Columns
Horizons
Spirituality



Advent wreath at Magnificat Chapel, Villa Maria Community Center, Sisters of the Humility of Mary (Photo by Eilis McCulloh)



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At Blessed Trinity Church in Cleveland, Ohio, we begin liturgy during the Advent season by singing and praying "Love's Pure Light" as we light the Advent candles.

We've begun Advent liturgies with this song for a number of years, so I don't always pay attention to the lyrics. However, this year, on the first Sunday of Advent, I was taken aback by the following lines:

> O Come, O Come Emmanuel and end this gloom of night
> Bring hope to the world
> Bring peace to the Earth
> And fill us with love's pure light.

Isn't that the perfect prayer for the time we're in? As I write this, I find myself yearning for hope and peace. It is hard to not feel stuck in the gloom of night — or even believe that there is an end to this darkness that seems to encompass the world.

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The short ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, which was cause for celebration and hope, has now ended, and Israel has renewed its attacks on Palestinians in southern Gaza and stopped aid from coming in through the Rafah crossing. More than 100 Israelis are still being held hostage by Hamas.

More than 450,000 people have been forcibly displaced in the North Kivu Province of the Democratic Republic of the Congo due to violence. Democracy in the United States is in a perilous situation and some members of Congress are doing all they can to close our borders and end the asylum process.

Not to mention, we are in the midst of a climate crisis, which Pope Francis says is the result of "the drive to produce and possess," which has "become an obsession, resulting in an inordinate greed that has made the environment the object of unbridled exploitation." And, this is just a short list of crises facing our world.



An Advent wreath at Blessed Trinity Parish in Cleveland, Ohio. (Photo by Eilis McCulloh)

Will hope and peace come to inhabit our world once again? Will we be able to, as my community's constitution states, "embrace the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of our sisters and brothers in the human family"? I am convinced that this is what the Advent season calls us to.

Advent — the season of living in the nitty-gritty of life as we prepare for the Incarnation — invites us to spend time in searching and waiting for. In the midst of

that, we find reasons to rejoice, reflecting on our role as midwives of hope and peace and, yes, even joy.

This is what we are reminded of in the first reading for Isaiah, where we are told that the spirit of the Lord is upon us because God has anointed us to bring glad tidings to the poor and to proclaim freedom. Isaiah reminds us that we do not need to get stuck in the waiting for the Messiah to come. God is here among us, reminding us day in and day out that we are anointed to do this work. That, my friends, is reason enough to rejoice, even when the grief, heartache and struggle seem overwhelming.

As the song suggests, where do I see this pure light, or where do I find reason to rejoice?



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For me, I witness it in my colleagues at Network and in our faith-filled justice seekers across the country who continually push for policies like the Expanded Child Tax Credit, ensure that WIC is available for all mothers and children who need the support of the program, and work to shed light on racist policies like the CBP One App. Their dedication to ensuring that all people have what they need to thrive lifts the gloom of night — even if just for a little bit of time.

Like Mary, my spirit rejoices in this world that God created — in spending time with friends and community members, sharing a meal, celebrating a new baby and laughing. It is also in this continual hope for lasting peace in the world that we rely on one another to bring glad tidings, heal the broken hearted, and give release to prisoners. It is only then that "love's pure light" will "make justice and praise spring up before all the nations."

This weekend, I challenge all of us to find joy and hope amidst the darkness.

This story appears in the **Advent** feature series. View the full series.