform ourselves and the world around us from self-centeredness to selflessness, from being mere creatures to being fully human, indeed "partakers of divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4).



**Rev. Fr. Nicholas Anton** serves as the Director of Operations for the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of the USA. He has also worked in Ecumenical spaces for the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America and as a coordinator between GOA and the UN. For more information on Fr. Anton's work, see <https://www.goarch.org/-/nicholas-anton>.





## Invitation to Advent Practice

The invitation this week is to  
proclaim God's justice.

*Take a few moments to reflect on these questions:*

01

In the face of the darkness of this age, characterized by injustice, pain, and suffering, what does it look like to put our trust in God's promises of justice? How might proclaiming God's justice change us?

02

How might we fully embrace divine love in the coming week?

## Prayer

O God of justice,  
We see a world that longs for your justice.  
A world so riddled with division and greed  
and selfishness.  
We find it difficult to trust that your  
justice prevails.  
As we wait for the Prince of Peace,  
Turn our gaze upon you.  
Change our hearts, transform our bodies,  
so that we might live fully into our  
humanness, and perhaps, partakers  
of divine nature.  
Make us agents of hope,  
proclaiming your justice  
in a world that so desperately needs it.  
We pray in the name of the one who  
proclaims good news to the poor and  
freedom to the oppressed.  
Amen



