



PREPARE THE WAY

By Sr. Bernadette Inocencio, CSJ

Excerpts from Today's Readings

***Take off your robe of mourning and misery,** O Jerusalem, and put on the splendor of glory from God forever. **Wrapped in the mantle of justice from God,** place on your head the diadem of the glory of the eternal One. **For God will show your splendor** to all under the heavens; you will be named by God forever: the peace of justice, the glory of God's worship.*

BARUCH 5:1-4

Although they go forth weeping, carrying sacks of seed, they shall come back rejoicing, carrying their bundled sheaves.

PSALM 126:5-6

As it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah:

A voice of one crying out in the desert:

"Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.

*Every valley shall be filled
and every mountain and hill shall be made low.
The winding roads shall be made straight,
and the rough ways made smooth,
and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”*

LUKE 3:4-6

Reflection

Advent is a season of hope, anticipating the fulfillment of the promises written in the scriptures. We hope that mercy, justice, peace, and joy await if we remain steadfast despite hardships, and if we persevere in charity. ***What do you hope for this season?***

Advent is a season of expectation, a “build-up period,” a readying time, a groundwork season. ***How are you laying the groundwork for Christmas? How are you actively preparing to welcome the Divine Presence this Christmas?***

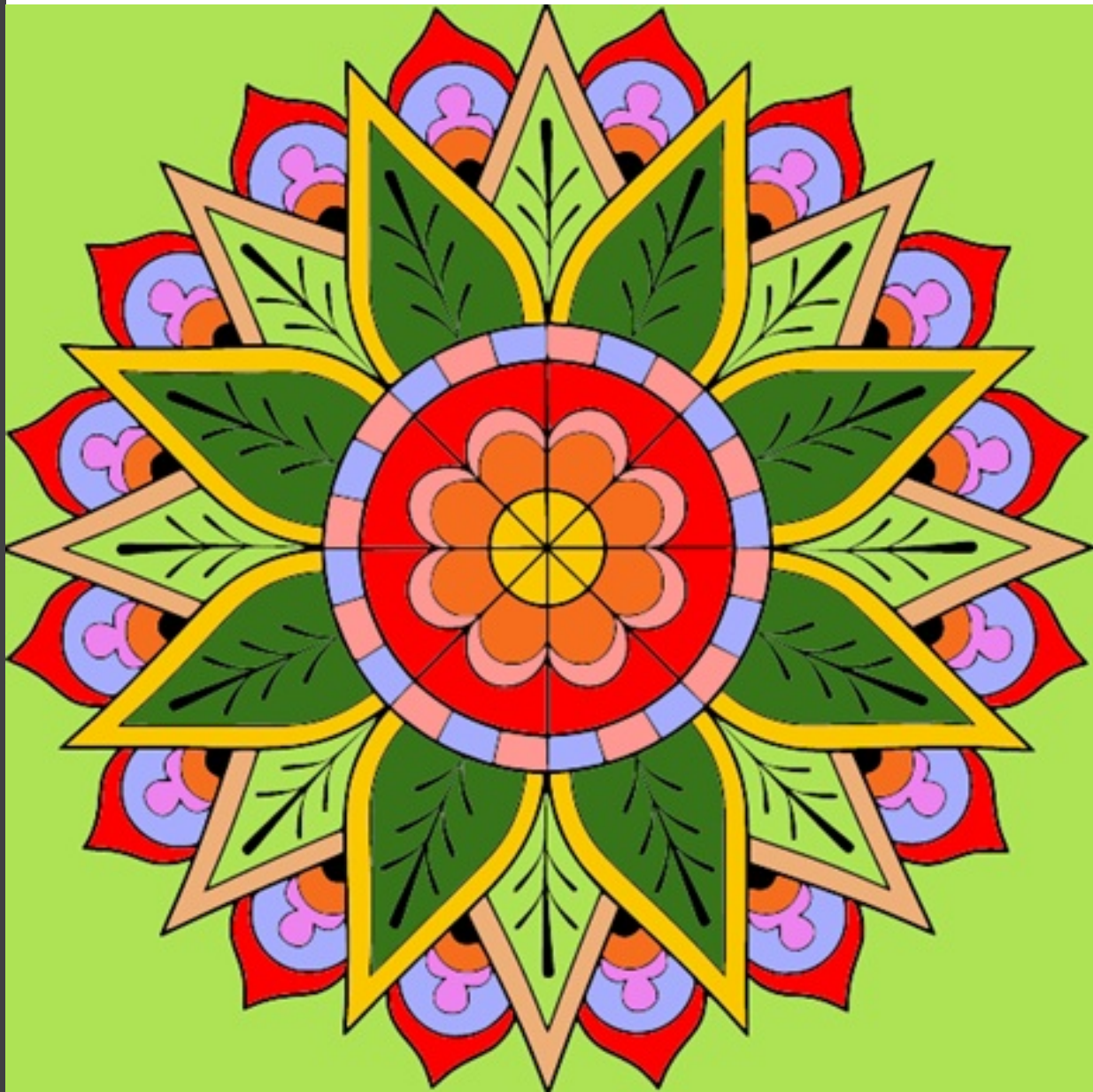
Back in mid-August, I went to the Filipino-American supermarket Seafood City in Anaheim. Filipino Christmas songs were already playing, and they had “parols” (Filipino lanterns, like the mandala in the picture below) on display. Feelings of nostalgia came over me. It took me back to when I was growing up in the Philippines.

The Philippines is known to have the longest celebration of the Christmas season, stretching from as early as August and lasting as late as the Feast of the Presentation of Jesus, February 2. Retail stores start their Christmas window displays usually when the “ber” months come (September, October, etc.), although some start as early as August. Christmas music fills the airwaves. Newscasters start their countdown, reminding people daily the number of days left until Christmas. The air feels festive. People get excited shopping for gifts. I always appreciated this tradition. It helped me look forward to Christmas.

It takes time for our souls to be spiritually present. This Filipino tradition is like journeying with Mary as she stayed with Elizabeth and traveled to Bethlehem. It is an inward journey, traveling from August to December. In school, we immersed ourselves in outreach activities such as spending time with kids in orphanages. Advent season peaked with the start of Simbang Gabi, the 9-day novena of dawn Masses. Mind-shift took place, arriving at spiritual awareness once Advent kicked in.

Preparation time here in the U.S. is shorter than the Philippines. Still, I make efforts to journey inward. I attend Advent penitential services. I try to attend even one night of the Simbang Gabi novena. I increase my centering prayer time. Changes in the seasons draw me to focus inward, like the autumnal equinox in September when leaves change color. Halloween brings out creativity and the child in us and leads us to hold in memory all whom we loved on All Saints and All Souls Days. Memories lead us to be grateful as we welcome a new liturgical year, then journey through Advent and celebrate Christmas. Each change in the season, each liturgical feast gives me Christmas hope that the winding roads will become straight, and the rough ways will become smooth.

The preparation for the Divine Presence this Christmas is only the beginning. Living and sharing a life that reflects the values of Christmas continues beyond the season and until the next year comes around.



For Pondering

- How do the bold red words in the scripture passages above resonate with you?
 - We are often so busy -- not only with our daily tasks but with the hustle and bustle of Christmas shopping -- that Christmas passes us by. While God is always with us (Emmanuel), how do you prepare to welcome the Divine Presence in a unique way this Christmas?
 - How can you integrate your Christmas preparation so that it becomes a practice that flows into daily life?
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For Prayer

*You Who Birth the Future:
In your promises,
I am instructed
to fear not the shadows of the future,
but to listen for your voice
through the valleys of darkness.
Show me the path to life
and the way to fullness of joy.
Remind me in prayer
that your Word casts no shadows
for it is the light of the world,
which includes me.
Amen.*

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