



COMPASSIONATE IMMIGRATION REFORM DEVOTIONAL

“And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins. By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

Luke 1:76-79

During Advent, as we prepare to celebrate the birth of baby Jesus, we hear the story of the birth of another infant, John. In this passage from Luke, John’s father Zechariah foretells how John will be a prophet, preparing the way of the Lord Jesus. Zechariah looks to the time when God’s presence in this broken and scarred world will “give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.” In these days of December, and every day throughout the year, over 40,000 non-citizens are being held in prison or prison-like settings while their immigration case is processed. They can be detained for weeks, months, or sometimes years in one of over 200 detention centers throughout our country. Over 1,000 of those being held in detention are children. One detainee described the visit they received while in immigration detention: “In a country where you are a stranger, when your name is called and you are told that you have a visitor, you feel like you’re going from darkness to light.”

Former Detainee, Locked in a Box

Maricella (named changed for protection) entered the U.S. near San Diego on Christmas Eve. At the time, she was several months pregnant, and had travelled thousands of miles from Guatemala together with her two-year-old son, husband, and mother-in-law. Like many migrants, the family first tried to seek asylum through an official border checkpoint; but being denied entrance, they were pushed into more dangerous territory to enter. Their life in Guatemala had become filled with perpetual threats from gangs who pressured Maricella’s mother-in-law to abuse her role in a financial institution to launder funds for the gangs. When she consistently refused to be dishonest, the gangs followed the family as they attempted to avert the threats by moving from town to town. Upon entrance to the US, the family was separated, as the mother-in-law was detained in California, the father was sent to a detention center in southern Georgia, and Maricella and the children were sent to live with a family member in the Washington, D.C. area. Currently, faith partners are assisting all three to pursue separate asylum claims, with three separate lawyers, in their three separate locations—as the family desperately hopes to re-unify, stabilize, and work in the year ahead.

Action and Resources:

- Watch “Locked in a Box” at <https://www.lirs.org/detention-visitation/>
This 18-minute video tells about life in immigration detention and the hope that detention visitors bring. Consider organizing a viewing with members of your congregation, using this discussion guide:
https://www.lirs.org/assets/2474/lirs_lockedinbox_discussion_guide_2017.pdf
- Read here: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/oct/02/texas-detention-camp-swells-fivefold-with-migrant-children> how the Tornillo detention camp for children has expanded to five times its original size in recent months. Most are children who crossed into the US alone, and



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some were separated from caretakers.

- Urge your legislators to support much less costly and humane Alternatives to Detention. Learn more about alternatives at: <https://www.lirs.org/assets/2474/lirs-backgrounder-on-alternatives-to-detention-3-25-15.pdf>
- Find out how you can engage to be a human presence and bring light to individuals and families who are detained at <https://www.lirs.org/detention-visitation/>

Life-giving God, make your presence known with those who are detained. In your tender mercy, accompany those who have left their homes and those who are behind bars. Give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death. Fill us with courage to hear the cries of those who are in prison, and to respond to your call to love our neighbor.

Hear us O God, for your mercy is great.



CHRISTMAS EVE DEVOTIONAL

"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 Savior, 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.'"

Luke 2: 8-12

Reflection

Seized by terror, the shepherds who lived in the fields had never seen anything like it – unexpected, unknown, uncontrollable was the inbreaking of God on that night. The answer to the shepherd's fear is the angel's announcement that a Savior, the Messiah is born – God is with us! And the sign of God's presence will be found in a child, lying in a manger. So much of our daily lives brings us face to face with events that are unexpected, new challenges for which we are unprepared, and a sense of having little control. On this night, the fear in our hearts is met with the good news that God is with us. God comes to us anew as we celebrate the birth of the Christ child of Bethlehem. And in the faces of the children around us, we see the Good News of hope and promise.

Story

In response to a court order, children who had been separated from their families under the "Zero-Tolerance" immigration policy were reunited, beginning in July, 2018. As those families transitioned from the traumatic experience of separation, they were met by friendly volunteers, child welfare experts, and trauma-informed case workers. A stuffed animal was placed in the hands of every young child; school age children received back packs; parents received clean clothes; temporary shelter and meals were provided; and ongoing needs were assessed as plans were made for transportation to the family's final destination in the United States. One mother remarked, "When I was separated from my son, I prayed for an angel. I never knew that God would send so many." In September, one father wrote to a volunteer to say he hoped one day his little girl would grow up to be like the volunteers who helped them when they were released.

Action and Resources:

- View photos and stories of children being reunited with their parents at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2018/07/photos-the-agonizing-realities-of-family-reunification/566330/>
- Send a letter to your members of Congress asking them to support child welfare protections: https://www.lirs.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Child_Advocacy_Letter.pdf

Prayer

Almighty God, as we celebrate the fulfillment of your promise to be present in the midst of your people, release us from the fear that holds human hearts and human communities in terror. Lead us to the manger to find you in the Christ child; turn us to the children in our midst to find your presence there. Bring joy to families who are safe and together; surround those who watch and wait with your love and abiding care.

Amen.