

# Dwell Among Us

AN ADVENT DEVOTIONAL



**SAINT JOHN'S CHURCH**  
*The Beloved Community*

**LIBERATION  
LECTIONARY**

**FATH FOR JUSTICE**

# Dwell Among Us

## A LIBERATION LECTIONARY DEVOTIONAL FOR THE SEASON OF ADVENT

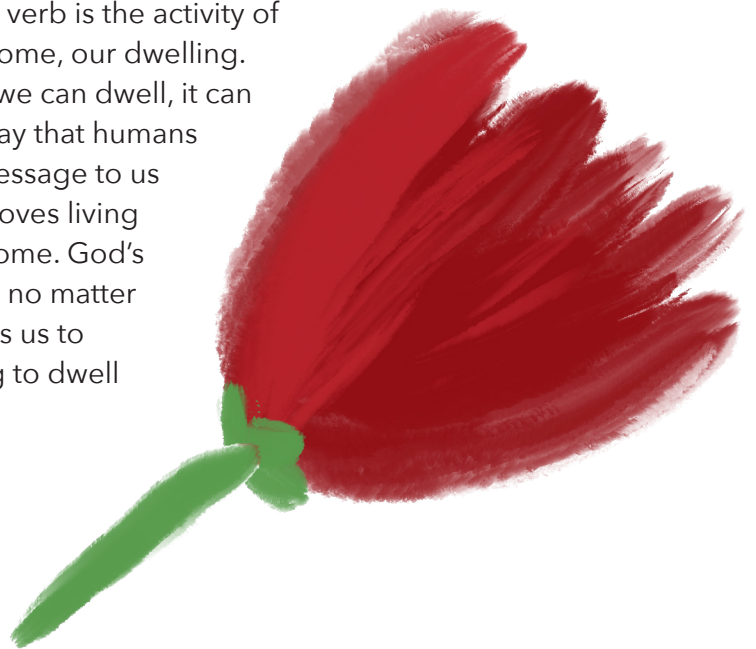
*"Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion, for I am coming  
to dwell among you. This is the Lord's promise."  
Zechariah 2.10*

*Welcome to the Advent devotional of the Liberation Lectionary: A Black liberation worship resource for progressive Christian communities.*

This four-week devotional has one entry per week, for the first week of Advent through Christmas Day. Learners are invited each week into a story from the Bible and a story from Black liberation history. This guide is designed for growing minds and group discussions to center God's promises of dwelling for everything and everyone.

### **HAVE YOU EVER HEARD THE PHRASE "FEELS LIKE HOME"?**

"Dwelling" as a noun means a place to live. "Dwell" means to remain, stay, or live somewhere, and "dwelling" as a verb is the activity of being in a place. God made the earth our home, our dwelling. Even though there is no other place where we can dwell, it can be a difficult place to live. Sometimes the way that humans live make it hard to feel like home. God's message to us through the story of Christmas is this: God loves living with us. When God lives with us we are at home. God's presence makes every place feel like home, no matter where we are! Remembering this truth helps us to prepare for the celebration of Jesus coming to dwell among us.





## **WHAT IS THE SEASON OF ADVENT?**

The word “advent” literally means arrival, and the term “Season of Advent” has taken on the meaning “time of waiting”. Many Christians observe a tradition of prayer and preparation for the Christmas holiday, when we celebrate Jesus’s arrival as a baby born in Palestine. We study a different theme each week, light candles and sing special songs. All of these practices mark a time of preparation, which for many years has been the four weeks leading up to Christmas season. We reflect on the invitation from God to make room for Them, in our hearts and our homes. This time of reflection and waiting is called the Season of Advent.

## **WHAT IS A LECTIONARY?**

The word lectionary has come to mean “daily lesson”, and it lets people know that they are using something they can return to over and over again. Repeating readings and lessons helps us to remember important truths and strengthen our connection to God and to our community. Devotionals are special entries of the lectionary that connect the lessons to a holiday season being celebrated by many people in our global family of faith.

## **WHAT IS BLACK LIBERATION?**

The Liberation Lectionary uses what is called a theological lens. Just like all writings and ideas from any person, what we believe about the world shapes the ideas that we share. The writers of this devotional believe that God favors people who are oppressed and gives gifts of faith and promises to them. In much of the history of the world, Black people have been oppressed and exploited for our gifts. So when God’s word talks about freedom, victory and healing, that promise includes Black people in a special way.



# Dwelling in Hope

*"But as for me, I watch in hope for the Lord,  
I wait for God my Savior; my God will hear me."  
Micah 7:7*

*Hope is an expectation and desire for something that has not happened yet, but we trust that it will happen. Hope is what helps us to hold on to God's promise that this world can change, and that we will live in peace and joy, through love.*

In Zechariah 1:16-17, the Lord says "'I will return to my holy city with mercy, and there my house will be rebuilt. And the measuring line will be stretched out over the city,' declares the Lord Almighty. Proclaim further: This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'My towns will again overflow with prosperity.'"

Maybe you have heard about or experienced some things that make you afraid that this world will never feel like home. Think about what it takes to build a place like that: a place that feels like home. Home keeps us healthy. Home keeps us safe. God is building a world that feels like home: where disabled people can access everything they need. We need a home where queer people don't have to be afraid of hatred. We need a home where Blackness is called beautiful, where women are respected, where old and young people are honored the same.

That has not happened yet. That is why we need to hope.

Hope makes us ready for the God who is coming to dwell among us. Hope helps us to build the places where God's presence makes all of us feel at home.

## HOPE IN THE BIBLICAL STORY: TAMAR

In the family history of Jesus, a woman named Tamar plays an important role. Tamar was from an area called Canaan, where today Palestine, Syria and Lebanon can be found. She was one of Jesus's great-grandmothers, and she would have been considered a foreigner. Tamar's husband was the son of Judah, a leader of his family. She lost her husband. Then Judah had his second son marry her, because for women at that time, being a widow was a marker of less worth. Her second husband also died, and Judah believed she was cursed, so he gave her no place in his family. There was no welcome for Tamar to be at home in Judah's house. She worked as a prostitute to take hold of the heritage that she deserved. There was very little work available for a woman who had been cast out at that time. Today, many people of faith would judge her as being unholy, and have her punished. But the Bible tells us that Judah was wrong to put her out of his family. God rewarded Tamar with what she hoped for. She was assertive and she found her power in a place that called her powerless. She did not know what the future would be, but she acted in hope that justice would happen. Tamar's name appears in Jesus's family history because God is proud of her place in Their family. You can read her story in the Bible, in Genesis 38.

## HOPE IN BLACK HISTORY: REVEREND JOHN LEWIS

"Be hopeful. Be optimistic. Never lose that sense of hope." John Lewis was an activist and a politician. He served as United States Congressman for an area in Georgia which includes the city of Atlanta. At the age of 23, John Lewis was a keynote speaker at the March on Washington, an event that brought two-hundred and fifty-thousand people to Washington DC to demand rights for Black people, and featured the famous speech "I Have a Dream" by Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The next year, Lewis led one of the most famous protests in history, in Selma Alabama. The event was rooted in nonviolence, but the police and racist governments made it one of the most dangerous Civil Rights demonstrations ever. John Lewis and other organizers led people over the Pettus Bridge in Selma. Police attacked and injured many people. That did not stop the movement for Black liberation. Just like his quote above, John never lost the sense of hope - that just because justice had not happened yet, that didn't mean justice would never come. John Lewis loved God, which gave him hope in God's promise of dwelling. He worked, lived and believed that the world should feel like home.



### PRAYER & MEDITATION

**Think about your need for hope this week.**

**Repeat this prayer everyday.**

*Lord let me make room for hope.*

*Lord let me make room for you.*

*May my heart be a home for hope.*

*May this hope make me feel at home.*

*Teach us how to hope O God, that we might prepare for you.*

# Dwelling in Peace

*“My dwelling will be a city without walls because of the great number of people and animals in it. And I myself will be a wall of fire around it,’ declares the Lord, ‘and I will be its glory within.’”*  
Zechariah 2:4-5

*Peace is also called “Shalom” or “Salaam” when described in Abrahamic faiths. We understand these terms to define peace as wholeness. Wholeness applies to our identities and our communities. When our spirits are whole, we are healthy. When our people are whole, we feel at home.*

Peace means more than what a dictionary tells us is freedom from disturbance and living in tranquility. Peace brings us the freedom to be everything we are meant to be. What do you think about when you imagine a place that has peace? Our scripture this week describes a great city with no walls. A place that does not need walls is a place that is never threatened and is always welcoming. Have you heard the story of the massive wall that was being built on the land between Mexico and the United States? The US and many countries were built by the false belief that walls and borders preserve a nation’s peace. But it is wholeness that makes protection. In the great city God builds in revelation, the entry gates are never closed. In this week’s scripture, God Themselves create the energy and protection. Peace means never being shut out, and being able to remain open. Peace is wholeness; it’s living with confidence, strength and comfort. When God dwells with us, They remove our walls and surround us Themselves. They bring peace in our hearts so that we can be whole. Wholeness is to feel at home with ourselves wherever we are. Wholeness helps us make wherever we are feel like home.

## PEACE IN THE BIBLICAL STORY: RAHAB

In the family history of Jesus, a woman named Rahab plays an important role. Rahab was from Jericho, which is one of the oldest cities on earth and is located in Palestine. Rahab owned a business that employed and protected people like Jesus’s foremother Tamar. Rahab believed in God and felt led by God’s Spirit to protect spies who were plotting to tear down the walls of Jericho. Rahab was confronted by the King of Jericho, and risked the safety of her family to hide the spies. She received protection and kindness, and she saved the lives of her whole household. Many historians believe this included her employees. Rahab is one of Jesus’s great-grandmothers. God is not ashamed of Rahab. In fact, she is a hero in our faith. She knew that her household deserved peace and protection, even if it meant that they had to make a new and very different place feel like home. You can read her story in the Bible, in Joshua chapters 2,6.

## PEACE IN BLACK HISTORY: ELLA LITTLE COLLINS

*"To me Malcolm was like Jesus. I can imagine how Mary felt about Jesus, that's how Malcolm was to me."*

Ella Little Collins was Malcolm X's half-sister. Born 11 years earlier to Daisy Little and Malcolm's father Earl Little, Ella always believed that Malcolm would be supernaturally gifted, so she cared for and educated Malcolm throughout his life. When Malcolm was six years old she traveled from Boston to Lansing, Michigan to check on him and his siblings after Earl was suspiciously killed in a car accident. Malcolm relocated to Boston to live with Ella, who became his guardian until he was 21. She established the first mosque in Boston and an attached daycare center. She personally funded his work and travels, and took over his organization after his assassination. Mrs. Collins's son, Rodnell Collins, said his mother continued to be an adviser to Malcolm X, urging him "to leave the Nation and go to orthodox Islam, to do something that was more substantial and not continue on the way he was going by putting so much energy into Elijah Muhammad's organization." She was undoubtedly a mother figure to Malcolm, and strong mother figures bring us a sense of comfort and strength - a sense of peace.



### PRAYER & MEDITATION

**Think about your need for peace this week.**

**Repeat these scriptures on your own or in a group.**

*Oh God, You will keep in perfect peace everyone whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.*

*The Lord gives strength to Their people, and the Lord blesses Their people with peace.*

*Cast all your anxiety on God because They care for you.*

*Isaiah 26:3, Matthew 5:9, Psalm 29:11, 1 Peter 5:7*



# Dwelling in Joy

*“Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory.”*

1 Peter 1:8

*Joy is a deep sense of delight. It is happiness combined with gratitude and confidence. Joy is a resource, like a tool for building or a power source for keeping on. Joy is also an element of well-being.*

Think of it like water; the element that makes up most of the world and most of our bodies. We don't always feel like it, and many people in the world have difficulties accessing it, but we have to drink water to stay alive. Joy is the energy of Advent. While we are waiting for the Lord to come and make the world feel like home, we keep close to joy so that we don't feel defeated. No dwelling is complete without joy. A good home is a joyful home, a place where joy stays in the atmosphere. Even when we don't feel like it, joy is there, because we need it to stay patient, grateful and confident. Just like water, we need joy to survive.

## JOY IN THE BIBLICAL STORY: RUTH

Ruth is a famous figure in the Bible. She left her homeland of Moab to live with Naomi, her mother in law, after the men in their family died, including both of their husbands. Naomi was full of grief. She did not want Ruth to be stuck in a home with that sadness, especially in a country where she was a foreigner, and called a stranger. But Ruth urges Naomi that they stay together. She did not want to be away from her. Ruth took care of Naomi. She found food for her and made a strong promise to her that wherever one went, the other would go too. Ruth brought joy to Naomi when Naomi could not stomach it. She made a home for Naomi even though she was far away from her own home. In the beginning of the story Naomi calls herself bitter, and by the end of the story, Naomi is so full of joy that when Ruth has a baby, all of their friends say “Naomi has a baby!”. Ruth is one of Jesus's great grandmothers. She teaches us the power of joy. Read her story in the Bible, in the Book of Ruth.





## JOY IN BLACK HISTORY: JUNE JOHNSON

June Johnson, 15 years old, SNCC organizer. Most famed for being younger than legal voting age - while working fervently to propel a voter registration campaign across the Jim Crow US South. June sang songs of joy despite the struggles and harm that she faced in a Mississippi jail one night, where she and others including Fannie Lou Hamer were caged after the police kidnapped them and beat them. June's spirit of Joy was a gift from God that gave her strength and determination. Her story teaches us that even while we are in a season of waiting for the world to feel like home, we don't need to wait to have joy.



### PRAYER & MEDITATION

Take a deep breath. Try to be still. Think about your need for joy this week. Use the breath prayer on your own. Pray the blessing over other people by thinking of them, or blessing them directly.

**Inhale:** "I know my home has weaknesses"

**Exhale:** "The joy of the Lord is my strength"

**Inhale:** "My world does not feel like home."

**Exhale:** "The joy of the Lord is my dwelling."

*"Go and celebrate with a feast of rich foods and sweet drinks, and share gifts of food with people who have nothing prepared. This is a sacred day before our Lord. Don't be grieved, dejected and sad, for the joy of the Lord is your strength!" Nehemiah 8:10*

# Dwelling in Love

*"This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'I am very passionate for Zion; I am overflowing with passionate concern for her.' This is what the Lord says: 'I will return to Zion and dwell in the Great City. Then my city will be called the Faithful City, and the mountain of the Lord Almighty will be called the Holy Mountain.' This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'Once again people of ripe old age will sit in the streets of their hometown, each of them with cane in hand because of their age. The city streets will be filled with children playing there.' This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'What seems impossible right now to you, who are few, is so possible for me that it will be easy.'"*

*Zechariah 8:1-6*

*What kind of home does love build? Hope leads us to believe that we can feel at home. Peace is the protection around our home - a wholeness that helps us feel at home wherever we are. Joy is the energy that powers our home. Love is the foundation of God's dwelling.*

Our scripture this week talks about the strong passion of God to see people of all ages living freely. God deeply desires to live with us and see us live well. Sometimes we feel sure that it is impossible to make everyone feel at home; indigenous people, disabled people, old people, youth. But when God sets Their passions on us, the people that are made in Their own image, it is easy for our own Creator to make a home where we thrive. God's love builds a home for everyone. And God's love is so passionate that the labor of love in building this dwelling will be easy.

## LOVE IN THE BIBLICAL STORY: BATHSHEBA

Bathsheba is an important person in the family history of Jesus. She was married to King David, who as a boy was named God's anointed to be king of his home country. Bathsheba's story is interrupted by King David's selfish actions. She suffered loss because of him, but she should have experienced love. bell hooks says that "love is an act of will, both an intention and an action." She says that love is the will to extend ourselves for nurturing our own or another's spiritual growth. That is what Bathsheba deserved, but that is not what David did at all. David knew this very well. So he made a vow to Bathsheba that their son Solomon would be king after him. When that vow was threatened, Bathsheba put her love into action. She did not let King David forget his promise. What was owed to Solomon was owed to her just as much. As a result of her love and her passionate action for her son's legacy, Bathsheba became queen and ruled beside Solomon when he took the throne. She is one of the great-grandmothers of Jesus. She is an example of love because in spite of the injustice and pain in her story, she fought passionately to make a home for herself and her son. Read about it in the Bible, in 1st Kings chapters 1 and 2.

## LOVE IN BLACK HISTORY: MATILDA MCCREAR

Matilda McCrear is the last known survivor in the United States of the transatlantic slave trade. A Yoruba born in 1857, her given name was “Àbáké,” meaning “born to be loved by all.” When she was two years old, Matilda and her mother and sisters were captured from their home in West Africa by the army of the Kingdom of Dahomey. Even though importation of enslaved people in the United States was made illegal in 1807, they were taken by Captain William Foster and forced on the Clotilda, the last known U.S. slave ship. They arrived in Mobile, Alabama where the Matilda was sold with her mother and 10 year old sister to one plantation, while her two oldest sisters were sold to a different one. They were never reunited. After the abolition of slavery in 1865, Matilda stayed in Alabama and worked as a sharecropper with her mother and sister. A true survivor, Matilda endured capture and enslavement, illegal trafficking to the US, the Civil War, Reconstruction, Jim Crow Laws, the Great Depression, and both World Wars. Love for life helped her to hold on. Love led her to find ways to feel at home when all her dwelling places seemed impossible. The Bible says that there is no law against love. God is coming to dwell with us to show that everyone is made to be loved. So Matilda was a living witness to Àbáké, her true name.



### PRAYER & MEDITATION

**Think about your need for love this week.**

**Repeat this prayer everyday.**

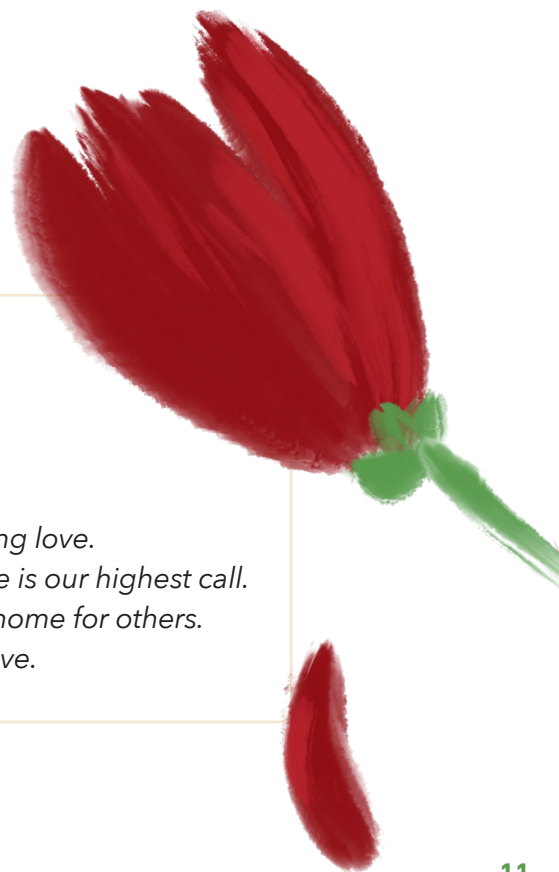
*Lord help me know what love is, and what it is not.*

*Lord help me believe that I am worthy of giving and receiving love.*

*Remind me that there is no law against love, and that to love is our highest call.*

*May Your love make me feel at home, and may I prepare a home for others.*

*Teach us how to love O God, that we might survive, and thrive.*



# The Welcoming God Who Dwells Among Us

*"I will strengthen them in the Lord and in his name  
they will live securely," declares the Lord.  
Zechariah 10:12*

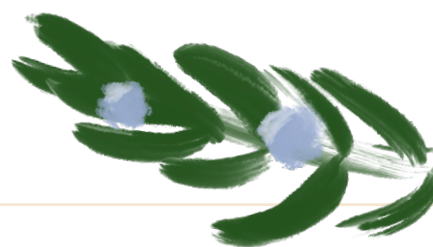
In the first chapter of Matthew, four mothers are named among the long list of the forefathers of Jesus. God's plan is very intentional. God wants us to see that Jesus is not ashamed of the people in his family. In Matthew's time, only fathers' names were recorded when people wrote the history of someone's parentage. This is because of a yet unnamed rule in most cultures called misogyny. The entire Bible was written during a time where misogyny controlled culture in more ways than it does today. The list of relatives by generations is called a genealogy. God promises to dwell with everyone in every genealogy, especially the people who are cast out, condemned, erased and attacked by misogyny. Jesus's Great-Grandmothers each have an important role in his story. He attends his mother like Ruth with Naomi. He fellowships with women who are prostitutes like Rahab. He embraces abused women like Bathsheba. He shows solidarity with the power of women like Tamar. God's promise that They are coming to dwell among us is fulfilled in Jesus - the Son of God. This is something to celebrate today! God's Son is making his dwelling with us, and generations of God's daughters - their spirits and their stories - have already made their dwelling in Him.

## DWELLING IN THE BIBLICAL STORY: MARY AND JOSEPH AND JESUS

Before Jesus was born, God's angel visited each of his earthly parents. God blessed Mary and promised her that she would bring up a son who would change the world. God told Joseph not to be afraid to keep his promise to make Mary his wife, and to be a father to their son. When it was time for Mary to have their baby, she and Joseph had to travel far from home for a mandatory census, which is a time when governments count people. In their time in history, people had to travel to their family's homeland in order to be counted. Mary was in labor after the journey. The Bible says that there was no room for them in guest houses - similar to a hostel, a motel, an inn, an Airbnb, or a bed and breakfast. Joseph and Mary did what they had to do to prepare for baby Jesus to arrive. They went to a stable. They laid the baby in a manger, an open container where cattle are fed. Have you ever been to a stable, or a barn? Maybe it would help to think about a shed. We might not feel at home in a place like a shed, but God did. God made a home with the dust and the cattle feed. God felt at home with the tools and the animals. When Jesus was born, Mary and Joseph had to give him a dwelling. That's what faithful parents do. But God was with them, in the body of a newborn baby, and because God was dwelling with them, they made a home right where they were. Shepherds came to see them, angels brought good news to people who needed to come see the newborn King who had made a dwelling from a barn. The story of Christmas is that God loves to live with us. Wherever God dwells is home. Read the story of Mary, Joseph and Jesus in Luke chapter 2.

## DWELLING IN BLACK HISTORY: PATRICIA OKOUMOU

Patricia Okoumou was 23 years old when she immigrated to the U.S. from the Republic of Congo, and she was 45 years old when she climbed the Statue of Liberty on July 4, 2018. She did it to protest the unjust detention of migrant children by the Trump Administration, and she didn't stop there. Later that year just before Christmas, she protested again by climbing the Eiffel Tower in Paris. In February 2019, she protested at a school owned by the CEO of a company who was profiting off of migrant children. Patricia Okoumou came to the United States for the freedom, peace, and opportunity that Lady Liberty is meant to represent. There is a poem on the Statue of Liberty that says "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free," but this place does not live up to those words. This place does not feel like a home that is safe for all to come and dwell, and Patricia, an immigrant herself, understands that.



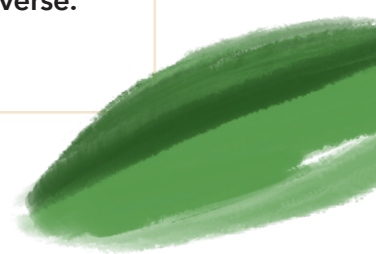
### PRAYER & MEDITATION

**Read and repeat the theme scripture for this devotional. Think of each of Jesus's foremothers as you speak the verse. Think of Patricia and Àbáké and Ella and June. Think of the mothers in your family, think of all of the femmes. For every pain and every joy, speak this promise over them.**

*"Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion, for I am coming to dwell among you. This is the Lord's promise." Zechariah 2:10*

**Read Psalm 84. Take time to remember and repeat verse 1. Look around your home and repeat it. Think of or look at your loved ones in person or in pictures and repeat the verse. Picture yourself in your mind or look in the mirror and repeat the verse.**

*"How lovely is your dwelling place, Oh Lord!" Psalm 84:1*





## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

Thank you for learning, reading and praying with us through this season of Pentecost. Join us at [faithforjustice.org/blog](http://faithforjustice.org/blog) for a new lesson with daily scripture readings every Sunday.

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