



## **An Advent Prayer Vigil for Refuge and Home**

Offered by Episcopal Migration Ministries

**OFFICIANT:** Jesus said: “Come, you that are blessed by God, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me...” (Matthew 25:34-35, NRSV)

**ALL:** **We hold up in prayer the 123 million forcibly displaced people in the world today.**

**OFFICIANT:** Jesus said: “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30, NRSV).

**ALL:** **With God’s help may we welcome the stranger, that all people may know the comfort of a home, the benefit of an education, the dignity of a job, safety, security, and the love of community.**

### **A MEDITATION<sup>1</sup>**

**READER 1:** When the world was dark and the city was quiet, you came. You came to us quietly. And no one knew. Only the few who dared to believe that God might do something different. Will you do the same this Christmas, Lord?

**READER 2:** Will you come into the darkness of tonight's world; not the friendly darkness as when sleep rescues us from tiredness, but the fearful darkness, in which people have stopped believing—that immigration raids will end, or that food will come, or that depression will cease, or that anyone cares. Will you come into that darkness and do something different to relieve your people of the heaviness of death and despair?

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<sup>1</sup> The meditation is adapted from *Cloth for the Cradle*. © 1997 WGRG, Iona Community, Glasgow, Scotland. Used with permission.

- READER 3:** Will you come into the quietness of this city, not the friendly quietness as when lovers hold hands, but the fearful silence when the phone has not rung, or it has, and brought tragic news; the letter has not come, or it has and said what was most feared?
- READER 4:** Will you come into that darkness and do something different, not to distract, but to embrace your people? And will you come into the dark corners and the quiet places of our lives?
- READER 5:** We ask this not because we are guilt-ridden, or maybe we are, but we seek some kind of relief, which feels impossible during the raw and brutal depths of despair and grief. We ask this because the peace we long for depends on us, once again, being as open and vulnerable to you as you were to us, when you came as a newborn, trusting human hands to hold their maker.
- READER 6:** When the world was dark, and the city was quiet, you came. You came to us quietly. Do the same this season, Lord.

## **CONFESSION**

**OFFICIANT:** Let us confess our sins against God and our neighbor.

**ALL:** **Loving and all-knowing God, we humbly ask mercy for the times we fail to offer hospitality to those in our world who suffer injustice, oppression, and poverty, and for the times we lack courage to address the root causes of these systems; for the times we give in to despair and resignation when confronted with the injustice of our world; for the times we allow our fears to triumph over the call to solidarity. We confess these sins and ask for your forgiveness. Open our hearts to hear the cries of your suffering people that we may be your hands, your heart, and the means by which your healing love is made manifest in the world. Amen.**

**OFFICIANT:** May God hear our plea, receive our remorse, soften our stiff hearts, forgive us with God's unending mercy, and help us to love as God loves.

## **READINGS**

**READER 7:** A reading from the prophet Isaiah (40:28-31).

Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

**OFFICIANT & PEOPLE:** *A Song of Our True Nature (Julian of Norwich)*

Christ revealed our frailty and our falling,  
our trespasses and our humiliations.  
Christ also revealed his blessed power,  
his blessed wisdom and love.  
He protects us as tenderly and

as sweetly when we are in greatest need;  
he raises us in spirit and turns everything  
to glory and joy without ending.  
God is the ground and the substance,  
the very essence of nature;  
God is the true father and mother of natures.  
We are all bound to God by nature,  
and we are all bound to God by grace.  
And this grace is for all the world,  
because it is our precious mother, Christ.  
For this fair nature was prepared by Christ  
for the honor and nobility of all,  
and for the joy and bliss of salvation.

**READER 8:** A reading from the first chapter of the Gospel according to John.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The Word was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through God, and without God not one thing came into being. What has come into being in God was life, and the life was the light of all people.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. She was in the world, and the world came into being through her; yet the world did not know her. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only child, full of grace and truth. From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.

## **REFLECTION<sup>2</sup>**

**READER 1:** It's the most wonderful time of the year!

**READER 2:** Only it's not.  
Not for everyone.  
Not for those for whom violence has destroyed their home.  
Not when you have had to flee with only the clothes on your back.  
Not when you have had to leave your country and live on the run.  
Not when your body is deprived of food and clean water.  
Not when you feel all alone even in a crowd.  
Not when you are not sure where you will sleep this night.  
Not when you are wracked with fear for your safety, when the risk of rape or theft or death resides in every moment of life.

**READER 3:** It's the most wonderful time of the year?

**READER 4:** No, it's not. For many the effort to smile and say "Merry Christmas" holds a grief that surpasses all grief, the loss of family, home, friends, and country.

**READER 5:** It's the most wonderful time of the year.

**READER 6:** Only it's not.  
Not for families separated.

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<sup>2</sup> This reflection is adapted from a meditation written by the Rev. Diane Hendricks. Used with permission from the author.

Not for people caged in detention.  
Not for asylum-seekers turned away at the border.  
Not for refugees seeing another year pass without hope.  
Not for those living in fear in our country—of xenophobic violence,  
of deportation, of their family never being able to join them.

**READER 7:** In truth, it has never been the most wonderful time of the year. Certainly not in the days surrounding that first Christmas so long ago. The story of the birth of Jesus is not to be told with yuletide merriment. It is the story of a teenage girl, pregnant with a child that is not her husband's.

**READER 8:** It is the story of a child born in a dirty animal stall.

**READER 1:** It is the story of a family of refugees who had to flee their homeland so that their child would not be killed.

**READER 2:** It is the story of one sent into the world in peace who was condemned to death.

**READER 3:** It is the story of a light sent to shine in the darkness, which the world attempted to snuff out.

**READER 4:** It is the story of God's never-ending, self-giving mercy which was rejected and condemned.

**READER 5:** In the great work the "Messiah," Handel quotes the prophet Isaiah, proclaiming that Jesus was "despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." Even as we approach the manger, we see the shadow of the cross.

**READER 6:** It is not the most wonderful time of the year.

**READER 7:** Only it is! .... It is:

If we forget about the tinsel and the trees.  
If we forget about the holly jolly tidings.

**READER 8:** If we forget about the presents and the ornaments and the trappings.  
And remember.

**READER 1:** Remember the story. Mary was alone and afraid.  
But God was with her and exalted her among women.

**READER 2:** Joseph was disgraced. But God revealed in Joseph's cause for disgrace  
God's plan to save the world.

**READER 3:** The world was in darkness. But God sent the light of life to shine.

**READER 4:** The lowly were imprisoned. But Jesus set them free.

**READER 5:** The blind wandered aimlessly. But Christ gave them eyes to see.

**READER 6:** The lame were rejected. But through the Holy One they were made to leap and dance.

**READER 7:** The deaf were confined to silence. But the song of life unstopped their ears.

**READER 8:** The sorrowful grieved. But God wipes away our tears.

**ALL:** **We were alone. But in Jesus Christ, Emmanuel, God is with us.**

**OFFICIANT:** The people rejected God.

**ALL:** **But God embraces us.**

**OFFICIANT:** The world crucified Christ.

**ALL:** **But God would not allow that to be the last word and gave us the sure hope of the resurrection. With God's help we can welcome the stranger and be a sign of new life to the broken and suffering.**

### ***PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE***

**OFFICIANT:** In the spirit of this season let us ask God for the wisdom to hear, the courage to respond, and compassion to help displaced people around the world...God, hear our prayer.

**ALL:** **And in your mercy, answer.**

**OFFICIANT:** For those who are victims of violence, terrorism, famine, poverty, and abuse...God, hear our prayer.

**ALL:** **And in your mercy, answer.**

**OFFICIANT:** For those who have died...God, hear our prayer.

**ALL:** **And in your mercy, answer.**

**OFFICIANT:** For those who are homeless, may they find housing; for those who are without food or clothing, may they be tended to; for those who have lost everything, may they find solace in your presence...God, hear our prayer.

**ALL:** **And in your mercy, answer.**

**OFFICIANT:** For the peace proclaimed by Christ, for our willingness and our ability to be the hands of Christ healing the brokenness of this world...God, hear our prayer.

**ALL:** **And in your mercy, answer.**

**OFFICIANT:** God of great compassion and love, listen to the prayers of these your people. Grant to all, especially the bereaved and troubled ones this Advent season, the blessing we ask in your holy name, saying:

**ALL:** **Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial**

**and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.**

## **CANDLELIGHTING**

*Here all are invited to pause and observe a moment of silence. During this time, individual prayers and petitions may be offered, and all gathered are invited to light a candle, either at home or in the shared space where the group may be gathered. After a time of silence, the officiant continues.*

## **CLOSING PRAYERS**

**OFFICIANT:** Let us pray.

Loving God, open our eyes that we may see the face of the infant Jesus in the face of friends and strangers; open our ears that we may hear people's cries for justice and offer food, clothing, and shelter to those who have nothing; open our hearts that we may welcome the stranger as Emmanuel, as God come near. Help us to bring love, hope, and faith where they are needed. Let us not be afraid to protect the weak or to defend the poor. May we do all this with your help.

**ALL:** Amen.

**OFFICIANT:** Go forth into the world to spread the light and peace of Christ.

**ALL:** Thanks be to God.

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Within The Episcopal Church's division of public policy and witness, Episcopal Migration Ministries focuses on serving communities by supporting ministries that are helping vulnerable migrants, including refugees, asylum-seekers, and others; addressing global migration through partnerships outside the U.S.; and protecting the rights of all migrants through education and advocacy.

To learn more about how The Episcopal Church is responding to current migration challenges and needs, [join weekly immigration calls](#) and [subscribe to The Episcopal Church Weekly](#) newsletter. Find resources for individuals, churches, and dioceses engaged in this work in the [Immigration Action Toolkit](#).