**Advent Reflection 2018**

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Advent is a time of not only waiting but of staying awake, preparing for journeys, living into proclamations, and singing songs of God’s great reversal. It is a time of saying Yes to birth and fleeing or screaming No to empire’s death grip. It is a time for learning how to see in the dark, for lighting candles, and bearing witness. It is a time for honoring the prophets and messengers who prepare the way, the women who recognize and celebrate new life and know how to bless it and sing about it.

It is a time of anxious anticipation and hope in a time of empire and occupation. It is a time not unlike our own when bureaucratic governments want our taxes to support their projects on the backs of the poor and occupied. It is a world desperate for change not unlike our own. And so, we remember that God used an earthly emperor’s tax census as the occasion for the birth of the true king, our redeemer. We remember this, and it renews our hope.

Like long ago, Palestine is occupied again and Bethlehem, a 4,000 year- old city of 180,000 is again under siege; this time with soldiers on corners, towering walls, military fences, and checkpoints; this on top of confiscating all the available agricultural land for illegal settlements. The people of Bethlehem, including the oldest Christian community in the world, behold the tragic irony that the holy family itself would not be able to enter the city without proper permits and identification. The hopes and fears of all the years are still met and unmet in Bethlehem this season.