

2015 Advent Devotional

Presbyterians for Earth Care

"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." (John 1:5)



For our Advent meditations this year we have focused on Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato si, mi Signore* (Be Praised, my Lord), *On Care For Our Common Home*. John 1:5 is our scriptural context: "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."

We may draw courage from the Pope's letter to us all in this season of holy waiting for the Christ Child's birth. No matter the outcomes of the Paris talks or the difficult issues in which we are currently engaged, we are asked to contemplate God's eternal light as it shines forth, always new and renewing, in Jesus. In the concluding section of the encyclical, Pope Francis writes "Let us sing as we go. May our struggles and our concern for this planet never take away the joy of our hope."

Nancy Corson Carter, Editor

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Presbyterians for Earth Care

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by Rebecca Reyes, M.Div., MSW



One of the songs I learned early in my childhood was

“This little light of mine.

I am going to let it shine.

Let it shine.

Let it shine. “

This song is simple yet it's a very clear reminder that our faith is to be active and visible. God's creation was entrusted to us. As stewards of God's creation how do we let the LIGHT shine?

Pope Francis has put out the call to the community of faith to care for the earth. He urges us to remember that the air we breathe must be kept clean for all living in the world. Likewise, he urges us to care for our water—in oceans, rivers, lakes, and all sources, knowing how humans, fish, and other beings depend on clean water for health. He makes this call to care for all elements of our earth home a moral challenge.

My undergraduate focus of study was in environmental ecology. I learned about the relations and interactions between organisms and their environment.

During college I became involved in the “Don't Litter” campaign as a way to live out my commitment to keep our roadsides clean. For a summer internship in the Gulf of Mexico I focused on ocean life and the impact of oil pollution on the migration of fish due to offshore drilling. This experience nudged me to pay attention to policies which impact local and global communities.

Whether it is recycling, advocating for clear water, paying attention to policies which impact the destruction of forests, water conservation, or the utilization of national resources, these acts give witness that God's creation is sacred.

As we light our candles this season of Advent, let us also commit to let our “little light” be an active witness to the care of the earth in our

A prayer-meditation from my friend, Jim Rigby: RECEIVING THE GIFT OF THIS DAY

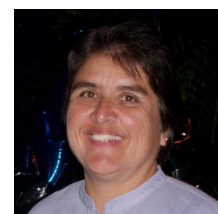
Take one breath conscious of the fact the air you breathe has passed through every kind of plant or animal you can imagine. Remember that every breath is a gift.

Wiggle your toes, if you have them. Remember that every part of your body is a gift.

Consider the electricity pulsing invisibly in your brain like a hidden firefly's tail. Remember that your consciousness is a gift.

Before you get lost in the problems and dramas of this day, remember that your life is a confluence of countless cosmic elements. Remember that this day of life is but an ephemeral kiss shared between ocean, earth, and sky.

Rebecca Reyes, M.Div., MSW, lives in Durham, NC. She is parish associate at Church of Reconciliation, as well as facilitator and consultant for non-profits.



by Rev. Ashley Taylor

Luke 3:1-6

As we reflect on the natural calling to care for and restore the earth, the gospel's words about the earth's terrain particularly catch my attention. In Luke, John's proclamation of "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" is likened to what the prophet Isaiah imagines as a dramatic leveling of all barriers for the Messiah's presence. Unlike the prophet's vision of wholeness, when we see valleys being filled, mountains being made low, crooked ways straight, and rough places smooth, it means that modern day Herods and Roman Empires have been polluting, extracting, exploiting, and compromising the earth's limited resources.

Surely Luke was not calling out bulldozers, dynamite, and atomic bombs to clear a path for the Messiah. But the prophets of whom Luke tells, and every event in Jesus' ministry, cry out for us to thoroughly live in the ways of justice and faith in God's design for wholeness.

If the Advent invitation is for us, in this age, how can the gospel's imagery spark a transformative moment? How can this season be the time to "repent," (to acknowledge the whole truth, experience the impact of the truth, and allow the transformation God leads), and practice forgiveness in such a way that our inner landscape appears leveled – and whole?

PRAYER:

Radiant One, may the mountains be leveled, not by mining companies stripping the earth, but by your courage in us to remove the obstacle of greed for more than the earth can sustain.

May all flesh see your salvation – the health and wholeness that is your great design.
Amen.



The Rev. Ashley Taylor is pastor with the North Highland Presbyterian Church in Denver, CO. This congregation is re-creating "church" by becoming a neighborhood center that helps develop local, small businesses, bartering, urban gardens to feed the city, and spirituality that can help sustain and inspire varieties of people.

by Kay-Robert Volkwin

"We know that the whole creation has been groaning..." (Romans 8:22)

What an astonishing text! It is on this theme that Pope Francis speaks in his encyclical: this Sister, Mother Earth, now cries out because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible uses and abuses of the goods with which God endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will. "This is why the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she 'groans in travail'."

When I go to the supermarket, it upsets me to see with what abandon people use plastic. Most plastic is not biodegradable, and much of it ends up in the oceans, forming "pits of plastic," killing sea creatures and choking birds.

My family tries to live simply. So we were pleasantly surprised when we received a letter and graphics from our energy provider,

congratulating us on being the most energy efficient household in the area! We will continue on this path and, doing so, help to slow down global warming.

As we enter this Advent season, we are reminded "For a child has been born for us, a son is given to us ... he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6). This child grew to become "the man of sorrows," who suffers with the earth and humans. As the spirit of Christ dwells within us, at odds with the power of sin and death, we experience conflict, yet not are driven to despair. Our redemption means hope for the whole creation, which "waits with eager longing for the revealing of God's children." As children of God and joint heirs with Christ indwelt by his Spirit, we are one with creation in suffering, longing, and hope.

Prayer: Spirit of God, groaning in creation, attune our spirits to your cries and the cries of all creation longing for liberation and renewal of planet earth.

Kay-Robert Volkwin did his schooling and seminary training in Cape Town, South Africa. He continued his studies in this country. In 1976, he completed his M.A. (Religion) and in 1984, his Doctor of Ministry. He was pastor in South Africa and here in the US. He served as presbytery associate and synod associate executive. From 1999 through 2004, he and his wife served as mission workers in South Africa.



Apaga tu motor, prende tu conciencia!
(Turn off your motor, turn on your conscience.)

Pacha Mama, Pacha Mama, si no se cuida no se ama.
(Mother Earth, Mother Earth, if we do not care for you, we do not love you.)

These past two years I have participated in climate marches that were inspired by the global meetings COP 20 and 21. There I heard these two chants as crowds from around the world gathered in solidarity, carrying signs and passing out flyers throughout the streets of Lima, Peru and La Paz, Bolivia. In Spanish, the word *prende* (in the first chant) expresses the command to *turn on* or *to light*. Perhaps this light, which the gospel writer John called us to attend to so long ago, is what needs to shine in our world these days. This can be a light that awakens us and calls us to live consciously; thus we will care for the *Pacha Mama* (the indigenous term for Mother Earth) and for God's gifts of life to all beings.

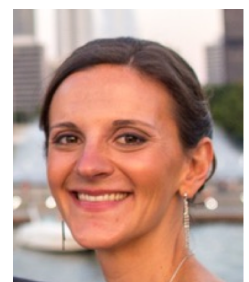
In his contemplative Encyclical Letter, *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis so beautifully affirms this call for us to care for our Casa

Común (Common Home). We are to live in "integral ecology," to be in communion as we embrace the interconnectedness of our environment.

In Bolivia, through the PC (USA) Presbyterian Hunger Program, Joining Hands, our network, UMAVIDA (Joining Hands for Life), is working with churches and grassroot groups to answer this call to care for Creation. Our mission is to address the root and structural causes of hunger and poverty through joint campaigns. Accompanied by our US Presbytery partners, our campaign advocates for environmental justice for communities affected by mining contamination and left without access to clean water. These global issues are interconnected, as we are in the body of Christ. Through our mission work, we strive to develop a spirituality of that "global solidarity" of which Pope Francis reminds us.

Prayer: God of Love and Light,
Our world cries. We pray that, through our faith, we can commit ourselves to reconnect to our Casa Común and be the light that inspires stewardship of your Creation, the Pacha Mama. Amen.

Chenoa Stock has served as Mission Co-Worker for the Presbyterian Church (USA) for ten years. She served in India and Sri Lanka, and for the past five years has been the Companionship Facilitator for the Joining Hands network in Bolivia, South America, UMAVIDA (Joining Hands for Life).



by Nancy Corson Carter

For this holy night I am drawn to Pope Francis's beautiful blessing for us in the conclusion (paragraph 245) of his encyclical (in bold letters).

In the heart of this world, the Lord of life, who loves us so much, is always present.

On this Eve of Christ's birth, we remember "For God so loved the world that he gave his only son." And every breath we breathe is his presence: *ruach, spiritus, pneuma*. In God's grace all children are beloved—Christ, ourselves, all creatures, all life.

He does not abandon us, he does not leave us alone,

Wherever we are, we can let the holiness of this Eve comfort and companion us (putting aside our last minute scurrying and worrying).

In return we offer our hearts as resting place for this dear Child.

He is Emmanuel, God with us—tonight, tomorrow, forever and ever.

for he has united himself definitively to our earth

In Christ God unites us with every element of the cosmos. The angels, donkeys, shepherds, and sheep at his birth represent the fullness of creation's rejoicing.

and his love constantly impels us to find new ways forward.

Pope Francis urges us to act with greater concern for nature and for the poor. He asks what "little ways of love" can we practice? What economic or political or other initiatives for earth care can we support?

We pray for patience to listen for Christ's call. Let us sing as we go, a brave and joyful song of hope.

Praise be to him!



Nancy Corson Carter is a publishing poet and writer, facilitates an Earth Care Congregation in Chapel Hill, NC, and is active in the Shalem Society for Contemplative Leadership. She is Professor Emerita of Humanities at Eckerd College and was Moderator of PRC from 1999-2005.

by Rev. Ginna Bairby

"For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God." - (Romans 8:19)

Rejoice, for the day is here! As one of my favorite hymns proclaims, "Love has come; a light in the darkness! Love shines forth in the Bethlehem skies!"⁽¹⁾ All of creation has been groaning in labor pains with Mary, and at last the Christ Child is born! The angels sing and the heavens rejoice and alongside the manger, "Sister Chicken" and "Brother Goat" cluck and bleat their own melodies of praise.

And yet. There's always an "and yet", isn't there?

And yet here we are some 2000 years later, still waiting. Still witnesses to (and participants in) the suffering of creation. Still hearing the cries of God's earth and God's people.

1. Ken Bible, "Love Has Come," 1996.

When Paul writes that the whole creation "groan[s] in labor pains" and "waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God," he's writing not only from the other side of the manger, but from the other side of the cross, even of the empty tomb. Christ's redemptive action has taken place, and yet creation is still in bondage. "Joy to the world...let heaven and nature sing!" – and yet the creation still groans.

It's intriguing to me that Paul writes in Romans 8 about the *children* of God rather than just the Christ *child*, God's only Son. For Paul, Jesus is the beginning, the "first fruits." The creation still waits, with eager longing, for the continued revelation of God's children.

Will we who are baptized into God's family answer the call?

Prayer: God of all grace, thank you for coming to us this day to be a light in our darkness. God who is both Father and Mother, help us learn to live as your children. Amen.

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