



Image by [Scott Erickson](#)

## The Risk of Birth: A Reflection on Hope

By: Erika Kobewka

I think there are a lot of reasons why candles in windows and twinkling roof-lines seem to be a prerequisite for this time of year. Strangers lighting the way for strangers in a disorienting darkness, Advent is indeed for everyone. For those of us up here in the Northern Hemisphere, as we turn the calendar to December, we are also inching ever closer to the longest night of the year. Doesn't Advent seem to arrive at precisely the right time? When the shadows stretch long and endless over a bleak and frozen horizon, and our hearts hang weary and heavy from all that

pains us and is not as it should be. Advent is hopeful and expectant, uttering murmurs, and whispers of Shalom in a world fraught with conflict and division.

Last Sunday marked the completion of the Liturgical Christian Year. “The Feast of Christ the King” is an exclamation that Christ is still Lord over all of creation and will one day come again to restore all things and reign in glory. This coming weekend, the Liturgical Year begins anew with Advent: four weeks that the church throughout centuries has traditionally used to, “prepare Him room.” Far from trite sentimentality, the Advent season leans into postures and rhythms of waiting, expectation, and longing. In a similar way that the people of God ached and groaned for their longed-for Messiah, Advent carries these yearnings: “Oh come, oh come Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel.”

Advent means, ‘arrival’, and it holds an awareness of 3 Advents:

1. Jesus was born at a distinct time and place in history.
2. Jesus inaugurated and embodied a new Kingdom that would have no end and we see glimmers of this Kingdom day-by-day.
3. We are still waiting and longing for the culmination of that promised Kingdom.

It is in remembering, recalling, and looking toward these significant Advents, that our hearts continue to cry out ever more keenly, “Come, Lord Jesus, come!” For Christians, the mystery of the incarnation is inextricably linked to the Paschal Mystery and the road of suffering leading up to the Cross of our Salvation.<sup>1</sup> Christ lived, died, rose from the grave, and will come again; however, one of the painful edges of our faith lies in the realization that we still reside in the aching spaces of hope deferred.

A few years ago, in the midst of a personal season that seemed overshadowed by grief, I read in some corner of the internet, “I wonder if the incarnation is God’s greatest act of solidarity?” I can’t for the life of me remember the author, but I do remember how my entire body seemed to let out a cry of relief. For a suffering world, it is not enough that God dwelt *among* us, even the most noble of kings and rulers extend a hand or comforting gesture to their subjects. God chose to suffer *along-side* us—“a thrill of hope” for the waiting and aching. It is not just that God chose to draw near humanity through the person of Jesus, but that God also chose to put on our skin, bones, circulatory and nervous systems, along with all of our human limitations, complexities, and constraints. Jesus, the Light-of-the-World chose to embrace human fragility on a cellular level. From embryo, to fetus, to a wriggling and glistening new-born baby—Emmanuel, God-with-us, is indeed flesh-and-blood, living, breathing, and stepping into our human reality.

Yet, when I look around at our current reality, our world is in utter chaos. We are spinning in brokenness, turmoil, confusion, uncertainty, divisiveness, war, rumours of war, and the loss of life to violence and sickness. As I look at societal conflicts, both locally and abroad, the world seems hopelessly bent toward destruction and retribution, and yet it was also into this reality that Christ was born. “The birth of Jesus, the incarnation of God into the world, is the

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<sup>1</sup> Webber, Robert E. *Ancient Future Time: Forming Spirituality through the Christian Year* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004), 44.

paradigmatic act of solidarity. God so loved the world that God took human form. It was total identification with the human condition, total solidarity with human history.”<sup>2</sup>

For me, some of the most moving footage that has surfaced recently is of fragile premature babies, born into war-torn land, being moved to safety while bombs and missiles sound nearby. Truthfully, my day-to-day lived experience, and the experience of my children is one of profound safety. I’m beginning to realize in a deeper way, my own heart both infuriated and broken, that birthing a child into safety and care, isn’t regarded as a human right.

*“There is no time for a child to be born,  
With the earth betrayed by war and hate  
And a nova lighting the sky to warn  
That time runs out and the sun burns late...*

*When is the time for love to be born?  
The inn is full on the planet earth,  
And by greed and pride the sky is torn—  
Yet Love still takes the risk of birth.”<sup>3</sup>*

At this very moment, there are mothers who are helplessly birthing their babies into a world riddled with risk, loss, human suffering, global catastrophe, and strife. The hope of the incarnation is that Christ was born into a despairing and conflicted reality and that He continues to draw-near the meek, the poor-in-spirit, and the heartbroken. Jesus, God-in-flesh, chose to be born right in the midst of a shattered humanity aching and travailing for a Saviour. It is this thrill of hope, however softly it comes and however painfully fragile it exists, that turns our hearts towards the light of His coming—Emmanuel, God is *with* us.

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<sup>2</sup> Golden, Renny. “Solidarity Works Shoulder to Shoulder.” Center for Action and Contemplation, June 28<sup>th</sup>, 2023. <https://cac.org/daily-meditations/solidarity-works-shoulder-to-shoulder-2023-07-03/>.

<sup>3</sup> “The Risk of Birth” by Madeleine L’Engle