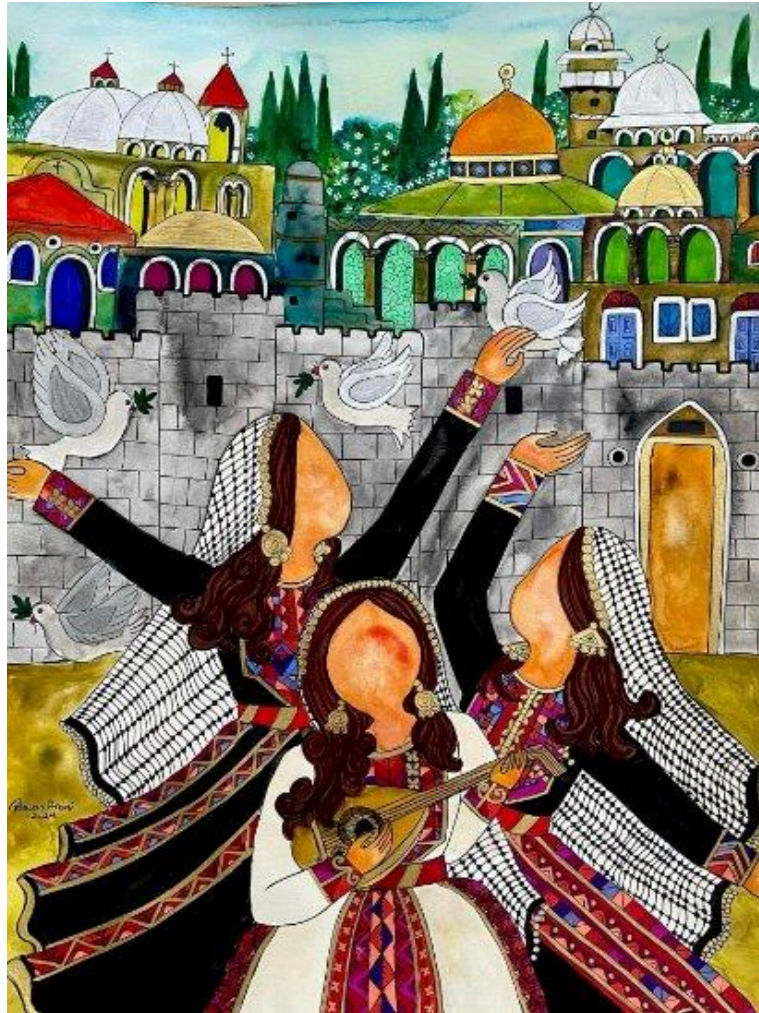


**Faith Bible Study Guide**  
**For the Week of December 15, 2024 - Third Sunday in Advent**  
**The First Advent in Palestine: The Love That Moves Us**



*“Dancing Doves” by Rawan Anani*

**Be still [2 Minutes]:** As you hear these Centering Words, let us greet each other, greet the Holy Spirit, and begin with 1 minute of silence, breathing in the breath of God and allow the group to open themselves to the Holy Spirit today:

**CENTERING WORDS:**

Rejoice and be glad! God is at work while we wait and hope and pray for God’s LOVE to come upon the earth.

**OPENING PRAYER:**

L: Rejoice, for God is here!

**P: God is our strength and our light.**

L: Let us give thanks to God.

**P: We will sing praises for all the earth to hear!**

**Be the Word Scripture Lesson:** Luke 3:7-18

<sup>7</sup>Then John said to the crowds who came to be baptized by him, “You children of snakes! Who warned you to escape from the angry judgment that is coming soon? <sup>8</sup>Produce fruit that shows you have changed your hearts and lives. And don’t even think about saying to yourselves, Abraham is our father. I tell you that God is able to raise up Abraham’s children from these stones. <sup>9</sup>The ax is already at the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree that doesn’t produce good fruit will be chopped down and tossed into the fire.”

<sup>10</sup>The crowds asked him, “What then should we do?”

<sup>11</sup>He answered, “Whoever has two shirts must share with the one who has none, and whoever has food must do the same.”

<sup>12</sup>Even tax collectors came to be baptized. They said to him, “Teacher, what should we do?”

<sup>13</sup>He replied, “Collect no more than you are authorized to collect.”

<sup>14</sup>Soldiers asked, “What about us? What should we do?”

He answered, “Don’t cheat or harass anyone, and be satisfied with your pay.”

<sup>15</sup>The people were filled with expectation, and everyone wondered whether John might be the Christ. <sup>16</sup>John replied to them all, “I baptize you with water, but the one who is more powerful than me is coming. I’m not worthy to loosen the strap of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. <sup>17</sup>The shovel he uses to sift the wheat from the husks is in his hands. He will clean out his threshing area and bring the wheat into his barn. But he will burn the husks with a fire that can’t be put out.” <sup>18</sup>With many other words John appealed to them, proclaiming good news to the people.

L: The Word of God for all people

P: Thanks be to God

**Be present: [Being mindful of others and sharing time]**

1. Take a deep breath. *How is it with your soul?*
2. How has the theme of Advent (Hope, Peace, and now Love) been resonating with you this season?
3. What does love in action mean to you personally?
4. Share a recent moment where you experienced or witnessed a love that challenged or transformed someone.

**Be rooted: [Bible Study]**

**Understanding God’s Transformational Love**

1. John the Baptist’s message can feel harsh at first glance (“You brood of vipers!”). How might this seemingly harsh call actually be rooted in God’s love?  
Reference: “God’s love for us is so great that God doesn’t want us to stay as we are.” How do you feel about this idea of love that calls us to change?
2. John calls the crowd to bear “fruit in keeping with repentance” (v.8). What do you think this fruit might look like in our lives today?

3. In the sermon, the example of sharing coats and food is highlighted. Where in your life might you have “more than you need”? How can you respond to John’s call to share?

### Insights from First Advent in Palestine

4. Kelley Nikondeha reminds us that Jesus was born into a time of political oppression and economic disparity. What does this historical context teach us about love? How does this differ from modern-day images of Advent as “passive waiting”?
5. Nikondeha challenges us to see Advent as a time of preparation for God’s love to “break into the world.” How do you feel called to prepare for love in today’s world?

### Love in Action

6. Reflect on the illustration of Rev. Allison’s husband, Andy’s church—housing immigrants, expanding their food pantry—and their response: “Because God has loved us, and we want others to feel that love too.” What resonates with you about this story?
7. In what ways can your community reflect God’s radical, transformative love? What are practical steps you can take, even if they seem small?
8. John’s simple guidance still speaks today:
  - Do you have more than you need? Share with someone who doesn’t.
  - Do you see a system that’s unfair? Work to change it.
  - Do you have relationships that need healing? Seek reconciliation.Which of these actions challenges you the most, and why?

### Optional Reflection:

- *Reflect silently for a moment: How will you embody God’s love this week?*
- *Light a candle (if possible) as a reminder of the **Candle of Love** and God’s transformative presence in our lives.*

### **Be transformed: [Call to action]**

#### **Action Items**

1. **Personal Reflection & Action:** Write down one specific way you can embody God’s love this week:
  - *It could be sharing a resource, advocating for justice, or taking a step toward reconciliation.*
  - *Pray about this action and commit to doing it.*
2. **Community Response:** As a group, brainstorm one way our church, family, or community could prepare the way for God’s love—through service, advocacy, or hospitality. Decide on a small, actionable step you can take together.
3. **John’s Questions:** Reflect on John’s practical message:
  - *How can you share what you have with someone who needs it?*
  - *Where can you work for justice in an unfair system?*
  - *Is there someone you need to seek reconciliation with?*Choose one question to take into prayer and action this week.

## Prayers & Concerns

### Joys & Celebrations:

- Celebration of marriage for Tyler and Michelle Matsumoto! (Congratulation to Val & Ray)
- Faith Babies:
  - The Pang's (Stanley & Edith) new grandson: Lucas Pang, born to Jeremy & Jodie and big brother, Noah
  - The Tondo's (Carol & Jerry) new grandson: Cayden Quan, born to Jessica & Derek Quan
  - The Inouye's (Wade & JuliAnn) new grandson Travis Inouye born, to Tracy & Danny Inouye and big sister, Ella
  - Rev. Keith & Viki Inouye's granddaughter: Rooney, born to Alison & Joe Boyd
  - The Hayashida & Higa family's newest granddaughter: Andi Michelle Chang, born to Erin & Jon Chang
  - Karen Ageno's new granddaughter: Danielle Sumiye Ageno born to Ryan and Ashley Ageno
- Frida - 98th birthday (12/4 Claretta's care home)
- Alice Kajiya - 97th birthday (11/26)

### For Healing and Wholeness:

- ~~Jill Ito (healing & recovery)~~
- Hannah Yamamoto
- ~~Susan Slade~~ - YAY!! She's doing well!
- Harry Lum
- Terry Matsumoto (Jane's)
- Kenny Medeiros
- Apolosi Lokotui
- Mary Tamura
- Masako Akiyama
- Florence Uchida
- Alvena Fukuhara
- Diane Ueda-Banda
- Austin Maeda
- Nancy Matsushima
- Mary Tamura
- (Harriet Tateyama)
- Brian Okumura (Sandy Ueyuenten's brother)
- Jan Tanabe

- Glenn & Millie Shimizu
- Scarlett Bone
- Larry Takumi
- Yoshi Yamasaki
- Bert Aguas

### Life Transitions:

- Emma Horiuchi, moving to San Diego to be closer to family by December
- Doris Kato, living in transitional boarding care
- Rev Harry Fujimoto's Transition to Japan (*relocated to Japan on Oct 2nd, and he will reside in an assisted living facility in Kanagawa, little south of Tokyo. His younger sister lives in a nearby city, and that was the main reason to choose that facility.*)
- Life transition for the Minei family, as empty-nesters Dave & Soyoung Minei sent both daughters (Kaila & Ashley) to college this year, and are transitioning to new jobs in a new city in Texas.

### Absent from the Body, Present with the Lord:

- Friends of Jason Sasaki, Kris Radcliffe and Kitty Meese
- The Sakaguchi family on the passing of JoAnn Suravech (Mari's brother Tosh's partner)
- The Tani family on the passing of Kelli Tani (October 20, 2024)
- The Inouye family on the passing of Juliann's brother, Lester Miya (October 21, 2024; Graveside, December 14)
- Sharon Endo and family on the passing of Fred Endo (October 19, 2024)
- Continued Prayers for the Ito family on the passing of Rev. Ito on Sept. 25th.
- James Tio Ichikawa- (Ralph Ichikawa's brother) - [Celebration of Life, November 2, 2024]
- Sam Kobayashi (in August)
- Rev. Hidemi Ito - [Celebration of Life, November 30, 2024]
- Miyano Family
- Ochi Family
- Finney Family (Veronica Finney)
- Lawson Family (Dorothy Lawson)
- Raymond Randall (friend of Allison)
- George Hokama (Ellen's husband)

- June Tatebe, (Danny's aunt; Chic Miyake & Ruth Hirata's sister)
- Mary Ann Polendey (Vigil: December 17, Green Hills, 5-8pm; Memorial at Calvary, December 20, 11am)
- Hanna Sacks (Rev. Allison's 100 year old friend passed on December 7)

**Let us continue to Pray for our Beloved Community and World:**

- People of the Holy Land and Ukraine and in all place where there is war and

**And Know that He is God:**

**Closing Prayer / Benediction**

*God of radical and boundless love,*

*You call us out of complacency and into transformation. Like John the Baptist, may we hear Your call to prepare the way—to bear fruit that reflects Your love for us and for the world.*

*Lord, help us to share what we have with those in need.*

*Give us courage to work against systems of injustice.*

*And grant us the grace to seek healing in our relationships.*

*This Advent, prepare our hearts to reflect Your love in tangible, meaningful ways.*

*Come, Lord Jesus, our love and our delight. Amen.*

- destruction
- Families rebuilding after natural disasters and man-made/created disasters
  - For the people, wildlife, and firefighters battling forest fires
  - Those affected by Hurricanes Helene & Milton
- For our country and all of the World's nations.
- For our healthcare system
- The fires in Malibu