





The Promise for All Nations

A 26-DAY MESA GLOBAL ADVENT





WEEK 1

God With Us in Waiting



INTRODUCTION

What is Advent?

MEXICO

Written by Paul Johnson, Director of Spiritual Formation

Christmas in Oaxaca, Mexico, is a vibrant season filled with colorful lights, elaborate decorations, and life-size nativity scenes throughout the city. The celebrations begin in December and continue well into the new year, bringing families and communities together for weeks of festivities. After living and ministering in Mexico for the past 26 years, I have not only witnessed these traditions but have also had the joy of participating in many of them.

This Advent season, we invite you to join us on a journey around the world as we reflect on the coming of Christ through the perspectives of those serving in different cultures and contexts. Throughout this series, we'll hear stories and reflections from across the globe, and together, we'll consider what it means to wait, prepare, and live in anticipation of our Savior's coming.

In Mexico, this extended season of celebration is often referred to as *Guadalupe-Reyes*. It begins on December 12 with the celebration of the Virgin of Guadalupe, Mexico's patroness, and continues through January 6, Three Kings' Day (*Día de los Reyes*).

Although Advent is observed in Mexico, there are more prominent cultural celebrations such as *Las Posadas*, which take place in late December. *Las Posadas* commemorate Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem as they searched for a place *(posada)* where Jesus could be born.

These nine evenings of celebration reenact that journey. Groups of people travel from house to house, with some playing the role of pilgrims outside and others acting as innkeepers inside. The pilgrims ask for lodging, and initially, those inside turn them away. Eventually, the doors open, welcoming the pilgrims in to celebrate together.

As beautiful and meaningful as these festivities can be, celebrations in the wider culture, both in Mexico and in the United States, can sometimes lose sight of the deeper meaning of Christmas: the coming of Christ, His presence in our lives, the transformation He brings, and our hope and anticipation of His return.



What is Advent?

Written by Paul Johnson, Director of Spiritual Formation

MEXICO

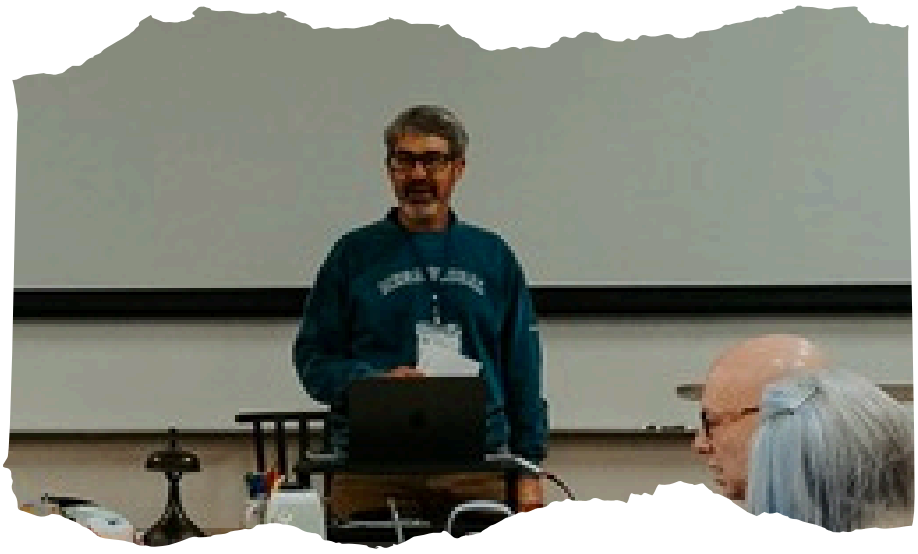
This is why the season of Advent offers such a meaningful invitation. The four weeks leading up to Christmas are known as Advent, a word that comes from the Latin *adventus*, meaning "coming" or "arrival." It is a season when we reflect on Christ's first coming, anticipate His second coming, and celebrate His presence in our lives today. Advent is also a time of waiting—a time to prepare our hearts and renew our anticipation of our Lord's coming.

As a people who wait, Advent invites us to pause amid the busyness of the season. It gives us space to prepare, remember, and anticipate. We remember what God has already done through Christ, become more attentive to His presence in our lives today, and look forward with hope to the day when He will come again.

In Mexico, the beginnings of these celebrations echo, in some ways, the anticipation at the heart of Advent. *Las Posadas* remind us of the journey leading up to Christ's birth, while *Día de los Reyes* recalls the visit of the Magi, who came to worship the newborn King. These traditions offer a glimpse of the waiting, longing, and joyful expectation that characterize Advent.

And while the traditions, cultures, and circumstances of believers around the world may look different, we share this same hope: Christ has come, Christ is with us, and Christ will come again.

As we enter this Advent and Christmas season, may the festivities around us point us beyond the celebrations themselves. And as we hear from brothers and sisters serving in different corners of the world throughout this series, may their reflections remind us that we are part of one global Church, united in our hope and anticipation of Christ's coming.



PSALM 130:1–8

DAY 1

Plentiful Redemption

UKRAINE

Written by Taras Dyatlik, Theological Education Consultant

When exchanged prisoners of war return home to Ukraine, we have two groups meet the buses. Some wait for a son, husband, or father on board, while others hold up photographs of men not on the bus. Exchange after exchange, they ask the returning soldiers one question: “Did you see him there?”

The psalmist knew such waiting: “I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope” (Psalm 130:5). The next verse says his soul waits more than watchmen look for the morning.
These family members know what that “more” costs. A watchman knows when dawn will come, whereas they cannot tell whether their night of waiting will ever end.

Verse 7 gives us the reason to keep waiting: “For with the Lord there…is plentiful redemption” (130:7). The Hebrew word for redemption comes from the language of ransom, of buying people out of captivity. Our exchanges are also a sort of ransom, but never a plentiful one—when the buses leave, many photographs go home unanswered.

Sometimes, however, a man from the bus takes a long look at a photograph and says, “Yes, I saw him there! He was alive in the spring.” And for one mother, it is the first news of her son in months.

Having come up from the depths, the psalmist does much the same: he stops speaking of his own soul and tells the crowd of pilgrims: “O Israel, hope in the Lord!” (130:7). Centuries later, the old widow Anna, who had served God, worshiping and fasting night and day in the temple, was waiting—and when she saw the child, she spoke of him “to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem” (Luke 2:37–38).

This Advent, I want to invite you to hold up one face before God, as our families in Ukraine hold up photographs during the exchange. And if you have seen something of His mercy, tell it to someone who is still waiting.



ISAIAH 40:27–31

DAY 2

The Weight of Waiting

Written by Andrew Pannagio, Mesa Scholar

PERU

During every election cycle in Peru, like the one completed in October 2026, a similar story unfolds. For months, political parties make strategic alliances. Candidates promise to improve infrastructure, combat rampant crime, and solve the traffic problem. Citizens watch with a complex mix of hope and skepticism. “Maybe things will actually change for the better!” “But why would this time be any different?” After votes are cast and the winner declared, public opinion often sours quickly. And, if the last decade is any indication—nine different presidents in 10 years—the elected leader’s prospects rot nearly at the same speed. All of this creates a sense of hopelessness, a deep-seated despair that, “Maybe we find ourselves in an inescapable cycle.”

In Isaiah 40, the people of Israel found themselves in a similar place—tired, suffering, in need of help, and waiting for someone to offer hope. Where could they turn? The Mesopotamian superpowers controlled most of the known world. Their gods seemed to have all the power. Had Israel’s God been defeated? “Why does God not answer our prayers? Is he ignoring us? Can he not see us?”

In this difficult time, the Lord sees Israel’s despair and asks them through the prophet: “Why do you say…my way is hidden from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God” (Isaiah 40:27)? Israel thought that God had abandoned them, but God shows that this is not so. Just as he “saw the people of Israel—and…knew” their pain in Egypt long before (Exodus 2:25), once again, God hears their cries and answers.

“Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth” (Isaiah 40:28). International superpowers, even those that cast an ominous and threatening shadow, all fall eventually. But the Lord can never be defeated! Nations battle to conquer the world, but every inch of it already belongs to its Maker.



The Weight of Waiting

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PERU

But this is of no help unless God actively engages the world, and Israel fears that God has withdrawn, giving them up for good. So, the prophet encourages God's people, "he does not faint or grow weary" (Isaiah 40:28). Quite the contrary, "he gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength" (Isaiah 40:29). A balm for Israel's pain, these words strike a spark of hope. God reigns eternally and does not tire. Moreover, the God of Israel desires to strengthen those that have nothing left, those that have nowhere else to turn.

But Israel must have wondered, "Will God give us strength too? Or did that only happen in the stories of old?" The prophet refuses to let them wallow in despair any longer; he tells them who God will restore: "they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength" (Isaiah 40:31).

In the same way, Christians around the globe continue to live in difficult circumstances, plagued by war, poverty, marital strife, and much more. Some have lost hope. Others trust in false sources of renewal. Yet, the words of the prophet remain true. One day God will fulfill this promise because the Lord never tires. Sometimes our wait lasts only a short while. Other times we must wait our entire life. Advent reminds us that waiting hurts. Christmas reminds us that we wait for a God who entered our pain and promises to fulfill our hope. One day, those who wait for the Lord will indeed "run and not be weary" (Isaiah 40:31). As we wait, may we look to the Lord, trusting that our God will be faithful.

HABAKKUK 2:1–4

DAY 3

How Long, O Lord

DRC

Written by Jaimie Fabling, Mesa Worker

When I compare the settings of where Jesus was born in the ancient near east to where I am serving in the modern near east of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in eastern Africa, I observe plenty of similarities:

An oppressed and occupied nation.
A complicated history filled with internal and external failings and exploitation.
A people group crying out, "How long, O Lord?"

The time of Jesus' birth and the current situation in the DRC also echo the words of the prophet Habakkuk when he cried out to God, "Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrongdoing? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds" (Habakkuk 1:3).

Over my last 3+ years living in eastern Congo, I have found myself asking the same questions as Habakkuk. Lord, where are You in the midst of over 30 years of ongoing war and exploitation? How can You let this go on? If You are really Emmanuel, "God with us," as we celebrate each Christmas, why don't you bring this waiting to an end?

The Lord has answered me through the faith of my Congolese brothers and sisters.

The Congolese church reminds me of Habakkuk's response at the beginning of chapter 2: "I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts; I will look to see what he will say to me, and what answer I am to give to this complaint" (Habakkuk 2:1). There is an inherent understanding among my Congolese sisters and brothers of the reality of "Emmanuel." In every corner and crevice of life, God is moving and working and present, from the excited young student sharing a testimony of God's faithfulness after a recent visit to the hospital, to an elderly woman—or *maman*—on the side of the road gently replying "God bless you" as we buy some strawberries from her basket. Congolese believers are constantly on the lookout for how God is working around them and how He will answer their complaints.



HABAKKUK 2:1–4

DAY 3

How Long, O Lord

DRC

Written by Jaimie Fabling, Mesa Worker serving in DRC

I recently shared a short message on Habakkuk 2:1–4 with a group of Congolese students graduating with their master's degrees in diplomacy, negotiation, and mediation. In the midst of one of the most complicated diplomatic situations in the world presently occurring in Goma, DRC, these students wrote and defended theses about the cause of the conflict, how to negotiate and mediate effectively, and practical steps forward—words and ideas that could put their lives at risk in a rebel-occupied zone.
These brave young men and women model the Lord's answer to Habakkuk, "Then the Lord replied: 'Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it. For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and it will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay" (Habakkuk 2:2–3).

Like Habakkuk, these students have courageously put their convictions into writing, trusting in God's faithfulness as they patiently seek His guidance and work towards peace in their country.

Around the time of Jesus' birth, God's people were waiting for the fulfillment of Messianic prophecy. Many Jewish people thought that would mean that the Messiah would come as a powerful warrior who would overthrow the oppressive Roman government. Alas, the Messiah came as a humble baby boy, entering the world quietly in an unknown corner of Israel to a flabbergasted young couple. This unassuming and unexpected, faithful fulfillment of prophecy is at the core of Christmas celebrations, and it is lived out by so many Congolese believers who model Habakkuk's prophecy: "See, the enemy is puffed up; his desires are not upright, but the righteous person will live by his faithfulness" (Habakkuk 2:4).

Though I do not know how the current crisis in Congo will resolve, I am grateful to be surrounded by faithful Congolese who exemplify humble devotion to God while waiting for the Prince of Peace to return and bring an ultimate end to all suffering and injustice.

LAMENTATIONS 3:21–26

DAY 4

Thrill of Hope

UNITED STATES

Written by John Brookshire, Regional Leader

For 40 years, Jeremiah prophesied about the destruction of Jerusalem. In the book of Lamentations, he now finds himself sitting among the ashes, crying out in sorrow for the city lost, those left behind destitute, and for those who'd been carried off as exiles. "My eyes fail from weeping, I am in torment within; my heart is poured out on the ground because my people are destroyed," he laments in 2:11. Everything he had known, gone. All that was normal, wiped away. The way of life, the people, many—if not all—of the familiar sounds, smells, and tastes, now existing only in memory. Jeremiah had reason to lament. He had reason for his anguish and sorrow.

Yet, in the middle of all the loss and pain, Jeremiah has a reason to lift his head. That reason: hope. Hope in God's love and mercy. Hope in salvation that would arrive through a coming Messiah. In Lamentations 3:21–22, Jeremiah says: "Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail." And then in verses 25–26 he says: "The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord". Jeremiah doesn't say these things from a tower or a mountaintop, he says them from a pile of rubble. It is from settings like this that hope is the most poignant.

In the North American Region of Mesa Global, many of our workers are engaged in ministry with refugees. Refugees are, by and large, not refugees by choice. It is usually because something has gone very wrong. Be it war, famine, persecution, or some other tragedy, they are refugees because it was impossible for them to stay in their place of origin. Everything they had known, gone. All that was normal, wiped away. The way of life, the people, many—if not all—of the familiar sounds, smells, and tastes, now existing only in memory. Refugees have reason to lament. They have reason for anguish and sorrow. Yet, in the middle of all their loss and pain, some are finding a reason to lift their head. That reason: hope. As Mesa Global workers walk alongside these refugees, sharing Christ's love and the good news of His coming, some are finding renewed hope and encouragement in their faith, while others are discovering His love and mercy and coming to faith in the promised Messiah.



LAMENTATIONS 3:21–26

DAY 4

Thrill of Hope

UNITED STATES

Written by John Brookshire, Regional Leader

One of our most beloved Christmas carols proclaims the following:

“Long lay the world in sin and error pining
Til He appeared and the soul felt its worth
A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn!”

Oh, that we might all truly experience the “thrill of hope” this Advent season. Whether we find ourselves on a mountaintop or a pile of rubble, whether in our place of origin or in the state of being a refugee, may we all know the hope the Messiah has ushered into reality. Sin and error still abound, but Jesus has appeared, so may our souls feel his worth. The world is still weary, but may it rejoice as people experience the thrill of hope that can only be found in Jesus, even as we wait for him to return again!



To Believe or Not to Believe

GUATEMALA

Written by Gerardo Corpeno, Mesa Scholar

In 1859, a French acrobat named Charles Blondin stretched a rope across Niagara Falls, more than a thousand feet long and high above the roaring water. Thousands gathered to watch. He crossed it blindfolded. He crossed it on stilts. He crossed it pushing a wheelbarrow.

And then, the story goes, he asked the crowd: "Do you believe I can carry a person across this rope?" They shouted, "Yes! We've seen you do it!" Then he looked at them and said: "Who will get on my back?" Silence. Believing that someone can carry you is one thing. Climbing on is another. Faith that stays at the edge of the gorge is not faith, and the Gospels show us what that looks like.

In Luke 1:5-25, the angel Gabriel announces to Zechariah that his wife Elizabeth will have a child, even though both of them are well along in years. Zechariah's reaction is one of incredulity. He is asking Gabriel for proof. Gabriel's answer is succinct and blunt: *"I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time"* (Luke 1:20).

Gabriel's response highlights something important: When God speaks, whether directly or through his messenger, we are called to listen and believe. Zechariah did not, and he lost his voice and had to remain silent.

Sometimes I wonder whether the church has stopped listening to and believing the word of God, and therefore we are unable to speak to the world the good news that Jesus has come to transform it. Has the Church lost its voice like Zechariah? Has he fallen silent like this priest? The priest's role in Israel was to intercede between God and the people of God. The church has a similar calling: We are a kingdom of priests, to announce the good news to the world, to speak out the wonders of God, and to intercede on its behalf (1 Peter 2:9).



We can have all the titles and credentials like Zechariah has, but if we don't have faith, we will remain silent, unable to speak to the world the Good News that a new king has been born and that there is hope despite what we see around us. So the real question for the Church today is not so much whether it has the resources, the right strategies, or political and cultural power. As in the days of Zechariah, to believe or not to believe—that is the real question!

LUKE 1:26–38

DAY 6

The ‘Yes’ That Changed Everything

SOUTH ASIA

Written by J, Hub Leader

“I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.” (Luke 1:38)

I know the silence that falls over a household when a young, unmarried woman becomes the subject of whispered conversation. News travels faster than truth, and a girl’s reputation can be undone in a single afternoon. Shame doesn’t fall on her alone, but on her whole family, for generations. Many women here learn from childhood that their first duty is to protect the family name, that their voice should be soft and their desires secondary.

I think we read the Annunciation too gently. Had Mary lived next door to me, I know what her next nine months would have looked like. Joseph could have walked away; the law permitted it. Neighbors would have counted backward on their fingers. Yet Mary said yes to a pregnancy that could have cost her everything.

Here theology and lived experience meet. In choosing Mary, God does not merely select a vessel; he inverts every human hierarchy of status. From no-account comes the Word made flesh. The early church called her Theotokos, God-bearer, not to elevate her beyond what a creature may bear, but to insist that the self-emptying—the kenosis (Philippians 2:7)—happens here, in this moment of consent. Her freedom is not diminished by God’s initiative but constituted by it, the cooperation of grace and will the tradition calls synergeia.

Mary’s yes was not the silence of a woman with no choice. It was the courage of a woman who understood the cost completely and chose it anyway. The submission South Asian women are so often taught is one of erasure: comply, disappear, protect the family’s face at the expense of your own voice. But Mary’s “I am the Lord’s servant” is a woman freely surrendering to God, not to social expectation. It is submission aimed upward, not sideways. She becomes the new Eve: where the first woman’s word unraveled Eden, Mary’s fiat begins its restoration. Her fiat—"let it be"—answers and heals humanity's primal no. There is a fierce, quiet strength hidden inside her softness—the same strength I've watched in women here who suffer greatly, silently, yet never once let go of their faith.



LUKE 1:26–38

DAY 6

The ‘Yes’ That Changed Everything

SOUTH ASIA

Written by J, Hub Leader

I know women in our churches who carry that same courage: the widow who chose baptism knowing it meant losing her inheritance; the young believer whose engagement broke because of her faith; the abandoned mother raising her child alone. Their obedience is rarely loud, and it seldom makes it into a testimony service. But it is not weakness dressed as submission. In them, as in Mary, the image of God imprinted on every person, regardless of caste, gender, or social capital, becomes visible.

What unsettles me most is that God didn’t ask a priest or someone with standing. He asked a girl with no status, no protection, and everything to lose, and he waited for her answer. This is the scandal of particularity: the infinite God chooses to be constrained by a single womb and a single “yes,” and so dignifies every small, hidden act of faithful consent. Grace has always moved this way, not overpowering us but asking, and waiting on the threshold of our lives, especially the lives our cultures have taught to stay quiet.

So I ask not only what I admire about Mary, but what she asks of me. Where is God waiting, patiently, for my own trembling yes? And to women who have been taught to shrink, may you see in Mary not a model of silence, but of sacred, unshakable strength.

“For no word from God will ever fail.” (Luke 1:37)

All Creation Waits

UNITED STATES

Written by Curtis Grenier, Mesa Scholar

By nature, I am pretty impatient. I am impulsive and self-focused. I know what I want, and I want it now. The cry of “I, my, me, mine” too often persists so loudly that all else just adds to the noise. The tyranny of the ego is a suffering that often becomes unbearable. I, I, I! It is just as painful to write it as it is to read it! Each of us loathes being around that person who must make everything all about themselves, right?

Thankfully, in today's reading, we are confronted with a few truths that work to dislodge us from this slavery to the self. It shows us more than our present sufferings and those things we do not have. We learn that we are not alone in our bondage. After proclaiming that our sufferings are nothing compared to the glory that is to come, Paul tells us that all of creation anxiously groans for relief. Words like bondage, corruption, futility, and pain cause us to pause and look a bit deeper. What exactly is Paul getting at?

During Advent, we have the opportunity to observe how God took on flesh to unite divinity and humanity. We read that all of creation lost its purpose and is longing for release from an unwilling captivity. In Jesus, this bondage finds its end. All of creation was subjected to futility—to meaninglessness. Thanks to our Lord, there is meaning to existence, even in the wait. This purpose is rooted in Him, yet things are still not as they should be. We must still wait. Even more glory is coming.

As we wait, we suffer. Our suffering is a captivity. While we have already beheld fleeting glimpses of hope in Christ, our perception is currently imperfect, obscure, and partial. We still long for full release from corruption. We who bear the first fruits of the Spirit are waiting for our full adoption as children of God. Only then will we be truly free. The good news is that we are not the only ones waiting. All of creation seeks relief from the futility and meaninglessness that King Solomon described as he preached (Ecclesiastes 12). The creation waits for the day that the children of God will be revealed. God's shalom will be restored. Glory will fully return to creation!



All Creation Waits

UNITED STATES

Written by Curtis Grenier, Mesa Scholar

As a Mesa Scholar, I have seen a version of this waiting and fulfillment through the ministry to which God has called me. Many of our brothers and sisters around the world long to have access to theological education and training so they can better serve their congregations. Some pastors are made leaders, not because of their training but simply because they have a copy of the Scriptures that they can read! God called them to feed their flocks. They cannot leave where God has placed them, so I have the honor of going to them. By God's grace, I am able to use my particular giftedness to teach the Bible and answer questions that many have longed to ask. In truth, it is discipleship and formation. Formally, I teach historical theology and spiritual formation, but contextually, I facilitate the very growth God yearns to give His Church. I help others worship God with all their heart AND their mind. It is both a burden and an honor to serve as Christ served when He walked among us. He came to proclaim the good news of salvation. I serve to bear witness to Him.

God is a loving Father who yearns to give more than we can ask or imagine. He is like the loving parents who cannot wait to give their child a gift that they will absolutely love and adore. In the Incarnation, the Father has given His Son. The Spirit testifies to this within our hearts. Can you imagine God's eager anticipation of that Day when all will be revealed? Since God the Father is patient, since all creation is eagerly anticipating deliverance from an unwilling corruption, and since the Son took on the very same humanity I have, my problem with "I" is put into its proper perspective. I am not alone. You are not alone. We are not alone. Rescue is coming. Maranatha! Christ, come quickly!

WEEK 2

God With Us in the Ordinary



RUTH 2:1–13

DAY 8

A Home for the Wanderer

COLOMBIA

Written by David Baer, Director of Mesa Scholars

Only rarely have I experienced human warmth and welcome as genuine and abundant as what my wife Karen and I know in our adoptive country of Colombia. I am incapable of understanding how some of the nations I love most in this world—Colombia and Lebanon spring to mind—experience such humanity and such deeply ingrained violence at the same time.

Millions of Colombians—some of them my beloved students at the Biblical Seminary of Colombia—have been forcibly displaced from their homes. If you turn around in our city of Medellín, you're likely to bump into someone who "is not from here." Often the story of how they arrived in this place is bathed in tears, blood, and irreversible loss.

The same is true in Lebanon, where I am privileged to teach once a year. My beautiful Middle Eastern students from countries like Syria, Iraq, Sudan, and too many others to name, have often been driven from their homes. They will never visit the graves of their family members, never again see the homes into which they were born. They're "somewhere else" now, and there's no going back.

The biblical story of Ruth tells a displaced young woman's story, one whose modern echoes have become all too familiar. Driven by the complications of hunger and bereavement, but with an uncommon dose of loyalty to her Israelite mother-in-law, this "Moabite woman"—as she is named across the first chapters of this biblical story—somehow finds a way to survive.

But there's more. The little pocket of emerging Israel that is the farm town of Bethlehem gradually finds a way to accept the presence of a foreigner, then to learn her name, then appreciatively to recognize her tenacious loyalty to the Israelite family of her late husband, who died too young. Finally, in a twist almost too gorgeous to be imagined, Ruth the Moabite becomes a full member of Israel and the great-grandmother of its greatest king.

How can this be?

The story offers two explanations, each of them partial but deeply moving if we allow it to be so.



RUTH 2:1–13

DAY 8

A Home for the Wanderer

COLOMBIA

Written by David Baer, Director of Mesa Scholars

First, Ruth has embodied the “loyal love” that is the primary personality trait of Israel’s God. This has generated a cycle of goodness that has brought the blessing of God’s life-giving presence into her adoptive family, clan, and nation. And eventually, to this whole wide world, if we allow the story to carry us that far into its future.

Second, Israel’s God has coaxed open a space in the hearts of the denizens of Bethlehem large enough to receive and then embrace the foreigner. And not just any foreigner, but a young woman from Moab, their complex and easily despised “near neighbor.”

The little book of Ruth is empty of prophet, priest, and king. There is no tabernacle, no temple, no sacrifice. References to Torah are detectable only in the quiet nobility of Israelite villagers towards a hungry foreigner.

Yet God is present. And because he draws near, a foreigner becomes the near ancestor of David, who prefigures a greater David, our King Jesus, and whom we name as Immanuel, “God with us”.

Life offers up a thousand ways to become forcibly displaced. My refugee neighbors in Medellín and my students in Lebanon can tell their editions of the story. Yet our hearts, too, often stray far from home.

All of us wander.

¡Oh, Emanuel! Come with your grace to this refugee heart of mine. Help me find my way all the way home!



1 SAMUEL 16:6–13

DAY 9

Serving in the Fields

COSTA RICA

Written by Ivan Oreamuno, Mesa Scholar

One of the privileges of serving in theological education in Latin America is meeting men and women who faithfully serve the Lord in circumstances that rarely attract much attention. Some pastor small congregations while working full-time jobs to provide for their families. Others travel long distances to attend classes, prepare sermons after exhausting days, or quietly serve their communities without expecting recognition.

There is something beautiful about this ordinary faithfulness. It reminds me of a young shepherd tending his father's sheep in Bethlehem.

When Samuel arrived at Jesse's house to anoint the next king of Israel, David was not even among the sons presented to him. Samuel saw Eliab and immediately assumed he was standing before the Lord's chosen king. But God's response challenged Samuel's expectations: "For man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7).

One by one, Jesse's sons passed before Samuel, but none was God's chosen king. Finally, they sent for David, who was still tending the sheep.

What strikes me about this account is not simply that God chose someone unexpected, but that God's sovereign purposes were unfolding while David was engaged in something so ordinary. David was not pursuing a throne. He was simply caring for his father's sheep. Yet God had already determined to establish him as king over Israel.

Of course, David's story is not ultimately about the greatness of an overlooked shepherd. It is about the faithfulness of God to his redemptive purposes. Years later, God would promise David a kingdom that would endure forever (2 Samuel 7:12–16). That promise would find its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ, our Lord.



1 SAMUEL 16:6–13

DAY 9

Serving in the Fields

COSTA RICA

Written by Ivan Oreamuno, Mesa Scholar

And how did this promised King enter the world? Not surrounded by the splendor of a royal palace, as we might expect of a king, but born in Bethlehem, the same town where David had once tended sheep. The eternal Son of God entered the ordinary circumstances of human life, taking on our humanity to accomplish the extraordinary work of our redemption.

This is one of the great comforts of Advent. God has not remained distant from the realities of our world. In Christ, he has come to dwell among us, to put his tent among us (John 1:14).

As I think about the many pastors, students, and Christian workers serving throughout Latin America, I am reminded that the significance of our service cannot be measured simply by its visibility or recognition. We are not promised extraordinary positions like David's, but we serve the same faithful God who accomplishes his purposes according to his wisdom.

Advent invites us to remember that the hope of the world was not found in what humanity considered impressive, but in the coming of the promised King.

And because that King has come, even our most ordinary days can be lived with the assurance that God is with us.



Too Little to Be Counted

UNITED STATES

Written by Alaa Salloum, Mesa Scholar

No one was looking at Bethlehem. It was too little to be counted. That is exactly where God begins.

Every semester I teach an online class at a small seminary in the Middle East. Most of my students come from small churches and will go back to serve them. From the outside, they are a handful of people from places no one notices. Yet behind each one I see a congregation holding on in towns that war and emigration have hollowed out, and disciples learning how to follow Christ faithfully. Small, yes. But God never needed great places to do his greatest work.

Micah wrote to people who had run out of visible options. “Why do you cry aloud? Is there no king in you?” (4:9), he asks. The question exposes what they have lost. In Israel the king was the guarantee of justice. He was supposed to defend the widow, hold back the invader, and keep the strong from devouring the weak. Micah pictures Zion doubled over in labor, driven out into the open field, while the nations gather at her wall and admire their own strategy. Against their schemes stands God’s plan: “They do not know the thoughts of the LORD” (4:12).

God’s thoughts were on a village no one counted. “But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel” (5:2). The king was in God’s plan. The king was God’s plan. God passes over the capital and goes to a village, the place that produced David when nobody thought to send for him. The king’s origins are “from the past, from the days of antiquity.” God had been preparing this for generations.

Yet Micah is honest about the delay. “Therefore he will give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth” (5:3). Until. The waiting is real. The labor is real. The hope is real. When the child arrives, the rest of his brothers return. This is the remnant, the people God holds on to through everything.

The king “shall stand and shepherd [his flock] in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God” (5:4). Shepherding happens daily, quietly, and mostly out of sight. Yet it ends with the picture of everyone under a vine and fig tree, with no one left to make them afraid (4:4). That is what peace looks like, and no king in Judah could promise it. But “this one will be peace” (5:5a). Peace in a person.



MICAH 5:2–5A

DAY 10

Too Little to Be Counted

UNITED STATES

Written by Alaa Salloum, Mesa Scholar

Centuries later, Herod demanded to know where the Messiah would be born. His scholars turned to Micah and named the village (Matthew 2:5–6). The answer had not changed: a King, born in a town too little to be counted.

My students are not preparing for an easier life. They are preparing to serve people for whom fear has become ordinary. One student serving one church is too little. So was Bethlehem.

You have your own version of that place, that trouble, that absence. Micah will not tell you the trouble is small. He tells you that God's answer is older than the trouble, and that it rarely comes from where the world is watching.

Immanuel came once, born in a town too little to be counted. He is coming again, and he will have the final say. Until then, the ordinary week carries more than it appears to. It is where the King is at work.

LUKE 1:39–45

DAY 11

God in the Fabric of Daily Life

DRC

Written by Bosela Eale, Hub Leader

In this passage, Mary travels to visit Elizabeth, and the moment she arrives, the child leaps in Elizabeth's womb. In an African context, pregnancy is often seen not merely as a biological fact, but as a sacred time, one filled with presences, signs, and relationships. The child's leaping might, for instance, evoke a profound, silent recognition of God's work, even before any words are spoken. In an African context, such bodily reactions are readily understood as signs, alerts, or blessings. Elizabeth's voice, offering a blessing, is equally significant: it is a word that sustains, encourages, and confirms that God is at work.

In many African cultures, a word spoken over someone carries both spiritual and relational weight. Elizabeth's blessing acts as a form of communal recognition; it validates what has been unfolding in secret. God acts within the fabric of daily life, in our journeys, our encounters, and our tangible acts of solidarity. Faith is not confined to the temple; it moves alongside people, alongside women who carry life, who walk, who share, who sing, who encourage one another. In African reality, this invites us to recognize God within the solidarity among women, in family, visits, in shared blessings, and in those small, joyful signs that herald new life. This is the good news: God allows himself to be encountered along the paths of Africa, paths full of movement, family, hospitality and hope.

For instance, we might focus on the fact that Mary sets out on a journey. In many African cultures, setting out is already an expression of openness to one's destiny, a receptivity to what God might bring about along the way. And when the child leaps, we can see the idea that life itself speaks before words are even spoken. The African oral tradition considers body and silence as forms of language. Thus, the encounter between the two women becomes almost a celebration of the body as witness to God's action.

We might even pose a question for reflection: where do we find such visits, such leaps of recognition, and such blessings in our own lives today? And how does faith set us in motion toward one another in a spirit of kinship? Should we place the emphasis on faith and trust, or on the solidarity between women as a model for our churches and our families?



LUKE 1:39–45

DAY 11

God in the Fabric of Daily Life

DRC

Written by Bosela Eale, Hub Leader

Focusing on female solidarity, Mary and Elizabeth support one another even before anyone else understands what is happening. This scene honors women's capacity to recognize life, to embrace God's surprises, and to support each other in a world that does not always understand. In African societies, women often carry the burden of life, family, health, education, yet they sometimes fail to receive the recognition they deserve.

Luke 1:39–45 places women back at the center, as the first witness to a new era. This encourages our communities to value women's voices, their discernment, and the way they provide support during births, crises, family joys, and life traditions. From this, we can draw a practical message: honor and support women who nurture life in the broadest sense, recognize their networks of mutual aid, create safe spaces for them to share their experiences and their faith, and celebrate together the grace that flows through them.

Prayer

Lord, thank you for the women who carry life all around us, those who walk with us, offer reassurance, provide nourishment, bring comfort, teach and pray. Grant us an attentive heart to recognize the blessings they are, to listen to them, and to walk alongside them in peace and justice. May our communities be places where their service is honored, and where life is welcomed with gratitude. Amen.

LUKE 1:46–55

DAY 12

Mary's Magnificat

Written by Joanna Feliciano-Soberano, Theological Education Consultant

PHILIPPINES

I'm bursting with God-news;

I'm dancing the song of my Savior God. (Luke 1:47, MSG)

The Magnificat in Luke 1:46–55 is sung as a response to Elizabeth's expression of joy when the baby in her womb leapt as Mary greets her. As these two women embraced their miracle baby-bearing, they joyfully proclaimed God's promise of hope, salvation, and shalom for the world. These women are giving strong voices to the fulfillment of the promised Messiah!

Mary humbly considers herself blessed to be chosen, overwhelmed by this new role (v. 48). Her heart sings and lifts up the Mighty One. As a young maiden, she sees beyond the suffering and brokenness of the world. Her faith confidently proclaims what God can do and will do. This is her song!

Her song names what's wrong in our world (Luke 1:51–53, MSG)—the abuses of the bluffing braggarts, the tyrants, and the callous rich. She also narrates what God does and continues to do—"His mercy flows in wave after wave" so that the victims are rescued, tyrants are brought down, the poor become insiders in a banquet. Her song gives us hope for a future because God's working! While brokenness persists, His reign permeates. Her eyes of faith confirm the fulfillment of God's promises.

Sadly, in many Protestant churches, Mary's role and voice have been silenced. I myself missed listening attentively to her voice because of contextual blinders. I grew up in a dominantly Roman Catholic country, the Philippines. In my hometown, she was celebrated with prayers, songs, and processions. In our country, her statue continues to be present in every religious festival. Her images consistently portrayed a devout praying Mother of God, alongside the images of the suffering and crucified Christ. She is easily accepted as the Holy Mother, a Mediatrix. No wonder I have observed that so many Filipino Roman Catholics, especially women, are more drawn to her than to Christ.



LUKE 1:46–55

DAY 12

Mary's Magnificat

Written by Joanna Feliciano-Soberano, Theological Education Consultant

PHILIPPINES

Given Mary's growing influence within the Roman Catholic Church, Protestant churches haven't always given her a voice in the story of salvation. I haven't heard a sermon about her, nor about how she bravely shared the powerful message of Christ's lordship in our broken world. It took me a long time to truly see the important message Mary brings to the Christmas story.

As the Magnificat is read this Advent season, Mary continues to speak a beautiful message of hope that lifts our hearts when we're going through hard times. Today, so many Christians are still facing persecution for their faith, like in some countries in Southeast Asia. I recently got to hear from our seminary graduates who returned to Myanmar. They were scared for their lives, feeling broken and hopeless. May the message of hope and restoration, of Christ's ultimate lordship, be heard afresh again, especially by those who are persecuted and marginalized, through the song of Mary.



LUKE 2:1–7

DAY 13

God's Extraordinary Gift

COLOMBIA

Written by Elizabeth Sendek, Mesa Worker & Board Member

The first verses of this chapter depict the ordinary conditions of human experience that surrounded the birth of Jesus, the Son of the Most High (Luke 1:32). Dominion is displayed by the politically powerful, emperor Augustus at the time. A census is held for taxation purposes, registering people based on property. A man who has migrated to Galilee, but still holds property in his ancestral city, Bethlehem. A couple, expecting their first child, does what is needed to comply with their legal responsibility. The child born and cared for like any other baby: clothing and a place to sleep. The extraordinary parameters of her pregnancy are not brought up in this section of Luke's narrative.

The registry of these common shared human experiences tells us that "God with us" is not a theological or idealistic abstraction such as the spirit of Christmas or family bliss. It is a historical reality: he entered our ordinary world of political power in action, taxation, migration, couples, pregnancies and newborns. He entered our world of flesh and blood, hopes and responsibilities, travels and housing scarcity.

The extraordinary, which is the reason for the celebration, is that the author of life became an embryo in the womb of one of His creations, where he is sustained and nurtured until birth, and then is cared for by her and Joseph. The baby is wrapped in the most basic form of dress for a human, swaddling clothes, and is laid to sleep in the ordinary feeding place for animals. These details are important because they set the entrance of God with us into our world in great contrast to the vast power of the emperor through the empire of his time. From birth, resting on a manger dependent on the care of Mary, we can see what is fully disclosed on the cross: self-assertiveness is not the way in which the Son of the Most High incarnates and displays God's presence with us. He does not reign in cold detachment above the realities of a rebellious world, but as one reigning by becoming one of us and taking upon himself the ordinariness of His creations.

The traditional church in Latin America has it partly right. The celebration of novenas or posadas is a reminder of the gestation process that led to Christmas. Neighbors gather to ponder the mystery surrounding this event, and to share in camaraderie and neighborliness. Prayers are said around *pesebres*, dioramas where the Biblical characters are present, often placed amid an array of ordinary people carrying out daily activities of contemporary life. These are great reminders of God with us in the ordinary paces of life. The core images portray some of the truth of that first Christmas: a vulnerable, smiling innocent God-child, lying in a manger, being cared for by his mother.



LUKE 2:1–7

DAY 13

God’s Extraordinary Gift

COLOMBIA

Written by Elizabeth Sendek, Mesa Worker & Board Member

In a popular Christmas carol focused on Mary, two lines are telling:

“The evil mule with her fine teeth
eat the straw of the innocent babe”.

The evil mule did not recognize God’s gift lying on the straw, only saw the straw as fodder. It is a metaphor of a tendency to bypass the Son of the Most High born of Mary, to focus on a purely secular celebration where Christmas is synonymous with vacation, an excuse for gluttony and for consumerism. Globalized seasonal decorations that bear little connection with the manger in Luke are the symbols displayed. These say nothing about God with us in the ordinariness of life, fully present, fully incarnate, fully sovereign. Let us see and worship anew the Son of the Most High.



LUKE 2:8–20

DAY 14

A Long-Awaited Peace

COLOMBIA

Written by Daniel Salinas, Mesa Scholar

Colombian coffee is well known worldwide for its mild, soft flavor and strong aroma. This quality is the result of years of intentional hard work. Yet behind this beloved product lies the story of a nation that, alongside its many strengths and blessings, has also endured decades of internal conflict. Over the years, the conflict has evolved, with new armed groups and criminal networks contributing to continued instability in parts of the country. Violence, displacement, and the devastating loss of life have left deep wounds in many communities and placed enormous strain on families and the economy. For some, the pain can feel overwhelming, even as countless Colombians continue working courageously toward peace. The message of the angels to the shepherds the night of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, "news of great joy" (v. 10), includes the gift that every Colombian wants for Christmas: "on earth peace to men" (v. 14). Peace seems to be in short supply. However, because "a Savior has been born" (v. 11) there is still hope that someday, not too far in the future, we will get a taste of a country in peace. We dream of peasants being able to stay on their farms and not being forced to leave. We imagine children enjoying school instead of being recruited for illegal armies. We desire to be able to travel to so many natural wonders without the fear of kidnapping. We pray for a country without violence, with a judicial system clean of cartel influence, with a police force and army not occupied in the war but building up the country. The lives of the shepherds that dark night were changed forever for good, “glorifying and praising God" (v. 20). We pray for Colombians of all ages to meet Jesus and to make the message of the angels every day a reality. We long for the church to be an agent of peace, reconciliation, and restorative justice. Peace is in our hearts, our longings, our deep desires, our prayers, our music, our poems, everywhere we hear the bells of Christmas these days. Peace is what Colombians want for Christmas.



WEEK 3

God With Us in a Broken World



The Promise Beyond Darkness

BRAZIL

Written by Arnon Batista, Mesa Scholar

It's Sunday, September 13. The 22 million inhabitants of São Paulo wake up to an unusually rainy morning. We, as usual, drive to our church's meeting place and park on the same street we always do. As soon as we get out of the car, two men on a motorcycle pop out of nowhere. One of them gets off, points a gun at my chest and demands my unlocked phone and wedding ring, then proceeds to do the same to my wife. It all happened in less than a minute, yet the trauma triggered within that minute has stayed with us for months.

In the weeks following that fateful Sunday, we learned that many of our local friends have gone through similar experiences. A cloud of insecurity and fear hangs on the very air we breathe in São Paulo. In fact, millions of honest people living in major cities across Brazil share that sentiment, so much so that the battle against systemic crime figures as a central topic in the current presidential run.

What does any of the above have to do with Advent? When we think of Advent, especially Christmas, the images that come to mind typically include a baby in a manger, gifts under a tree, and feasting with family. Such scenes should be cherished and celebrated, of course. But they cannot account for the full magnitude of the arrival of God's ideal king, at least not how the Hebrew prophets envisioned it. When the prophets, led by the Spirit, imagined the coming king, they painted bold, grand, and even defiant canvases of a completely reconfigured world.

Isaiah 9:2–7 is one of those canvases, and one that exudes hope in the face of distress. Around 735–732 B.C., Assyria's ruthless army devastated the Israelite territories mentioned in Isaiah 9:1. About ten years later, the entire Northern Kingdom of Israel would collapse under the Eastern superpower. This oracle, however, anticipates a day when the darkness that settled in the land of Israel would be dispersed by light (v. 2). More specifically, God would restore and multiply the joy of his people (v. 3) by breaking political and military oppression (v. 4), putting an end to wartime violence (v. 5), and by raising up an ideal king who is here called a "child" and a "son" (v. 6).



The Promise Beyond Darkness

Written by Arnon Batista, Mesa Scholar

BRAZIL

This son of David comes as the crescendo in a symphony of divine interventions through children in Isaiah 7 and 8. The name of the child Immanuel (Isaiah 7) means “God with us.” The ideal Davidic son promised in the present oracle is “born to us” and “given to us” (9:6). The verbal resonance between these two sons tells us that the child here envisioned embodies the meaning of “God with us.”

This king’s famous titles (v. 6) confirm him as the chief conduit of God’s virtues for the benefit of submissive humanity. He is endowed with unmatchable wisdom (“Wonderful Counselor”), divinely given power (“Mighty God”), incredible longevity and care (“Everlasting Father”), and the capacity to perpetuate harmony (“Prince of Peace”). His peaceful kingdom would be characterized by what all leaders and civilizations of Isaiah’s day lacked: social justice and integrity (v. 7).

By confronting darkness with bold hope, Isaiah 9:2–7 invites us to enlarge our vision of Advent. The incarnation of Jesus Christ, son of David and son of God, signals that God is not done with the world. Darkness will not remain forever. Even the most responsible and well-meaning politicians and parties will not heal Brazil, the United States, or any other country for that matter. But we can hope in God and his ideal king, who is with us even in the present brokenness.

Less than a month after the traumatic events of September 13, we had a taste of that blessed presence. It came in the form of a blissful discovery: when the robbery happened, my wife was already carrying a baby in her womb. God spared our lives and our baby’s life amidst violence and trauma. We stand as witnesses of his goodness.

Out of the Chaos

Written by MB, Mesa Worker

AFRICA

In the midst of a broken world, a world where suffering and persecution are a reality for so many Jesus-followers, knowing that God is near can make all the difference. Knowing that God is near, no matter what the circumstances, can quiet fears and bring hope.

Over the past several years, we have trained church planters from some of the most difficult contexts in our region. These faithful brothers come and dedicate up to ten months to be trained in a secure location before going back to their mission field to spread the Gospel. And they come for training having already, in real and tangible ways, counted the cost of what it means to follow Jesus and to be His ambassador in areas that are hostile to the Gospel.

For these faithful brothers, their daily life feels a lot like Psalm 46. The Psalmist describes the earth giving way (v. 2), roaring waters and trembling mountains (v. 3), and raging nations and tottering kingdoms (v. 6). Psalm 46 is a picture of the realities and difficulties of this life: brokenness, chaos, problems, war, anger, rebellion, and much more. Yet amid all that, God is there. And God is there as a "very present help in trouble" (v. 1). God never denies the brokenness and suffering of this world. Instead, He promises His people that He is there with them and for them in their hardships.

When they need shelter and safety and stability, He does not direct them to look elsewhere but rather calls them to Himself, declaring that He is a refuge and fortress (vv. 1, 7, 11). He invites His people out of the chaos and into the stillness of knowing that no matter what the circumstances He is still God and He is still with them. Amid the chaos and uncertainty, the One who is exalted among the nations and in all the earth invites His beleaguered people to simply be still and know that He is God (v. 10).

And this brings us to the beauty of Advent.



Out of the Chaos

Written by MB, Mesa Worker

AFRICA

In the Incarnation, Jesus made His dwelling among us. Fully God and fully man, He came near to be with His people in the midst of their trials, suffering, and chaos. His coming was not sterile, guarded, or at a distance. He entered our broken world to be Immanuel—God with us. Present. Near. Caring. Helpful. And Jesus is still near today. Through the presence of His Spirit, whether you are a homemaker in Illinois or a church planter in a country hostile to the Gospel, Jesus is still with His people. And He is still there to help.

As I teach these faithful brothers, I can say with confidence that the nations will rage and hardships will come. But I can also declare with biblical certainty that "the Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress" (v. 11).

As we reflect upon the coming of Jesus this Advent season, may we, with the Psalmist, "be still and know that He is God." He is God and He is with us to help. In a broken world, a world where suffering and persecution are a reality for so many Jesus-followers, knowing that God is near can make all the difference. Knowing that God is near, no matter what the circumstances, can quiet fears and bring hope.

MATTHEW 1:18–23

DAY 17

A People of His Presence

Written by Elie Haddad, Hub Leader

LEBANON

Joseph's world had suddenly become unfamiliar. The future he had imagined with Mary seemed to have collapsed, and every available choice carried pain, shame, or loss. It was into this confusion, not after it was resolved, that God spoke: "Do not be afraid." The child Mary carried would be called Jesus, because he would save his people from their sins, and Emmanuel, because in him God had come to be with us.

In Lebanon, we know how quickly the familiar can become uncertain. War, displacement, economic pressure, and the departure of loved ones have marked our communities. Yet these realities do not tell our whole story. Around tables, in churches, and among neighbors, we also witness courage, hospitality, worship, and a stubborn hope that refuses to disappear.

Emmanuel speaks directly into this tension. God does not observe a broken world from a safe distance. In Jesus, he comes near. He enters the vulnerability of human life and knows what it is to live under threat, to become a refugee, and to experience rejection and suffering. God does not merely see our pain; in Christ, he has entered it.

But God's presence is more than companionship. Matthew joins two names: Emmanuel, "God with us," and Jesus, "the Lord saves." The One who comes near also comes to rescue us from the deepest fracture in our world, sin, which separates us from God and from one another. At the cross, Jesus bears our brokenness; in his resurrection, he opens the way to reconciliation, life, and hope.

This does not mean that every danger immediately disappears. Joseph still had difficult roads ahead. So do we. Yet we do not walk them alone, and suffering does not have the final word.



The promise of Emmanuel also changes how we inhabit a broken world. God's presence with us informs our presence with others. Having been met by Christ in our own vulnerability, we are called to draw near to those who suffer, not as people who possess easy answers, but as people who know that faithful presence can become a vessel of grace.

When the community of God lives this reality, hope becomes visible. We sit with those who grieve. We welcome displaced families. We share food and resources. We remain beside those whom others have forgotten. We listen before speaking, serve without seeking recognition, and work for reconciliation across the divisions that wound our society. These acts may appear ordinary, but they bear witness to an extraordinary truth: God has not abandoned this world.

MATTHEW 1:18–23

DAY 17

A People of His Presence

Written by Elie Haddad, Hub Leader

LEBANON

We are not Emmanuel; Jesus alone is God with us. Yet through his Spirit, the church becomes a people shaped by his presence and sent into the world. In Lebanon and beyond, our presence can point to his presence. Our hospitality can reflect his welcome. Our perseverance can testify to his faithfulness. Our life together can become a sign that even here, even now, God is with us, his kingdom has already broken into our world, and one day it will be revealed in all its fullness.

Prayer

Emmanuel, make us attentive to your presence in our suffering. Then shape us into a people who draw near to others with compassion, courage, and hope. May our life together bear witness that you have not abandoned this world. Amen.

What God Has Done

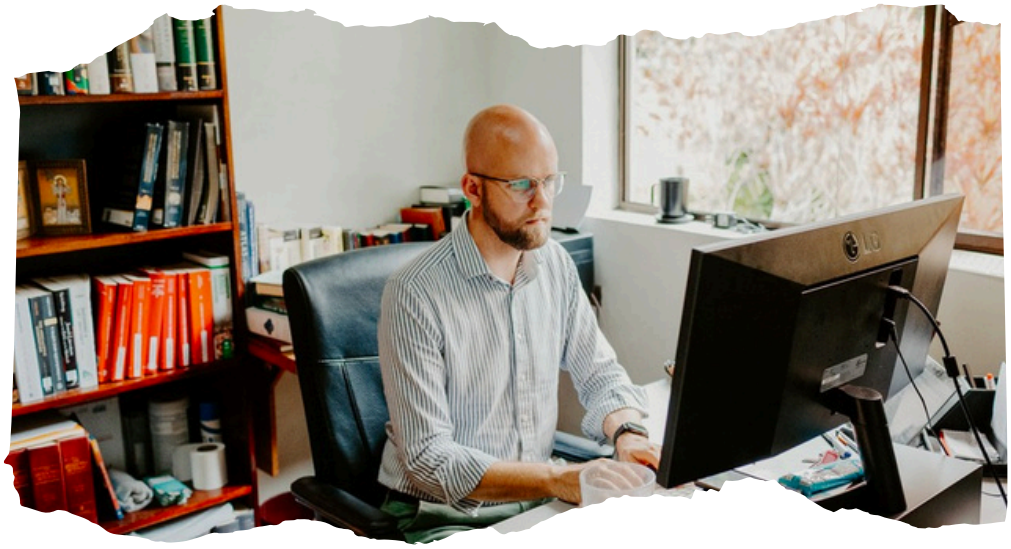
Written by Devlin McGuire, Mesa Scholar

COLOMBIA

In this passage, Zechariah gives praise to God after the birth of John the Baptist. Previously, an angel had told Zechariah that his wife would have a son to be named John (Luke 1:5–17). After John was born, and in response to God's fulfilled promises, Zechariah "was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke this prophecy" (1:67).

Yet much of the hymn does not fit our common conceptions of prophecy. The first part, or strophe, is in the past tense (1:68–75) and does not directly relate to Zechariah's son. The song reflects on God's faithful fulfillment of his promises to Israel through the house of David. Consider the verbs; they speak of what God has done. God has visited, redeemed, raised up, spoken, shown mercy, remembered, promised, given, and rescued. Zechariah does not repeat a single verb; instead, each one adds to his picture of the incredible work of God in raising up a Savior. For Zechariah, this event is so certain that he can speak of it as already accomplished. The second strophe turns to John the Baptist's role in the coming of the Messiah. John will "go before" the Lord and will "give knowledge" of salvation (1:76–77). And the Messiah will "give light" to those in darkness and "guide" the people into peace (1:79).

Zechariah's prophecy speaks powerful words to those in a broken world, and Zechariah himself lived in such a world. These events took place "in the days of King Herod of Judea" (1:5), a man who held the title of "king" but in reality answered to Rome. One Jewish text calls Herod "a wanton king…a man rash and perverse…He will kill both old and young, showing mercy to none" (Testament of Moses 6:2–4). Zechariah's world was also under the rule of Caesar Augustus (Luke 2:1). Augustus brought Rome out of years of civil war, and for this he was proclaimed in inscriptions and on coins as "savior," "son of god," and the bringer of "good news" (the same Greek word translated "gospel"). In this context, Zechariah declares that God has brought about a new Savior, the Son of God, who brings good news. This is not to say that Luke's conception of salvation is solely political; it is holistic, including the political, the social, and the spiritual.



What God Has Done

Written by Devlin McGuire, Mesa Scholar

COLOMBIA

In Colombia, where I serve, the broken world needs this same holistic salvation. The armed conflict between the government, paramilitary groups, guerrilla groups, and drug cartels started more than 60 years ago and has never completely stopped. About half a million people have been killed and over seven million forcibly displaced. A 2016 peace agreement with the FARC, the country's largest guerrilla group, brought hope for peace and, for a time, a reduction in violence. But that trend has reversed, and splinter groups have grown increasingly violent. This violence disproportionately affects those already marginalized, such as rural communities, the poor, and Indigenous peoples.

The Tejedoras de Mampuján, a group of Afro-Colombian women, remember this violence that displaced them and others through quilted art that moves from scenes of suffering to brightly colored depictions of hope. Their art is designed to promote forgiveness, healing, and reconciliation. They stand with Zechariah in prophetic witness to the work of God in our broken world. God has redeemed and will redeem us. God has remembered and will remember us. And God has given and will give us light and guide us into peace. God has visited us, and God is with us.



JOHN 1:4–5

DAY 19

The Light We Carry

Written by Bailey Thaworn, Mesa Worker

THAILAND

You're sitting at your desk grinding away at work emails and your to-do list when you look at the clock and realize what time it is. You're reminded again how much time got away from you when you walk outside and see a dark sky; the sun has already fallen from the sky. You blink your eyes, allowing them a few moments to adjust. What was once light is now completely dark.

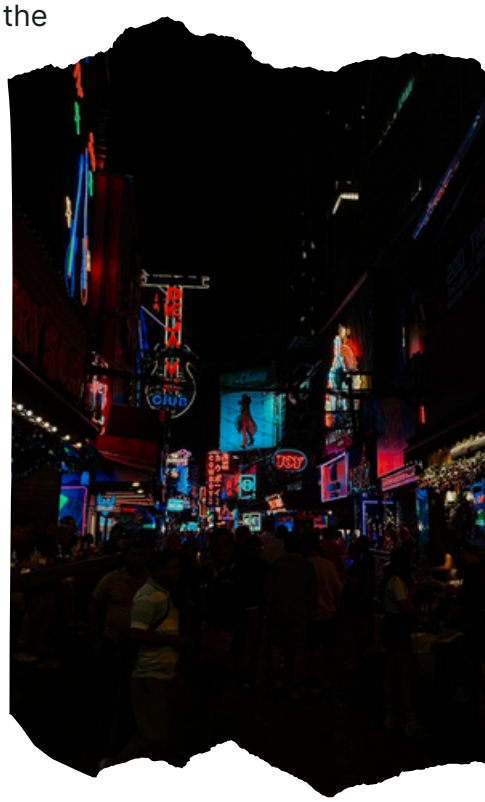
We need light in our daily lives—to open our front door, to do our makeup, and to measure ingredients. We need light, but not just in the traditional sense. We need Light.

John 1:4–5 says, "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."

This passage reminds us that Jesus is our life, and this life is our light. And when we carry around this kind of light, darkness can't overtake it. Our eyes never have to adjust.

In Bangkok, where Christians are a small minority, I'm reminded daily of the darkness in this spiritual landscape. I see spirit houses in my neighborhood, amulets around my neighbors' necks, and flowers left at shrines along my commute downtown. These everyday reminders of the gods of this city deepen my longing for my neighbors to know the light and life of Christ. And on some days, that longing feels especially heavy.

Each week I walk through red-light districts where my friends, Thai women engaged in sex work, are too often treated as objects rather than people of dignity and worth. I see the darkness of exploitation and injustice. I journey into the darkness. I pray through the darkness. Here, the darkness becomes even more tangible.



I live and walk among people whose lives, like all of ours, are touched by the brokenness of this world. And yet, His word says that in Him light still shines. In Him, I don't have to be afraid because the darkness can't compete with the light.

In a favorite translation of mine, the VOICE, John 1:4–5 says, "His breath filled all things with a living, breathing light—a light that thrives in the depths of darkness, blazes through murky bottoms. It cannot and will not be quenched."

We have access to a living, breathing light. Inhaling. Exhaling. It's breathing! It's alive! We carry this light with us. You carry this light with you. Do you know how powerful that is? Be encouraged! His Word says that this light has the power to blaze through murky bottoms and can never be quenched.

JOHN 1:4–5

DAY 19

The Light We Carry

Written by Bailey Thaworn, Mesa Worker

THAILAND

A few weeks ago, my ministry partners and I got the opportunity to visit an older auntie who has been living in a ministry that houses elderly individuals. This auntie has called this place home for 6 months now, after she left sex work and said yes to Jesus. When we got out of the car after arriving at the ministry, I was shocked by what I saw. In just 6 months, she looked years younger, her face glowing. She gave us a tour of the ministry and showed us her room, sharing how grateful she was to no longer be unhoused and selling herself. As we visited with her, she hugged us saying, "I don't want to go anywhere. My dream is to stay here forever." She has truly experienced the Light, and you can see it on her face. Like my auntie, why would any of us ever want to leave the Light after it's transformed us? Wouldn't we want to stay in the Light with Him forever?

How does it feel to have access to such a powerful light? To me, it feels safe. It makes me feel protected. Light shows me where to go, what's in front of me, and who's beside me. The light we carry cannot be quenched. The light we carry fills us with life in Him. Today you may find yourself in a dark place or in a dark season, but don't forget: the darkness has not overcome the light.

Pray for the Light to continue to change hearts, transform lives, and show people who they are in Him.

2 CORINTHIANS 4:6–10

DAY 20

Light in Dark Places

Written by Lisa Befus, Mesa Worker and Board Member

COSTA RICA

With rolling blackouts lasting up to five days at a time due to the current energy shortage, darkness arrives early in Cuba. Against that dark sky, the stars stand out—a striking sight in the midst of hardship.

Advent invites us to look for the light of Christ even while darkness remains. In Cuba, that hope takes shape in lives transformed by His love.

On a recent visit, Emilia* described the season of darkness in her life before she saw the light of Christ. Years ago, her marriage was in shambles. Her heart was wounded by betrayal and full of bitterness. Desperation finally drove her to accept a neighbor's repeated invitation to visit a house church. Over several months of conversations, she gradually found hope in Jesus and healing for her heart. For a long time, she kept her decision to follow Jesus a secret from her husband, fearing his reaction. When she finally told Roberto* that she planned to continue attending church, he exploded with the anger she had feared. How dare she? Didn't she understand the risk to his military career, their livelihood, and their reputation? He demanded that she not go!

But the change in her life was unmistakable and compelling. After two years of strong resistance, Roberto announced that he would visit church with his wife. Eventually, he too surrendered his life to Christ.

When word reached the authorities that he had become a Christ follower, Roberto was stripped of his commission as a naval officer. And their housing. And his pension. He would never be hired for another job recognized by the government. Their son would be denied a university education. Some family members and friends distanced themselves as though the social consequences of Roberto and Emilia's faith might be contagious.

Despite those difficulties, Emilia's eyes light up as she describes how God restored their marriage and transformed their family. She and Roberto are living examples of 2 Corinthians 4:6–10, which begins, "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ." Today, Roberto pastors a church and serves on the leadership team of a network of churches. Emilia prepares and leads Bible studies—in person when possible and by cell phone when it is not.



Light in Dark Places

Written by Lisa Befus, Mesa Worker and Board Member

COSTA RICA

2 Corinthians 4:7 continues, “But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.” The descriptions in verses 8–9 resonate with the experiences of our Cuban friends: “hard pressed on every side,” “perplexed,” “persecuted,” and “struck down.” Current fuel shortages have reduced access to transportation, food, reliable drinking water, basic hygiene, and medical care for everyone on the island. Many elderly people have been left in charge of young grandchildren without the food, money, or emotional reserve to even care for themselves. Mosquito-borne illnesses have reached near-epidemic levels. Parents worry about how disruptions in education will impact their children’s futures.

In these circumstances, it can be increasingly difficult not to feel “crushed, in despair, abandoned, or destroyed.” Yet Paul holds suffering and hope together: “hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.” Despite facing the same circumstances as their neighbors, our friends respond with hope. Verse 10: “We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.” Physical suffering, hunger, thirst, and disease remind us of our bodily vulnerability to pain and even death. But as followers of Jesus, we also look forward to being raised with him to life. And that hope sustains us.

In this season of Advent, let’s pray for God’s sustaining encouragement for our brothers and sisters around the world who are reflecting the light of God’s love in dark places. May the life of Jesus be revealed in them and bring hope even amid suffering.

*Names have been changed

WEEK 4

God With Us for the World



REVELATION 21:1–5

DAY 21

God in Our Neighborhood

COLOMBIA

Written by Guillermo & Wanda Mejia, Mesa Scholars

Our neighborhood nowadays is in Colombia, a country of remarkable beauty, rich traditions, and resilient people, yet one that has also experienced profound suffering. Like many nations, Colombia bears the wounds of a broken world, including a history of exploitation by foreign powers, systemic economic injustice, narcotrafficking, corruption, and violence. Even religious institutions have at times contributed to these wounds rather than reflecting the hope and healing of Christ.

In this country, where Catholic traditions have deeply shaped the country's religious and cultural life, the *"novenas"* are a beloved nine-day Christmas tradition of nightly community gatherings leading up to Christmas Eve, symbolizing the nine months of Mary's pregnancy. They include Colombian holiday treats such as *natilla,* a custard made with *panela,* and *buñuelos,* deep-fried cheesy dough balls. Families and friends gather around the nativity scene to read daily prayers and sing traditional carols, such as *"Mi Burrito Sabanero"* that chants of going on a donkey to Bethlehem to see baby Jesus. It is a beautiful tradition that reminds us of the joy and excitement of having Jesus, God with us, living in our neighborhood. But Revelation reminds us that just as wonderful as having Jesus come into our world is God's promise that He is coming and indeed has come into our neighborhood to live and reign!

These traditions reflect our inkling for the unceasing excitement of having the deepest longings and laments thoroughly satisfied as ascertained by God Himself in Revelation 21, after He will have dealt with finality with the sources of tears, death, mourning, crying and pain: all gone, the first order of things, gone, gone.

At Christmas, we celebrate Emmanuel, God-with-us in Jesus, which gives us real glimpses of the fulfillment of this thunderous prophecy coming from the very throne of God. Jesus came and lived among us, and left his Holy Spirit to permanently dwell in every believer. So, we do have the joy of witnessing God's indwelling today, albeit partially, as God's love restores broken homes, heals abuse, and gives purpose and hope to the lost. We have seen the blessing of Christians choosing to live in neighborhoods marked by hardship, bearing witness to the light of Christ that transforms lives. We have seen students marvel at the transforming grace of God, discovering that through Jesus, hearts once burdened by sin are made new in His sight. But to see this work complete, without having to battle the dark forces, is something that we yearn and long for.



REVELATION 21:1–5

DAY 21

God in Our Neighborhood

Written by Guillermo & Wanda Mejia, Mesa Scholars

COLOMBIA

And so it is that we delight in the fact that God has moved into our neighborhood, in Jesus. At Christmas, we celebrate the promise: “Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men and women!” We do that now, partially and with certainty, and live in anticipation of the fullness of God among us. This delight emboldens us to continue serving alongside our Colombian brothers and sisters, bearing witness together to the hope of Christ in our neighborhoods and around the world.

GENESIS 12:1–3

DAY 22

A Bigger Promise

UNITED STATES

Written by Bobby Booze, Mesa Worker

The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.
I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you;
I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.
I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

As we enter Christmas week, it may seem a bit odd to focus on Genesis 12 today. However, the promises God made to Abram are never more relevant than when the incarnate Jesus was born into our world. And there are many parallels between Abram and Jesus.

In obedience, Abram left his comfortable home and family to go to a new land. He and his descendants became a great nation designed to be a blessing to all peoples on earth. However, the ultimate fulfillment of this promise would one day come through Abram's promised offspring, Jesus (Galatians 3:16). Similarly, Jesus left the glory of his heavenly home to humble himself and live as a servant. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

For much of his journey, Abram lived as a sojourner in tents. Jesus was born in a manger and spent much of his earthly life "with no place to lay his head."

God changed Abram's name from "exalted father" to Abraham, "father of many nations." His name did become great, and his journey of obedience became an example of faith for all believers.

The Father also, through an angel, gave Jesus his name, which means "Yahweh saves." The Father gave Jesus the place of highest honor and the name above all names, the greatest name of all.

Finally, Jesus was the ultimate fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham that all peoples on earth would be blessed through him. The whole Bible tells the story of God using this family as the means to reconcile the nations to himself with Jesus' life, death and resurrection providing the way.



A Bigger Promise

Written by Bobby Booze, Mesa Worker

UNITED STATES

In Galatians, we see that as each of us trusts in Jesus, we become part of this family. We will join the vast crowd that will be too great to count in Revelation 7—people from every nation, tribe, people and language.

The question then comes—how can we also be a blessing to the nations? On one hand, Mesa Global and other missions live this out as we send global workers among the nations of the world to proclaim and spread the Good News. My wife Debbie and I had the privilege of living in Hungary for 22 years and have traveled to over 50 nations, joining God's work among all these peoples. It's a joy and privilege to partner with God in what He's doing around the world!

However, the nations are also coming to us, and we have the opportunity to bless these people groups in our own cities. For example, we've watched around 1,000 Afghan refugees come to our hometown in the past 5 years. We've been able to build deep relationships with numerous families and bless them with practical help, friendship, and prayer.

We've also had the privilege of doing Discovery Bible Studies with three families and have seen God at work in profound ways among these Muslim friends. Earlier this year, we had the joy and honor of baptizing a young couple who chose to begin a life of following Jesus.

Praise God that the promise of Genesis 12:1–3 continues to be fulfilled today! Through faith in Jesus, we have become part of Abraham's family and heirs of God's promise. And now we have the privilege of participating in God's mission to bless all peoples on earth.

We celebrate the blessing of Christmas not only by receiving God's blessing but by becoming a blessing to the nations. May we be faithful to do our part!

God's promise to Abraham was always bigger than Abraham, bigger than Israel, and bigger than any one generation. It was a promise to bless all the peoples of the earth through Jesus Christ. And at Christmas, we celebrate the arrival of the One through whom that promise would ultimately be fulfilled.



ISAIAH 49:5–6

DAY 23

From Mary's Womb

Written by Rawee B, Mesa Worker

THAILAND

The holiday season in Thailand is the busiest time for ministry. It is a time when churches have many opportunities to give gifts and share the greatest gift of the Gospel in schools, homes, and communities through music, drama, and celebrations. Amid the rush, I sense a need to pause and return to the heart of Christmas.

When the season of Advent arrives, I take the opportunity every year to ground myself by engaging in a visio divina of the art piece Mary and Eve by Sister Grace Remington. I prayerfully and slowly focus on the details of this piece, allowing it to speak to and permeate my heart. I ponder the turmoil of creation, the tension of life, and the truth of the Gospel.

The Turmoil of Creation

Eve stands in shame, the fruit still in her hand and the serpent wrapped around her leg. Her shame speaks of the turmoil we experience daily in our lives: all things are not as they should be. We feel it in broken relationships, in weary bodies, in ministries that struggle, and in our own hearts. Like Eve, we often hide and cover ourselves rather than come into the light.

Where do you experience the turmoil of things not being as they should be this Advent? What are you holding onto or hiding?

The Tension of Life

Mary offers Eve an empathetic invitation. She is an unmarried virgin, carrying a child in her womb that she cannot fully explain to others. Mary touches Eve's face and draws Eve's hand to her womb, inviting Eve to feel and realize the tension she holds. Inside that womb is the one who will crush the serpent's head and fulfill the promise of the proto-evangelium in Genesis 3:15. Mary does not condemn Eve. She invites her to touch the promise.

Where are you living in tension right now, holding a promise of God that others may not understand? Who is the Eve in your life whom God is inviting you to approach with empathy rather than judgment?



ISAIAH 49:5–6

DAY 23

From Mary's Womb

Written by Rawee B, Mesa Worker

THAILAND

The Truth of the Gospel

Isaiah 49 speaks of the Servant formed from the womb to bring Jacob back to God. Yet the Lord says that is too light a thing. His salvation is meant to reach the end of the earth. When Simeon held the infant Jesus in the temple, he proclaimed this same truth: Jesus is a light for revelation to the Gentiles (Luke 2:32). The child in Mary's womb is the Servant for Israel, for Eve, and for all the nations.
In what ways has your vision of what God wants to do in you, your church, or your ministry been too small?

Awaiting His Second Advent

This warm and inviting art piece depicts the reconciliation of the turmoil and tension in awaiting the first Advent. We now await His second Advent. We still feel the turmoil and live in the tension, but we hold to the truth that He will return. And as we wait, Christ calls each one of us, our churches, and our ministries to be a light to the nations while we wait.

How is waiting for Christ's return shaping the way you live and serve today? Where is God calling you to be a light this season?

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of Mary, the Promised One, may you shine your light into our lives so that your light would shine forth to the nations. Bless the sharing of your Advent story as many in Thailand and around the world hear the Gospel. May hearts, minds, and eyes be turned to you with joy and hope. We await your coming again, when all things will be made new. In your name we pray. Amen.

LUKE 2:8–14

DAY 24

The Roar of Christmas

Written by Brian Rice,
Director of Leadership Development

UNITED STATES

In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, when Lucy, the youngest of the siblings, learns that Aslan, the King of the world, is not a person but a Lion, she admits that she would be afraid of a lion and asks, *"Is he – quite safe?"* Mr. Beaver says, *"Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King."*

There is a tendency and temptation for us to want a tame lion, a safe Savior, a comfortable Lord, and a standard Christmas. We have heard this story so often that it has become cozy and comfortable. We need to hear, once again, the roar of the Lion in the newborn wrapped in cloths.

My work is primarily with those God has called to provide leadership in the global church. Everywhere Mesa Global works, the need for servant leadership is enormous. The challenges and opportunities facing the mission of Christ are enormous. Christmas is about a New Kind of Leader who has been born. A leader who left his place of greatness, took on our lowly humanity, descended to all the indignities of human nature, who would face constant opposition from those who loved the darkness more than the light.

In Matthew 20:20–28, Jesus teaches and models the way of a new kind of leadership. Servant Leadership that suffers and sacrifices so that others will flourish. About the pattern of worldly leadership, Jesus simply says to all who would lead in his name—NOT SO WITH YOU. The community of Mesa Global resonates with this NOT SO WITH YOU message of Jesus.

From beginning to its end (and the real ending comes thirty-three years later), the Christmas story is counter-cultural and counter-intuitive. The upside-down kingdom of God has arrived. And oh, how it has arrived!

It has arrived in a baby, born to a nondescript couple, birthed in an out-of-the-way village, in a barn (or cave) in an obscure nook on planet earth.



LUKE 2:8–14

DAY 24

The Roar of Christmas

Written by Brian Rice,
Director of Leadership Development

UNITED STATES

It has arrived, announced by an angel and enhanced by a host of supportive angelic voices in the first Hallelujah Chorus.

It has arrived with the message of Good News…of a Great Joy…For all the People…Peace on Earth… the Favor of God With Us!

It has arrived and been given to the most unexpected group—shepherds—those hanging out at the bottom of the social ladder of respectability.

It has arrived in the form of a baby. Talk about appearances that are deceiving! A baby lying in a feeding trough for animals! Indignity of indignities! How sad! How pathetic! For any baby! But this baby… this baby is not any baby. This baby is the Savior…the Messiah…the Lord.

It's inconceivable. It's ridiculous. It just doesn't make any sense at all.

No wonder the Christmas hymn writers struggled to find words sufficient enough to communicate what is going on.

In a modern Christmas hymn (How Many Kings), the Canadian band, Downhere asks,

"How many kings stepped down from their thrones?
How many lords have abandoned their homes?
How many greats have become the least for me?
And how many gods have poured out their hearts
To romance a world that is torn all apart?
How many Fathers gave up their Sons for me?"

The answer—only one!

Don't let this Christmas be safe and tame. Don't let the all too familiar story breed boredom…the "been there, done that, heard it before" attitude.

For it is not a tame Savior and Lord in that manger. It is the fierce, overwhelming love of God with you to save you from your sins. To restore to you all that has been lost. And to make all things new.

What MUST you do this Christmas? Do what the shepherds did and run to that manger and see what God has done. Believe all over again. Fall on your knees. Hear the angels sing, *"Glory to God in the highest!"* Shout it out loud with them, at the top of your lungs.

Let the songs of Christmas roar through your season. And know more deeply than ever the peace and favor of God with you and for you.

LUKE 2:25–32

DAY 25

Promise, Presence, and Peoples

PHILIPPINES

Written by Steven Guest, Mesa Scholar

Few people celebrate Christmas quite like Filipinos. Christmas music begins playing while the "ber months" have barely begun. *Parols*, star-shaped lanterns, appear in windows and along streets. Families make plans to come home, sometimes traveling great distances to be together. Churches prepare special services, many communities observe Simbang Gabi, and tables are prepared for Noche Buena. Christmas is a season of light, family, generosity, and joyful expectation.

In some ways, that sense of waiting and expectation can help us appreciate Simeon in Luke 2.

Luke describes Simeon as "righteous and devout." He was "waiting for the consolation of Israel," trusting that God would fulfill his ancient promises (v. 25). We do not know how many years Simeon waited. But one day, prompted by the Holy Spirit, he entered the temple as Mary and Joseph brought in the infant Jesus.

Taking Jesus in his arms, Simeon declared that his waiting was over: "For my eyes have seen your salvation" (v. 30).

But then Simeon said something remarkable. The salvation he held in his arms was not for Israel alone. God had prepared it "in the sight of all nations." Jesus would be "a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel" (vv. 31–32).

God had come to be with us—but he had come for the world.

Simeon was echoing a theme woven throughout Scripture. God had promised Abraham that "all families on earth" would be blessed through him (Gen. 12:3). Through Isaiah, God promised a Servant who would be "a light for the Gentiles," carrying his salvation "to the ends of the earth" (Isa. 49:6). Now Simeon held that promised Savior in his arms.

That truth gives special meaning to the lights of Christmas. A Filipino parol traditionally recalls the star of Bethlehem. But perhaps its light can also remind us of Simeon's words. Jesus is not merely the light of our homes, our families, our churches, or even our nation. He is the Light for the nations.
And that means Christmas should turn our attention outward.



LUKE 2:25–32

DAY 25

Promise, Presence, and Peoples

PHILIPPINES

Written by Steven Guest, Mesa Scholar

Filipino Christmas celebrations often emphasize pagbibigay—giving. Filipinos prepare gifts, welcome visitors, share food, remember relatives, and send something home to those they love. Yet Christians have something infinitely greater to share. Having received Christ, we have been entrusted with the good news of Christ.

For some, participating in God's mission will mean crossing oceans, cultures, and languages to make Christ known. For others, it will mean discipling young people, teaching Scripture, training pastors, equipping servant leaders, supporting missionaries, giving generously, or faithfully witnessing to neighbors, coworkers, classmates, and relatives. A Filipino working overseas may discover that God has placed him or her among people from nations that might otherwise be difficult to reach. A young believer may begin by sharing Christ with a classmate. A church may discover that God has blessed it not simply so that it can flourish, but so that through it others may flourish in Christ.

The Incarnation moves outward.

So when the parols shine, families gather, gifts are exchanged, and familiar Christmas songs fill the air, remember Simeon holding Jesus in the temple.

His waiting was over.

God had come.

And the Savior in his arms was "a light for revelation to the Gentiles."

This Christmas, perhaps the question is not simply, "What has God given us in Christ?" Maybe we should also ask: "Since God has come to us in Christ, how is he calling us to carry his light to others?" God with us—for the world.



MATTHEW 28:18–20

DAY 26

Truth for All Nations

Written by Kathy Myatt, Mesa Scholar Member Care Coordinator

BRAZIL

As the Member Care Coordinator for Mesa Scholars, I have the privilege of knowing these theological educators working in seminaries all over the world. God has called and equipped these brothers and sisters to fulfill Jesus' command specifically to teach and to disciple those who will become another generation of pastors and leaders. These are not ivory-tower intellectuals pondering esoteric philosophical mysteries (though they could). Rather, they work to bring Biblical truth to everyday practical realities that influence how the church functions and grows.

While in Brazil as missionaries, my husband and I encountered syncretistic practices by many who went to Mass on Sunday and frequented Spiritist centers regularly. Evangelicals were deeply weary of all things Catholic and rigorously avoided knowing anything about them. It was vital that future pastors understand the beliefs of the largest denomination in South America. We took students to the Basilica devoted to Our Lady of Aparecida—where people crawled on their knees to gaze upon a statue of Mary the size of a Barbie doll. We passed through a room where candles in the form of body parts could be purchased so prayers could be offered for whatever ailed the buyer. This experience provided fodder for important discussions at seminary about the nature of God, of salvation, and of truth.

Truth. Today many people don't believe in objective truth. Is it a matter of perception? Context? Feelings? Just prior to his crucifixion Jesus prayed to the Father for his disciples:

"Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world… I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word." (John 17:17–20) Jesus prayed for us, who have heard his word passed down through the ages through his disciples making disciples.

And today our Mesa Scholars are scattered across the world, fulfilling God's call to teach, train, and equip the church and her leaders for carrying out the Great Commission. As I pray for these beloved brothers and sisters, I picture them in Ethiopia, Ghana, Costa Rica, England, Israel, the Philippines, Brazil, Guatemala, Italy, Colombia…and all over the world. They have left families behind, learned new languages, and acquired cultural awareness to speak in a relevant way that others could hear. Why? Because God is reaching out to establish his kingdom throughout the entire planet. May he be glorified.



MATTHEW 1:18–23; JOHN 1:14

CHRISTMAS DAY

God With Us

UNITED STATES

Written by John Bernard, Mesa Global President

Before going to Spain as missionaries, my wife and I went to Costa Rica for language school. One day, in a conversation with our neighbor, I said, “Estoy embarazada.” He gave me a strange look. I thought I was saying, “I’m embarrassed.” In fact, I said, “I am pregnant.” Not my finest moment. Becoming a missionary means being willing to humble ourselves as we move into a new culture.

The Christmas story tells of a far greater humbling. John 1:14 says, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.” The Message translation has, “He moved into the neighborhood.” The Word through whom all things were made had to learn his first words on his mother’s knee. He spoke with a Galilean accent. He was a carpenter in a small town. God didn’t stay at a safe distance from the suffering in this world; in love, he humbled himself and came to be with us.

We usually picture the events of Christmas in sublime terms. All is calm, all is bright, round yon virgin, mother and child, not a blemish or wrinkle in sight. Even the cattle are lowing softly. But in his Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius offers a different picture. The Trinity looks down on the face of the earth and sees people of every nation, some at peace and some at war, some being born and some dying; people living in blindness, wounding and killing each other, and headed for destruction. And the Trinity decides to enter in. The wide lens of God’s redemptive purpose for all nations zooms in on one small house in one small town and one young woman.

Matthew’s Gospel opens with Jesus’ birth, the coming of “God with us.” It closes with the Great Commission for us to make disciples of all nations and the promise, “I am with you always.” John’s Gospel begins with the “Word made flesh, moving into the neighborhood.” It concludes with: “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (John 20:21). The manger is the beginning. It leads directly to a cross and a commission, which again widens the lens to all nations.



MATTHEW 1:18-23; JOHN 1:14

CHRISTMAS DAY

God With Us

UNITED STATES

Written by John Bernard, Mesa Global President

We can't do what Jesus did, but he sends us as he was sent. We are sent to particular people in particular places. I think of Mesa workers and partners bringing hope at the front lines in Ukraine, lifting hearts in flood-ravaged villages in South Asia, strengthening the church in Slovenia, Cuba, and Colombia... The list is a long one. They move into the neighborhood. They build relationships. They share Jesus.

Think about your neighborhood. Have you really moved in, so that you live with your neighbors, or do you just live nearby? What would it look like for you to enter in more deeply, learning someone's world, their story, their hopes and fears? Or even learning their actual language, as the nations have literally moved into our own neighborhoods? Could you consider inviting someone to your table in the coming year, someone who would not normally be there?

Jesus said: "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." The God who moved into our neighborhood now sends us into the neighborhoods of the world, and he does not send us alone. "And surely I am with you always, to the end of the age."