

The Scandal of the Nonviolent Incarnation

Sr Katrina Alton: National Chaplain to Pax Christi E&W

Advent doesn't tiptoe in with candles and carols; rather the Spirit blows wide open the doors of our hearts. It announces that God is breaking into a world ruled by Empires, and doing so without permission, without weapons, and without waiting for the powerful to acquiesce. Advent is not a cosy countdown to Christmas; it is a disruption, a holy trespass, a declaration that God sides with those crushed beneath the warmakers of every age. Dorothy Day said it plainly: "Our problems stem from our acceptance of this filthy, rotten system." The Incarnation is God's refusal to accept it. God enters history not neutrally but on the side of the poor, the oppressed, the marginalised.

At the centre of that resistance stand Mary and Joseph—ordinary, poor, nonviolent resisters whose "yes" becomes the seed of revolution. Mary's Magnificat is no lullaby but a manifesto: "He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly." A young woman from Nazareth dares to proclaim the downfall of every Empire. She consents not to domination but to the life of God breaking into history through her own body, a courageous act of nonviolent Love.

Joseph—so often sanitised—resists quietly. He refuses to expose Mary to the violence of the law, refuses to collaborate with systems that punish the vulnerable, refuses the machinery of honour and shame. He flees with his family. Jesus begins life as a refugee because Joseph chooses life over legality. Their flight to Egypt is holy disobedience.

Pope Leo's theme for World Peace Day 2026 calls the Church to be "disarmed and disarming". Not politely pacifist but stripped of illusions and loyalties that contradict the outrageous nonviolence of Jesus. Thomas Merton warned that our age is marked by a "mass psychosis," a sickness that convinces us war is normal and compassion naïve. We are living inside that sickness now. Military budgets soar while the poor tighten their belts. Leaders speak of peace while approving airstrikes. And Christians—God help us—often nod along as though Jesus ever blessed such madness.

Advent exposes the lie. The manger confronts every war room, every border, every economy built on sacrifice of the poor. The Incarnation announces that God's answer to injustice is not bombs, bullets, or wealth, but vulnerable, unstoppable Love. Daniel Berrigan saw through the myth of violence: "Because

we want peace with half a heart... we get war.” Advent demands whole hearts. It asks whether we can worship the Prince of Peace while tolerating the systems of death.

To be “disarmed and disarming” is to walk the path of Mary and Joseph: to protect life, welcome the stranger, challenge the violence embedded in our laws and economies, reject fear, and follow the God who comes unarmed. It means becoming a contradiction to the culture of death: standing with refugees, defending conscientious objectors, dismantling the myth of redemptive violence.

Advent is not for the faint-hearted. It is for those willing to have their lives unsettled by a God who comes in weakness, not power. Advent is a time of ‘waiting’ – but waiting for what? For political leaders to save us? For today’s Empires to discover a conscience? For the arms trade to transition to a green economy? No! Let us be the unreasonable ones, the radical ones, who believe peace is possible because the nonviolent Christ has shown us the way.

This Advent, let us stand with the prophets and troublemakers—Merton, Day, Berrigan, Mary, Joseph—and join the call for a true and just peace in Gaza, Ukraine, Sudan. For justice wherever Empire casts its shadow of violence.

Because the Incarnation is God’s disruption of a violent world— and this Advent season asks only one thing of us: **holy disobedience, trusting in the revelation of divine Love, Emmanuel – God with us. Amen**