

Commentary: Advent reflection: Hope amid struggles

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As we light the first candle of Advent, our hearts are drawn to the little town of Bethlehem, the birthplace of our Lord Jesus Christ, where hope and peace broke through the darkness.

For Christians worldwide—and especially for those of us in the Holy Land—Christ’s birth is a profound reminder that God is with us, even in the most challenging times. In a land often marked by conflict, occupation and sorrow, his birth not only is the promise of salvation, but also a call to live with unwavering hope and faith.

The journey of hope

Advent invites us to reflect on Mary and Joseph’s journey. They traveled through a land under Roman occupation, facing hardship, uncertainty and exile, seeking refuge in a humble stable. Their trust in God’s plan continues to inspire us today.

Like Mary and Joseph, we also face trials—military checkpoints, the apartheid wall dividing our land and communities, and the constant threat of violence. Yet, as they found hope amid their struggles, we also find hope in the midst of our darkest circumstances.

The nature of hope

Hope is not passive or wishful thinking. It is a resilient, active faith that empowers us to endure.

In Palestine, hope is visible in the resilience of our people. We see it in the laughter of children playing in Gaza's church courtyards, in hymns sung under curfew or bombardment, and in the olive trees we continue to plant on war-ravaged land.

These acts of life amid the rubble testify to God's presence with us, reminding us even when the way forward is unclear, his light never will be extinguished.

The light of hope

Isaiah's prophecy rings true this Advent: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light" (Isaiah 9:2).

Christ's coming is that light, dispelling the darkness of the past and offering hope for the future. In a world filled with trials, we are called to be bearers of that light, bringing hope to those around us. This Advent, let us not wait passively, but act in hope, planting seeds of love, compassion and peace wherever we go.

The life of hope

For Palestinian Christians, Bethlehem is not just a historical site. It is where God's promises remain alive. Every time the bells of the Church of the Nativity ring, they remind us Christ will return to fulfill his promises.

Hope is alive in us, empowering us to endure, rebuild and continue to love, even in the face of adversity. We live in this in-between time, holding fast to hope and knowing one day, God's peace will be realized in fullness.

The gift of hope

In Palestine and across the East, we greet one another at Christmas with, “Christ is born!” and the response, “Hallelujah!” or “Let us glorify him!”

These words remind us Christ’s birth is not a commercial celebration or a distant historical event, but a living reality that calls us to glorify God in our lives—even amid hardship and war.

As we reflect on Advent’s significance, let us remember hope is a divine gift. Rooted in God’s unchanging love, it is not just for the future but for today. Alive in our hearts, hope urges us to stand with those who suffer and to be the living testimony of Christ’s light in a world that desperately needs it.

Prayer of hope

Lord, amid our struggles, we thank you for the light of Christ that shines brightly. Help us to walk in faith as Mary and Joseph did, trusting in your promises even in our trials. May the hope of Advent fill our hearts and guide our actions.

We pray for the peace of Jerusalem, the United States, Ukraine, Artsakh and the entire world, and for healing in our communities. Strengthen us to act with compassion, to stand with those who suffer and to plant seeds of peace in a broken world. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Christ is born! Let us glorify him!

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views expressed in this opinion article are those of the author.