

Friends of the Center

On Advent and Epiphany

The full Christmas season begins with Advent and ends with Epiphany, which is certainly longer than most people tend to keep holiday lights up now-a-days. Often the season is marked with happiness, decorations, gifts, holiday music, and traditional foods. Yet, the full season is more complex and not entirely filled with only positivity and good vibes. The full picture Luke & Matthew generously share discuss political shifts, uncertainty, ordinance-compliance, miraculous pregnancies, travel, prophecies, and a marginalization that forces one particular traveler to give birth in a stable. *The time came for [Mary's] baby to be born. She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger; because there was no lodging available for them,* Luke tells us.

The LIVING HOPE the people awaited made HIS way into a complex reality filled with uncertainty, pain, politics, and expectation. A healthy and accurate view of today's full realities ought to recognize that today's times continue to hold uncertainty, pain, politics, and expectation. To gloss over the pain of some or choosing to look only in the direction of joy and celebration is not in alignment with the full witness of these gospels. As one body of Christ, we must choose to believe in the abundance God promised us all without getting distracted with shiny riches within our reach or any momentary rewards of this world. Our call as one's awaiting the Messiah's return is to be *a-la-expectativa* in expectation, to how The WORD continues to break into this world and liberate captives, house the unhoused, feed the hungry, and welcome the stranger.

This is the sacred offering and true worship that Christmas embraces.

As people flee lands they can never return to, as people rebuild what seems utterly destroyed, as people seek to love God and love their neighbor, may this Christmas season include the courageous choice to press onward in the midst of what seems more and more difficult and complex.

May God's Spirit that led the Holy Family through an unplanned pregnancy, into an unlikely birthing space and then a foreign land, guide our actions in order to hold the necessary spaces for those God is calling us to serve and worship alongside with.

May this season help us expand our understanding of how God welcomes all, strangers and friends and may God love fill us with surprising, complex, and courageous fullness in the Christmas season.

May it be so. AMEN.

– Rev. Dr. Alexandra Zareth

