

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 24

Psalm 98, Luke 2:1–20

The city was crowded, sure, but someone could have found space for them if they had enough money. It was Joseph's hometown—anyone there would have felt the obligation of kinship towards them...if it weren't for the shame of Mary's pregnancy. The disguise couldn't have been better. Born in obscurity, poverty, disgrace...God's glory, His very presence, hidden in plain sight.

Like Mary, Thembela (*name is changed to protect her privacy*) was looking for a place to shelter her son. He was born while she was in prison. When we met, he was about to age out of the Baby-Mother Unit where they were housed—only children under two are allowed. Thembela told us that her family would not accept him because of the shame of her incarceration. Her father had said, "I want nothing to do with this child because I want nothing to do with you."

In this season of Advent, we remember that we are awaiting an eternal home. Like Mary, and like Thembela, we are longing for a place of peace and safety, where our shame and desperation can be transformed as God's glory breaks through.

Our story is not finished yet...and praise God, neither was Thembela's. We witnessed God's glory breaking through as she engaged in a restorative justice process, giving a true confession and asking forgiveness from her family. By the end of the week, her father's heart was transformed: "Your son must come to me, and when you are released, you are welcome home too."

As we await our Father's welcome, we are called to extend that welcome to the orphans, widows, refugees, prisoners—the outcasts of our world, the disgraced, the desperate. God is already at work building a home—His church. This Advent, let us be the welcome this world needs. As we do, we are welcoming God With Us.

Anne May—Anne loves learning worship songs in Southern African languages, but the clicks can be a challenge. She's in the right place to learn, though, since she lives in Cape Town, South Africa where she serves as a Park Street Missionary. Anne also enjoys hiking and dim sum.