


GOD ON THE MOVE

REFLECTIONS ON ADVENT
THROUGH THE LENS
OF MIGRATION



We
Welcome.



Hello friends! We know that there are abundant options of advent devotionals, books, and study guides to choose from this time of year, and we are deeply honored that you would set aside time to walk through these reflections with us. This guide is designed so that each week's reflections can be read in one session, or could be spread across 3 shorter readings per week if you prefer that format.

At We Welcome, we're passionate about the story God tells about welcoming the stranger, and we see threads of His love for immigrants all throughout Scripture. As we meditate on what it means that **God with us** "became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood,"¹ may we see his face in the displaced around the world today.

-THE WE WELCOME TEAM

¹ John 1:14, The Message



WEEK ONE: HOPE

REFLECTIONS ON MATTHEW 2

The nativity narrative in the gospel of Matthew goes beyond the birth of Jesus to give us a peek into the early life of his family. Despite a joyous birth and warm welcome from shepherds, travelers from afar, and faithful prophets in the temple, there was one person who was not celebrating. King Herod's jealousy of a newborn king turned a joyous celebration into a frightful drama. Overnight, Mary and Joseph's lives were turned upside down as they were forced to flee beyond the political reach of a cruel king who threatened the life of their son.

In modern terms, a refugee is someone who flees their home country due to fear of persecution based on their race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. Given the circumstances surrounding their flight to Egypt, the Holy Family met at least a couple of these grounds, and would be considered refugees today. What incredible **hope** it took for Joseph and Mary to pack up all of their belongings and flee, following the best path they knew in order to keep their family safe!

Millions of people around the globe are forced to make similar choices every year due to war, political unrest, and many other forms of violence and danger that prevail in a broken world. Refugees make hope their home. Like the family of the Christ child, they choose to press forward into the unknown with a hopeful expectation of a safer tomorrow.

REFLECTIONS

ON GLOBAL MOVEMENT TODAY

- How can we see Christ in our refugee neighbors, or other neighbors facing displacement?
- How would we describe his parents' choice to flee to another country to save their lives? Does this differ from the way we describe the choices made by parents today when they take dangerous journeys for the sake of their children?
- In Matthew 25, Jesus tells us that the way we treat the vulnerable is the way we treat him. What actions can we take this holiday season to welcome the stranger in the same way we would welcome Jesus in our midst?





Jesus,

We are in awe that you would choose an embodied existence on this earth not in luxurious palaces but in the form of a refugee fleeing for your life.

We are grieved that so many individuals and families today face the same terrifying choice that your family endured generations ago. We ask that you be near in their sorrow and in their anxiety.

You know what it feels like to be crushed by the weight of corrupt political leaders. Bring your comfort to the oppressed in our world today.

We pray for your hope in the refugee camps, in the boats bracing the choppy waters of the Mediterranean, and at the borders that divide us.

Lord, be near.

A M E N .

WEEK TWO: PEACE

REFLECTIONS ON ISAIAH 9:1-7

Peace is a word we hear often during the Christmas season, but how often do we pause and reflect on what it really means? Shalom, the Hebrew word in Scripture that's translated as peace, is not simply quietness or an absence of conflict. It's a **wholeness** that restores the world to what it was meant to be.

In the book of Isaiah, the prophet spoke about a new hope that was coming to Israel, a child that would be born to restore this shalom to the world—a Prince of Peace. Jesus, this Prince of Peace who was also given the titles of Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, and Eternal Father, chose a surprising way to accomplish this. He left a place of perfect peace and moved into a world of chaos, pain, and danger. In order to bring wholeness, Jesus sought peace not through a show of might but through humility and sacrifice.

Seeking peace through sacrifice is a path that many asylum seekers are intimately acquainted with. In recent years, we have seen increasing numbers of people making treacherous journeys through jungles and deserts to escape violence in their countries of origin. Tragically, instead of seeing the face of Jesus in these brothers and sisters, our government has spent tremendous time and resources seeking to deter rather than seeking to restore. The result has been limited access to our asylum process for the vulnerable and an increase in migrant deaths. We long for shalom in our borderlands, and for those in power to see the need for peace rather than a militarized response.



REFLECTIONS

ON GLOBAL MOVEMENT TODAY



- Jesus is described as the Prince of Peace, and the angels declared at his birth, “peace on earth!” In what ways do you see Jesus bringing peace on earth?
- Have you ever experienced living in a neighborhood or city where there was no peace? How does widespread violence affect the ability for a community or a family to flourish?
- Today many asylum seekers who arrive at our border are not fleeing a traditional war, but are facing chronic violence from corrupt governments and transnational criminal organizations. What would you do if your family was trapped in such a situation? Where would you go for safety?





Lord,

*We thank you for your example of seeking peace
through sacrifice. We marvel at the love you have for
your people!*

*Our hearts are with the many thousands of people who
come to our borders every year seeking peace. We grieve
the sacrifices and indignities that they so often face
along their journey, and we lament the mistreatment
that sometimes comes at the hands of our own
government officials.*

*We ask for your protection and comfort for those who
are weighed down by the world's brokenness. We pray
for eyes to see and learn from their courage and faith as
they boldly pursue wholeness for themselves and their
families.*

*Prince of Peace, we cry out for your
peace on earth today.*

A M E N .

WEEK THREE: JOY

REFLECTIONS ON MATTHEW 2:1-12

Perhaps one of the most surprising elements of the nativity story is the visit from the magi. These visitors were not Jewish, and they followed astrological signs in their search for a new king, something typically frowned upon in the biblical narrative. Their role in the story is unexpected, but it has something beautiful to teach us about how the expansive joy of Jesus' birth is good news for all nations.

We aren't entirely sure where the magi came from or how long their journey was, but as they traveled from "the east," they came prepared with gifts fit for a king. This wasn't a hasty flight by night but a planned and intentional journey. The magi traversed borders and dined with kings on their way to find the Messiah, and their search ended with overwhelming joy. They found the child they sought: a promised king who held promises of joy for them as well as for the people of Israel.

Migration has been part of human civilization since the very beginning. While we often focus on the hardships inherent to the migration experience, joy can also be found in these stories. Sometimes human movement is an occasion of growth, opportunity, or reunification with loved ones. Temporary visitors migrate to seek new opportunities, and families immigrate so they can be together once again. Migration spans the spectrum of human experiences: sometimes bringing sorrow, sometimes bringing joy, and many times bringing a little of both.



REFLECTIONS

ON GLOBAL MOVEMENT TODAY

- The magi were not immigrants, but they did have a migration story of sorts as they traveled across nations to discover the long-promised king. In similar fashion, there are people today who migrate temporarily to pursue their dreams or goals. What would inspire you to take a journey like this?
- Similarly, not all immigration stories are those of loss and trauma. Some stories are born out of joy, whether it's a couple getting married, a family reuniting after years apart, or someone starting a new job. Do you know anyone who migrated or immigrated for one of these reasons? What kind of support do you imagine these individuals would need as they upend their lives, even if for joyous reasons?





God,

*We thank you for the joy that you bring to all nations,
and for the surprising ways you reveal yourself to those
who seek you.*

*Our imaginations are kindled as we reflect on the magi
who sought you across border lines and cultures.*

*Many of our neighbors have also made courageous and
hopeful journeys as they pursue hopes, dreams, and joy
in their lives. We pray for your protection and guidance
for them, and for moments of joy in their journey.*

*We lament the brokenness in our immigration system,
which often keeps families apart for far too long. We
ask for backlogs to be cleared and for separated loved
ones to have open paths back to each other.*

*We pray that those who wait will soon find your
overwhelming joy.*

A M E N .

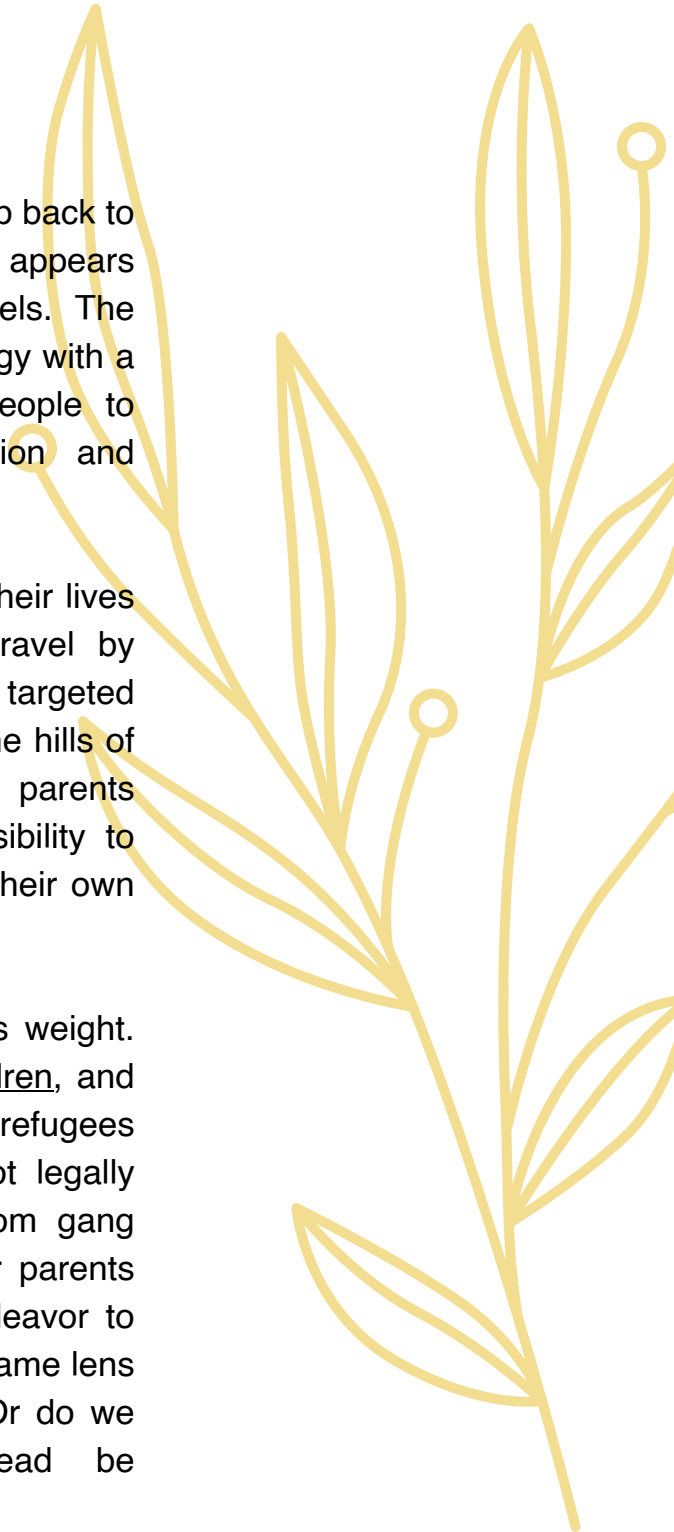
WEEK FOUR: LOVE

REFLECTIONS ON MATTHEW 1-2 & LUKE 1-2

As we enter the final week of Advent, we take a step back to view the story as a whole and see how movement appears throughout the two birth narratives in the gospels. The opening words of Matthew feature Christ's genealogy with a timeline patterned around the exile of God's people to Babylon, reminding us that stories of migration and displacement weave throughout all of Scripture.

Reading further, we see Mary and Joseph uproot their lives multiple times in this story. Initially forced to travel by government decree, then fleeing for their lives from targeted oppression, and finally returning to their home in the hills of Galilee. Every step of the way, these devoted parents moved in love. They honored their holy responsibility to protect the child that God gave them, and risked their own lives to preserve his.

So many parents across the world also know this weight. About 40% of the world's refugees today are children, and hundreds of thousands of children are born as refugees every single year. Many other children, while not legally recognized as refugees, face similar dangers from gang violence, climate disasters, and civil unrest. Their parents are faced with unimaginable choices as they endeavor to keep their children safe. Do we see them with the same lens we use when reading about Mary and Joseph? Or do we assign judgment where there should instead be compassion?



REFLECTIONS

ON GLOBAL MOVEMENT TODAY



- What factors do you think lead parents to choose to take their children with them across borders or even send them ahead alone to a new country?
- Why do you suppose migrant workers make the choice to leave their children behind as they seek to provide a better life?
- If you felt that your child was in danger or that you could no longer provide for their needs, what would you do? Would a legal border or barrier stop you from protecting your child or seeking their flourishing?





Father,

We thank you for the nurturing love that you have for all people, and your desire to see flourishing on the earth.

We come to you with broken hearts for parents on the move who are seeking the best for their children, but struggling to find peace and safety.

We trust that you want the best for children everywhere. Please deliver those in danger from the perils that face them, and help them to experience comfort through your love.

Guide our hands and feet to bring repair in places where we have influence, and give us courage to raise our voices for justice. Help us to seek mutuality in our hospitality, and give us humility to listen and learn from others about what they need.

God of love, mold our hearts to love as you do.

A M E N .

We hope these last four weeks have been meaningful as we've revisited a familiar story with fresh eyes, seeking to understand what a God on the move has to say about the way we view migration in our world today. God's people have always been on the move: from Abraham to the apostles, the people found in biblical narratives were well acquainted with feelings of displacement, uncertainty, and being strangers in a strange land.

We believe there is a special significance in God's choice to lean into that reality and move close to the vulnerable through the incarnation. As the Advent season draws to a close and Christmas draws near, our prayer is that you will feel the presence of a God who understands our struggles and our joys. May you experience the hope, peace, joy, and love of Christ this holiday season, and may you share them with your neighbors both near and far.



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www.terraandsage.com/shop

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We Welcome.



We Welcome is a grassroots community seeking to educate, equip, and mobilize women of faith to initiate and cultivate a community of welcome from their tables at home to the halls of Congress.

We provide ongoing education and a safe, welcoming community to help guide individuals on their next steps in advocacy for immigration policy that honors the God-given dignity of every person.

JOIN THE WELCOME MOVEMENT.



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