



Artwork by Jessica Jacks

# 2018 ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

Presbyterians for Earth Care

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“Blessed are The Feet of Those Who Bring Good News”

*How beautiful on the mountains  
are the feet of those who bring good news,  
who proclaim peace,  
who bring good tidings,  
who proclaim salvation,  
who say to Zion,  
“Your God reigns!” Isaiah 52:7*

Advent brings a time of waiting, sometimes patiently or not so patiently, for the arrival of many things, namely Christ, in our lives. Advent brings a time of hope, of celebrating, of expectant joy. God is coming to live among us! This passage in Isaiah reminds me of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel’s famous quote about how his feet were praying while marching with Martin Luther King, Jr. in Selma during the Civil Rights Movement. Blessed are the feet of those who bring good news. In the wake of hurricanes in the eastern part of North Carolina, Puerto Rico, and now Florida, it is time to have our feet move. This passage reminded me of those who walked to General Assembly from Fossil Free PC(USA). This passage reminds me of those speaking out, marching, and demanding protection for our environment. I think of the roots of the trees as feet, of all the living organisms that bring forth good news of life in abundance.

Advent is a time of waiting, but waiting doesn’t mean standing still. In this season of Advent, we are reminded of all those who have prepared the way for the good news throughout history. The prophets, priestesses, proclaiming the good news, preparing the way for the infancy of this great truth. It is also a time of Mary singing the lullaby of revolution; the lullaby and joy as resistance to what is the norm in our economic, greed-based society. Those who bring good tidings, peace, and the one who will bring salvation are not for commercialization. (continued...)

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## “Blessed are The Feet of Those Who Bring Good News” continued

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news...of those who climb up the famous peaks to get a new vantage point to see the world, to see the beauty of creation. This Advent, may we embark on our own journey of movement as we (patiently) await the arrival of joy. May we sing joy as resistance to the order of things, and practice faith based economics that remind us of creation. If the world is the theatre for God’s glory, as John Calvin writes, then it is up to us, as human beings, to draw ourselves again and again to the living waters of the world, to protect our environment, and to stand at the mountaintop and see the beauty, and run down to proclaim the Good News.



I also give thanks to Jane Laping and Dennis Testerman for asking me to edit this devotional, and for their work throughout the process and assembling this for you all. My grateful thanks to each writer for their creative lens in which they took the prompt, and produced what is before you. Also, thanks to Jessica Jacks for the beautiful cover art.

Blessings, Peace, Joy, and Love to you all this Advent season.  
Rev. Joanna Hipp



**Joanna Hipp** is a North Carolina native, residing in Charlotte, North Carolina. She is a member of the presbytery’s Ministry Resource Committee, vice president of the Alum Board of Louisville Seminary and serves on the Charlotte Clergy Coalition for Justice. Joanna loves minions, colorful pants and all sports.

# First Sunday of Advent

*How beautiful on the mountains  
are the feet of those who bring good news,  
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Breathing in, I enter the labyrinth.

I'm aware of all the things I'm releasing into the world as the rain gently falls on my head and shoulders: Control. Power. Sadness.

I don't know why God has called me to walk this serpentine path this morning.

There is so much on my to-do list: people to see, emails to send, projects to finish.

Still, with each step on the path into the center of the labyrinth, I try to breathe, try to slow down, try to quiet my mind. My thoughts keep trying to break in, and my soul keeps trying to release everything.

Step by step... in I go.

At the center of the labyrinth, I pause with the group of people I'm walking and praying with. We silently look at the ground, our minds focused on receiving. Our breath mingles, the rain continues to mist around us, the sky turns grey and wet.

As I stare at my feet, I remember what it was like to do a different kind of pilgrimage from the Sun Gate to Machu Picchu in Peru:

*At the top of the mountain, my traveling companions and I rested and enjoyed the sun. We'd climbed the Inca Trail as quickly as we could to get to the top and it was good to take a moment to look out across the valley. On the way up, I'd wanted to prove to myself that I was fit enough to climb, and subconsciously I wanted to be the first one to the top to prove that I was more fit than anyone else in*

## First Sunday of Advent (continued)

*our group. What a ridiculous reason to speed up a beautiful mountain. The absurdity hit me as I looked at the sun kissing the valley. I needed to slow down.*

*I took off my shoes and socks.*

*We headed down the mountain. My toes helped me find the way to smoother rocks, gingerly avoiding the rough edges. I was slower, choosing carefully where to step, stopping to look at the valley and the trees and the plants. The ground was cool and damp underneath my feet and step by step, we made it to the bottom.*

At the center of the labyrinth, I take a deep breath. I reach down and touch the soil and give thanks for the earthy foundation beneath. I accept the peace of slowness as the gift that it is.

I step back into the labyrinth. I breathe again and go into the world.

Today I will choose to slow down. I will choose joy. I will choose God.

*Prayer: In this season of waiting, it is so easy to become so busy that we miss the joy of your coming. Help us slow down and help us breathe. Remind us that your marvelous power in the world surrounds us and calls the Christ into the world. In the name of the one who comes we pray. Amen.*



**abby mohaupt** is a Teaching Elder in San Francisco Presbytery and PhD student at Drew University. She is the moderator of Fossil Free PCUSA. She loves Jesus, running, and the ocean. Her previous work has included working as a pastor in Northern California, a volunteer at a domestic violence shelter in Chicago, and an artist for worship and liturgy for a variety of conferences. She semi-regularly blogs at [www.featheology.org](http://www.featheology.org), and her writing on earth care has appeared in Sojourners, the Presbyterian Church USA's Unbound, and Ecclesio. She can usually be found with at least one crayon in hand.

# Second Sunday of Advent

## But Ask the Animals and They Will Teach You

*<sup>7</sup> "But ask the animals, and they will teach you; the birds of the air, and they will tell you; <sup>8</sup> ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you; and the fish of the sea will declare to you. <sup>9</sup> Who among all these does not know that the hand of the LORD has done this? <sup>10</sup> In his hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of every human being. Job 12:7-10 (NRSV)*

In March of 2014, I embarked upon my first trip to the Grand Canyon in Phoenix Arizona with a dear friend. As I approached the mouth of the canyon, I was struck with awe at the beautiful sight that lay before me and I gasped for breath. The pictures of the canyon that I had seen previously could not adequately capture the spectacle of it and I imagined that God had chiseled this amazing work of art in earth and stone for all to see. The wonder of the experience was best captured by a little boy who had simultaneously arrived at the canyon with his family. "Oh Wow," he exclaimed! "I know, right," I responded with equal excitement.

In the hours that followed, as my friend and I trekked through nature's wonder, we encountered a tree that had not yet received its spring foliage. Lighted upon the tree was a beautiful black bird whose fanned tuft of feathers around its head, and beautiful



singing voice caught our attention. We stopped to listen to it sing and I couldn't resist the urge to sing along so I launched into the song *Simple Gifts*. The black bird immediately stopped singing and cocked its head as if listening to me. Fearing that I had disturbed its song, I fell silent. The black bird began to warble again. Intrigued, I began to sing again too. The bird stopped its song, cocked its head curiously; so this time, I just kept right on singing for a while. As soon as I stopped, the bird resumed its musical discourse. Pretty soon a crowd formed around that tree as the bird and I sang our

## But Ask the Animals and They Will Teach You (continued)

little duet. Eventually, I had to move on but that moment felt divine. For just a moment, I felt one with nature and with God. I said goodbye to the bird as I moved along, and thanked it for sharing such a wonderful gift with me. As an afterthought, I wondered what would happen to that bird, and then, I thought about all of the birds, and animals, and plants, and nature's wonders that we humans carelessly attend and realized that nature was not just put here for us to use and enjoy; but that, we...that I was put here to care for nature.



*Prayer: God of the trees and forests, rivers and seas, hills and vales, and the creatures that walk the earth, during this season of Advent help us to remember the earth in all of its fullness is yours, and that we are stewards of the abundant life you have given. And just as the star that shown over Bethlehem lit the way to the place where the Christ child lay, giving hope to a world in need, help us to be the lights that guide others to see that all you have created is truly precious.*



**Donna R. Phillips** is a Master of Divinity and Master of Arts in Marriage and Family Therapy Student at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. She has served in the Music Department of Second Presbyterian Church in Lexington, Kentucky for over 20 years, formerly as Children's Choir Director and currently as Adult Handbell Choir Director. Donna was also the Music Programs Coordinator at Shaker Village of Pleasant Hill, Kentucky from 2000 to 2015. In addition, Donna is a Singer, Composer, and Playwright.

# Third Sunday of Advent

## Jubilee and Hope

*Isaiah 40:1-11 and Luke 3:1-6*

As we celebrate the coming of the Savior to the world let us take time to pause and think about the opportunities we have in this restorative season of Advent. Seldom do we consider the connections of our economic priorities with the stresses of our planet's biosphere, even less how those same priorities affect our homes and health. Those decisions were not made in the homes of everyday people, but rather in spheres and palaces of power and privilege. Gradually they moved away from sabbath and jubilee practices, to an economy controlled by their monarchies and the exploitation of their land. The jubilee practices, particularly those promoted in the Levitical laws, understood the intricate connections between labor, health and land. Yet as the world moved towards a centralizing power they created a privileged nobility, and their economy became one of mining, particularly extracting labor and land. John the Baptizer audaciously proclaimed a message of repentance to awaken the agency of the covenant people to be actors in the redemptive plan that their God had set out for the covenant people, from an enslaved nation to a jubilee community.

What would it take to be a jubilee people? Interestingly in Luke's Gospel we find that people from all walks of life, profoundly moved perhaps of John's stirring message, asked questions of what needed to be done in order to



demonstrate the repentance he demanded from the masses. To some he expected to share their goods with one another. To others who possessed taxing authority (publicans) they were to respect the just wages of themselves and especially of others. Even to those of foreign birth (soldiers), they were to behave as citizens of the Promised Land. The Jubilee Community was also established to bring blessings to the Earth itself. In the same manner



## Jubilee and Hope (continued)

that “crooked places” were to be set straight, society’s healing also meant healing for the land: property was not to be hoarded and farmland was allowed to rejuvenate itself periodically. It was akin to turning on a giant reset switch for the people and the Earth. All were to be set free from debt and extraction, so that the true potential of all can be celebrated in harvest and sabbath.

The celebration of Advent is for us to stop, meditate, prepare and work towards a new age of Jubilee. Winter is the time required for seeds to be sorted and prepared, just as we must read the signs to see when it is ripe to plant and reap anew. The opportunity will come to till, plant, nurture, wait, pray and care with hope that our efforts produces food and health to our bodies, to strive for an economy that restores the land that the Lord gave us, together with a willing vulnerability to share God’s blessings and bounty with love and joy. John’s challenge to repent is an opportunity for us to be agents of hope in times of debt and hurricanes.

*Prayer: God of Jubilee.*

*As we suffer the mighty winds and storms of this world we live in hope for the sun to shine, the rains that give life and the marvel of all things coming to life again. Gather in us through your renewing power, to forgive beyond what we think is owed to us so that we may strive to live in oneness with our neighbor. May we reconcile with the land that sustains us and with all of Creation. Give us love for the Earth which you have deemed good, and through the coming of your Son may we become the covenant people, the Jubilee people, the beloved community you expect us to be. Amen.*

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**José González-Colón** currently is pastor of the Iglesia Presbiteriana en Hato Rey, San Juan, Puerto Rico. A Brooklyn, New York native of Puerto Rican parents, he ministers with rural and urban communities as teacher and pastor with an emphasis on economic justice, environmental advocacy and food sovereignty. He is the current Moderator of the Synod of Boriquén, Puerto Rico.

# Fourth Sunday of Advent

## The Call of the Ocean



*Let the floods clap their hands; let the hills sing together for joy at the presence of the Lord, for he is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness; and the peoples with equity.*  
*Psalm 98:8-9 (NRSV)*

I was first introduced to the ocean at 11 years old when my siblings and I spent the summers with our father in Miami, Florida. Sundays were beach days. Playing in the ocean, getting used to the saltiness of the water, learning that Black skin does sunburn, and finding out that grains of sand could work themselves into every nook and cranny of our bodies were integral to our summer education. Those beach days were good days with the ocean as the backdrop for lasting sibling memories, while the ocean covertly birthed a yearning within me to go to the water as a place of respite whenever I could.

During those youthful times, the ocean also broke cultural barriers. The ocean was the place of exploration and discovery. We noticed the varying skin colors, eye shapes, and linguistic accents of people that were different than ours. This broadened our awareness that the world was bigger than our zip code. Conversely, beach days were also spent explaining to Floridian youth why we 'talked funny', and that, 'Yes, we do wear shoes in Kentucky', thus adding spice to their 'gumbo-lives' of diversity that we did not have at home.

(continued...)

## The Call of the Ocean (continued)

However, over the years, the ocean became a menace to me. As I experienced the call of the ocean in family vacations and chaperoned Spring Break trips for our sons and their friends, the water was a clear and present danger for the frolicking antics of reckless youths. In parenthood, I constantly counted heads to make sure that everyone was present and accounted for. I also began to wonder if my ancestors had dreaded the sounds that the ocean made as slave ships sliced through the water, pirating countless Black peoples away from the motherland to foreign places of oppression. How could this be that the ever faithful ocean that had been the joy of summer visits with Dad had become such a threat to those I loved and to those who had come before me? Yet, the ocean continued to call me.

One night during our last pre-college family vacation, I remember standing on the balcony of our hotel room listening to the ocean ebb and flow under the brightness of a full moon. It was there that the ocean again called, acting as the place of discovery and reconciliation. Gone were the threat of danger to my loved ones, and the dread of my ancestors. This time, the ocean called and introduced me to the greatness of God. On that balcony, my spirit was overwhelmed by the glory of our loving and victorious God. The God that Psalm 98 proclaims, '...will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity.' Therefore, as God's people, we have a promise and a blessed hope! One day, we, along with the seas will clap our hands, and sing together with the hills for joy at the presence of the Lord.

*Prayer: During this Advent Season, listen for the call of the Holy Spirit as God's Spirit whispers in ways that are particular for your hearing. Discover that place in Creation where you hear God's voice most clearly. Spend time there, drawing strength, courage and wisdom as the Body of Christ prepares for the coming of our Lord.*



Rev. Angela Johnson is Pastor of the 120 year-old Grace Hope Presbyterian Church, a predominately African American urban congregation located in the Smoketown Community of Louisville, KY. Rev. Johnson received a Master of Divinity degree and a Certificate in Black Church Studies from Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, and is currently pursuing a Doctor of Ministry degree from Louisville Seminary.

# Christmas Eve

18 I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us.

19 For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God;

20 for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope

21 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now;

23 and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.

24 For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen?

25 But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Romans 8:18-25

This has been the year of groaning in my life. Perhaps you can relate. It has been a year of tension, navigating a shift in vocation, strained relationships, politically-induced stress every week, the heartbreak caused when our beloved denomination chose not to divest from fossil fuels, and action steps in the face of the catastrophic ecological crisis. I'm not sure if the groans



"Living in Harmony with Nature"  
Abbot's Mill Project from the Mother Earth Festival

of my body and soul feel more like labor pains or the pangs of death. In this season of Advent, I struggle to find the light in the midst of darkness.

In this deep darkness, God is with us. Creation groans with us. Creation has been subjected to futility, not by its own will but by the will of all of us who have dominated all of the resources of Mother Earth, who have not been good stewards of her gifts to us.

But we worship a God of creation, a God of life and death and resurrection. We know what comes at the end of this season. God comes to us as the light of the world, enfleshed in the body of a baby. This season of Advent is a season of the groans of labor pains. (continued...)

## Christmas Eve (continued)

While we groan with Mother God and Mother Earth, may we also act as midwives, bringing new life and hope where we see suffering. May we give, act, and pray when the traumatic effects of climate change strike frontline communities around the world. May we refuse to profit from the destruction of Mother Earth and divest from fossil fuels. May we deepen our relationship with creation by learning about the watershed where we live and the Indigenous Peoples who have traditionally survived on the land we occupy. May we dream up new ways of living in community with God, humans, and creation. May we

support those working to heal creation through the development of renewable energy. May we breathe in energy from Mother Earth and breathe out gratitude for all the ways she supports life.

We know that this Christmas light will set creation and all of the world free from its bondage to decay. We hope for that which is not yet seen, and we work to transform the pangs of death into the groans of labor. Through this hope for creation, we find our bodies redeemed and transformed, and we see glimpses of God's glory revealed to us.

*Prayer: Mother God, comfort us in our suffering and challenge us in our complacency. We are so eager to see your glory revealed to us. Hold our hands as we breathe and push to create spaces where your new life may flourish. Liberate us from the bondage of decay we see in our lives, our systems, and in your creation. Sustain our hope and anticipation for you to break into our world once again. Amen.*



Angela Williams is a senior student, training to be a community organizer and a pastor, at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Austin, TX. She is a candidate for ordination under the care of Providence Presbytery. She finds life in experiencing music, listening to podcasts, and exploring creation.

# Christmas Day

## Booking it to Nain

*Soon afterwards he went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went with him. <sup>12</sup> As he approached the gate of the town, a man who had died was being carried out. He was his mother's only son, and she was a widow; and with her was a large crowd from the town. <sup>13</sup> When the Lord saw her, he had compassion for her and said to her, "Do not weep." <sup>14</sup> Then he came forward and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, "Young man, I say to you, rise!" <sup>15</sup> The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. Luke 7:11*

Each morning of this summer's PCUSA Walk for a Fossil Free World began with liturgy. We moved from song into story into prayer, grounding ourselves in the testimonies of frontline communities before each day on the road. In Vincennes, Indiana, we read about the arduous task of fetching water during the dry season of the West African Sahel, and about Japanese theologian Kosuke Koyama's *Three Mile an Hour God*. Koyama's thesis became one of the most enduring theological frames for our walk. As we trekked across Indiana and Illinois, we found ourselves covering three miles every hour, knowing that Jesus of Nazareth walked in ancient Palestine at that same slow-and-steady pace.

There are nevertheless moments where Jesus seems gripped by urgency. After healing a centurion's servant in Capernaum, Jesus heads to a small town called Nain.



Some manuscripts indicate Jesus went to Nain "the next day" — all the more impressive when we realize Nain is 23 miles southwest of Capernaum, and uphill. In our journey from Louisville to St. Louis, our daily hikes never exceeded 17 miles. Moreover, in first-century Palestine most Jewish burials did not include embalming. The son's funeral would have occurred the day after he died. The implicit scandal is significant. The God-who-moves-three-miles-an-hour heals the servant of a Gentile centurion while a working-class Jewish widow loses her only son. The messiah is too late. (continued...)



## Booking it to Nain (continued)

That's how Advent feels. God comes to live among us too late; if there was a time when things could have changed, that time has passed. That's how it feels in the fight against climate change. While some at this summer's General Assembly insisted that we still have time to get oil companies to change course, the Trump Administration acknowledged in a 500-page report that our planet will be a catastrophic 7 degrees hotter by 2100. For the Administration, this is *not* a call to action; we're too late, and should carry on as we are. How quickly the powerful turn from climate denial to unrepentant capitalist nihilism.

Jesus doesn't go three miles an hour to Nain; he *books it*. When Jesus arrives, he raises the widow's son and gives him back to his mother. Just when the messiah is too

late, when the widow has been cut off from her only son, Jesus arrives and does the impossible. Likewise, Advent is not the delay of a complacent God waiting for the appropriate time to intervene; Advent is God *booking it* to get to us and to bring healing to all creation.

It is easy to look at the devastation of Florence and Maria and think that we're too late. We very well might be. But Advent ought to remind us that God is booking it to North Carolina and Puerto Rico and the Florida panhandle and the Philippines and Standing Rock, and that what appears to us as "too late" is in fact an opportunity to get right with creation and to proclaim the good news of a God who is booking it to be with us.

*Prayer: God, when some of us fetch water in the desert, and when others of us march against fossil fuels in the Midwest, you walk alongside us at our meager three-mile-an-hour pace. But remind us, Creator God, that during Advent you were not taking your precious time; rather, you have always been booking it to be with us. Strengthen us in our hope for and anticipation of your healing presence, and empower us that we might participate in your love for all creation until you come again. Amen.*

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**Casey Aldridge** is a middler MDiv candidate at Princeton Theological Seminary, a youth ministry intern at Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York City, an inquirer with the Presbytery of Charlotte, and a member of the Walk for a Fossil Free World. Casey grew up in Concord, North Carolina, and he attended UNC Charlotte from 2013 to 2017 as a Levine Scholar, studying Religious Studies, History, and Political Science. Casey hopes to pursue a PhD in Religious Studies as well as PC(USA) ordination, and these days his interests lie in what Christian theories of time and history have to offer our struggles against capitalism, fascism, and climate change.

Cover Illustration Credit:



Jessica Jacks is a versatile artist who has produced illustrations for children's literature, cookbooks, professional journals and murals. Using traditional pen, pencil or digital tools, Jessica creates impish characters and realistic landscapes. Many of her inspirations come from her faith, children and current events. More of Jessica's work can be found on her website, [jessica-jacks.squarespace.com](http://jessica-jacks.squarespace.com)

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