



Dear friends and partners,

Once again Advent is upon us, and we are invited once again into the mystery of “God with us.” Kathleen Norris writes this about Zechariah’s experience of being struck dumb when confronted with the mystery of hearing that he and his equally elderly wife would bear a son they were to name John—the very one who would prepare the way for Immanuel:

“I read Zechariah’s punishment as a grace, in that he could not say anything to further compound his initial arrogance when confronted with mystery. When he does speak again, it is to praise God; he’s had nine months to think it over.”

There are ways where we have been confronted by the mystery of God’s grace at work amid the continuing (and multiplying) crises here in Lebanon, Iraq, and Syria. There are no words to describe how this mystery happens, but every day God’s Spirit provides grace enough, strength enough, wisdom enough, hope enough, faith enough, and love enough to our partners, friends, and neighbors so they are able to keep on keeping on with ministries that nourish hope, faith, and love in their respective communities. Humbling indeed. Christ indeed continues his multi-faceted ministries of justice and mercy through the life of his Church, especially during times like these.

We’re grateful to share in that work together with you. Thank you for joining with us, the Presbyterian Mission Agency, and our partners across the Middle East to bear witness to the mystery of God’s grace at work through the person of Jesus Christ. In this season of Advent and Christmas, may the mystery of Immanuel, God with us, continue to fill you with all heart courage and hope to remain a steadfast part of God’s work of justice and mercy in your community and beyond.

Together in Christ’s Service,

Scott and Elmarie Parker