

In those days – the days of Caesar Augustus – God’s people suffered terribly and were afraid of what was going on in their nation and the world. The Roman government was oppressing them. Taxes were inordinately high, and many struggled to pay for necessities such as food and health care. The marginalized tried to fight back. During Quirinius’s census, a man named Judas the Galilean – not to be confused with Judas Iscariot – led a rebellion against Rome. Indeed many little revolutions and wars broke out that Augustus had to suppress. Bandits threatened to take over some cities. Pirates tried to rule the seas, so people felt that what they did possess was at risk of being stolen.

In some cases, the people feared for their safety. God’s chosen people were having trouble being hopeful about their future. They were having trouble finding peace and joy amid the economic, personal, and social challenges they faced.

Into the challenging world that existed **in those days**, God chose to break forth into ordinary lives. God decided to take up residence among people in those days. God broke into the world as a tiny baby, born in humble circumstances to ordinary people struggling to make their way in a world gone haywire. The news that God had come into the world to bring peace was first given to the shepherds – ordinary people just going about their everyday business of tending the sheep.

In these days -- the days in which you and I live now -- we have wars and conflicts in many places in the world. Our government leaders spend much of their time in partisan fighting rather than working together to create a better environment. We have racial injustice and racial unrest. Inflation is causing us to struggle to buy the things we need. We see the standard of living declining for our children. Active shooters show up in schools and grocery stores, and we sometimes find ourselves afraid. Sometimes, hope eludes us. We have trouble finding joy in our social, personal, and economic situations.

God comes among us into the challenging world that exists **in these days**. No, God doesn’t come as a baby in a feeding trough today. God does come to dwell among us and to bring peace, however.

Here are some places we find God if we choose to seek him. We see God in the diversity of our worshipping community – diversity of age, socioeconomic status, and political affiliations, to name a few. Yet, despite our differences, we work together to try to help others. We work together to provide food, toys, and clothes to needy families. We support each other when one of us is suffering.

We see God in the faces of others, created in the image of God. We especially see God in the faces and actions of children. Each is a miracle, and each is an innocent. We also can see God in the faces of the elderly, those who have lived long and faithfully.

We also see God bursting forth in the kindness of others. Sometimes, God bursts forth during big acts of kindness, such as someone driving you to a doctor’s appointment or

lending you money when you need it. God also is present in small kindnesses, such as someone holding the door for you when your arms are full.

We also can see God bursting forth in ourselves if we allow the burst. We also are created in God's image. Whenever we act in a peaceful, loving way, God bursts forth into the world. For example, when someone hurts our feelings and we pray for them instead of bearing a grudge. Or when we buy food for a needy person even though inflation is zapping our grocery buying power.

We can't get the whole country or the whole world on track by ourselves. We can't end all injustice – although we can ensure we treat people fairly. We can't end the war in Ukraine, but we can pray for its ending. We can also solve our individual conflicts with our neighbors through loving, peaceful means. We can be the good news for those around us.

We can also take a step back from our anxiety and distress. Instead, we can focus on where we see God breaking through **in these days** of complex challenges. We can develop the spiritual practice of being alert to transcendence breaking forth in the mundane activities of our daily lives.

In these days of rampant inflation, sickness, violence, injustice, and fear, Emmanuel comes. God bursts forth into our ordinary activities, and God remains with us. Because God is with us, we have no need for fear and hopelessness. God is with us now just as he was with the people in those days of Caesar Augustus. God's presence among us is still the good news.