



## December 3, 2023 FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

The Year of Grace 2024 Begins

What I say to you, I say to all: 'Watch!'. Mark 13:37



Dear Friends;

In her book *The First Advent in Palestine*, author Kelley Nikondeha writes:

*"When we accept sentimental expressions and concede to holiday hurry, we miss understanding how God's arrival, how God-with-us, shapes our ability to see the breaking in of God into a landscape, a people, a narrative—and what the earthly trajectory of the life of Jesus implied then and implies now. How God entered the world matters. Where and when God chose to come into the world carries significance...the advent narratives orient us toward a lifetime of faithfulness to the God of liberation, love, and peace."*

In today's passage from the Mark's Gospel, Jesus is exhorting us to watchfulness. Advent calls us to pay attention to the people, places, and the politics of those who were awaiting the arrival of God's kingdom of justice. The stories around the birth of Jesus call us to a deep faith for troubled times, then and now. Advent invites us to the darkness. We pay attention to things that we would rather avoid; suffering, oppression, those struggling to hope for something new and better.

The Holy Land of the first Advent still throbs with pain today. Over the last two months we have recoiled over the terrorist attack on Israeli communities with the slaughter and kidnapping of women, children, fathers, mothers, grandparents, and young people. The fearsome response of Israel its unrelenting bombing even hospitals, churches, and mosques where people sought refuge; millions displaced, thousands of people and children dead.

Both Jewish and Palestinian history is filled with trauma. That trauma is intensified because much of the world refuses to acknowledge it: there are those who deny the genocide of the Holocaust, and Palestinians are often all labeled as terrorists. The trauma of violent histories almost makes it impossible for the Israelis and the Palestinians to see each other's humanity. This makes more violence likely.

The Holy Land of Jews, Christians, and Muslims, lies at the crossroads of history's empires. Egypt, Phoenicia, Assyria, Babylonia, Greece, and Rome, someone always subduing the native population. More recently, Arab, Ottoman, French, British, and American empires carved up the region for their own geopolitical purposes. We hear the stories of the conquerors, but do we see the conquered?

To say that God-is-with-us is more difficult and more hopeful than our usual holiday party schedule. Advent invites us to encounter darkness. It is only then that we can fully understand the arrival of God into our world. We must come to see and embrace those who have been traumatized over millennia.

Nikondeha says, *"Advent begins when our Jewish friends light the first candle on the menorah, inviting us into that dark and holy space where we sit in solidarity with others and await relief, maybe even a deliverer. And advent carries with it the scars of Palestinians from decades of violence and relinquished hopes in the land...When we engage the darkness before God's arrival, we come closer not only to the first advent but also to each one since...we learn that God is always coming to our troubled times."*

Shalom, Peace, As-Salaam-Alaikum,

*Fr Ron*

Esta carta está en español en el sitio web: [www.anne.church](http://www.anne.church)