

# Advent Study 2023



ELCA

World Hunger

## Dear friends in Christ,

Where and how do you encounter God? God, through the prophet Isaiah, urges us to take comfort, trusting that the “the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all people shall see it together” (Isaiah 40:5). At a time when our world bears the wounds of conflict, hunger and disaster, it can be challenging to uncover where and how God is at work. Yet we know in faith that God is actively working in the world, transforming, reconciling, sustaining and inciting us to ever-greater acts of justice and mercy.

In the season of Advent, we reflect on our biblical ancestors, waiting for the coming of the Messiah as they, too, longed for God to be revealed, “to lift up the lowly and fill the hungry with good things” (Luke 1:52-53). We thank you for joining ELCA World Hunger in this Advent study as we discern together the ways we encounter the living God today. Through reflection on the stories of our biblical past and the stories of ministries responding to hunger and poverty today, we will explore together the many ways “the glory of the Lord” is revealed in communities that have come together to confront deep challenges with strength, hope and longing for a just world where all are fed.

Each session of this study will explore one way we encounter God, from revelation to proclamation. In 2024 this exploration will continue in ELCA World Hunger’s Lenten study, so be sure to order or download copies for yourself or your congregation from **[ELCA.org/hunger/resources](https://elca.org/hunger/resources)**.

Thank you for being part of the work the ELCA is called to as church together.

In Christ,

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# ADVENT

## Week 1 – Revelation

Isaiah 64:1-9

Psalms 80:1-7, 17-19

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

Mark 13:24-37



“When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect, you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence” (Isaiah 64:3).

Isaiah’s words provide our opening to Advent, a season of hopeful expectation as we look ahead to the coming of the Christ child on Christmas Day. That, perhaps, makes the choice of these verses a bit odd for the first week. The prophet’s words are far from hopeful. They are filled with lament and grief, a mournful pleading for God to get back to work. There is some disagreement about when exactly this section of Isaiah was written, but in general, biblical scholars agree that it was sometime after the exile of Judah. The kingdom of Judah had fallen to the Babylonians, the temple had been destroyed, and most of the people had been sent into exile. Some writers think that Isaiah’s words in this chapter were written as some of the people returned, anguished and disillusioned, to their devastated homeland. These are the words of a people who feel abandoned and defeated, not hopeful and excited, a people longing for a time before their exile.

That is a sharp contrast to the mood of Advent as most of us understand it. Advent is about looking forward. Even the Gospel reading from Mark encourages readers to “keep alert” for the deeds God is yet to perform (Mark 13:33). The prophet Isaiah, though, looks backward to a time when God “did awesome deeds we did not expect,” deeds of power that made the nations “tremble” (Isaiah 64:2).

Perhaps what holds these two in tension — the alert anticipation of Advent and Mark and the nostalgic memory of Isaiah — is the question we have asked so frequently in ELCA World Hunger’s seasonal studies: where have you encountered God?

As we embark on the season of Advent this year, this will be our guiding question. Where and how do we encounter the living God? Each of our study sessions for Advent and, in a few months, for Lent will explore one potential answer to this question.

Drawing on the readings for this week, we start with a seemingly simple response: we encounter God in acts of **revelation**.

At first glance this seems obvious. Of course we encounter God as God is revealed. But revelation, as the Bible readings for this week indicate, is complex. In Isaiah we hear the voice of a people who felt abandoned and pleaded for God to be revealed in “awesome deeds,” as God had been revealed in the past. Isaiah longs for the mighty and miraculous revelation of divine power, for heavens torn open and mountains quaking, signs that assure us God is at work. Yet no deeds of power are coming.

Is Isaiah’s desire so different from our own? How often do we long for the special, miraculous moment when we know without a doubt that God has been revealed? How often do we hear about “mountaintop experiences” in which the revelation of God is so clear that it cannot be denied? How often do we pray for God to come down and make everything right, to end every trial? Even the reading from the Gospel of Mark suggests that we “keep awake” for this kind of moment, the coming-in-power of “the Son of Man” (Mark 13:26).

Sure, there are stories in Holy Scripture of God being revealed in such moments. But there are nearly as many — if not more — stories of God being revealed in more ordinary ways, and these everyday revelations often tell us more about God than do quaking mountains or falling stars (Mark 13:25). For most of us, revelation is not a matter of encountering God’s earth-shaking majesty, or really an event at all; it’s a process of discerning the many ways God is already present.

Catholic theologian Karl Rahner describes this process as the “mysticism of everyday life.” Most of us will never hike to the top of the nearest mountain and get a nice, clean plan for our lives and communities written on tablets (either stone or digital). Many of us, though, will experience the mystery of God in subtler but no less important ways. For Rahner, this experience is unescapable, springing from the deep divide between how the world is and how we know it ought to be, “for nothing measures up to that which rests at our deepest center. The immense longing speaks to us, even if at times only in a whisper.”<sup>1</sup>

Martin Luther was more specific than Rahner in describing where God is revealed. In his commentary on the Gospel of John, Luther writes, “God says, ‘I do not choose to come to you in my majesty and in the company of angels but in the guise of a poor beggar asking for bread. ... I want you to know that I am the one who is suffering hunger and thirst.’”<sup>2</sup> Anticipating more modern perspectives on Christian service, Luther saw the neighbor not merely as the object of a Christian’s good works but also as a revelation of Christ in the world. As much as Christians are called to “love and serve” the neighbor, so too are they called to perceive the face of Christ within the neighbor.

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<sup>1</sup>Harvey D. Egan, *Karl Rahner: Mystic of Everyday Life* (New York: Crossroad, 1998), 60-61.

<sup>2</sup>Martin Luther, “Sermons on the Gospel of John,” trans. Martin H. Bertram, *Luther’s Works* 22:520 (St. Louis: Concordia, 1957).

This was particularly true of the neighbor in need. As the commentary on John suggests, Luther believed that, since the incarnation enabled God to come “in the guise of a poor beggar,” God continues to be revealed wherever people are in need.

Theologian Cynthia Moe-Lobeda provides something of a bridge between Luther and Rahner in her writing on Luther’s idea that Christ dwells within us and within the community of faith. According to Moe-Lobeda, Luther didn’t see salvation as a matter of Jesus simply washing away our sin. Jesus is not some cosmic washcloth wiping us clean. In salvation Christ comes to dwell within us, transforming us to reflect the love of Christ in the world. The presence of Christ within us is nothing less than “the active love of Christ for the world working within human beings.”<sup>3</sup>

What does all that mean for us today? As we begin Advent, this season of waiting and anticipation, perhaps we are called to recognize the ways God is already present. Maybe, *just maybe*, the role of the church in this season is not trying to figure out how we can “bring people to Jesus” but discerning how we can be more fully present with our neighbors, lamenting injustice, confronting human need, reflecting the love of God in service, and recognizing that these are the spaces where God is being revealed every day.

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<sup>3</sup>Cynthia D. Moe-Lobeda, “Re-Radicalizing Justification,” in Karen L. Bloomquist, Craig L. Nesson, and Hans G. Ulrich, eds., *Radicalizing Reformation: Perspectives From North America* (Zurich: Lit Verlag, 2016), 141.

# REFLECTION

## *Questions*

In what ways has God been revealed to you in your everyday experiences?

What strengthens or comforts you when you are far from the “mountaintop”?

How might it change how you experience life or other people when you think of each encounter as a possible revelation of the presence of God?

What does it mean for a church to shift its attention from uniting people with Jesus to “discerning how we can be more fully present with our neighbors”?

# ADVENT

## Week 2 – Invitation<sup>4</sup>

Isaiah 40:1-11

Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13

2 Peter 3:8-15

Mark 1:1-8



“Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish” (2 Peter 3:14).

In last week’s session of this study, we reflected on what it means to encounter God through revelation as God is revealed in our neighbors, in our lamentation against injustice and in our work together to meet the needs around us. This week we move from encountering God through revelation to encountering God through **invitation**. We’ll wrestle with one question: What are we invited to be part of?

Kathy (name changed for privacy) was so afraid of her abusive husband that one day she decided to leave him. In search of safety, she fled her home and all the people and places she knew, finding refuge in the vault of a closed bank, the thick walls insulating her from the cold.

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<sup>4</sup>This week’s session includes a description of violence against women. If you use this study in a group setting, be aware of and sensitive to the variety of feelings, including pain and trauma, that this session may elicit in listeners.

When Kathy found out she was pregnant, she knew she needed help. She came to South Suburban PADS, a partner of ELCA World Hunger, where she found temporary shelter and was quickly matched with a housing program. South Suburban PADS works to prevent and end homelessness in the Chicagoland area by empowering homeless individuals to create a sustainable future through emergency shelter, affordable housing solutions and supportive services. The organization gave Kathy hope, helping her to secure a safe, stable apartment for herself and her baby. “I thought I would have to bring my baby back to the bank vault,” Kathy said. “I didn’t know how I would keep her safe, but now she gets to live with me in our apartment, where she will never know about showering with a bottle of water, begging strangers for money to eat, and being woken up by others looking for food and shelter.”

Responding to hunger can mean sharing in stories of celebration, such as Kathy’s, but it also means confronting the stories of pain, fear and trauma that often are at the root of food and housing insecurity in the first place. For many women and girls, violence is among those roots, often in the form of domestic violence or intimate partner violence.<sup>5</sup> A recent review of research studies found that women and girls who experienced violence were nearly twice as likely to be food-insecure.<sup>6</sup> The relationship is complex. Food insecurity and poverty may make it more likely for women and girls to experience violence. On the other hand, violence may make it more likely for women and girls to experience food insecurity and poverty, by preventing them from working, going to school or having their own financial savings. What we do know is that the experience of hunger for many women and girls in the United States and around the world is often also an experience of violence and fear.

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<sup>5</sup>The terms “domestic violence” and “intimate-partner violence” are often used interchangeably. In law and in research “intimate-partner violence” is most commonly used to describe a situation of violence between partners in a romantic or sexual relationship, whereas “domestic violence” is broader, describing many forms of abuse or violence between members of a household.

<sup>6</sup>Abigail M. Hatcher, et al., “Systematic Review of Food Insecurity and Violence Against Women and Girls: Mixed Methods Findings From Low- and Middle-income Settings,” PLOS Global Public Health, Sept. 14, 2022.

That reality gives the lie to centuries of Christian theology that has counseled women and girls, especially, to be patient, to quietly abide until the fullness of salvation is realized. Christian writers and preachers have extolled patient suffering as if it were some sort of virtue. We are to “strive to be found ... at peace,” as the writer of 2 Peter states. How often have the “virtues” of patience and peaceful waiting been exploited to allow violence to continue?

The problem with such interpretation of 2 Peter and other biblical passages about patience is that it gives the church and community permission to be patient with suffering, to look ahead to the promised future rather than allow the promised future to shape who and how we are in the present. The church cannot afford to be patient when more than 250 million people around the world face acute food crises, when conflict and violence have driven more than 108 million people from their homes and when nearly 1 in 3 women worldwide has experienced intimate-partner violence or nonpartner sexual violence. The church can be many things, but it cannot be patient.

To be found “at peace” does not mean to be found waiting, watching and wishing for God to show up. Rather, what we find in both 2 Peter and the Gospel of Mark is a shift from eager anticipation to active participation in the future that is coming. The Gospel writer echoes the prophet Isaiah: “prepare the way of the Lord” (Mark 1:3). The writer of 2 Peter admonishes the people to not just wait for but “hasten” the coming reign of God (2 Peter 3:12). In both cases the message is clear: patience is meant not to keep people quiet in their suffering but to sustain them in their active resistance to suffering. We will encounter God in fullness in the future, but we encounter God today in the invitation to be part of bringing that future to pass.

This doesn't mean that people of faith can build the reign of God on their own. Yet it does remind us that there is work to be done now and we are invited to be part of it.

That's not an invitation to take lightly. Nor is it an invitation for us to do everything on our own. To be part of the work God is doing in the

world is to journey alongside organizations such as South Suburban PADS and neighbors such as Kathy, to confront — with them and through them — the depths of human sin that consign people to fear, insecurity and hunger, and to celebrate — with them, through them and because of them — the renewed hope for change that God fosters even now, as we wait for the promise in its fullness.

The invitation to be part of what God is doing now is an invitation to be both in the bank vault and in the new apartment with Kathy and her baby. It is an invitation to be honest about the depth of pain and fear in our world and to be driven by that honesty to strive for the justice and peace of the world to come. It is an invitation to be a people both “waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God” (2 Peter 3:12). It is an invitation to seek the living God not just in prayers and song but also in the affordable housing, emergency shelter and supportive services provided by partners such as South Suburban PADS — and in the strength and courage of the neighbors they help. It is an invitation to consider that “preparing the way of the Lord” might look a lot like preparing an apartment for a new tenant and her child.

It is, in short, an invitation for the church to be what it is called to be — actively anticipating and participating in the creation of a new world where all can experience the fullness of security, safety, peace and justice.

# REFLECTION

## *Questions*

How might violence or the threat of violence make food insecurity more likely?

What does it mean for the church to be “both in the bank vault and in the new apartment”?

Where is God calling you and the church to be today, in your own community?

In what ways can patience be helpful? In what ways can it be harmful?

# ADVENT

## Week 3 – Vocation

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11

Psalm 126 or Luke 1:46-55

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

John 1:6-8, 19-28



What does it mean to be “church”? Even a brief internet search will yield wildly differing responses. This is a difficult question and an important one. Many of us have come to realize that what previous generations considered “church” is rapidly disappearing. Over the last three years or so, mainline Protestant denominations in the United States have seen a rapid decline in worship attendance. Some congregations have seen attendance decline by as much as 40%. Young families and youth are noticeable in many congregations only by their absence. Households that were reliable parts of worshiping communities have simply disappeared. One might point to the COVID-19 pandemic as the key factor in all this, but it only accelerated a change we all knew was coming.

This is a painful thought to those of us longing for packed pews and at least one congregational budget report that doesn’t leave us feeling worse. In this reality, the week’s Advent readings seem almost to be taunting us: “Rejoice always” (1 Thessalonians 5:16).

Yet this is precisely what we are called to do as church: to preach the word of joy, to rejoice because “the Lord has done great things for us” (Psalm 126:3). As people of God, we are called to speak the word of joy and abundance. To be the church is to be a visible reminder

of the promise of God unfolding in history. Our very vocation and identity are rooted in the same joy and hopefulness we struggle to experience in our congregations. There is a fundamental longing for the church to abound in what we need if we are to become who we are called to be.

Maybe this longing makes Advent particularly meaningful for some of us this year. Maybe the waiting and watching of the season resonate with our own yearning for God to equip the church for the bright future we've been promised. Maybe the Advent message gives us hope that God will show us a way to build the church and fill the pews so that we can do impactful ministry with new gifts and volunteers.

Certainly our hope for God's promise to be fulfilled ought to define our church. All too often, though, yearning for the future tempts us to procrastinate in the present. With so many challenges, both within the church and across the wider world, our point of view shifts from abundance to scarcity, from recognizing what God has already made possible to recognizing only what the world, finances or the unexpected makes impossible.

When that happens, we miss out on the significant ways we encounter God through our vocation as God's people. As the ELCA explains in its social teaching, the church is called to be a "disturbing presence," confronting injustice and violence; a "reconciling presence," drawing people together across boundaries that divide us; and a "serving presence," advocating for justice and meeting the needs of vulnerable neighbors.<sup>7</sup> This is the work to which we are called as church together. Often we describe this vocation as helping others encounter God. Yet as we see in the story of Iglesia Luterana San Andres, a ministry of the Nebraska Synod, we live into our vocation not when we bring God to others but when we encounter God's abundance ourselves.

Iglesia Luterana San Andres, a congregation serving South Omaha, is rooted in meeting the needs of its neighbors. The congregation

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<sup>7</sup>ELCA social statement *For Peace in God's World* (1995), p. 5.

understands itself to be “called to proclaim the Gospel by being a sign and witness of God’s inclusive and universal love. Our commitment is to actively respond to the needs of our immigrant community, especially low-income ones, by creating educational-pastoral programs, and opportunities for engagement and community service that transform lives and promote change.”

To that end San Andres has a food pantry, an education program providing scholarships for certification in health ministry and early childhood development, a support group for families with LGBTQ+ children, and a summer camp for students. The congregation’s holistic approach is aimed at improving the comprehensive health of its community.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit in 2020, the congregation at San Andres knew there was deep need, and it responded. Communities such as South Omaha experienced rapid rises in hunger, poverty and unemployment. At the same time, congregations faced the difficult task of keeping members safe, finding new ways to worship and experience community, and maintaining the support needed to face the unknown for months to come.

Instead of being overwhelmed by the scarcity of resources, opportunities and knowledge about COVID-19, the people of San Andres “decided to lean into abundance,” trusting that God would be revealed as they lived out their mission in the world.<sup>8</sup>

“They trusted that if this is what God was calling them to see and respond to, that God would show up,” reads a story on the synod website. “And God has done so and continues to do so.”<sup>9</sup>

By “leaning into abundance” and trusting that God would meet them as the church lived into its vocation as a “disturbing ... reconciling ... and serving presence,” San Andres was empowered to confront growing need with hope.

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<sup>8</sup>“Sharing God’s Abundance, Grounded in Good News — Iglesia Luterana San Andres, “ ELCA Nebraska Synod, April 25, 2022, [nebraskasynod.org/news/sharing-gods-abundance-grounded-in-good-news-iglesia-luterana-san-andres/](https://nebraskasynod.org/news/sharing-gods-abundance-grounded-in-good-news-iglesia-luterana-san-andres/)

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

Martha, a member of San Andres, came to the church through San Andres' weekly food pantry, a ministry supported in part by ELCA World Hunger. Originally from Mexico, she says she has lived in her South Omaha community for nine years, "and in all this time I never had the opportunity to be part of San Andres until the food pantry opened its doors to help us and to listen to us just as soon as the COVID-19 pandemic began." The food pantry has been "a blessing" to Martha and her daughter, Brisa, a stomach cancer survivor.

Martha and Brisa became active parts of the San Andres congregation, serving others in need as volunteers. Brisa is now part of the ELCA's Horizon Apprenticeship program, designed to help young people of color, or whose primary language is other than English, develop a missional imagination, discerning their future and the church's role in their life. As Martha says, Brisa "is happy to belong to the Lutheran family, [and] we have both found enough reasons in this church to change our lives. Now I can share what I know how to do, and that's what God has given me."

Being the church in this world is no small task. We need courage and creativity to "lean into abundance" when the world seems continually to be teaching lessons of scarcity. Yet the apostle Paul counsels us to "rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances" (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). This isn't a foolish dismissal of the challenges lying before us or the need we see all around us, including in our congregations. Rather, it is the radical faith that trusts in the abundant promise of God, who meets us as we live out our vocation as God's people, the God we encounter in neighbors such as Martha and Brisa.

Called to be a disturbing, reconciling and serving presence in the world, we cannot wait for God's abundance to be made clear before we take steps to become who we are called to be. The world cannot wait, and neither can this church. Rather, we must be that presence in the world, trusting that God has already provided all we need to fulfill our sacred vocation.

# REFLECTION

## *Questions*

How have you encountered God through the service of others?

What does it mean for the church to be a “disturbing, reconciling and serving” presence in the world?

When do you find it difficult to trust in God’s abundance?

What would it mean for your church to “lean into abundance”? What gifts do you and your community have that might be hard to perceive?

# ADVENT

## Week 4 – Proclamation

2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16

Luke 1:46-55 or Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26

Romans 16:25-27

Luke 1:26-38



Thus far this season we have explored some of the ways we encounter God in our lives. In Week 1 of this study we considered what it means to encounter God in revelation, both in “mountaintop moments” and in everyday life. In Week 2 we heard the invitation to encounter God as part of God’s work in the world. In Week 3 we read Martha’s story and discerned the ways we encounter God as we live out our vocation with faith in abundance. In the coming new year we will continue this journey during the season of Lent.

Before then, however, we should think together about what it means to encounter God in the act of **proclamation**. As the people of God, we are set free to boldly and audaciously proclaim that the God for whom we yearn is already present. How do we encounter God in our own proclamations, and how do we encounter God in the proclaiming witness of our biblical ancestors?

The first reading for this final week of Advent takes us to the palace of King David. David has ascended to the throne of Israel, battle-weary from struggles against the House of Saul and the Philistines. The Ark of the Covenant has been temporarily sheltered for safety in a tent outside the palace. Peace has come, and David reflects to

his adviser, the prophet Nathan, that God ought not to stay in a tent while David lives in “a house of cedar.” His plan is to rebuild the temple and move the ark to a more permanent dwelling place.

One can understand David’s desire. The shepherd who would be king is finally at a place where he can think long-term. At least for now, he has found the stability and peace he longed for, and he is eager to lay down roots and find a “suitable” way to honor the God who helped him and his people.

But God’s response through Nathan is far from sympathetic. “Are you the one to build me a house to live in?” God asks rhetorically (2 Samuel 7:5). “I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this Day, ... I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel; and I have been with you wherever you went” (7:6, 8).

*I have been with you wherever you went.*

In the end God’s message to David is God’s message to us. Through economic uncertainty, through violence, through unrest, through pandemics and disasters, through injustice, through hunger and grief, “*I have been with you wherever you went.*” The great hope and comfort of Advent is that God has drawn near to humanity in love. To experience God proclaimed is to be reminded that all life and, indeed, all history are the story of God encountering us, meeting us, even in our moments of deepest need.

“Footprints in the Sand,” a popular folk poem, reveals the presence of God in our struggles. In it a person walks along a beach with “the Lord” as scenes from their life play out. At the end the person looks back and notices that, at the most difficult times in their life, the sand shows only one set of footprints. God explains, “In those times, I carried you.”

*I have been with you wherever you went.*

This allegory points to the sort of comfort brought by God's proclamation through Nathan: the assurance that God is with us, the promise of Emmanuel, is meant to comfort us in times of trouble and remind us that we are never alone. As strenuous and tenuous as life can be, God is ever with us, abundantly providing for us, guiding us and nurturing us toward the fulfillment of God's promised reign.

"Footprints in the Sand" delivers this important message of comfort. But there is another side to the story, another side to proclamation, and for that we turn to Mary, the mother of Jesus, who offers a different perspective on what it means to proclaim that God has entered history and our lives.

Mary's hymn of praise, her proclamation of the Lord's presence with her, comes during her visit to Elizabeth. After an angel tells Mary the role she will play in bringing Christ into the world, she rushes to Elizabeth's house. Filled with the Holy Spirit, Elizabeth echoes the angel's message that God favors Mary, and Mary responds with the Magnificat, a powerful hymn to God. In it she proclaims, "The Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name" (Luke 1:49). She then proceeds to outline these "great things":

*He has shown strength with his arm;  
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.  
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,  
and lifted up the lowly;  
he has filled the hungry with good things,  
and sent the rich away empty (Luke 1:51-53).*

Mary, so often depicted as meek, declares that the time of unjust rule by the wealthy and powerful is over. The "Mighty One" who scatters the proud, dethrones the powerful, fills the hungry and sends the rich away empty has come to fulfill the promise.

One cannot help but compare and contrast what the Magnificat and "Footprints in the Sand" tell us about encountering God in the proclamation of Emmanuel, God-with-us. In "Footprints" the encounter is one of comfort. The One who walks along the beach

with us carries us when we can no longer go on. In the Magnificat there is a sort of comfort in Mary's hymn of praise. However, the God encountered here not only carries us but ushers in a new world, perhaps one where the beach will be an easier walk for people who live with poverty, hunger or oppression.

Surely we need to encounter God as comfort, to hear the proclamation that we are not alone in our suffering and our trials. The world we live in is marred by violence, injustice, hunger and thirst, and God comforts us. Yet in our world we also need to encounter the God who declares that this is not what God intended. The hunger, the insecurity, the inequity — these are not part of the plan and will not be part of the promised future.

As we have seen from the stories in this study, life is no easy beach, and those "hard times" can deal death to us and our neighbors. Comfort and companionship never cease to be important, as "Footprints in the Sand" reminds us. But as the Magnificat reminds us, we need to encounter the God who will remake the beach so that we all can journey together in safety, confidence and security. We need to encounter God in the proclamation that God is not just journeying with us in solidarity but actively dismantling the powers and principalities that give rise to hunger and human vulnerability. The proclamation of Jesus' birth is more than mere words; it is an announcement that, as Rory Cooney's popular hymn "Canticle of the Turning" declares, "the world is about to turn."

To share that encounter with others is to remind those who suffer that they are never alone and that, even now, God is working to transform the world so that we can proclaim together, in Mary's words, "Holy is God's name." Holy is the name of the One who, even now, is transforming the world into a place where we "will hunger no more and thirst no more ... and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes" (Revelation 7:16-17).

# REFLECTION

## *Questions*

When have you been comforted by the promise that God is with you?

When has encountering the word of God inspired you to change your community?

How might the church be a sign of both comfort and protest against unjust systems, structures or practices?

Reread 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16 and Luke 1:46-55. How is God revealed in each reading? What do we learn about God in each reading? What might these proclamations of God mean for our vocation as church?





ELCA World Hunger

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