

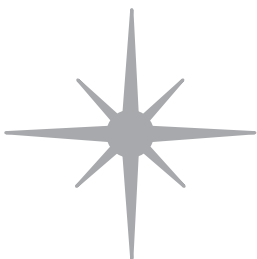
Advent

PRAYER GUIDE


2024

Waiting for Fulfillment





Advent
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2024



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Waiting for Fulfillment

Welcome to Advent season! This is a Christian tradition that begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas and ends on Christmas Eve. For hundreds of years, Christians have marked these four weeks as a sacred time to reflect on the importance of Jesus' birth.

We're often super busy around Christmas time. In contrast, Advent is a call to slow down. It's a time for followers of Jesus to look beyond the preparations of Christmas to the larger narrative of God's kingdom. This season is an invitation to us to grow more deeply in our understanding of our faith and reflect on the story of God's great rescue.

By reading and reflecting on Scripture during Advent, we can recognize how Jesus' birth fulfilled Old Testament prophecies, and how the anticipation of his return is a fundamental aspect of our Christian hope while we wait.

While there is no direct command from God to observe Advent, participating in this rich tradition is an opportunity to immerse ourselves in the narrative of God's redemptive story, recognizing how our own lives are intertwined with it. To know God's story is to better see and know how our story is enfolded in His big story.



HOW TO USE **This Advent Prayer Guide:**

For this Advent season, you are invited to use this prayer guide to intentionally slow down and contemplate the truth of who Jesus is. It is designed to help you practice the spiritual discipline of prayer by responding to reflective prompts surrounding the theme of waiting.

The title, "Waiting for Fulfillment," echoes December's sermon series, Fulfilled. This series focuses on how Jesus' birth fulfilled Old Testament prophecies.

Each week includes five readings for each of the four weeks of Advent. It is designed to be read Monday through Friday, but please feel the freedom to read it in a way that works best for your schedule. You can read it individually as a part of your devotional time with Jesus, or during shared meals with your housemates or family members.

Each day's reading takes around 20 minutes. Included with this prayer guide is also a candle and candle holder. You may light your candle each time before you begin as a symbol of hope in God's faithfulness during Advent.

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The following steps may help enrich your time:

1. Set a Regular Time:

Choose a specific time each day that works for you to engage with the readings, whether in the morning, during lunch, or in the evening.

2. Create a Sacred Space:

Find a quiet place where you can focus. Light the candle included in the guide to symbolize hope and create a peaceful atmosphere.

3. Follow Each Day's Prompts:

- **Prepare:** Take a few deep breaths and ask for the Holy Spirit to guide you.
- **Read:** Look up the scripture references in your Bible from each day's reading. Take your time to absorb the text.
- **REFLECT:** Use your notebook to jot down your thoughts, feelings, and any insights that come to you during your reading. Consider how the themes relate to your own life and the world around you.
- **PRAY:** Close your time by responding in prayer. You can write your own prayer in your notebook or in the space provided in the guide.

4. Involve Others: If you choose to read with family or friends, take turns reading and sharing reflections. This can deepen the experience and foster meaningful conversations.

5. Embrace Flexibility and Grace: If you miss a day, don't worry! Adapt the guide to fit your schedule. The key is to remain open to what God wants to reveal to you during this time.



Advent

WEEK ONE

The One We Wait for



The Promise of Immanuel

PREPARE



READ: Isaiah 7:1-17, Matthew 1:18-23

REFLECT

The big story of Advent is that we are waiting for “Immanuel.” What does this word mean, and who is Immanuel, and what does it mean to wait for him?

The first mention of Immanuel is in the Old Testament when Ahaz was the king of Judah. Fearful and entrenched in a geopolitical crisis, King Ahaz received a message from the prophet Isaiah, assuring Judah’s deliverance through the birth of a child, conceived and born to a virgin. This child would be named Immanuel. The name Immanuel means “God with us.” It’s a promise that God’s presence will be with His people. In Judah’s turmoil, Isaiah’s prophecy emphasized that their true and lasting help comes from God alone. The promise of Immanuel would one day deliver them from more than their present struggle to survive as a nation.

The next mention of the name Immanuel came seven hundred years later in the New Testament. Here, Matthew wrote his account of Jesus’s life and ministry. In this passage, Matthew emphasizes that the circumstances surrounding Jesus’ birth fulfilled the prophecy from Isaiah 7:14. The unfolding of this prophecy was challenging for Joseph to absorb. According to Hebrew marriage customs, there was a year-long waiting period to ensure the bride’s purity before the wedding, during which the couple did not live together or engage in a sexual relationship. Mary’s unexpected pregnancy during this time was scandalous.

When Joseph heard that Mary was pregnant, he initially decided to end their engagement, as he had every right to do.

— CONTINUED

Immanuel is the Perfect King

PREPARE



READ: Isaiah 11:1-5

REFLECT

Isaiah 11:1-5 presents a powerful vision of Immanuel as the Perfect King, emerging from the lineage of Jesse, symbolizing hope and restoration. This passage describes a ruler who will govern with wisdom, understanding, and righteousness, distinguishing Him from earthly leaders.

Immanuel's justice will not be swayed by appearances but rooted in true justice, bringing peace and harmony to a world marked by strife and unfairness. Immanuel embodies the ideal qualities of kingship—compassion, righteousness, and divine authority—inviting us to trust in His perfect leadership.

Look at verses 2 and 3 closely. In a world filled with injustice, these verses inspire us to pursue true justice and embody integrity, urging reflection on how we can become agents of change.

Which of these characteristics of Jesus do you need to hold on to today? Ask God to reveal to you one characteristic to focus on during this season.

PRAY

Immanuel Restores Creation

PREPARE



READ: Isaiah 11:6-9

REFLECT

Isaiah 11:6-9 paints a vivid picture of the world that will one day come true. Immanuel will return His creation back to what he intended. The result will be a harmonious world where natural enemies peacefully coexist.

The imagery of a wolf lying with a lamb and a child playing near a cobra’s den symbolizes the radical change that His reign will bring, ending fear and hostility.

The vision of a world free from harm and destruction invites us to anticipate the fulfillment of God’s promises, reminding us that through Immanuel, all aspects of creation will be reconciled and healed physically and spiritually.

This restoration offers hope for a future where God’s peace reigns, reflecting His original design for a flourishing and interconnected creation.

Where do you need to declare and trust that one day Jesus will bring justice and peace to a situation you’re facing? Ask the Holy Spirit to give you insight.

PRAY

Immanuel Restores His People

PREPARE



READ: Isaiah 11:10-16

REFLECT

Isaiah 11:10-16 offers a powerful illustration of Immanuel's promise to restore His people. The passage depicts a time when He will become the gatherer of all nations. The imagery of the root of Jesse suggests that from humble beginnings, God will bring forth a powerful leader who unites and redeems His people.

As the exiles return and the barriers are dismantled, we see a vivid picture of hope and reconciliation, reminding us that Immanuel's reign brings healing to brokenness and division.

Ultimately, these verses encourage us to trust in God's faithfulness to keep His promise. We can hold fast to Him as our source of hope.

In what specific areas of your life do you need to hold fast to hope in Jesus?

What fears do you need to surrender to Him as you anticipate Jesus' return?

PRAY

KID THOUGHT: *This poem can be read as counterpoint: left stanzas read by adult, right read by child.*

SCRIPTURE USED: John 1:14

READ today's poem out loud twice.
Ask the Holy Spirit to give you additional insight as you read the poem.

PREPARE



How will we know

How will I know
When I have been made whole?
When Christ's salvation
Has reached the corpuscles of my being?

*How will I know
That this is the Christ?
Shhh!..., he is asleep.*

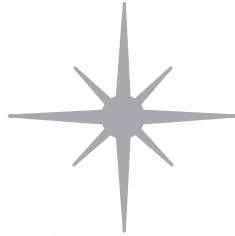
How will I know
That I have stayed—waited at the manger
Until my heart beats holy?

*Listen, Mama...
I can hear him breathing
Yah...weh...Yah...weh...*

How will I know
That Yah...weh has become my breathsound, too?
Childlike adoration—learned from this holy first.

*Mama, wait...will Jesus get big like me?
BIG like Papa???
Is he going to live with us?*

How will we know
That God dwelling with man...is accomplished?
That covenant is hereafter measured
In the wonder of infant fingers
Twined round our welcoming hearts?



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WEEK TWO

**What Does It
Mean to Wait?**



Jesus is the Long Awaited Shepherd King

PREPARE:



READ: Micah 5:2-15, Matthew 2:6

REFLECT

Micah 5:2-15 and Matthew 2:6 together paint a profound picture of Jesus as the long-awaited shepherd king, fulfilling ancient prophecies and embodying the hope of a nation that had longed for deliverance.

For centuries, Israel longed to be free. They yearned for a leader who would restore their dignity and govern justly, a king who would guide them away from the oppression and despair of Roman rule.

Micah foretells the birth of a righteous and majestic ruler who will come from Bethlehem. The prophet emphasizes that the ruler who comes out of this humble birthplace will guide and restore God's people.

In Matthew, the fulfillment of Micah's prophecy reveals the significance of Jesus' family background and place of birth, affirming His role as the Messiah. This shepherd king is not primarily a political figure; He comes with a greater mission of restoring people's souls to God, changing hearts, bringing comfort to the weary, and guiding His flock with love.

As we follow Jesus, we still wait for the ultimate fulfillment of a rescuer. It's that "now-and-not-yet" truth at work. Christ restores us to God now, but not everything in the world is yet made right.

— CONTINUED

David Waited, Even After a Promise was Made

PREPARE



READ: 1 Samuel 16:1-13

REFLECT

According to 1 Samuel 16:1-13, Samuel anointed David as king when he was still quite young, perhaps around age 15. David doesn't fully become King until 2 Samuel 5:4—when he is 30 years old.

After David was first anointed, he had to endure some extremely difficult times. He had the promise of becoming king someday, but for many years he was caught in the jealous grip of King Saul.

God was still working in David's life during that time of waiting. In many ways, David "grew up" as he waited. He learned how to lead people and stand for righteousness, so he could one day fully step into the role God had for him. He was transformed from the ruddy faced shepherd boy into the strong leader of a nation. He became a man after God's own heart.

Jesus too, with all his passion for God, heart full of the Spirit, and love for people, had to wait years in obscurity before beginning his public ministry around the age David did, 30 years old.

Sometimes we find ourselves waiting for things, longing for them to appear. God is using this process of waiting in our lives to help shape and grow us into the image of Christ. This process of waiting may impact generations for good in ways we may never see.

Let's go back to waiting. Yesterday, we invited you to pray

— CONTINUED

Simeon Waited for Most of His Life

PREPARE



READ: Luke 2:25-33

REFLECT

Note that in Luke 2:25-33, Simeon is a righteous and devout man. The text implies that he's an elderly man near the time of his death. He has been waiting for a very long time to see what God had promised him.

The Holy Spirit prompts Simeon to go to the temple. There, Simeon encounters the infant Christ. Simeon took the baby in his arms and praised God. The elderly man recognized that the baby was the Messiah. Simeon declares that he can now depart in peace after seeing the Savior. This declaration reveals a deep trust in God's timing and plan.

Simeon's hope transcends his immediate circumstances; he understands that Jesus will bring salvation not just for Israel but for all nations. This points to the expansive nature of God's grace for all people. This moment serves as a powerful reminder that faith often requires us to wait patiently, trusting in God's faithfulness even when the fulfillment of His promises seems distant.

How we wait matters. For Simeon, a lifetime of hopeful waiting came from unshakeable hope that he would see the Messiah. For Simeon seeing Jesus face to face made a lifetime of waiting worth it.

How can we follow Simeon's example? Ask the Holy Spirit to provide you with the same unshakeable hope as you wait to see Jesus' face.

— CONTINUED

Navigating the Tension of a Delay

PREPARE



READ: 2 Peter 3:1-18

REFLECT

It's natural for frustration and hope to go hand in hand. In 2 Peter 3:1-18 tells us that Christ is going to come back someday. He will return with glory and set everything right. The early believers in the first Church knew this, because Jesus had promised this to them. Still, they wondered how long it would be. When would Jesus return?

Note that in verses 3-4, people have always scoffed at this idea. People will question the promise of Christ's return.

Meanwhile, verse 14 notes that there's work for us to do. God calls us to be spotless, blameless, and at peace with him. It's also key in verses 8-9 that God wants all people to come to repentance. We can participate in this work.

This delay between the promise of Christ's return and the fact that he hasn't returned yet can evoke feelings of doubt and impatience. It can prompt us to wonder if our faith is misplaced.

Yet, Peter reminds us that God's perspective on time differs vastly from our own. What feels like a delay is actually an opportunity for grace, as God desires for all to come to repentance. This tension calls us to cultivate patience and steadfastness, grounding our hope in the assurance of God's ultimate justice and restoration.

In our own lives, this waiting period can serve as fertile ground for spiritual growth, inviting us to deepen our trust in God's promises while actively living out our faith in anticipation of His return.

— CONTINUED



SCRIPTURE USED: 1 Revelation 21:3b esv

PREPARE



READ today's poem out loud twice.
Ask the Holy Spirit to give you additional insight as you read the poem.

Sometimes Favor

Sometimes—like Bethlehem
We are waiting for favor;
Find it when least expected
Nestled within the swaddling
Fingered and folded into song by Mary.

Unleashed upon the hillsides
Midnight's least and lonely hour
Filthy feet fleetly ferry
Godly gossip, good news!
Shepherds sprint
To greet... the Shepherd.

Folded into the contours of each human heart
Where God's own longing begs
To frame a home.
Mystical Messengers mention
I find you...
Blessed.
We barely hear this lub-dub.

"Behold the dwelling place of God is with man.
He will dwell with them and they will be his people..."¹

PRAY



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WEEK THREE

**The World We
Are Waiting In**



A World Shaped By Sin

PREPARE



READ: Genesis 3

REFLECT

The world we live in is deeply affected by the consequences of sin, as shown in Genesis 3. This passage clearly demonstrates how disobedience has altered the experience of being created in God's image.

Adam and Eve chose to do their own thing, rather than obey God. Their choice to eat the forbidden fruit stemmed from a lack of trust in God's goodness and intentions, which distorted their relationship with Him.

After disobeying God, Adam and Eve were immediately filled with shame. They began to blame one another (and the serpent). Their communication broke down. They refused to take responsibility for their actions. This all showed how sin can fracture relationships.

Pain was introduced—both in childbirth and in labor. Now that everything was broken, toil and hardship became a part of the human experience. The struggles of life created an ongoing sense of frustration and difficulty.

Adam and Eve were sent out from the Garden of Eden. Now they were separated from the perfect communion they once enjoyed with God. The close connection they had with God was now forever stained by their sin. Ultimately, their sin ushered in death, both physically and spiritually. Sin created a deep chasm between the Creator and His creation.

— CONTINUED

A World Where There is Danger

PREPARE



READ: Matthew 2:14-15

REFLECT

In a world filled with danger, Jesus' refugee experience highlights the reality that people are vulnerable and need divine protection. Matthew 2:14-15 tells how Joseph, warned in a dream, fled with Mary and Jesus to Egypt to escape Herod's decree to kill all baby boys in Bethlehem.

Joseph's urgent decision to escape reflects the desperation that people feel when they're afraid. He and Mary needed to leave behind their home, community, and everything familiar. Displaced in Egypt, this little family encountered cultural differences and potential hostility as outsiders.

Jesus' refugee experience also connects him to the broader narrative of Israel, fulfilling the prophecy that God would call His son out of Egypt. As the True Israel, Jesus embodies hope for the oppressed, demonstrating that even in the darkest times, God's presence guides and shelters those in need.

Where do you feel fear and uncertainty in your life? Who is on your heart that has experienced the kind of fear and danger that Joseph and Mary must have had?

PRAY

A World Where There is Suffering and Injustice

PREPARE



READ: Exodus 2:1-10, Jeremiah 31:15, Matthew 2:16-18

REFLECT

In Matthew 2:16-18, the Christmas story takes an extremely dark turn. Suffering and injustice are shown for all their horror. The massacre of innocent children at the hands of Herod shows the depths of human cruelty. Deep despair, grief, and loss are the result.

The image of Rachel weeping for her children shows the heavy sorrow and mourning that follows such loss. Her tears mirror the cries of countless parents and communities who have faced tragedies throughout history. This difficult story reminds us that the pain of innocent lives cut short is a universal experience.

In Exodus 2:1-10, Pharaoh killed all the Hebrew baby boys in Egypt. The story of King Herod killing all the baby boys in Bethlehem mirrors this tragedy. At the same time, one Hebrew baby boy survived—Moses. And one Jewish baby boy survived—Jesus. This shows that even in spite of horror, tragedy, and injustice, God is still committed to saving his people. Jesus' very entrance into the world is not an escape from suffering but a direct confrontation with it.

Through these two difficult stories, God's purpose becomes clear. Wherever despair reigns, God wants to bring hope, healing, and redemption. God has always worked through the darkest moments of human history to fulfill His promise of rescue.

A World That Has a Rescuer

PREPARE



READ: Mark 1:1-8, Malachi 3:1, Isaiah 40:3-5

REFLECT

We've seen how the world is marred by injustice. Even so, the world has a Rescuer.

This is good news, because the reality of sin in the world today can be overwhelming. It's easy to feel despair. Yet in a world filled with suffering and injustice, God's promise of a Rescuer is brought about through His Son, Jesus Christ. Immanuel, God with us, steps into our brokenness and restores us.

Notice how the promise of a Rescuer emerges powerfully through the proclamation of Jesus' arrival, as seen in Mark 1:1-8. Here, John the Baptist prepares the way for Jesus, echoing the prophetic voices of Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3-5, reminding us that God is actively fulfilling His plan of redemption.

The promise that Jesus rescues us extends beyond our present circumstances. This promise assures us that God will ultimately restore all things.

While we navigate a world shaped by sin, we hold onto the hope of Christ's return, when suffering and injustice will be eradicated. This future hope inspires us to persevere, reminding us that we get to participate in His larger ongoing plan of redemption.

What does it mean to you that Jesus comes to rescue us? What in your life is in need of restoration today? How is this passage Good News for your life today?

READ today's poem out loud twice.

Ask the Holy Spirit to give you additional insight as you read the poem.

PREPARE



Waiting

Sometimes it aches

A cave inside one's chest, begging to be filled

Like Elizabeth's womb and Zechariah's quiver.

Sometimes it weeps

Knowing too much—

Rachel's despairing arms.

Sometimes waiting gapes

Question mark concavities

When? How? Whimpered why—most vulnerable of all.

Sometimes it rages

Frustration lying atop the fear

What if 'Never' happens...and I am left abandoned?

Sometimes waiting longs

For God to be, and do

Just as He.has.said.

Today...waiting hopes

Midst the psalm of God's own desire:

To know and be known.

Let my heart announce, if nothing else

God is with us!

Immanuel is come.



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WEEK FOUR

**Celebrating the One
We Are Waiting For**



Celebrating Our Rescuer, Immanuel

PREPARE



READ: Galatians 4:4-7

REFLECT

In today's verses, Paul emphasizes that at the right time, God sent His Son to rescue people from bondage to the law, highlighting both the divine timing and purpose of Jesus' arrival. This act of redemption also invites us into a profound relationship with God, where He calls us His children.

As God's children, we get to call God "Abba, Father," which signifies intimacy and belonging. That's the truest thing about us that will never change.

Here Paul uses images of slavery and family to help us understand what Jesus accomplished for us.

Like a slave whose freedom was purchased for them, we have been redeemed.

Like an orphan without parents we have been adopted and welcomed by our Abba.

Like a child of a good Abba, we know we will one day inherit all the good gifts of our Abba's Kingdom.

Today's passage reminds us that our identity is rooted in grace and love, encouraging us to live in the freedom that comes from being accepted as part of God's family.

You are called a child of God and a brother or sister to Jesus. How does this truth affect how you see God and your relationship to God?

— CONTINUED

Celebrating Immanuel's Conception

PREPARE



READ: Luke 1:30-55

REFLECT

In today's passage, we are celebrating that the Messiah was conceived, and we're invited to rejoice in this amazing news along with Mary. When the angel Gabriel tells Mary, "Do not be afraid," it shows that God always knows what He's doing, even when the circumstances aren't what we imagined.

Mary accepts this news – that she will be the bearer of the Messiah – even though she is a virgin and she wonders how this will all come to pass. The angel tells her that the conception is divine. Mary acknowledges that she is the Lord's servant.

In response, Mary sings a hymn of praise. She celebrates God's faithfulness, pointing to His power and provision. In verses 54-55, Mary recounts that God keeps his promises to his people.

Her song stemmed from a deep sense of purpose and connection to God's plan. The recognition of her unique role in such a monumental event, along with the promise of God's presence in the world, brought her immense joy.

What connection do you notice between the conception of Christ and joy? Mary dwelt on, reflected, and sang about the character and actions of God that brought her joy. What is it about Christ that brings you joy today?

PRAY

Celebrating Immanuel's Birth

PREPARE



READ: Luke 2:1-20, Isaiah 9:6-7

REFLECT

Today, simply read the Christmas story as shown in the passages above. Celebrating the birth of Jesus invites us to marvel at the astonishing presence of Immanuel—God is truly with us!

May we be filled with wonder at the profound truth that the Creator of the universe chose to live among us as a baby. In Luke 2:1-20, his entrance into the world, amidst the simplicity of shepherds and a stable, beautifully contrasts with the majestic promise of Isaiah 9:6-7.

The miraculous event of Christ's birth, heralded by angels who proclaimed peace to the lowly shepherds, marks the fulfillment of God's promise to be present with his people. Jesus' birth is not merely a historical event, he is the central figure of God's redemptive drama. The assurance of salvation in the prophecies of the Old Testament was and will be fulfilled in Christ.

Mary pondered and treasured in her heart all things about the birth of Jesus. What have you encountered in Jesus this Advent season, this Christmas Day, that he invites you to ponder and treasure in your heart?

PRAY

Celebrating While We Wait For His Future Return

PREPARE



READ: Isaiah 65:17-25, Titus 2:13,
Galatians 4:19, Romans 8:23-25

REFLECT

Even after Christmas is over, there's more joy and expectation to come.

As we navigate a world marked by sin and suffering, we cling to the promise of Christ's future return, a hope vividly portrayed in Isaiah 65:17-25. This passage reminds us that God will create a new heavens and earth, where joy replaces sorrow, and life flourishes without pain or death.

In Titus 2:13, we are called to eagerly await this precious hope, finding strength in the assurance that God's story transcends our current struggles.

Meanwhile, Galatians 4:19 highlights the transformative work of the Holy Spirit, who is shaping us into the image of Christ, even in the midst of our trials.

Romans 8:23-25 speaks to our yearning for redemption, affirming that our patience in waiting is not in vain.

While we wait for this ultimate restoration, we can celebrate the present work of God in our lives, recognizing that each day is an opportunity to mirror His image and bring His love into a world that desperately needs it.

Our waiting is not passive; it is a dynamic journey of growth, anticipation, and hope as we look forward to the day when all will be made right forever.

— CONTINUED

SCRIPTURE USED: Luke 1:45,
² Ephesians 1:12 (paraphrased)

PREPARE



READ today's poem out loud twice.
 Ask the Holy Spirit to give you additional
 insight as you read the poem.

Sifting Through Straw

In the waiting—the infamous now but not yet
 While Gabriel's words wildly gestated—
 Mary and Elizabeth sang; sang celebration
 Your goodness, Oh Lord
 Has reached our humble estate...

Months later...children
 sift treasures from the straw
 Twig sword, crimson thread...
 They are mesmerized by holy light.

Rough youths ponder
 The possibility of peace
 While Matthew and men weigh probability.

Census is complete (you showed up!)

Suddenly, the light flees far into Egypt
 And sojourners plod their long ways home.
 Before the grown-ups
 Yawns forever.

Forever, with its consummate questions—
 Promises yet to be fulfilled.
 Faint echoes of "Glory, Glory to God!"
 Resound then fade along the hillsides.

— CONTINUED

And in the close caverns of our hearts?

In Judah and Mamre, Sinai and Haran
Pocketed midst close and distant lands
Echoes of God's ancient promises
Wait...to be recalled.

Forte and sotto voce; solely and to crowds,
"Do not be afraid."
Dare we with Mary and Elizabeth, Joseph and Zechariah
Traipse bravely—knowing ourselves 'Blessed'?
Back at the manger
What gold did you find? Dare we let one gilded thread
pull us time and again:
look long into the face of God?

Oh that we, amongst these fledgling first to hope in Christ,

Might be praise unto his glory...²
And in this persistent press of perplexed humanity
Allow Christ's glorious golden light—refract through us.

Holy, holy, holy
Together let the people sing:
God is with us
Peace, Jesus, peace.

PRAY

Written by Mary Margaret Brotherton.
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love God | grow together | care for the world