

Living in comfortable America, we often expect that things can and always should be good
Christians sometimes forget the backdrop of Scripture
 Rather than a story of God's interaction with a people called to follow God
 A people that sometimes listened and sometimes did not
 A people that more often than not were oppressed by foreign powers
 Sometimes within their own country—as by the Romans at time of Jesus
 Sometimes they were taken into captivity, living in exile—as in Babylon

The Advent Scriptures are addressed to people who lived in fear
 The threat of terrorism was a reality for the exiles in the days of the Hebrew prophets
 For those who lived under Rome's heavy hand in Jesus' homeland
 For the scattered early Christians to whom Paul was writing
Advent promises the coming of God's great reversal—
 Swords changed into plowshares
 The lowly lifted up and the powerful brought low
 The hope of God with us—Emmanuel

I've been thinking about what it was like to live in exile and under foreign occupation
 Something I've never known
 The closest I have come to it was being in Palestine/Israel at Christmas time
 Seeing firsthand the oppression of Palestinians—I could leave, they could not
 Roads blocked for no good reason
 Lack of water and electricity while others a short distance away had plenty
 A refugee camp of people living in exile for over 60 years
 Check points that hassled people
 Guns—lots of them
 The scrutiny of my person and my luggage flying in and out of the country
 And this is only a smattering of what people live with day after day

It is to these people that the message of Advent is given
 To people oppressed and living in exile
 This is exactly why Jesus came
 Jesus came to us in the midst of our broken world

Isaiah 9:6-7 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.

Isaiah 61:1-3 The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor.

In recent weeks we've focused on what it means to be the Kingdom of God where there is Gospel Order

It is where we live today

The Kingdom of God comes to bring peace and enable us to live out Kingdom truths

To stand and take our place as the people of God

We are empowered through the spirit to speak to violence

To be the people that bind up the broken hearted

That message has been given to us

We must be faithful to take our place as the church and go forth

In this advent season as we sing O Come, O Come Emanuel—I'm reminded that God is with us

And that God gives us everything we need to live into the fullness of the Kingdom of God today

We are empowered to go forth and work to make the Kingdom of God real

Let us be faithful

Let us be aware that God has come and dwells among us