

EDITORIAL

An Advent Theology of Suffering and Ministry

Advent season is almost over and there is only a week left till we celebrate the Western Christmas. As I have pondered the articles and book reviews for this SEEDBED which are about ministering among people influenced by Islamism, Wahhabism and violence, I have been struck by the similarity of such contexts to those of Christ's first Advent.

The circumstances in which many of us live throughout the Arab world parallel the circumstances into which Jesus was born. The journey to Bethlehem was a forced journey imposed by the occupying government on a people who deeply resented the rule of their godless governors. Jews living in the midst of the pagan Roman Empire sought to remain faithful to God under an empire deeply opposed to everything they believed. God chose to take on flesh and be born in a position of utter weakness and vulnerability in an inconspicuous little village in a nation ruled by unjust oppressors.

In countries in which we live and serve, believers are often in similar positions of weakness and vulnerability. As in the days of the early church, our Saviour is misunderstood and ignored; believers have no rights and often live under tyrannical governments. Islam is a religion that delights in political power, has a social system that enforces conformity, and is a community that rejects the Messiah and does not admit the need for a Saviour.

When I Skyped this week with a colleague in the AP who is helping disciple the small handful of believers in his city, I was struck afresh by the vulnerability of what they and we are called to do. These believers are growing in faith while living quietly so as not to attract attention from friends and government authorities. What God did that first Advent, in sending his son to the village of Bethlehem in the occupied territory of Judah, and later what he did in sending out the Jewish Apostles to proclaim the Gospel of the King of Kings to the entire Gentile Roman Empire and beyond, was a vulnerable approach to ministry that was content to begin invisible and hidden; a work of faith content to work under God's leadership in line with his purposes and timing.

Is there an Advent theology of ministering in suffering and oppression that we can draw from that first Advent? Can we learn from Mary's response to God's messenger when she responded: 'Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word' (Luke 1:38)?

May God grant us faith like that of Mary who accepted God's call even though she understood little and bore much pain and suffering as she fulfilled her calling.

With you, serving the humble King,
Don Little, Editor

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