

Protecting hope

An Advent journey with refugees

JRS
JESUIT REFUGEE SERVICE

TABLE OF CONTENT

Introduction.....p. 3

Week 1 - Hospitality protects.....p. 5
29 November 2026

Week 2 - Opportunity protects.....p. 9
6 December 2026

Week 3 - Community protects.....p. 13
13 December 2026

Week 4 - Safety protects.....p. 17
20 December 2026

INTRODUCTION

Protection is at the heart of the Advent story

As we prepare to welcome the birth of Christ, we are invited to reflect on a God who chose to enter our world in vulnerability. Jesus was born as a child dependent on the care of others. Mary and Joseph sought shelter, crossed uncertain roads, and relied on the hospitality of strangers. From the manger in Bethlehem to the flight into Egypt, the story of the Holy Family reminds us that protection is not guaranteed. It is made possible when people open their hearts, their homes, and their communities to one another.

This Advent, as we mark the 75th anniversary of the 1951 Refugee Convention, which protects the rights of refugees, we are invited to reflect on protection not only as a humanitarian response but also as a Gospel calling. Protection means creating the conditions in which every person can live in dignity, safety, and hope. It begins when we recognise Christ in those who seek welcome, accompaniment, and belonging.



Photo: Mirko D'Accurzio /Centro Astalli

We are called to become refuge for one another. We are called to become a manger where God's presence can find room to dwell. We are called to be an open door.

Throughout these four weeks of Advent, we will reflect on four essential dimensions of protection:

WEEK 1
Hospitality protects

WEEK 2
Opportunity protects

WEEK 3
Community protects

WEEK 4
Safety protects

Each week, we will explore how these expressions of protection help uphold dignity and restore hope in the lives of forcibly displaced people and in our own communities. We will also reflect on how God invites each of us to become instruments of protection: creating spaces of welcome through hospitality, opening paths of growth through opportunity, fostering belonging through community, and safeguarding human dignity through safety.

In a world where fear often encourages us to close our doors, Advent invites us to do the opposite. It calls us to make room. To prepare a place for Christ.

To remain attentive to the presence of God among us.

As we light the candles of the Advent wreath, may we remember that the Child we await is still seeking shelter in our world today. May we recognise Him in our displaced sisters and brothers, in those searching for safety, community, opportunity, and welcome.

And may this season of preparation inspire us to become people who protect: people who keep the door open, who make space at the table, and who help create a world where all can find refuge, dignity, and hope.

29 November 2026

WEEK 1 Hospitality

"Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it."
Hebrews 13:2

The Advent story begins with a search for welcome.

As Mary and Joseph journeyed toward Bethlehem, they carried within them the promise of new life. Yet they also knew uncertainty, vulnerability, and the experience of needing a place to stay. The Son of God entered the world not in comfort or privilege, but in a borrowed space, dependent on the hospitality of others.

Hospitality is more than a kind gesture. It is a way of seeing. It invites us to recognise the dignity of another person before we ask where they come from, what they possess, or what they can offer in return. Hospitality transforms strangers into neighbours and creates the conditions where protection can flourish.

Today, millions of refugees and forcibly displaced people continue to search not only for shelter, but also for belonging. They long for communities willing to open doors, listen to their stories, and make room for their gifts.

In a world often shaped by fear, suspicion, and division, hospitality becomes a prophetic act. It is a declaration that every person is worthy of welcome.

God's protection is often revealed through ordinary people who choose to keep their hearts open. Every time we create space for another person, we become a living reflection of God's love. We become, in some small way, a manger where Christ can be received again.



Photo: Mirko D'Accurzio /Centro Astalli



REFLECT

This first week of Advent invites us to ask: Where is God calling me to be an open door? Who is seeking welcome in my community, my workplace, my parish, or my family? How can I become a source of protection through the simple yet transformative act of hospitality?

MAKING ROOM FOR WELCOME

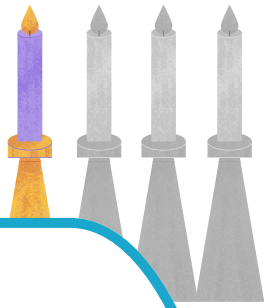
A mother and her seven-year-old daughter arrived in Paris from Chambéry the day before an important asylum interview. The mother spoke little French, did not know the city, and was deeply worried about what the next morning would bring.

Through the JRS France's Cool Welcome Fontenay project, volunteer Brigitte welcomed them into her home. While she prepared dinner, she gave the child paper and pencils to draw and helped the mother look through her documents. The next morning, Brigitte explained the route and accompanied them to the interview.

While they waited, the little girl drew messages for her mother. Soon, other children came closer, and she began talking and laughing with them. In a moment filled with uncertainty, her joy created its own small space of welcome.

When the mother finally returned, the journey back felt calmer. Brigitte later remembered their warm goodbye and the child whose laughter had encouraged both her mother and the children around her.

Hospitality did not remove the uncertainty they faced. But for one night and one decisive morning, it meant they did not have to face it alone.



PRAYER TO LIGHT THE CANDLE

God of Welcome,

As we light this first Advent candle, we remember Your faithful love that makes room for all people.

You came into our world as a vulnerable child, seeking shelter and finding refuge in the care of others.

Open our hearts during this holy season. Remove the fear that closes doors and the indifference that keeps others at a distance.

Teach us to welcome as You welcome. Help us to recognise Your presence in those who seek safety, belonging, and hope.

May our homes, our communities, and our hearts become places of hospitality where dignity is protected and every person is received as a beloved child of God.

As this candle shines, may its light remind us that even the smallest act of welcome can become a sign of Your Kingdom.

Amen.

WHAT I CARRY IN MY HEART

Write down what stays with you as a reminder, a guide, or a grace for the path ahead.

6 December 2026

WEEK 2 Opportunity

"Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths."
Mark 1:3

Advent is a season of preparation. Throughout Scripture, God is revealed as the One who opens paths where none seem possible. Through the prophet Isaiah, valleys are lifted up and rough places made smooth. Through John the Baptist, a way is prepared for the coming of Christ. Again and again, God creates new possibilities for life to flourish.

For people who have been forced to flee their homes, opportunity is a form of protection. Access to education, meaningful work, legal status, and the chance to develop one's gifts can make the difference between surviving and building a future. Opportunity restores agency. It allows people to make choices, support their families, contribute to their communities, and hope again. When opportunities are denied, people remain vulnerable to poverty, exclusion, exploitation, and despair. When opportunities are created, dignity grows and lives are transformed.

We are not all called to solve the challenges facing our world. But like John the Baptist, we are called to prepare the way. We are invited to remove obstacles, share resources, and encourage the gifts we see in others. In doing so, we participate in God's work of creating pathways toward hope.



Photo: Mirko D'Accurzio /Centro Astalli

REFLECT

This Advent, we might ask ourselves: Where is God inviting me to help create opportunity for another person? What gifts, talents, or dreams in others need encouragement to grow? How can I help prepare a path toward a more hopeful future?

AN OPPORTUNITY TO BUILD ON

In Minawao Refugee Camp in Cameroon, Tidjani was already working hard to support his large family. He ran a small business, but limited capital and stock made it difficult to earn enough to meet his family's needs.

An opportunity came through a livelihoods programme supported by JRS and UNHCR. Tidjani received a small business kit that gave him the resources to strengthen the business he had already started.

He used the support to expand his shop and reinvested part of his earnings, adding fruit juices to the products he sold. Gradually, his business grew.

Today, the income helps him provide food, healthcare, and education for his family.

For Tidjani, the support was more than assistance. It gave him the opportunity to use his experience, initiative and entrepreneurial skills to build greater stability.

"I was already a trader, but my resources were very limited," he explains. The support he received gave his business the boost it needed.

Sometimes, preparing a way forward begins by recognising what a person can already do and creating space for those skills to grow.





PRAYER TO LIGHT THE CANDLE

God of New Beginnings,

As we light this second Advent candle, we remember that You are always at work, opening paths where none seem possible and creating hope where the future appears uncertain.

Through the prophets, You promised a way in the wilderness.

Through John the Baptist, You prepared hearts for the coming of Christ.

Today, You continue to prepare the way through those who remove obstacles, open doors, and create opportunities for others.

Open our eyes to the gifts You have placed within every person. Help us recognise the strength, talents, and dreams of those who have been forced to flee their homes.

Give us the courage to create opportunities that restore dignity, nurture hope, and allow people to flourish.

May we be people who help prepare the way: making room for learning, growth, meaningful work, and belonging.

As this candle shines, remind us that every opportunity offered in love can become a sign of Your Kingdom and a form of protection for our sisters and brothers.

Come, Lord Jesus, and make us builders of hope.

Amen.

WHAT I CARRY IN MY HEART

Write down what stays with you as a reminder, a guide, or a grace for the path ahead.

13 December 2026

WEEK 3 Community



"As a garden makes its growth spring up, so will the Lord God make justice and praise spring up before all the nations."
Isaiah 61:11

Advent reminds us that God does not save us in isolation. From the beginning, the story of salvation unfolds through relationships: families, neighbours, communities, and peoples journeying together in hope.

The prophet Isaiah describes God's vision as a garden where justice and praise spring forth and flourish. Growth does not happen through a single plant standing alone, but through an ecosystem of life that supports and sustains itself. In the same way, protection is strengthened when people come together.

For refugees and forcibly displaced people, community is often the first source of protection. Families care for one another during difficult journeys. Neighbours share information, resources, and encouragement. Refugees organise support networks, accompany those who are struggling, and help newcomers find their footing. In countless places around the world, displaced people are not only recipients of protection; they are active builders of it.

Communities that welcome newcomers are also transformed. Gifts are shared, cultures encounter one another, and new bonds of solidarity emerge. When people recognise that their futures are interconnected, communities become stronger, more resilient, and more capable of responding to challenges together.

This spirit of protection extends beyond families and local communities. Society itself is a form of community. When institutions and governments uphold human dignity, protect rights, and promote the common good, they contribute to the safety and flourishing of all.

Advent calls us to recognise that we are preparing the way for Christ not only in our hearts, but also in our relationships. As we wait for the One who comes among us, we are invited to strengthen the bonds that protect life, nurture belonging, and remind no one that they must walk alone.

REFLECT

This week, we might ask ourselves: Who are the people who help sustain and protect my community? How have I experienced protection through the support of others? In what ways can I strengthen the bonds of solidarity around me? How can my community become a sign of hope and belonging for others?

A COMMUNITY THAT RECONNECTS

For almost three years, Radina did not know whether her sister was alive. When fighting reached their community in Sudan, both families fled and were separated in the chaos. Radina crossed into South Sudan with her husband and children and settled at the Doro refugee camp reception site in Maban County. Her sister also reached Maban, settling in Kaya camp, but neither knew the other was nearby.

Their reunion began during a JRS group mental health and psychosocial support session. Counsellor Elizabeth noticed that Radina closely resembled a woman she had been supporting in Kaya.

Through careful conversations and after verifying the details, JRS staff discovered that the two women were sisters who had been separated by conflict.

When Radina learned that her sister was alive, she wept, but after so long apart she could hardly believe it until they met. At Doro, the sisters finally embraced, cried, and spoke about the life they had shared before the conflict.

Counselling sessions provide a space to be heard and supported by others. For Radina and her sister, that space of care and connection also helped restored a family bond that displacement had broken.





PRAYER TO LIGHT THE CANDLE

God of Communion,

As we light this third Advent candle, we thank You for the gift of community.

You walk with us through one another's presence, care, and support. Teach us to build communities where all are welcomed, valued, and protected.

Strengthen the bonds that unite us. Help us share one another's burdens, celebrate one another's gifts, and ensure that no one walks alone.

May the light of this candle remind us that together we reflect Your love and become a source of joy for the world.

Amen.



WHAT I CARRY IN MY HEART

Write down what stays with you as a reminder, a guide, or a grace for the path ahead.

20 December 2026

WEEK 4 Safety



“Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.”
Luke 1:30

As Advent draws to a close, we find ourselves standing beside Mary.

When the angel appeared to her, she did not receive a detailed plan for the future. She was not promised an easy road, freedom from uncertainty, or protection from every hardship that lay ahead. Yet before anything else, she heard these words:

“Do not be afraid.”

Mary's safety did not come from knowing exactly what would happen next. It came from trusting that God would be with her every step of the way.

The promise made to David was the same promise fulfilled in Mary: God desires to dwell among His people, to establish a lasting home where fear, violence, and suffering do not have the final word. Throughout the history of salvation, God continually creates spaces where life can flourish and hope can endure.

For refugees and forcibly displaced people, safety means more than physical protection. It means being able to trust again. Trust that violence will not return.

Trust that rights will be respected. Trust that children can grow, learn, and dream. Trust that dignity will be recognised and that the future remains open.

Creating safety is one of the deepest expressions of love. It happens when communities welcome those who have experienced fear, when institutions uphold human dignity, and when people accompany one another through uncertainty. Such spaces do not eliminate every challenge, but they allow hope to take root.

Mary's "yes" reminds us that trust is possible even when the road ahead is unclear. Had she known everything that awaited her, she would likely have said "yes" again and again, because her response was rooted in love. The God who became human entered our fragile world not out of necessity, but out of love.



REFLECT

This final week of Advent invites us to reflect: Where do I find my sense of security? Who in my community longs for a place where they can feel safe and trusted? How can I help create environments where others can heal, belong, and hope again? What would it mean for me to trust more deeply that God is with me?

A SAFE PLACE TO BEGIN AGAIN

When earthquakes struck Venezuela, Alex was at home with his wife, Kimberly, and her sister. As the building shook and water entered their apartment, the door jammed. Eventually, they escaped and spent three nights outside until engineers declared their building safe to return to.

But returning home did not mean the fear was over. Kimberly struggled to sleep, and Alex, a teacher, psychologist, and JRS volunteer, tried to support her while also accompanying others affected by the disaster.

In the weeks that followed, Alex returned with JRS to devastated communities, offering psychological first aid and helping families access emergency assistance. Eventually, he realised that he too needed help. His wife noticed him shaking in his sleep, and Alex began receiving psychological support himself.

For Alex, recovery is not about pretending the fear has disappeared. It is about having people beside you as you begin again.

Amid the destruction, one survivor described the need to learn how to live differently. Alex saw in those words something deeper: the possibility of a new beginning and the hope of rebuilding life together.

WEEK 4 *Safety*



PRAYER TO LIGHT THE CANDLE

God of the Promise,

As we light this fourth Advent candle, we remember Mary, who trusted Your promise even when she could not see the road ahead.

When fear and uncertainty surround us, remind us that Your love remains steadfast.

Help us create places where people can find safety, dignity, and peace. May refugees, families, and all who have experienced hardship encounter communities where they are protected, valued, and free to hope again.

Teach us to trust as Mary trusted, knowing that Your presence is greater than our fears and Your love stronger than anything that divides or wounds.

As this candle shines, may it remind us that true safety is found in You, and that Your love continues to make all things new.

Come, Lord Jesus.

Amen.



Photo: Sergio González/JRS

WHAT I CARRY IN MY HEART

Write down what stays with you as a reminder, a guide, or a grace for the path ahead.

Closing Blessings

God of Love and Protection,

As we come to the end of this Advent journey, we thank You for walking with us.

Through hospitality, You taught us to open our doors.
Through opportunity, You taught us to prepare the way.
Through community, You reminded us that no one is meant to walk alone.
Through safety, You revealed that true security is found in Your faithful love.

As we celebrate the birth of Christ, may we continue to create spaces where others can find welcome, dignity, belonging, and hope.

Make us a refuge for those seeking shelter, a voice for those longing to be heard, and a sign of Your presence in a world marked by displacement and uncertainty.

Like Mary, may we trust in Your promises.
Like Joseph, may we protect what has been entrusted to our care.
Like the manger of Bethlehem, may our hearts always have room for You.

And may the Child who comes among us bless us with courage, compassion, and peace, so that we may help build a world where all people are protected and all can flourish.

Come, Lord Jesus.

Amen.

JRS
JESUIT REFUGEE SERVICE

www.jrs.net