

# From our Churches

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## Celebrating Advent Globally

- **FIRST SUNDAY – PHILIPPINES: BAMBOO BRANCHES [LOVE]**
- **BUYER:** The prophet Jeremiah lived through catastrophes that fell upon the people of Jerusalem and through this troubled him greatly, he was able to provide some hope. Some of the greatest words in the book of Jeremiah point beyond these troubled times to a new day, and to the love of our Lord expressed in a new covenant. In chapter 33 we find him telling the people that the prophesied king of Israel would be a part of David's family tree. Today we travel to the Philippines, we visit Fabiola and Fiona, grandmother and granddaughter, some of the outer branches of an ancient family tree in these islands. Let's listen and watch.

*[Fabiola, the grandmother is busy with some reeds and branches, preparing them for the weaving of a basket or wreath. Fiona, the granddaughter is seated at her feet, studiously watching the process.]*

**FIONA:** Where did you learn to do that, grandmother?

**FABIOLA:** Well, that's a long story, Fiona, Many, many years ago, long before any missionaries had come to our islands my great, great, great grandmother along with a number of other women in the village used reeds and branches just like these to make containers. As you know these reeds and branches grow all over these islands and we have used them in many ways over the years. The containers were used for storing things, for carrying food and water and also in religious ceremonies. The first baskets were plain and simple – utilitarian. But as time passed each generation became more skilled and added some colour, and also made different shapes. And as you can see today some of them are actually used to decorate our homes.

**FIONA:** Oh, grandmother, do you think I'll ever be able to learn how to weave and make pretty baskets...and that other thing you are making?

**FABIOLA:** You certainly will. You see even when catastrophes like floods, earthquakes and erupting volcanoes hit our island our grandmothers and mothers were

always able to get some reeds and branches and continue to make baskets and teach their daughters and granddaughters. And when the people came to our islands from across the oceans they loved our baskets and took them back with them. They also taught us about Jesus and how His love for us can help us through all our troubled times. They also suggested that we might be able to use our skills to make special decorations to commemorate Jesus' birthday and his love for us. The wreath, the other thing I am making, is in the form of a circle and symbolizes Jesus' love. When people prepare to celebrate His birthday, they often use wreaths like this to remind everyone of his special event. And so today as we prepare for Christ's coming we offer this wreath, a symbol of love.

**BUYER:** Advent is a season of love – love that is experienced and expressed in many different ways. As we prepare to light the first candle of Advent let us listen to the words of Paul as he writes to Thessalonica, “May our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus prepare the way for us to come to you! May the Lord make your love for one another and for all people grow more and more and become as our great love for you.”  
[1 Thessalonians 3:11, 12]

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• **SECOND SUNDAY – NEPAL: FILIGREE ORNAMENT [JOY]**

- **BUYER:** The prophet Malachi tells us how the messenger of the new covenant will sit as a refiner of precious metals, purifying and refining the followers of God as if they were gold and silver. The craftsman we will visit today uses some of these metals in the manufacture of Christmas ornaments in Nepal. Allow me to introduce to you Iqbal, a teenager living in Kathmandu, Nepal.

*[Iqbal is sitting on a chair with scraps of metal on the floor and a blow torch near at hand. He uses a malleable piece of metal [solder] to make some simple shapes.]*

**IQBAL:** Five years ago my family lived in a small mountain village – the village near where our family had lived for generations. Times were hard, and my father lost his job, so we had to move to the city. We thought life would be better there. We were wrong – none of us could find steady jobs, we had no money, and our landlord kept threatening to turn us out into the street.

Then, one day, a man came to our door, and he wanted to speak to me. He said he was from the Bhavna Arts and Crafts Society. He said the Society was looking for boys my age who wanted to work part-time and go to school part-time; and would I be interested? Of course I was – a steady job would be wonderful, and I hadn't dreamed about ever being able to finish school because it cost so much. But I was suspicious. It sounded too good to be true. So I told the man I would have to see where these boys were working before I could make the decision.

That evening he took me and my father to see the factory. It was a small building not far from where we lived. There I saw boys like me working, making things called ornaments that people in other countries like to hang on trees at a time of the year they call Christmas. It was neat to watch them work. First they

cut pieces of brass wire and arranged these pieces in shapes like stars and trees. Then they welded the wires together using a small torch. After cleaning the ornaments in acid, they put a thin coating of pure gold on them, and finally they glued small stones for decoration.

The finished product is quite beautiful, don't you think? This one says **JOY**. It's my favorite because it reflects how I feel as I do my work and go to school. I am filled with joy because I know that my work here means a better future for me and my family. And now I offer it to you so you too can be filled with joy.

**BUYER:** Advent is a season of joy – joy that is experienced and expressed in many different ways. As we prepare to light the second candle of Advent, let us listen to the words Apostle Paul used to proclaim the joy he felt to the believers of Philippi:

"I thank my god every time I remember you. In my prayers for all of you, always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel for the beginning until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Jesus Christ." [Phil 1:3-6]

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- **THIRD SUNDAY – MEXICO: STRAW ORNAMENTS [HOPE]**

- **BUYER:** John the Baptist, baptizing the crowds at the Jordan River, tells of the time when Christ would come, baptizing with the Holy Spirit. "He has his winnowing shovel with Him, to thresh out all the grain and gather the wheat into his barn." (Luke 3:17) The craftswoman we will visit today uses the wheat straw to make Christmas ornaments and other straw decorations in Mexico. Please listen as we hear from Maria, a young mother from San Jeronimo, Mexico.

*[Maria sitting on chair; braiding or weaving a few pieces of straw; bits of straw all around her; baby sleeping/watching from baby seat on floor nearby.]*

**MARIA:** We've been weaving things out of straw for years. We started making little figurines and shapes for our children to play with from bits of straw on the ground. It only took about 10 minutes to make one.

The one day an MCC buyer came to our town. How did he find us? Up here in the highlands we don't even speak Spanish. Imagine our surprise when he said people from his country wanted to buy our little straw creations.

Now we pick our straw more carefully, ensuring that it's clean and fresh. The children still help out, watching the dyes and picking out the right lengths of straw. When they get bigger, they start weaving with us. The money we make allows us to send the children to school, to put in concrete floors, to improve our roofs (which is such a treat in rainy season) and even to buy new land and livestock. All that with just \$43.00 a month.

The ornament I am making today is a candle. The candle is a symbol of Christ's light. God sent his Son into the world to bring hope. I look around me and see

hope for my children as they attend school – hope for a better life. I offer these candles to you, that you also may see Christ's light and have hope.

**BUYER:** Advent is a time of **HOPE** – hope that is experienced and expressed in many different ways. As we prepare to light the third candle of Advent let us listen to the Apostle Paul as he proclaims his hope to the believers at Philippi: “Show a gentle attitude towards everyone. The Lord is coming soon. Don't worry about anything, but in all your prayers ask God for what you need, always asking him with a thankful heart”. [*Phil. 4:5-7*]

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- **FOURTH SUNDAY – BANGLADESH: JUTE [PEACE]**

- **BUYER:** In Psalm 80, the Psalmist describes the people of Israel as a plant, brought out of the land of Egypt, and planted in a new land. The plant's roots grew deep and the plant is spread over the land. The couple we will meet today create many products, including Christmas decorations, from a tenacious, flourishing plant, the jute plant, a major cash crop in Bangladesh. Join with me as we meet Muba and Munjot, workers with Corr, The Jute Works, in rural Bangladesh.

*[Muba is standing near Munjot guiding jute rope/yarn as Munjot weaves/braids something. Nativity scene is on floor in front of them.]*

**MUNJOT:** Growing and harvesting jute has been going on in this area since before Bangladesh become an independent country. The Western countries that write about the feasibility of jute production say it's only economical in areas with “a large supply of low-paid hand labour” – it's a nice way of saying hard manual labour.

Well, Bangladesh certainly has enough of us low-paid manual labourers – especially in the rural areas.

**MUBA:** Do you know what it takes to make something out of jute? First we plant the jute seeds. Three months later it's harvest time – hacking down 10 to 15 foot stalks with hand sickles, then gathering them according to length, bundling the stalks together and then soaking the bundles for 1 to 3 weeks in pools of water. When this “retting” is finished, the gummy part of the jute stalk is rotted away and the part – which is the part we use – then separates from the woody stalk. We get the fibre off the stalks by thrashing them against the water. Then we hang the bundles to dry. All this in **HOT, HUMID** weather. Then the bales have to be transferred by boat to the storage areas. Three men with especially strong neck muscles can carry up to a tonne of jute together.

**MUNJOT:** Then we, the women work. We start with the silky skein of the fibre and spin the jute into yarn by hand. Then we use the fine yarn to weave or braid handbags, mats, rugs and sacking. We can also spin the jute into rope to make plant hangings and ladders and things. Since the MCC buyer suggested it, we've started making Christmas decorations too.

- MUBA:** It's very hard work and takes hours. But it is work, and in a country like Bangladesh, where most people don't make enough to support themselves, we are ever so grateful to know that even though our economy is doing poorly, our jute products are still selling in North America.
- MUNJOT:** There are about 6,500 women working at Corr – The Jute Works, all rural, and needing the extra money we make to support our families. We are **VERY** happy to be working, but we could do much more work – Corr's only functioning at 30% capacity right now.
- MUBA:** The Christmas decoration here is one of the jute products the women make. The jute is dyed and woven finely into burlap. Burlap is the **FINEST** quality product you can make from the jute plant. This is a mother and child – you call it the nativity scene. We find it also reflects our feelings – the feelings of the peace of a mother and her baby. Having the opportunity to express our creativity and to work brings us dignity and peace, and an improved lifestyle. In a country buffeted by disasters – both economic and natural, we find peace of heart and peace of mind knowing that we have work. We now offer this nativity scene to you, so that you may also find peace.
- BUYER:** Advent is a season of **PEACE** – peace that is experienced and expressed in many different ways. As we prepare to light the fourth candle of Advent, let us listen to the words of the prophet Micah, proclaiming the peace of the Lord's universal reign: "In the days to come, many nations will come streaming to the mountain and the people will say 'Let us go up the hill of the Lord. For he will teach us what he wants us to do; we will walk in the paths he has chosen.' Nations will never again go to war, never prepare for battle again. All will live in peace among their own vineyards and fig trees, and no one will make them afraid. The Lord Almighty has promised this." [*paraphrased from Micah 5:2-5a*]

## CELEBRATING ADVENT GLOBALLY

### • Ideas for Bulletin Format

- Within order of worship:
  - Country
  - Character name(s)'s story
  - Theme
  - Lighting of Advent Candle
  - Advent Hymn

### • First Sunday of Advent

- Philippines
- Fabiola & Fiona's story
- LOVE
- Hymn: "O How Shall I Receive Thee" #182 HWB

### • Second Sunday of Advent

- Nepal
- Iqbal's story

- JOY
- Hymn: *"Hark, The Glad Sound"* #184 HWB

- **Third Sunday of Advent**

- Mexico
- Maria's story
- HOPE

- **Fourth Sunday of Advent**

- Bangladesh
- Mabu and Manjot's story
- PEACE

- To be included in the bulletin each week of Advent:  
Christmas decorations used in the Advent display come from Global Village Gifts. The Advent stories are based on information distributed by Self-help Grafts.