



WONDER WILL SAVE US:

An Advent Proclamation

By Katie Harmon-McLaughlin
Spiritual Formation Ministries

And my soul in an excess of wonder cried out: "This world is pregnant with God!"

—Angela of Foligno, *Complete Works*

watch her eyes widen as she holds her small hand in front of her face, seeing, perhaps for the first time, her fingers moving in harmony with her thoughts. She gazes, completely engrossed, at what for most of us is a natural daily occurrence. Even now my fingers glide across the keyboard with swift coordinated ease.

My daughter is in the developmental stage many refer to as "the enchanted months." Between two and three months old, babies begin to awaken to the world around them, including to their own being. Watching a baby discover the world, and herself, reminds me of Rabbi Abraham Heschel's description of spirituality as "to be amazed."

As a mother of young children in a perilous time, I have felt the pull between the wonder of infancy and the horror of the many devastating realities around me. The day my daughter was born, Russian missiles hit a maternity ward in Ukraine. I watched on the hospital television as pregnant bodies, bloodied and frightened women, emerged from the wreckage. How do we hold this perennial paradox, the absolute miracle of it all, with the atrocities that send us retreating into numbness?

We often dull our capacity for beauty because we cannot bear to stay awake for the atrocities that we encounter when we love fragile creatures. It requires so much courage and strength to endure love for the beauty of the world.

—Wendy Farley, *Beguiled by Beauty: Cultivating a Life of Contemplation and Compassion*

Advent knows well the paradox of beauty and suffering. The fragile infancy of God in Christ is at the heart of the Advent story.

This is God with us, discovering her own hands and fingers, enchanted at the stunning newness of everything. There are many breath-catching moments of awe from shepherds gazing into the heavens to the

wise men "overwhelmed with joy" by the sight of the star leading the way to Christ.

The whole season is encompassed in wonder—a dimly lit, soft hue of candles and carols, a shush to the frenetic, a womb of calm for the soul.

We "wonder as we wander." And yet, the Advent story also bears the weight of oppression, empire, and violence. Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore reflects on Mary pondering in her heart as a spiritual practice in this context:

Here in the small word ponder is an image of a mother in turbulent spiritual waters, wading through the emotional swings of care... "stunned by wonder and stung by worry."

— *In the Midst of Chaos: Caring for Children as a Spiritual Practice*

