



*Advent 2017*

THE PRIMATE'S WORLD RELIEF AND DEVELOPMENT FUND

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*Produced by*

**The Primate's World Relief and Development Fund**  
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*Advent 2017*

# The Primate's World Relief and Development Fund

## *Advent 2017* Daily Devotional Schedule

### **Advent 1: Is 64:1–9; Ps 80:1–7, 16–18; 1 Cor 1:3–9; Mk 13:24–37**

Sunday December 3	1 Cor 1:3–7
Monday December 4	Ps 80: 1-3
Tuesday December 5	Is 64: 1-4
Wednesday December 6	Mk 13: 24-28
Thursday December 7	Is 40: 1 & 11
Friday December 8	2 Pet 3: 8-10
Saturday December 9	Ps 85:9-12

### **Advent 2: Is 40:1–11; Ps 85:1–2, 8–13; 2 Pet 3:8–15a; Mk 1:1–8**

Sunday December 10	Mk 1:1
Monday December 11	Ps 85:8
Tuesday December 12	Is 40: 3-5
Wednesday December 13	Mk 1: 4-8
Thursday December 14	Ps 126: 1-3
Friday December 15	1 Thess 5: 16-18
Saturday December 16	Is 61: 1-4

### **Advent 3: Is 61:1–4, 8–11; Ps 126; 1 Thess 5:16–24; Jn 1:6–8, 19–28**

Sunday December 17	Lk 1: 46b-53
Monday December 18	Is 61:11
Tuesday December 19	Ps 126: 5-6
Wednesday December 20	Ps 89:1
Thursday December 21	Jn 1: 6-8
Friday December 22	Lk 1: 26-29
Saturday December 23	Rom 16: 25-27

### **Advent 4: 2 Sam 7:11, 16; Ps 89:1–4, 19–26; Rom 16:25–27; Lk 1:26–38**

Sunday December 24	Lk 2: 8-14
Monday December 25	Is 9: 2-6





*An Advent invitation*  
from The Primate's World Relief and Development Fund  
by The Rev. Shawn Sanford Beck

*For priests and worship leaders*

As we move into the season of Advent, we encourage you to consider drawing your congregation's attention to the work of The Primate's World Relief and Development Fund (PWRDF). There are several ways to do this.

Please sign up and invite your parishioners to sign up for our daily devotional resources throughout the season. Each devotional reflection is based on a portion of the weekly lectionary, some from the Sunday prior and some from the Sunday to come. I hope that these will be useful for your sermon preparation, as well as your own prayer life. Embedded in the reflections are hypertext links to the PWRDF website, so that you and your parishioners can learn more about the work done on your behalf by PWRDF.

We are also hoping that you will choose to use the resources we have created for your Sunday worship. For each Sunday in Advent, as well as Christmas Day, we have provided an intercession to use in the prayers of the people, a short bulletin piece, and a short reflection on the theme of Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (MNCH), which is an important area of focus for PWRDF. These reflections might be used as part of the sermon, included as an announcement, woven into the children's time or used however you feel appropriate in your own liturgical context.

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Please feel free to contact Christine Hills at [chills@pwrdf.org](mailto:chills@pwrdf.org) if you have any questions or feedback about this resource. We would love to hear from you!

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## Sunday December 3

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind—just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you—so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. (I Corinthians 1: 3-7)*

SO HAPPY New Year! Yes, it is that time again, as the annual cycle rolls around to the beginning of the Christian liturgical year: Advent. In the midst of snow and darkness, we are summoned by the Spirit into a more reflective mode of being. Our hope here at PWRDF is that this series of thoughts and prayers might help you connect deeply with the work of our church throughout the world. As you read, follow the links to in-depth stories on the PWRDF website, and spend some time enjoying communion with our partners scattered near and wide throughout God's good Earth. And do not forget to pray for them, as they are undoubtedly praying for us!

In the Christian tradition, Advent ushers in a season of intentional watching and waiting; we wait, as Paul reminds us, "for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ." This means of course the final, cosmic parousia, which will consummate the whole Creation in God's destined salvation. But it also means waiting and watching for the smaller appearances of Christ ... the helping hand of neighbours near and far, the glimpses of beauty we catch in the winter wonderland, the foretastes of the heavenly banquet we receive as we work for justice. These too are the comings of Christ in our midst. As we tell these smaller stories, the "testimony of Christ" is strengthened among us, as it was for Paul's friends in Corinth.

Yesterday (at the time of this writing), I was in a meeting with my bishop, and his face was alight with joy as he described his recent trip to Tanzania as part of a PWRDF delegation. Bishop David regaled us with stories of village gatherings, shared food, smiling faces and the power of Jesus among the people of the Anglican Diocese of Masasi. <http://pwrdf.org/2017/sharing-bread-in-tanzania/>. From a secular perspective, this could be seen simply as an ecclesiastical travel narrative. But for people of faith, the stories my bishop brought back with him are signs of

"the grace of God that has been given us in Christ Jesus." Throughout this Advent season, may we be strengthened by this grace, and may we each encounter the Lord who is revealed in such stories of gospel partnership.

**Let us pray:** *Holy and Loving One, you come among us in a multitude of ways. As we watch and wait for you, continue to reveal yourself to us in the faces of your beloved people far and wide. Amen.*





## Monday December 4

*Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock! You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh. Stir up your might, and come to save us! Restore us, O God, let your face shine, that we may be saved. (Psalm 80: 1-3)*

I'M VERY excited! This summer, our farm community gained five new members: sheep! Two ewes and three lambs, good Icelandic stock. There is something about having sheep around the farm that seems just so darn biblical. While we know that cattle played a key role in the agricultural economy of ancient Israel, it is the sheep that catch my attention much more in the literature of the Bible. "The Lord is my shepherd" (Ps. 23), "we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture" (Ps. 100), "give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, you who lead Joseph like a flock" (Ps. 80) ... the psalms are full of such pastoral imagery. Turn to the New Testament and it is much the same. Jesus comes to us as the Good Shepherd and we are his sheep. Very cozy (apart from the fact that the sheep will eventually be eaten ... but that is for another reflection!)

For me, ewes and their lambs are a powerful symbol of the loving care that God has for each of us. Not only is God our Shepherd, but on another level, God is also our mother ewe, our divine dam. This is a very appropriate image and it lends itself well to the Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (MNCH) work being done by PWRDF partners. If you have not yet done so, consider checking out the promotional materials developed for this theme, and share them with your parish. <http://pwrdf.org/resources/promotional/>

Like a brave shepherd or a mother sheep, we give thanks this Advent that God does lead us like a flock, and God's gentle might will always save us.

**Let us pray:** *God of farmyard and backyard, country lane and city street, you never leave us to face life's dangers alone. Stir up your might, great Shepherd, and let your face shine, that we may be saved. Amen.*



## Tuesday December 5

*O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence—as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil—to make your name known to your adversaries, so that the nations might tremble at your presence! When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect, you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence. From ages past no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who works for those who wait for him.*

(Isaiah 64: 1-4)

**F**EW CANADIANS will forget the kindled brushwood that turned into a raging inferno in northern Alberta in the summer of 2016. Fort McMurray, to the horror of the rest of Canada, faced and fought one of the wildest fires they could imagine, a fire “of biblical proportions” some residents were quoted as saying. <http://pwrdf.org/2016/reflecting-on-fort-mcmurray/>. The disaster quickly led to the largest fire-related evacuation in the recorded history of Alberta. A year and a half later, the citizens of Fort McMurray are still returning and struggling to rebuild their community.

When a crisis of that magnitude occurs, there are many different responses. Many people immediately worried about the state of the tar sands tailing lakes and whether or not they would catch fire as well. Others reflected on the long-term effects of climate change and faced the reality that these types of massive fires may become the norm for the foreseeable future; for example, many northern Indigenous communities have been dealing with the threat of fire in their communities for a number of years. And of course, everyone’s primary concern was with the people of Fort McMurray ... getting them out safely, battling the fire, struggling with the effects of displacement and trauma. In the midst of all this, many people ask, “Where is God?”

For people of faith, the answer to this question is relatively clear: God is right there in the middle of the disaster, with the fearful, with the grieving, with the brave firefighters, first responders and ordinary citizens helping each other out. God is there in the midst of the ravaged eco-system as the Power of resilience and healing, not only for the human community, but for the whole web of Creation. God is never far removed, watching from a distance. In the midst of crisis, God does “awesome deeds that we did not expect”, inspiring through the Spirit amazing acts of bravery, compassion and solidarity.

This solidarity includes the work of PWRDF, which received approximately \$285,000 in response to the wildfires to help with immediate and longer term needs. Through your generosity, you are part of the divine miracle of renewal among the good people of Fort McMurray. Thanks be to God.

**Let us pray:** *God of compassion and bravery, in the midst of the wildfires of life, you never leave us or forsake us. Help us in our hour of need, this day and always. Amen.*



## Wednesday December 6

*But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory. Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven. From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near.*  
(Mark 13: 24-28)

THIS DAY, December 6, is for many a day of contradictory thoughts and feelings. It is, on the one hand, the joyous feast day of St. Nicholas, the patron saint of children (among other things) and the faithful precursor to the more modern secular figure of Santa Claus. On the other hand, December 6 is also the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women, commemorating the horrific events of the l'École Polytechnique de Montréal massacre in 1989.

What both of these memorials have in common is a back-story of structural violence against women and girls.

Fourth century Asia Minor, as in much of the ancient world, was not a safe or stable place for women in poor families. In one particular story (probably representative of the reality of many), three young women are in danger of being consigned to a life of prostitution, as their destitute parents cannot afford even a tiny dowry to provide them with the small dignity of marriage. When their bishop hears about this, Nikolaos of Myra is moved by the Spirit to provide anonymous gifts of gold, to spare them from the ravages of a thoroughly patriarchal system. Hence our tradition of gift giving through the example of Saint Nicholas.

Unfortunately, patriarchy did not end in the fourth century. Sixteen hundred years later, male chauvinism and the hatred of women spewed forth its violent venom in the merciless slaying of 14 women in the Montreal Massacre.

The church recognizes that violence against women and girls does not emerge from a vacuum. It is a manifestation of the deeper structural issues of systemic inequality and oppression. That is why PWRDF is committed to gender equality, which is number five of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Until women and girls are treated as equals in our society, violence and strife will continue to haunt us all.

**Let us pray:** *Creator God, Mother and Father of us all, we give you thanks for the gift of the women and girls in our midst. Transform our world, destroy the patriarchy, and usher us into a world of partnership and peace. Amen.*



## Thursday December 7

*Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. He will feed his flock like a shepherd, he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep. (Isaiah 40: 1 & 11)*

SO WHAT brings you comfort? In prevalent North American lingo we talk about "comfort food", "comfort toys", "comfort books", comfort whatever.... Not that there is anything wrong with this; we all need sources of comfort which make us feel safe, secure and relaxed. But somewhere along the way, we may have watered down or trivialized the power of the word comfort.

For the people of Judah, to whom Isaiah is writing, the time of exile has been long and hard. They have seen their holy city of Jerusalem besieged by military might, and the people of the country afflicted by disease and famine. Babylon had conquered and the dreams of ancient Israel seemed to be dead in the dust. Into that context, the prophet Isaiah speaks his word of healing: "Comfort, O comfort my people." God is not far away, sitting in judgment and wrath. Rather, God is near at hand, gathering the exiles like lambs, preparing to bring them home to a restored Jerusalem under a renewed covenant. The comfort God brings is neither sentimental nor trivial. It is a matter of life and death for the whole community.

In our world today, there are so many people who live in the shadow of death. In particular, the countries of Nigeria, South Sudan, Somalia and Yemen (<http://pwrdf.org/2017/east-african-appeal/>) are facing the largest humanitarian crisis since the Second World War, with more than 20 million people on the brink of starvation. Drought, climate crisis, famine, political corruption and military conflict have come together in a perfect storm. For the foreseeable future, death will reign in these regions of Africa. Like Judah in exile, the people of these countries will cry out for deliverance.

Our church, through PWRDF, will be part of God's loving response to this crisis. As we observe this holy season of Advent, let us join together in prayer and action that God will bring "Comfort, o comfort, for my people Africa".

**Let us pray:** *God of eternal comfort, you gather the lambs in your arms and carry them close to your heart. Break the chains of conflict and famine, that your children might live in peace. Amen.*



## Friday December 8

*But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed (2 Peter 3: 8-10)*

**O** GOOD Lord, give me patience. And give it to me NOW!!! I don't know about you, but for me, this prayer is an almost constant refrain on my lips. I wish I possessed the virtue of patience, but alas, my gifts lie elsewhere.

As a young activist, I spent several decades working and striving with a sense of intense urgency for a just society. I organized, I protested, I wrote letters, articles, books, I blockaded busy city streets and sat-in MP's offices. I went to court and went to jail, numerous times, in an effort to make the world a better place. And I wouldn't take back a bit of it, even as I look back now from a different perspective. We need our activists. We need our peaceful warriors.

But if I could speak to my younger self, perhaps I would counsel a bit more patience. A bit more of the long view. Not to douse the passion and intensity of that younger self, but simply to remind him that these things take time. Redemptive change does not tend to come overnight (for the most part!). Indeed, in God's time, "one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day." Illusions about instant and easy change lead to cynicism and burnout. But the Spirit's gift of patience can help the activist in all of us stay true to the generational work of justice.

One particular area where all of us need that "urgent patience" is in our work of reconciliation. It has been only two years since the Truth and Reconciliation Commission presented its painful findings and released its 94 Calls to Action. Justice Murray Sinclair reminded us all that the cultural genocide went on for seven generations and it will take seven generations for the healing to occur. Seven generations ... that is a call to radical commitment and patience. But as people of faith, we are no strangers to commitment and patience. The Creator waits with patience and

compassion and the promise of the Great Spirit will never fail. Let us renew our own baptismal promises and strengthen each other in the lifelong work of reconciliation and justice.

**Let us pray:** *Fire of justice, descend upon us and dissolve our abusive systems of privilege and oppression. Bring healing to your people, both now and seven generations henceforth. Amen.*





## Saturday December 9

*Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him, that his glory may dwell in our land. Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other. Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from the sky. The LORD will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase. (Psalm 85:9-12)*

**F**OOD SECURITY, food sovereignty and food justice: these are complex and interrelated concepts. For many people who live in relative comfort, seeing images of famine, starvation, and poverty in far away lands leads to guilt-ridden and somewhat simplistic reflections on quick solutions. Just send the food and it will all be okay. Prairie farmers feed the world, after all, so why is it so hard to get that food to where it is needed?

Of course, this is a defective view of what really happens. Globalized corporate agri-business is one of the reasons why many countries around the world are no longer able to feed their own people. When you add political instability, militarized conflict and massive climate upheaval, you quickly begin to see that "just send them food" is not a long-term sustainable solution to global hunger.

However, in the midst of all this, there IS still a role for getting emergency nutrition to starving people. It is only one small piece of a very large and complex puzzle, but it is important nonetheless. That is why PWRDF continues to partner with the Canadian Foodgrains Bank. Foodgrains Bank <https://foodgrainsbank.ca/> works with partner groups all over the world to get food where it is needed most in times of emergency ... but also to work with farmers and agencies in famine stricken countries to grow their own forms of food security, food sovereignty and food justice.

We pray for the day when organizations like Foodgrains Bank will no longer be needed, the day when "God's glory will dwell in the land," when "faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from the sky." Then, in that day, the Creator of all will "give what is good and the land will yield its increase." Both God and Mother Earth are working together to bring justice and healing to the land. Let us give thanks, and join in their saving work..

**Let us pray:** *Earth-maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver, your saving will is over all the world. Bring food, with justice, to all the peoples of the planet, and may the whole creation live to praise your name. Amen.*



## Sunday December 10

*The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.* (Mark 1:1)

"THE GOSPEL is meant to be good news." This was the surprising assertion made by Korean Minjung feminist theologian Chung Hyun Kyung; surprising because it seems so obvious. What else could the gospel mean except good news? But what Dr. Chung was trying to point out was the reality that for many people around the globe, especially impoverished women of colour, the gospel has not been good news. It has been profoundly bad news. When the "good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" arrived on the shores of many nations worldwide, it was brought by missionaries riding the wave of colonial development. The liberating and saving message of the gospel was, in so many cases and so many ways, obscured and perverted by powers-that-be. In the words of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, "when the missionaries came to Africa, they had the Bible and we had the land. Then they said 'let us pray.' We closed our eyes. When we opened them, we had the Bible and they had the land."

Sharing the gospel in the context of this painful history is an ongoing challenge. We now recognize that sharing can never be a one-way exchange. Sharing is partnership and collaboration. Building new and just relationships is essential for us, even if it means we must all constantly call ourselves and each other to account, to make sure we are not promoting bad news rather than good.

PWRDF strives to live this accountability at all levels, especially through its Canadian Anglican Partnership Program <http://pwrdf.org/our-work/canadian-anglican-partnership-program/>. By making sure that the voices and perspectives of all our global partners are heard, we open ourselves to the gift of meeting Christ in "the other". This Advent season, as we await the birth of the Divine Child among us, let us open our ears and our hearts to our partners all over the world, that together we might truly hear "the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."

*Let us pray: Holy One, Loving One, let the news we share with each other be genuinely good. May your living gospel come into our midst. Amen.*



## Monday December 11

*Let me hear what God the LORD will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts. (Psalm 85:8)*

AS WE make our way together through Advent and approach the great Feast of Christmas, there is one particular messianic title that always makes my heart leap. Jesus shall be born among us as the "Prince of Peace."

In our war-torn and weary world, who among us does not yearn for peace? Modern historians have begun talking about the 20th and 21st centuries as the age of unceasing war, beginning with the world wars, the Korean War, the Cold War, Vietnam, Iraq, Sudan, Afghanistan, Syria... one after another, a whole litany of ongoing violence.

One of the side effects of warfare is the displacement of people from their homes. Throughout the globe, refugees and asylum seekers are on the move. This year, PWRDF and many other groups marked World Refugee Day in Canada (<http://pwrdf.org/2017/pwrdf-marks-world-refugee-day-in-canada-and-abroad/>) and abroad, reminding us of Jesus' words: "I was a stranger, and you welcomed me." Having worked with refugees in the past, I know that one of the deepest joys of someone who has made it to Canada is the sense of "finally, we have peace."

Every day in my own prayers, I ask for "peace in my heart, peace in this grove, peace on the farm, and peace through the Earth." And as the well-known bumper sticker says: if you want peace, work for justice. Let us do so, and truly become a people of peace.

*Let us pray: O Prince of Peace, we wait for you with open hearts. Come and heal our world, and give peace in our day. Amen.*



*Tuesday December 12*

*A voice cries out: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken." (Isaiah 40: 3-5)*

**T**HOUGH HIS birthday celebration is not until the middle of January, I cannot help but hear the voice of Martin Luther King Jr. whenever I come across this passage from Isaiah. That revolutionary speech, though I was too young to hear the actual oration, has taken up permanent residency in my imagination. And I suspect I am not alone in that.

The Civil Rights movement marked a watershed in North American socio-political reality, but in some very important ways, the movement remains unfinished. Since the sixties, new issues have cried out for our attention: feminism, gay rights, environmental action, the peace movement, refugees, multi-culturalism, anti-oppression movements, indigenous justice, truth and reconciliation, Black Lives Matter ... and so many more very important voices.

There is much work to be done. But as people of faith, we can be sure that we do not work alone. The prophet Isaiah still cries out his words of hope in the wilderness. John the Baptizer and his rabble-rousing cousin Jesus still work tirelessly to level the mountains and lift up the valleys. The Spirit weaves Her endless tapestry of justice and healing. And in the midst of it all, "the glory of YHWH shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together." All people includes me and you, and every soul who yearns for the righteous Reign of God.

Through PWRDF, we are part of that great Dream of Life. The history of PWRDF resonates with the history of the Civil Rights movement, and all the struggles that have followed. We are part of a long and Spirit-filled story ... may it continue until Kingdom come.

**Let us pray:** *O God of the wilderness voices, you always hear the cries of your people. Weave us into your great story, that we may see with open eyes the glory of your love. Amen.*



## Wednesday December 13

*John the Baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." (Mark 1: 4-8)*

WHERE I live, Advent is observed in the midst of blizzards, minus 30 degree temperatures and a vast ocean of brilliant snow. Every morning I head down to the frozen lake, where I draw water through several feet of ice, to keep the homestead going. So when I read this passage from Mark's gospel about John baptizing in the wilderness, you will have to forgive me for finding it hard to imagine. The desert climate of the Judean countryside seems worlds away from the reality I inhabit. Dust, the flowing Jordan ... what does that have to do with Advent?

However, on deeper consideration, I suspect that the historical and terrestrial differences are insignificant next to the spiritual realities described in this gospel text. Thousands of years later and thousands of miles away, people are still desperate to hear the call of "repentance for the forgiveness of sins." Sin is a haunting reality that never really goes away, even though it changes form from time to time.

In the middle of "the holiday season", as our culture tends to call it, we are surrounded not only by snow and cold, but also by shopping, glitz and endless parties. It is very tempting to forget the piercing wisdom of the ancient church elders, who described Advent as a "little Lent". Advent is primarily a season of penitence, of preparation, of patient waiting for the coming of Christ. It is a "desert" season (not a dessert season!), and we still need to heed that call to repentance.

John the Baptizer cries out to us in many different ways. Here in Canada, John speaks powerfully through Indigenous communities across the land. As you imagine the waters of baptism, hear the call to repentance in the context of water for all. Forgiveness of sins means healing and justice for all.

**Let us pray:** *God of the Living Waters, you call us to reconciliation. May this Advent season bring us closer to you, and closer to each other as we strive together for healing in our world. Amen.*



## Thursday December 14

*When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then it was said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them." The LORD has done great things for us, and we rejoiced. (Psalm 126: 1-3)*

**Z**ION. FOR those of us who find our place in the biblical tradition, Zion is a name that often evokes a sense of home, of safety, of the presence of the Creator. Zion is synonymous with Jerusalem, or sometimes one of its proximate mountains, but it can also (within the Jewish mystical tradition of Kabbalah) represent the mystical "still point" of all creation, from which proceeds the Holy of Holies and the Realm of God. Those of us who are die-hard sci-fi fans will remember the climax of the Matrix series, where Zion was the secret gathering place of a beleaguered humanity, under attack from the Borg-like world of artificially intelligent machines. Those of us who are children of the seventies will remember the Rastafarian ballad, gently singing, "by the rivers of Babylon, where we sat down, there we wept, as we remembered Zion." In each of these cases, Zion holds a lot of emotional power. Many of us can relate to it, but I suspect that the sense of Zion is especially potent for those who have been exiled, displaced by war or famine, scattered far and wide.

Several years ago, Daesh (sometimes known as ISIS or ISIL) began its brutal assault of the Middle East. Since then, literally millions of people have been displaced in the region. Some have escaped to Europe or North America, but many are trapped in refugee camps or worse, waiting for the war to end. PWRDF, through its partnership with the ACT Alliance, has been doing its part to shelter and support those who have been scattered by the war. The stories of these refugees, people like Zinab and her children from Iraq are utterly heartbreaking. <http://pwrdf.org/2017/waiting-to-go-home-an-iraqi-womans-story/>. For them, Zion has been stolen from them. Home is long gone.

And yet, the words of our psalm today come as both history and promise. Long years ago, the Lord DID restore the fortunes of Zion. The people DID return from a bitter exile, to a homeland waiting for them. What God has done in the past, God can do again. Not by waving a magic wand or through the force of divine wrath, but through patient and loving perseverance, through

the way of the cross. Among the exiles, God quietly suffers and moves, healing, strengthening, preparing a way to safety. God is doing great things for them, and together we shall all rejoice.

**Let us pray:** *Loving God of Zion, you restore the fortunes of the wounded, and bring the wanderers home. Shelter the refugees of the world, and help us to find a Zion for each and every child. Amen.*





## Friday December 15

*Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. (1 Thessalonians 5: 16-18)*

SO I NEED to admit, right off the bat, that I like this passage. Always have. In the midst of the sullen grey skies and freezing temperatures, there is something about this bold invitation to "rejoice always" that has a way of lifting my spirits.

And yet, on the other hand, there is also something about it that quite annoys me. Who does Paul think he is, setting out "rejoicing" as "the will of God in Christ Jesus for you?" How can Paul have the gall to command us to rejoice? Joy cannot be compelled, can it?

I suspect that many of us have gone through shadowed times in our lives, times when we have wrestled with doubt, struggled with temptation, times when we have danced with the dark angel of despair. And when we are in the midst of those seasons, it can be annoying, even hurtful, to be told to just cheer up, get over it, rejoice. Even when the words are well intentioned, advice like this can add insult to injury and gas to the fire.

But I suspect that Paul is too wise to offer us that cheap sort of crypto-counsel. Paul is no stranger to hard times, and his people in Thessaloniki are right in the midst of their own particular trials and tribulations. Paul is not urging a Pollyanna-ish cheerfulness, but rather a deep and courageous joy, a joy intimately familiar with suffering, but linked as well to prayer and thanksgiving. This is an Advent joy beyond tinsel and twinkly lights, a joy that strains forward to the coming of the Holy One, the God who is faithful to us through all our shadowy valleys and times of trial. Throughout the world, even in places of great sadness and travail, divine rejoicing breaks forth in surprising ways. Several years ago, former PWRDF director Adele Finney remembers a meeting with Olinda Magaia, of EHALE in Mozambique. During the course of their conversation, in the midst of many thanksgivings, Olinda reached out to embrace Adele and began to jump for joy. <http://pwrdf.org/2015/jumping-for-joy-praying-for-peace/>. Even though the challenges of life in Mozambique remain ubiquitous, the joy of the Spirit is unquenchable.

So when you hear Paul's words, think of Olinda and Adele and all the many believers like them throughout the world, and rejoice.

**Let us pray:** *O God of great joy, your Spirit inspires us with courage and hope. Let us rejoice with you and with all your children, as your gracious will transforms our lives. Amen.*



## Saturday December 16

*The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me, he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to provide for those who mourn in Zion—to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, to display his glory. They shall build up the ancient ruins, they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations. (Isaiah 61: 1-4)*

**I**N JULY 2016, Rebecca Deng returned from asylum in Canada to her home in war-torn South Sudan to help set up a Women's Resource Centre. In the midst of a brutal famine, the Centre is a beacon of hope for women, children, elders and the whole community.

Stories like this are always inspiring. When our radios, TV screens, and mobile feeds are filled to the brim with war, racism and general mayhem, we need the antidote of truly good news.

Advent is a time of watching and waiting. It is a season of deliberately keeping our eyes peeled for any sign of God's presence. I picture our Advent disciplines of prayer as a form of "spiritual birdwatching"; we perch ourselves on a log in the forest, quiet, careful, senses tuned, binoculars or camera at the ready, eager to catch a glimpse of bright feathers, a trill of song in the distance. As Advent "Spirit-watchers", we listen ever so carefully for the song of good news, the gospel of liberty, and release, and comfort, and gladness, and praise. And we are not disappointed in our watching. God's Spirit is faithful. In spite of the pain of the world, there are so many disciples like Rebecca who are "building up ancient ruins and repairing the ruined cities."

For those with eyes to see, these are the signs of Christ's coming among us. For the Holy One comes not just once-upon-a-time in a manger, nor only once again in the far-off future, but also

here and now, day-by-day, in the lives of the "oaks of righteousness" near and far. May we be attentive enough to see, and to rejoice.

**Let us pray:** *O Great Spirit of Deliverance, you anoint all who bring good news to the poor. Raise us up, that we too may become oaks of righteousness, for the sake of your beloved world. Amen.*



## Sunday December 17

*My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. 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: 46b-53)*

AS WE enter the third week of Advent, the lectionary gives us the option of replacing the appointed psalm with a canticle from Luke. It is a very famous canticle, read, prayed, and sung at numerous services of evensong over the centuries. Sometimes the beauty of the music and the ancient language of the text disguises the fact that this is a very dangerous piece of scripture. It is dangerous because it threatens to turn our world upside down!

This is the Magnificat, Mary's song. Echoing the words of Hannah and other women of the elder testament, Mary sings in exultation of the work of God's Spirit in her life. Her soul "magnifies" God, and her spirit "rejoices". This is good stuff! Give us a bit of that rejoicing, especially now in the cold darkness of the winter. But ... and here is where things get dangerous ... if we go on a few lines in the Magnificat, we notice that Mary is singing about a revolution. God is planning on casting down the powerful and lifting up the lowly. The Holy One is about to fill the poor with good things, but send the rich away empty. So where do we fit in this once-and-coming revolution of the Reign of God?

For many of us, especially if we know we fit somewhere in between the powerful and the poor, solidarity and accompaniment is the path we can take in living out the Magnificat. Walking together with those who are in great suffering, those who are marginalized or oppressed, those who experience the very depths of poverty, this is the path of gospel for us. In Mozambique, PWRDF invites us into solidarity with those who are suffering from HIV and AIDS. By helping to fund *activistas* (community health workers), we become partners of accompaniment with the lowly who are being lifted up, and the poor who are being filled with good things. <http://pwrdf.org/2013/accompaniment-for-life/>

This Advent season, let us continue to pray for the ongoing revolution of the Magnificat. May we find our place alongside all who suffer, and accompany them in true companionship of Spirit.

**Let us pray:** *Revolutionary God of Mary, long live your subversive and dangerous message of change! May our souls magnify you, and our spirits rejoice in you, as we join with all your children in the healing and transformation of the world. Amen.*



## Monday December 18

*For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations.* (Isaiah 61:11)

OUR FAMILY is a gardening family. Well ... ok, I will tell the truth: my wife is a gardener. A full-time, all-out, no-holds-barred gardener. She helps run the oldest community shared agriculture (CSA) operation in Saskatchewan. Janice loves nothing more than spending hours upon hours pulling weeds, picking produce, and putting up the harvest for the cold winter months. Me? ... Well I am basically her household assistant. I try to get some of the other homestead duties done, like hauling water from the lake and keeping the wood box filled.

As a gardening observer, I must admit to being in total awe of my wife. As I watch her move through the rows of peas, peppers and potatoes, she seems like a garden-goddess, in harmony with the earth beneath her bare feet and the bright blue skies above. Her craft is magical, and her harvest is pure. In short, my wife reminds me of God.

This is what God must be like, striding through the great garden of creation, tending the plants, uprooting weeds, channelling water, and even (when need be) spreading manure. It cannot be easy being God ... gardening is hard work, even when it is sweet and joyful. God must be truly dedicated to this Edenic patch of the cosmos!

The prophet Isaiah paints us a picture of a glorious harvest of righteousness and praise springing up in the earth, a wonderful work of the Spirit in our midst. As Christians, we know that the proper and appropriate response to such a harvest is thanksgiving and gratitude. God's gifts to us call forth our gifts for others. May the harvest of justice and compassion continue, not only at this gift-giving time of the year, but throughout our lives.

**Let us pray:** *Gardening God, you work tirelessly for the good of all creation. Help us to join in your toil, that together we may reap a harvest of life, forever. Amen.*



## Tuesday December 19

*May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy. Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves.*

(Psalm 126: 5-6)

IN BANGLADESH, as is the case throughout the world, seeds are life. These tiny bundles of genetic material are truly miraculous, and peasant farmers everywhere have always known that their livelihoods, and their very lives, depend on having access to seeds. Small village projects such as the Nayakrishi Seed Hut, <http://pwrdf.org/2016/the-seeds-of-a-cow/> supported by PWRDF's partner organization in Bangladesh (UBINIG), are making it possible for local farmers to regain control and access to the seeds which are so vital to their lifeways.

These types of seed projects are not limited to the global south. Here in the overdeveloped "first world", many people are rediscovering the gift of creation through saving and planting their own seeds. Seed libraries, seed networks, and local events like "Seedy Saturday" are growing a movement of resistance to the corporate control of our food and our lives. Many small local seed companies, (such as our own neighbours' Prairie Garden Seeds), are involved not only in the sale of seed, but also in seed education and activism.

As the winter cold begins, during Advent, it is sometimes hard to imagine that the ground will ever be soft enough again to sow seed! And that is how it is in the spiritual life as well. During the cold and the dark, sometimes all we have left to us is a divine promise. But remember, that promise is the Living Seed, the seed of faith, the seed of hope, the seed of love. And that Seed will soon come to birth, in our world and in our hearts, as surely as Christmas follows Advent. May it be so.

**Let us pray:** *Sower of the Living Seed, come quickly and grow within us. And if we have gone out weeping, then bring us home with shouts of joy. Amen.*





## Wednesday December 20

*I will sing of your steadfast love, O LORD, forever; with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations. (Psalm 89:1)*

I AM NOT much of a singer ... just ask my family. I wish I had a melodic voice, but it is usually best for all present if I just lip-sync during hymns in church. However, as Christmas draws near, and the (yes, liturgically illicit) carols break forth, something magical happens. My voice is unchained and the music flows like liquid gold (well, at least to my own ears!) There is something about these traditional songs that strikes a chord deep in my heart, and inspires hope and joy even in this icy season of wintry darkness. I cannot help but sing, when the songs hold so much meaning.

There are few things that link us to our deep traditions more powerfully than music. Just hear the opening strains with these magical phrases: "it came upon a midnight clear", "once in royal David's city", "away in a manger", "hark the herald angels sing"... and we are transported to that "O holy night" so many centuries past. In the gift of sacred music, the ages collapse into one another, and all times converge in the eternal now of God's Kingdom.

Passing the stories and teachings of our faith to the younger generations seems to be more of a challenge than ever in this day and age. The cultural currents of post-modern secularism erode any sense of the "old, old Story" which we attempt to pass on. Still we must try; it is so important that our children and grandchildren learn to "sing of God's steadfast love" and "proclaim God's faithfulness to all generations."

PWRDF knows that God's partners in peace and justice are not just older folks. Young people have a vital role to play in the healing mission of God in the world. Through "justgeneration.ca" of the PWRDF Youth Council, the song of the Spirit flows into the future. The music of faith continues. [www.justgeneration.ca](http://www.justgeneration.ca).

**Let us pray:** *Christmas carol God, singer of the Sacred Song, let your music flow through us, and through our children, and through our children's children, from generation to generation. Amen.*



## Thursday December 21

*There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. (John 1: 6-8)*

SO, HAPPY Yule! December 21 marks the ancient midwinter feast of the ancestors of northern and western Europe. On this longest night of the year, the houses and village mead-halls would have been decorated, the candles and hearth fires stoked, and the last of the non-breeding livestock butchered. It was feasting time! Music would be played, stories told, and offerings made to help ensure that the year-wheel would turn and the people would survive another long winter season.

When Christianity came to the forests, fields and fens of Europe and its Isles, Yule was transformed into the celebration of the Christ-mass, and many of the religious and cultural impulses of the ancestors were fulfilled in the faith of the church. People understood instinctively that the rebirth of the sun at the solstice prophetically prefigured the birth of the Son of God in Jesus. In the midst of the longest night, the light would begin to shine.

Our gospel reading today points toward Jesus as the light of the world. In the depths of the shadowlands, he is born. He was born way back then, and he continues to be born here and now. PWRDF is honoured to be part of this Shining Light in many places around the world, but we are also at work closer to home. In Canada's north, the winter darkness is long and severe, but the Spirit's work in the Yukon diocese is filled with warmth and hope. <http://pwrdf.org/2017/cold-weather-warm-hearts-pwrdf-in-the-yukon-diocese/>. In the final days of this Advent season, may each of us feel this gospel warmth and fan the flame of hope that is in us.

*Let us pray: Light of the World, shine forth in these midwinter shadows. Illumine our darkness with your Advent, and prepare us for the great Yule feast of salvation. Amen..*



## Friday December 22

*In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. (Luke 1: 26-29)*

**"H**AIL MARY, full of grace, the Lord is with you." Thus begins one of the most important prayers of western Christianity, the Hail Mary. In the Anglican tradition, there are a variety of opinions (surprise, surprise) on the role of Mary within salvation, and the devotion appropriate to her. But as Christmas approaches, even the most die-hard of Protestants cannot help but feel their hearts strangely warmed toward this vulnerable young woman. The High-Church folk in our midst may own her as Queen of Heaven, but at this point in the gospel's unfolding story, Mary is unprotected, socially weak, and at the mercy of forces in her own community that could severely marginalize her, or even take her life.

In short, Mary is a living icon of God's solidarity with vulnerable women and children everywhere. The 6,000-year history of patriarchy throughout the world has consistently, and often brutally, forced women and girls to the lowest levels of the social, political and economic pyramid. Here in Canada, Indigenous women and girls continue to experience a high risk of being treated as disposable, a reality confirmed by recent awareness of the Highway of Tears, and the long-awaited national inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. In such a context as this, it is important for us to remember that Mary was a young brown woman.

PWRDF has been drawing attention to the unjust exploitation of women for years. The current focus on maternal, newborn and child health is one more facet of the struggle for women's liberation everywhere. It is our way of saying, to each and every woman we encounter, "Hail sister, full of grace, the Lord is with you."

**Let us pray:** *O Mother of God, you show us the heart of God the Mother. Lend your strength to our struggle for equality, that all your children find freedom in your grace. Amen.*



## Saturday December 23

*Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever!*  
(Romans 16: 25-27)

**M**YSTERY ... prophecy ... revelation ... wisdom ... these words stir in us a taste for the transcendent reality of God. Throughout the season of Advent, we have been watching and waiting, hoping and praying, straining for a glimpse of God's redemption in the midst of a broken and lovelorn world. The dark winter cold has closed in around us, and any glimpse of light, any wafting warmth, causes us to stop and listen. Is it God? Is the Spirit moving? Is Christ coming again among us?

As people of faith, we have a secret resource that is generally unavailable to our secular post-modern society. We believe in a Big Story. We have trust in a Divine Author of life, who weaves us into a metanarrative of salvation that enfolds the whole creation. For us, life is not just a series of unrelated episodes, and history is much more than just "one damn thing after another". We worship a Creator who has been intimately involved with the unfolding of the universe from the very beginning, and who has loved that creation so much, that the Creator became incarnate, embodied, within the fabric of space and time. This is "the proclamation of Jesus Christ", whom Paul hails as the "revelation of the mystery", that is, the key to the whole Big Story of Life, the Universe, and Everything.

When we, as the church, put our faith into action through PWRDF, we are sharing in the many stories of our partners throughout the world. Know for certain that these stories, and our own stories, are all part of God's Big Story. It can be rough along the way, but it ends "happily ever after."

**Let us pray:** *Master Storyteller, Word-Weaver of all the Worlds, we thank you for the gift of the Big Story. Graft us into your narrative with such love that we find ourselves forever in you. Amen.*



## Sunday December 24

*In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours!" (Luke 2: 8-14)*

JUST RECENTLY, our farm acquired some sheep from a neighbour's flock. We only have five of them, so it is not like a big operation, but boy are those sheep cute. They are a hardy Icelandic breed, fairly small, with big eyes and curled horns. It is taking a while to get them tame and comfortable with us, but the trust is starting to grow. I must say though, even as an ardent animal lover, that those sheep are not the brightest creatures on God's green earth. They are skittish, stubborn and herd bound. New scientific research is challenging the perception that sheep are among the most dimwitted of the animal kingdom, but frankly, they do seem a bit daft.

Maybe that is why I like them so much. Sheep pop up throughout the scriptures, and they are usually symbolic of us. When God is the shepherd, we are the sheep. We are the ones who are skittish, stubborn and dim. Yes, I know that we would rather think of ourselves as brilliant, independent and courageous (and sometimes we do rise to those heights!) but normally we are more like the lowly sheep.

In our scripture passage today, a passage rich and redolent with layers of emotional and symbolic meaning, I am glad that the angels are announcing such great good news to everyone, shepherds and sheep included. I am glad that God's good tidings of great joy are not just for the successful and bright among us. I am glad the gospel of salvation is for the whole creation, ourselves included.

As we prepare to celebrate the Great Feast of the Incarnation, let us place ourselves in those cold dark fields so long ago, part of God's beloved flock, listening with baited breath to the song of the angels: Glory to God in the highest, and peace, deep peace to all the creatures of Earth. A child is born this night, the prince of peace, a gift of love from the heart of the Creator. Thanks be to God!

**Let us pray:** *O Holy One, great Shepherd of all the sheep, keep us close in your fold. Help us to hear the angelic song of salvation, and to share your love with all your creatures near and far. Amen.*



## Monday December 25

*The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light, those who lived in a land of deep darkness on them light has shined. You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire. For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9: 2-6)*

**S**O THIS is it, my friends ... the time of waiting is over! Christmas has come once again! The great Mystery of the Incarnation is accomplished, and the Messiah of God has come among us.

Together, we have walked through the Advent season with our eyes on the scriptures and our hearts open to the Spirit's work in our lives and in the world. We have borne witness to the suffering of God's children, but we have also seen the resilience and faithfulness of our partners in the gospel through PWRDF. Their voices of hope have encouraged us to keep up with the struggle of solidarity. Together, we can continue every day in faith, in prayer, in communion and fellowship with sisters and brothers around the globe who work so hard to transform the world with peace, with justice, and with healing for the whole creation.

In the Litany of the Incarnation (BAS p. 121), we pray that "the kingdoms of this world may become the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." Through the continued work of The Primate's World Relief and Development Fund, may we help to make it so. And from all of us at PWRDF, may you be blessed with a very Merry Christmas!

**Let us pray:** *Creator of heaven and earth, we thank you this day for the great miracle of Christmas. May the joy of this celebration spill over into our world, and bring peace on earth, good will to all. Amen.*

# *Advent Sunday Resources on Maternal, Newborn and Child Health*



## ADVENT 1

**Intercession:** In our PWRDF Advent prayers, we give thanks for EHALE, a partner organization working in Nampula, Mozambique. May their grassroots leaders and birth attendants be angelic ministers to the pregnant women in their communities. God in your love: hear our prayer.

**All Mothers and Children Count 2015–2020:** The Primate's World Relief and Development Fund has over two decades of experience managing and delivering development initiatives related to maternal, newborn and child health. A five-year \$17,697,412 funding agreement between Global Affairs Canada and PWRDF will run from 2015 through March 2020 and will focus on maternal and child health in 350 villages in Burundi, Mozambique, Tanzania and Rwanda. This funding will enhance existing projects in Burundi, Mozambique and Tanzania, and initiate programming in Rwanda. The aim is to reduce illness and death among women of reproductive age, newborns and children under five by addressing the lack of access to birth attendants, under equipped health centres, the need for food security, the eradication of waterborne diseases and the inaccessibility of medical services due to distance.

To view or download the PWRDF placemat on this important theme, go to: <http://pwrdf.org/uploads/489/2017placemat.pdf>.

**Bulletin announcement:** Keep up to speed with the work of PWRDF through its Advent collection of daily devotions and prayers. Sign up for this free on-line resource at <http://pwrdf.org/resources/seasonal>, and don't forget to support our programs by making a gift online at <http://pwrdf.org/worldofgifts!>





## ADVENT 2

**Intercession:** In our PWRDF Advent prayers, we give thanks for all who work for healing in communities struggling with HIV and AIDS, especially among pregnant mothers and their children. God in your love: hear our prayer.

**PWRDF'S Maternal, Newborn and Child Health Program responded to the high HIV and AIDS, and TB infection rates** among pregnant women in the Ngqushwa District of the Eastern Cape by training village health workers to train community members on the prevention and care of HIV and AIDS, and TB, among women of reproductive age and pregnant women. By facilitating a district wide nurse-initiated anti-retroviral treatment system with the government HIV and AIDS directorate targeting pediatric AIDS, they reduced mother to child transmission in the program areas. The project mobilized communities to act and health workers to follow up on those who tested positive and to counsel pregnant women. The program reached 30,000 people with information, education and services on prevention and treatment. Eighty village health workers in remote villages were trained to encourage villagers to go for HIV and TB screenings, to educate women of childbearing age about HIV and the prevention of mother to child transmission and to care for children affected by AIDS. Learn more here: [http://pwrdf.org/uploads/490/2017mnch\\_brochure.pdf](http://pwrdf.org/uploads/490/2017mnch_brochure.pdf)

**Bulletin announcement:** Deepen your prayer life and learn more about the work of PWRDF through its Advent collection of daily devotions and prayers. Sign up for this free on-line resource at <http://pwrdf.org/resources/seasonal>, and don't forget to support our programs by making a gift online at <http://pwrdf.org/worldofgifts!>



## ADVENT 3

**Intercession:** In our PWRDF Advent prayers, we give thanks for the solar suitcase program, providing portable energy for midwives in Africa to do their work more effectively. God in your love: hear our prayer.

**PWRDF is partnering with Indigenous communities in Mexico, Peru and Canada** to implement a Maternal, Newborn and Child Health program in the Americas. Indigenous peoples in the Americas have resilient midwifery birthing values and customs informed by tradition, knowledge and practices that have been passed from generation to generation. Articles 11, 15 and 24 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People state the right of Indigenous people to receive health care in ways that are appropriate. This is a commitment reaffirmed in the Sustainable Development Goals. Many Indigenous women in the Americas continue to deliver their babies assisted by traditional birth attendants. Collaboration between traditional birth attendants and those in the formal health systems will contribute to the formalization of training methodologies aimed at the inclusion of indigenous knowledge and best practices in the educational curriculum of midwifery in these countries. The result will increase Indigenous women's access to health services that reflect their cultural practices, beliefs and cultural sensitivity — without compromising the quality of service. To find out more, go to: [http://pwrdf.org/uploads/490/2017mnch\\_brochure.pdf](http://pwrdf.org/uploads/490/2017mnch_brochure.pdf)

**Bulletin announcement:** Keep watch, and pray for the work of PWRDF through its Advent collection of daily devotions and prayers. Sign up for this free on-line resource at <http://pwrdf.org/resources/seasonal>, and don't forget to support our programs by making a gift online at <http://pwrdf.org/worldofgifts!>



## ADVENT 4

**Intercession:** In our PWRDF Advent prayers, we give thanks for mothers and children throughout the world and for all the people who support them. May health and blessings be upon all women in the midst of the dangers of childbirth. God in your love: hear our prayer.

**NODI:** When Shahana went into labour, she and the other women in Bantiar village in Bangladesh knew they had to act fast. Her first son had died at six months and Shahana was having convulsions that could lead to eclampsia. The Dais (traditional birth attendants) knew she needed to go to hospital immediately. Bantiar is a remote village on the bank of the Pechakola River. Shahana and her husband Jahangir are poor farmers. Thanks to PWRDF and Global Affairs Canada, a Daighor (health centre) was built where the Dais monitor pregnant women. The Dais took Shahana by bicycle ambulance to the riverbank and placed her in the covered boat ambulance. The Dais were prepared having brought their kit bags. Shahana delivered a beautiful baby girl on the river and she named her Nodi, meaning 'River'. Shahana's convulsions stopped and she and Nodi returned home thanks to the Dais, the bicycle ambulance and the boat ambulance.

For more information, check it out: [http://pwrdf.org/uploads/490/2017mnch\\_brochure.pdf](http://pwrdf.org/uploads/490/2017mnch_brochure.pdf)

**Bulletin announcement:** A blessed day of Christmas Eve! Thank you for sharing with us in our PWRDF Advent collection of daily devotions and prayers. We give thanks for your continued support! Check us out anytime at [pwrdf.org](http://pwrdf.org). May the blessings of the ever-coming Christ Child be with you and your loved ones, and with our sisters and brothers around the world, now and always. Amen.



*PWRDF is grateful to*

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a priest and theological educator in the Diocese of Saskatoon, for writing this  
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