

*Restore us, O God;
let your face shine, that we may be
saved.*

[Psalm 80:3 NRSV]

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ in the
Northeastern Ohio Synod,

We are living in anxious times. It seems
lately that the news cycles have been filled
with nothing but stories of mass shootings,
political acrimony, wars, and natural
disasters.

Where once one could worship, study, or
attend a concert or other public
performance with a relative assurance of
safety; we now hesitate about venturing
out to places we never gave a second
thought to visiting.

Our world has been shaken by uncertainty.
We are less trusting of our once-reliable
institutions. We're increasingly cynical of
our elected officials. We are more vigilant
and suspicious of those we don't know. We
don't feel inclined to reach out to those
unfamiliar to us. We hold on more tightly to
those for whom we care.

As we enter the season of Advent, the
thoughts of Hope, Peace, Joy and Love
appear to be nothing but illusory dreams.
Yet it was into a world such as this that God
sent a Savior.

At the time Jesus was born, the nation of
Israel was under Roman dominance. Taxes
were high. Morale was low. The people
were in despair. There was enough
resentment to regard the area as ripe for

rebellion. The
ubiquitous
military presence
acted as a highly
visible deterrent
to anyone who
would consider
any sort of
upheaval.

The turmoil of
today seems tame by comparison.

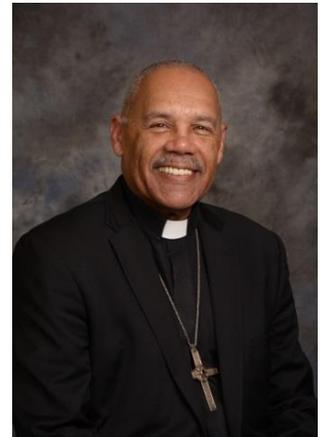
According to historian Philip Jenkins, "The
Romans and the high priestly elites were
absolutely right to be worried about the
turbulence of Jerusalem, which so often
was central to violence foreign and
domestic."¹

We, too, are right to be concerned, but not
overcome by fear. While it is prudent to be
somewhat cautious, caution shouldn't
control our behavior.

The words of the psalmist hold a key for us
in 2017. "*Restore us, O God; let your face
shine, that we may be saved.*"

It is a prayer we say at Advent and words
that hopefully will guide us through this
time of preparation. The words point us to
Jesus. Advent is all about Jesus coming,
arriving and showing up.

Advent is a reminder that the longing of
God's people was not disappointed. God



¹ Jenkins, Philip, *A Most Violent Year: The World into
which Jesus was Born* (ABC Religion & Ethics, 16
December 2015) www.abc.net.au

was faithful and kept His promise to send the Savior!

But we also need to be reminded that God did not end the oppression of the Romans. In the form of Jesus, God was simply present with the people of Israel through the trying times, walking alongside them.

When God gave us Jesus, it was a demonstration of God's love for humankind. It reminds us how committed God is to us, to our existence, that God would choose to become human, vulnerable, one of us.

God is with us as our savior.

"God with us" were words of hope centuries ago when the Israelites were under siege. They were words of hope in the Dark Ages when living conditions were almost unbearable. And they are words of hope to our own fallen and broken world today, a world living in darkness and despair.

Advent is a time of preparation for the coming of God, a time to pay attention to the clues that God is active, that God is with us, and we are reminded of that fact throughout Advent, throughout Christmas, and the rest of the year.

Blessings to you this Advent season,



The Rev. Abraham D. Allende,
Bishop