



Advent Reflection for Thursday, December 23
Patrice Rankine

You can listen to the reading and reflection by clicking [here](#).

Matthew 4:14-16

so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: "Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles— the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned."

Okay, so here's the thing about the Christmas season. I often feel great pressure to make the season feel dream-like and peaceful. My scattered imaginings of the Biblical highlight reel are so beautiful. Out of the deepest darkness comes a great light. People are gathered together in fields where they lay. A young couple eventually finds a place of peace. A baby is born.

All of which exists in stark contrast to my life in December, as the scriptures do not mention iPhones and breakdowns in the global supply chain, which may extend delivery times on Christmas gifts and the fact that there is still a global pandemic all these many months later and co-workers who call in sick and tenuous relationships with in-laws and holiday-inspired depressive spells and the endless to-do lists that accumulate just by being awake and alive in the world. It's all a bit much most days of the week, and some days feel like fighting my way through a thicket of plans and counter-plans just to survive until bedtime. And I'm a person who truly enjoys being busy to the point of near exhaustion, which works minor wonders in my professional life and can wreak generous havoc in my personal life. And, of course, the Bible depicts the horrors of totalitarian power structures, violence, illness, death, xenophobia and inhumanity throughout its description of the first Christmas. Focusing on the bucolic imagery is mainly the realm of Christmas carols and Hallmark movies. Even so, I often get stressed during this season about somehow "getting Christmas wrong".

But then there's this passage from the Book of Matthew gently reminding me that Advent is a waiting season, a watchful season. This passage demonstrates that all of the innumerable ways I may try to manifest light will not bring it forth. The people of Galilee are not actively doing much of anything in the traditional sense. They sat in darkness then saw a great light. They observed. They paid attention. Perhaps they would have missed the light dawning if they had been rushing between errands and chores – feeling overwhelmed. The relationship between prophesy and manifestation is so powerful in this passage. That light will come and that it will come forth from darkness has already been foretold long before the people

of Galilee or we even existed, which I find so comforting. We are simply being asked to be calm and to notice. To be patient and to observe. To pay attention. For it is in this stillness that we may begin to perceive emerging truths and answers to long-awaited questions. Chief among these is that to be still is to know God and bear witness to light.

Patrice Rankine lives in Mississippi and has been best friends with Mother Sarah for 20 years. She tries to attend Holy Apostles on Zoom as often as her call schedule will allow.

