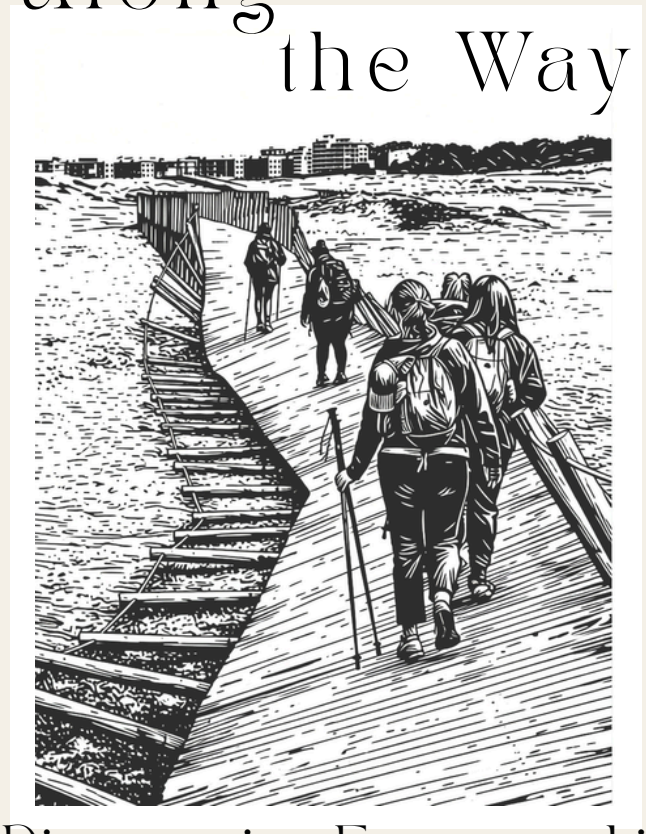
CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE
EURASIA

A PILGRIMAGE THROUGH ADVENT

Along the Way



A PILGRIMAGE THROUGH ADVENT

Discovering Emmanuel in the Journey to Christmas

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Eurasia Region Church of the Nazarene

CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE
EURASIA

THIS ADVENT STUDY DOESN'T REQUIRE YOU TO HAVE WALKED THE CAMINO.

YOU ARE INVITED TO SEE YOUR OWN ADVENT, WHEREVER YOU FIND YOURSELF, AS A PILGRIMAGE. A PLACE WHERE CHRIST IS ENCOUNTERED NOT ONLY AT THE DESTINATION, BUT IN EVERY ORDINARY STEP ALONG THE ROAD.




SANTIAGO
LOVE
PEACE
GOOD WAY
FRIENDS
HOPE
FRIENDSHIP

introduction

On the Camino, you are never alone.

In May of this year, several ladies from our Region took on the challenge of walking the Camino de Santiago together. Along the way, we discovered the truth behind the Camino saying: "On the Camino, you are never alone". The Camino is more than a path leading to Santiago de Compostela; it is a journey shared with people from all walks of life, each carrying their own stories, hopes, struggles, and questions.

We met people who had set out on the Camino at a crossroads in their lives. Some were trying to make sense of difficult experiences. Others were searching for a new direction and asking questions like: What should I do with the rest of my life? Beneath walking the kilometers and physical effort was a deep desire to find meaning and answers.

There is widsom in regularly stepping away from routines and distractions of our busy lives and creating space for reflection, slowing down, listening to our hearts, and thinking about the things that matter most. Sometimes we find answers to questions we have carried for years, other times answers to questions we never knew we had. We also learn things about ourselves we never knew before. We even may set out looking for one thing and discover something totally unexpected.

Advent, too, is a journey.

Rather than simply walking through the days towards Christmas, Advent invites us to slow down, reflect on our lives, and become more attentive to God's presence. It invites us to revisit the story of God's people waiting for the promised Messiah. And as we see their hopes, struggles, and questions, we might also recognize our own longing for hope, peace, joy, and love.

And as on the Camino, may this Advent journey lead us to discoveries we did not anticipate. May familiar passages of Scripture speak to us in new ways, revealing truths about God or ourselves that we had overlooked. May we also remember that Emmanuel, God with us, is at the center of our journey. Jesus draws near to us in our joys and sorrows, our questions and uncertainties, our hopes and disappointments.

On the Camino, we experienced how much it means to have others walking alongside us. A conversation, a helping hand, sharing supplies or simply knowing that someone understands our sore blisters makes the road easier. Yet Advent reminds us of an even deeper truth: we are not alone because God himself has drawn near. Emmanuel is not merely the destination we hope to reach at Christmas; He is the One who meets us along the way.

As you begin these devotional readings, take time to slow down and listen. Bring your questions, hopes, and uncertainties to God. Be open not only to the answers you seek, but also to the truths you may not yet know you need.
May this Advent become a journey of discovery, drawing us closer to the One who has come to dwell among us. Emmanuel. God with us.






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PREPARING THE WAY

FAITH DOESN'T REQUIRE US TO KNOW THE WHOLE ROAD. SOMETIMES IT MEANS TRUSTING GOD ENOUGH TO TAKE THE NEXT FAITHFUL STEP.



WORDS FROM THE CAMINO

NEVER FORGOTTEN BY GOD

By Tatiana Cantarella

Isaiah 49:14-16 (NIV)
"Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands."

On our first day, we were all arriving in Porto from different countries of our Region. Those arriving at roughly the same time agreed to meet at the airport so we could travel together to our accommodation in the city. Arriving just a little later, I wasn't thinking much about how to get to the city since I assumed those waiting for me would have it all figured out by the time I got there.

On my long journey (coach bus across the border, spending the night and then a flight to Porto) I met a young girl, Ksenia, who was also travelling from Minsk to Porto for the Camino. It was so unbelievable that two people from such a small country as Belarus were heading to do the Camino at the same time! I shared my excitement in our Camino group chat thinking how wonderful it will be to introduce Ksenia to the rest of our group when we arrive at Porto airport.
But when we arrived, there was nobody there! I started messaging the group, only to discover that they had already left on a train to the city. In our communication mix-up, my group had went on ahead to the city because they thought Ksenia and I were traveling together to our starting point.

Needless to say, I couldn't resist giving Cezi a hard time about leaving me behind at the airport—all in good fun, of course! I've travelled independently for many years, all over the world, so it really wasn't a big deal.

On a serious note, we got to thinking about how people care about us at times can forget us, misunderstand us, or unintentionally leave us behind. And Isaiah 49 says that God's people did feel forgotten and abandoned, too: "'The LORD has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me,' they cried." (v.14). But God's response is one of the most tender assurances in Scripture: "I will not forget you!"
God describes His love as even more enduring than a mother's love for her child. He has engraved His people on the palms of His hands—a beautiful picture of how deeply and permanently they are held in His care.

As we begin our Advent journey, we may sometimes feel overlooked or wonder whether God has forgotten us. Yet the promise of Emmanuel, God with us, reminds us that we are never beyond His sight or reach. We may not always understand His ways or feel His presence, but we can trust that He has not forgotten us.

AS YOU JOURNEY TOWARD CHRISTMAS, MAY YOU BE REMINDED THAT GOD HAS NOT FORGOTTEN YOU.

SUNSET TOGETHER

By Erin Ketchum

Isaiah 64:1-4 (NIV)
"Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before you! As when fire sets twigs ablaze and causes water to boil, come down to make your name known to your enemies and cause the nations to quake before you! For when you did awesome things that we did not expect, you came down, and the mountains trembled before you. Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for him."

In this season of Advent, patiently waiting in anticipation and excitement for the birth of Jesus, I am reminded of the evening before we began our Camino journey in the city of Porto, Portugal.

After our first dinner together some of us decided to go watch the sunset over the Douro River, as it was listed as one of "Porto's top things to do." As we approached the recommended "best view to watch the sunset from," we saw that the hillside was covered with the picnic blankets of families, friend groups, couples, and tourists. We weaved our way through the crowd and found an empty spot on the lawn. Musicians were playing cover tunes and entertaining the crowd, chatter could be heard in many languages, and children were playing chase across the lawn.

While everyone there came from different places and backgrounds, we were all there with one purpose: to wait expectantly for something wonderful and beautiful to take place.

The blue sky started to darken, and the bright oranges and hot pinks of the sunset took the spotlight. Gasps, oohs, and aahs were heard as the sun started to settle perfectly into the crevice between the hillsides where the Douro River cuts through the land and the iron bridge connects the city. The crowd burst into applause, united in wonder at the reflection of God's glory.

In Isaiah 64, Isaiah speaks of the Israelites longing for God to break into the world: "Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before you!" Their waiting came from a place of hardship and suffering—an ache for God to break through. "For when you did awesome things that we did not expect, you came down, and the mountains trembled before you. Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for him."

SUNSET TOGETHER

For some people during this Advent season, waiting carries with it heartache from difficult circumstances; maybe it's broken relationships, physical or financial hardship, political unrest, or communities affected by conflict. The hope that God will make all things new might seem dim. Yet still, we find the courage to wait with assurance; remembering God's faithfulness in the past, so that we can trust him with what is to come.

ADVENT INVITES US INTO THAT SAME COMMUNAL SEASON OF WONDER. TOGETHER WE WAIT AND WATCH, CELEBRATING THE ONE WHO CAME AND AWAITING THE ONE WHO WILL COME AGAIN. MAY WE NEVER LOSE OUR CAPACITY FOR AWE ALONG THE WAY, WHETHER IN THE BEAUTY OF SUNSETS AND SEASHELLS OR IN THE GIFT OF OUR FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES.MAY THE DAY COME WHEN ALL CREATION BURSTS INTO PRAISE AT THE WONDER OF WHO GOD IS.

THE EXCITEMENT OF BEING TOGETHER WITHOUT EXPECTATION

By Kelsey Hendrix

1 Corinithians 1:2 (NIV)
"To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all others everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ – their Lord and ours."

When you think of being excited, where in your body do you feel it? Does excitement lie in your heart? In your mind? In your arms? In your stomach? Science shows us that it does occupy each of these parts of our bodies, and yet each of us will experience excitement differently, just as each person on a journey experiences the journey differently. Beginning the journey of being together is exciting because we are looking ahead. The unknown of the journey and each other brings excitement. IThis is was we see in 1 Corinthians 1:2, "together will all others everywhere", we are excited to be together because we are united with the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus himself is our excitement.

It is here that we see Jesus working in each us. We don't have to come with an exciting show, presentation, or even amazing words of wisdom. We show up and allow God to flow through us into each other. This is the joy of simply being present. By giving of ourselves to each other, we are giving a gift of God flowing through us. There is a joy when we are present without expectations of each other. We just walk side by side and speak whatever God asks us to say that day. The excitement comes through God in us. That is part of being on the Camino and taking part in our daily journey. Are you letting God bring excitement to others through you? Or are you working daily to present some form of presentation or words to really excite others?

When we let God flow through us, we see genuine excitement - not in planned meetings - but in what God is doing in the moment. When we choose to journey without expectation, we are genuinely surprised when we see God. And this isn't because we didn't believe He would show up, but because we experience the delight of a relationship with Him where He is showing up.

WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU WERE GENUINELY EXCITED? WHERE IN YOUR BODY DID YOU FEEL IT? WHERE ARE YOU ALLOWING SPACE FOR GOD TO GENUINELY EXCITE YOU?

WHEN GOD CHANGES THE STORY

By Cezarina Glendenning

1 Peter 2:4–5 (NIV)
"As you come to him, the living Stone, rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him, you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house."

It was our third day walking the Camino. After days of walking together, sharing stories, and laughing until our stomachs hurt, something interesting happened. Without planning it, we all seemed to naturally drift into moments of solitude. Even the extreme extroverts among us, myself included, needed some space. Before the Camino, I had prepared a list of things I wanted to process, pray about, and seek God's wisdom for. Many were connected to my responsibilities as Field Strategy Coordinator. For two years, I had carried the privilege and responsibility of serving fourteen countries, each with its own people, challenges, and opportunities. I love what I do, but I also feel deeply the weight of that responsibility.

As I walked alone along the beach, praying and reflecting, I noticed small piles of rounded stones carefully balanced on top of one another. I stopped and wondered about the people who had placed them there. Perhaps someone had laid down a burden, offered a prayer, remembered someone they loved, or simply wanted to leave a mark that said, "I was here."

I didn't know their stories, but those stones invited me to consider my own. I began collecting fourteen stones, one for each country I serve. Some were larger, others smaller, each with its own shape and beauty, just like the countries and communities they represented. I started stacking them in groups of three. And somewhere in that simple act, I sensed God breaking into my thoughts: "These are my stones. I will use them as foundations for holy communities. They were here before you, and they will be here after you. I am not asking you to carry them. I am asking you to be faithful to them."

At that moment, something shifted within me.

The rocks that had felt like heavy weights on my shoulders suddenly became something different. They were no longer burdens I needed to carry, but part of what God was building. The Church belonged to Him, not to me. My leadership was temporary, but His mission had begun long before me and would continue long after I was gone.

The rocks had not changed. But God had changed the story I was telling myself about them.

Throughout Scripture, stones often serve as reminders of God's faithfulness. In Joshua 4, the Israelites placed twelve stones as a memorial of God's work among them. In 1 Peter 2, believers are described as living stones being built into a spiritual house, with Christ as the cornerstone. God is the builder, and we are invited to participate faithfully in what He is creating.

WHEN GOD CHANGES THE STORY

Perhaps this is also the wonder of Advent.

When Jesus entered the world, He broke into a human story shaped by fear, injustice, oppression, and distorted understandings of power. Yet God did not enter as a mighty ruler demanding recognition. He came as a vulnerable child, revealing a different understanding of power, greatness, and hope.

Emmanuel. God with us.

His coming did not immediately remove every injustice or burden, but it changed the story. God had drawn near, and through Christ, a new creation was beginning.

He continues to break into our stories today, challenging the narratives that shape our fears, responsibilities, and expectations. Sometimes God does not change our circumstances or give us the answers we seek. Instead, He changes how we understand our place within His greater story.

That day on the Camino, God did not solve the challenges I had brought before Him. He renewed my understanding of my calling. And that changed how I would return to it.

REFLECTION: WHAT STORY ARE YOU TELLING YOURSELF ABOUT THE RESPONSIBILITIES OR BURDENS YOU CARRY? WHERE MIGHT EMMANUEL BE INVITING YOU TO SEE THINGS DIFFERENTLY, TRUSTING HIM WITH WHAT BELONGS TO HIM AND REMAINING FAITHFUL TO WHAT HE HAS ENTRUSTED TO YOU?

PREPARED FOR THE JOURNEY

By Kristin Burchfiel

Luke 1:26-38 (specifically v34-38) (NIV)
"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I
am a virgin?" The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you,
and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one
to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative
is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be
unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will
ever fail." "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered.
"May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.

Perhaps I overprepared for the Camino, if one is to believe my Camino companions and most people in the Camino Facebook groups.

I trained as much as I could. I researched shoes and socks, weighed each of my items, studied packing lists, and read countless stories from people who had walked before me. Why? Because I wanted to control what I could. I wanted to make the journey as easy as possible. And it did make me feel better about the unknowns. But eventually, I had to admit that no amount of preparation could tell me exactly what the Camino would hold.

I think that's part of what makes Mary's story here so remarkable.
When the angel Gabriel told Mary that she would give birth to Jesus, Mary had questions: "How will this be?" She wasn't given a detailed itinerary. She wasn't told how Joseph would respond, what people would think, where she would give birth, or what this calling would ultimately require of her.

But Gabriel reminded her that "no word from God will ever fail."
And Mary's response? "I am the Lord's servant... May your word to me be fulfilled." Mary's story reminds us that being prepared for God's journey doesn't mean having all the answers. It means being willing to trust God with what we don't know and respond faithfully to what God asks of us.

Perhaps that's what it means to be prepared for the journey of Advent. We can make plans, gather what we need, and prepare as best we can. But eventually, every journey brings us to something we cannot anticipate or control.
Faith doesn't require us to know the whole road. Sometimes it means trusting God enough to take the next faithful step.

As we journey toward Christmas, what are you facing that you wish you could prepare for or control? What might it look like to entrust that uncertainty to God, trusting that Emmanuel, God with us, is already present along the way?

PRAYER: GOD, HELP ME PREPARE FAITHFULLY FOR WHAT I CAN, AND TRUST YOU WITH WHAT I CANNOT. WHEN I DON'T KNOW WHAT LIES AHEAD, REMIND ME THAT YOU ARE WITH ME ON THE JOURNEY. GIVE ME THE COURAGE TO JUST TAKE THE NEXT STEP. AMEN.

A TIME TO BE SILENT

By Reetu Height

Ecclesiastes 3:1, 4, 7 (NIV)
"There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens ... a time to weep and a time to laugh ... a time to be silent and a time to speak."

If you put six women together on a pilgrimage across Portugal, you can probably imagine how much talking and laughter there will be. And believe me, there was plenty of both!

During our Camino journey, we shared stories, laughed at ridiculous things, and enjoyed getting to know one another in ways that only hours of walking together can allow. I loved those moments. But as an introvert at heart, I also discovered that sometimes I needed something different.

There were moments when I intentionally slowed my pace, let the others walk ahead, put in my headphones, and listened to music while taking in the scenery around me. It wasn't because I didn't enjoy their company. I simply needed a little space to be quiet, to enjoy the beauty around me, and to let my thoughts wander without needing to contribute to a conversation.

But silence on the Camino wasn't always about needing time for myself.

Sometimes it meant choosing to listen.

As we walked, people shared all kinds of stories. Some were deeply personal and emotional. Others were funny, ordinary, or even a little gossipy. I began to realize that listening well required intentionality. It meant resisting the urge to jump in with my own thoughts or experiences and instead giving someone else the space to be heard.

And then there were those moments along the Camino when silence seemed to come naturally. One of those moments was walking along the coastline. With the ocean stretching out beside us, the beauty of the landscape was enough to make me stop and simply take it all in. There was something about the vastness of the water, the rhythm of the waves, and the beauty of creation that inspired a sense of awe. In those moments, conversation almost felt like an interruption. There was nothing that needed to be said. I simply wanted to be present and appreciate what was before me.

Ecclesiastes reminds us that there is a time for everything. A time to laugh and a time to weep. A time to speak and a time to be silent. The challenge is learning to recognize which moment we're in.

As we enter the Advent season, we find ourselves surrounded by noise. Christmas music, gatherings, conversations, preparations, and endless lists of things to accomplish. Many of these are good things, and they bring joy to the season. But in the midst of it all, are we making room for silence?

A TIME TO BE SILENT

Not simply silence for the sake of having a quiet moment, but silence that allows us to be present.

Present with ourselves, recognizing when we need to step away and rest. Present with others, listening to their stories without feeling the need to fill every pause. And present with God, allowing ourselves to experience the wonder of Emmanuel without needing to explain or rush past it.

The first Christmas was filled with extraordinary announcements, joyful praise, and people sharing the good news. Yet Luke also tells us that Mary treasured these things and pondered them in her heart. Perhaps she understood something we often forget: not every sacred moment needs words.

This Advent, may we embrace the laughter and conversations that bring us together, but may we also recognize the moments that invite us to be still. Because sometimes, the most meaningful thing we can do is simply listen. Reflection: Where might God be inviting you to practice intentional silence this Advent? Is it in making space for your own thoughts, listening more carefully to someone else, or simply sitting in the wonder of his presence?

PRAYER: EMMANUEL, THANK YOU FOR THE GIFT OF LAUGHTER, CONVERSATION, AND COMMUNITY. TEACH US TO RECOGNIZE WHEN TO SPEAK AND WHEN TO BE SILENT. HELP US LISTEN WITH INTENTION, APPRECIATE THE BEAUTY AROUND US, AND MAKE ROOM FOR YOUR PRESENCE IN THE MIDST OF OUR BUSY LIVES. MAY WE NEVER BECOME SO DISTRACTED BY THE NOISE AROUND US THAT WE MISS THE QUIET MOMENTS IN WHICH YOU ARE INVITING US TO LISTEN. AMEN.



SHARING THE LOAD

GOD HAS GIVEN EACH OF US DIFFERENT GIFTS AND STRENGTHS SO THAT WE CAN STRENGTHEN ONE ANOTHER ALONG THE WAY.

WORDS FROM THE CAMINO

CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE
EURASIA

GOD WILL PROVIDE

By Kristin Burchfiel

Exodus 18:17-23 (NIV)
Moses' father-in-law replied, "What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone. Listen now to me and I will give you some advice, and may God be with you. You must be the people's representative before God and bring their disputes to him. Teach them his decrees and instructions, and show them the way they are to live and how they are to behave. But select capable men from all the people—men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain—and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. Have them serve as judges for the people at all times, but have them bring every difficult case to you; the simple cases they can decide themselves. That will make your load lighter, because they will share it with you. If you do this and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain, and all these people will go home satisfied."

A couple of months before our Camino journey began, one of the other women in the group and I met to make reservations for where we would stay each night. Since there would be six of us and we had no idea what to expect in terms of crowds, we decided it would be wise to reserve our accommodations in advance. There was just one problem: the only reasonably priced place large enough to accommodate all six of us on our first night didn't accept reservations. I messaged them to ask if they thought they would have room for us. They said yes, but it was first come, first served, and they opened at 2 p.m., so we should arrive as close to that time as possible.

We decided it was good. It would give us a little more of the "real Camino experience," different kinds of accommodations and even one night without a reservation!

But as that first day of walking went on, I couldn't shake my anxiety. What if we arrived and there were no beds? Despite knowing that there were six capable women in our group, I had somehow taken on the responsibility of making sure everything worked out. If our plan fell through, I felt like it would be my job to figure out what came next.

As I walked with another friend and shared my concern, she gently reminded me: "We're all in this together. We'll figure it out together."

I walked a little lighter after that. And we did get beds.

GOD WILL PROVIDE

Moses knew something about carrying too much responsibility. His father-in-law, Jethro, watched him work from morning until evening and told him, "The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone." Jethro's solution wasn't for Moses to work harder. It was for him to share the responsibility with others.

Sometimes God's provision doesn't mean that God removes the uncertainty or solves the problem before we arrive. Sometimes God's provision comes through the people God places beside us, the ones who remind us that we don't have to carry the uncertainty alone.

As we journey toward Christmas, we remember that God doesn't remain distant from us. In Jesus, God comes near. Emmanuel, God with us. Perhaps part of God's provision is found in the people God has placed around us, ready to help carry what feels too heavy to carry alone.

What are you carrying right now that isn't meant to be carried alone? Who might God have placed along your path to help you carry it?

PRAYER: GOD, THANK YOU FOR THE PEOPLE YOU PLACE ALONG OUR JOURNEY. HELP US RECOGNIZE THE GIFTS OF COMMUNITY AND GIVE US THE HUMILITY TO RECEIVE HELP WHEN WE NEED IT. REMIND US THAT WE DON'T HAVE TO CARRY EVERYTHING ALONE. THANK YOU FOR BEING EMMANUEL, GOD WITH US, ALONG THE WAY. AMEN.

ROOM FOR ONE MORE: A COMMUNITY THAT DRAWS

By Tatiana Cantarella

Romans 15:7 (NIV)
"Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God."

On our very first day of walking the Camino, we had to start early and move quickly to reach our destination before 14:00. The albergue (or hostel) where we were staying didn't take reservations—it was first come, first served. And for a group of six, we didn't want to take any chances! Thankfully, we arrived in good time and managed to get a room with three bunk beds all to ourselves.

The room was so tiny that if someone stood in the narrow passage between the beds and the wall, nobody else could get past. So, while half of us were trying to settle in, the other half made their way outside to sit in the sun and stretch out our tired legs.

We were sitting there chatting and laughing when a young man from Germany approached us and asked if he could join us. His name was Jan. As the other ladies came outside, they pulled up more chairs and joined the conversation. Then another, even younger German—a very shy lad, also named Jan—came over and asked if he could join us, too. We ended up having a wonderful conversation with these two complete strangers. But later that evening, as we were chatting before bed, we started wondering: What on earth would draw two young men into a conversation with a bunch of ladies, some of whom could be their moms?

That day, we realized that without even trying, we had become a little community that seemed to draw people in. And as our Camino continued, we discovered the joy of welcoming others into that community along the way. There is something wonderful about finding a place where you feel welcome. The two Jans had set out on their journey on their own, yet something about our little group made them feel comfortable enough to approach us and join the conversation. Perhaps we don't always realize how much people long for connection and a place to belong.

Paul reminds us that our welcome toward others begins with the welcome we have received from Christ. He didn't wait for us to fit in, have everything figured out, or prove that we belonged. He welcomed us by grace. And now we are called to extend that same welcome to others. Hebrews 13:2 encourages us not to forget to show hospitality to strangers, reminding us that we may never know what an ordinary act of welcome might mean to someone else.

As we journey through Advent, we remember how God himself drew near to us in Jesus. What if our homes, churches, and communities could reflect something of that same welcoming presence? We don't always need a plan or a special activity. Sometimes, all it takes is a smile, a little conversation, or simply pulling up another chair.

AS YOU JOURNEY TOWARD CHRISTMAS, WHO MIGHT GOD BE INVITING YOU TO WELCOME? IS THERE ROOM IN YOUR CIRCLE FOR SOMEONE WHO IS STILL A STRANGER?

SHARING THE LOAD

By Erin Ketchum

1 Corinthians 12:4-6, (NIV)
"There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work."

Antibiotic cream. Check.
Blister tape. Check.
Anti-inflammatory. Check.
Band-Aids. Check.
Vaseline. Check.
Earplugs. Definitely check.

Packing for the Camino requires you to be intentional about what you bring. Along with the basics of clothing and toiletries, you also want to be prepared for the unexpected without carrying your entire medicine cabinet on your back. So, in preparing for our trip, we came up with a simple system of sharing the load.

Each of us had different needs and different things to contribute, from blister tape, which quickly became one of the most-used items, to a little extra space in a backpack. If someone's feet began to hurt or they felt unwell, it became something we all were a part of tending to. The goal was not for each of us to manage on our own, but to help one another reach our destination together.

Ironically, as Christians, practicing dependence on others is not always easy. It can expose vulnerabilities and wounds that may make us feel weak or less spiritual. We may believe that managing everything ourselves makes us appear strong and faithful. But God did not design us to care for ourselves in isolation. He created us to live in community. Sometimes learning dependence means not only being willing to carry someone else's load but also being willing to let them carry some of ours.

In Luke 1:39—45, after receiving the angel Gabriel's message, Mary went quickly to visit Elizabeth, who welcomed her with joy and spoke a blessing over her: "Blessed are you among women and blessed is the child you will bear." Mary and Elizabeth were both carrying pregnancies marked by God's extraordinary work, creating a unique spiritual and maternal bond between them. We can imagine the comfort Mary may have found in not walking through this alone. Elizabeth could not carry Mary's calling for her any more than we could walk someone else's miles on the Camino, but she could walk beside her. Sometimes sharing the load does not mean taking away what another person has been asked to carry; it means being present, so they do not have to carry it alone.

SHARING THE LOAD

Our communities work in much the same way. God has given each of us different gifts and strengths so that we can strengthen one another along the way. There are seasons when we are called to carry something for someone else, and other seasons when we discover that what we need has been placed in someone else's backpack. As a missionary family, one of the most precious gifts we have received is the way others have helped carry our load through prayer. Time and again, during difficult seasons, we have sensed the Holy Spirit sustain us through the faithful prayers of people around the world.

SCRIPTURE REPEATEDLY REMINDS US THAT FAITH WAS NEVER MEANT TO BE CARRIED ALONE. WHOSE LOAD MIGHT GOD BE ASKING ME TO HELP CARRY THIS ADVENT? AND WHERE DO I NEED TO STOP INSISTING ON CARRYING EVERYTHING MYSELF?

A RELATIONSHIP ROOTED IN FAITH

By Kelsey Hendrix

Interconnection of travelers is a common occurrence on the Camino. Frequently, people you start out with in Porto will show up again in other towns and hostels as you all make your way on a consistent pace towards the same destination. It is beautiful to spend time thinking that everyone on the Camino will eventually end up in front of God. Throughout our earthly journeys, we interconnect with people - for mere days or perhaps for longer stretches of our lives - as we all journey to our final destination before God one day in the future.

In our interconnectedness with other travelers on the earth, how does our faith relationship root us? What flows through us out of our groundings? 1 Corinthians 1:21 "Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us." Like trees and plants, being rooted allows us to stand firm. And our roots should be in Christ. With Christ, we don't have to always be worried about our surroundings. Trees who have deep roots aren't worried about the seasons; they have seen them come and go many times and still keep growing.

We met a young woman on the Camino and spent a couple of our days traveling with. She was a delightful woman who had experienced alot in her travels around the world. She had clearly spent much time getting to know herself, and she also laughed easily as she recounted scary stories of sleeping in a tent with a wild animal outside. We loved walking with her and each of us had the chance to bond with her on our journey. We felt the love of God pour of out us from our rootedness into her. We didn't have to share Scripture, it was verse 21 says: "He annointed us." And the anointing that had been poured onto us was rolling onto her as well. Our rootedness was an attracting bond. In chemisty opposites attract, like in hydrogen bonding when: "The partially positive hydrogen of one water molecule is attracted to the partially negative oxygen of a nearby water molecule, forming a temporary hydrogen bond." (Campbell Biology) Sharing stories creates bonds as we sit with other's emotions, feelings, thoughts and ideas. Sometimes we hold those stories inside ourselves for a short while, or perhaps they become stories that never leave us. Like hydrogen we temporarily connect and then move on again down the trail. When we connect, what gets transferred? Do we transfer our rootedness? The love of God?

AS YOU THINK ABOUT YOUR ROOTEDNESS, WHAT INSIDE OF YOU GETS TRANSFERRED WHEN YOU ENCOUNTER OTHER'S STORIES? WHAT PARTS OF YOU ARE YOU SHARING? IN OUR CHANCE WALKING WITH OUR GROUP FRIEND, WE ALL FELT A CONNECTION, BOND, AND LOVE FOR HER. HOW COULD WE NOT FEEL LOVE FOR A SISTER FORMED IN THE IMAGE OF GOD, CREATED AND LIVING OUT A STORY NOT OUR OWN. IN YOUR JOURNEY THIS WEEK, HOW ARE YOU SHARING GOD'S LOVE AS YOU ENCOUNTER OTHERS LIVING OUT A A STORY DIFFERENT THAN YOUR OWN?

OUTRUNNING THE STORM

By Kristin Burchfiel

Mark 4:35-41 (NIV)
That day when evening came, he said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!"

It was our third day of walking. The weather had been hot and sunny one day, hot and sunny and then pouring rain the second day, and just rain on this day. So much rain. When we arrived at our lunch spot, we were soaking wet. After a wonderful Italian meal while drying out our clothes and shoes, we took off again to make it to our accommodations. As we walked, we could see blue skies with nice white clouds over the ocean to our left. But to the right, over the mountains, were very dark clouds. And it seemed the clouds were moving with us, right toward where we were headed.

We decided we needed to try to beat the storm. So instead of walking on the designated Camino path, we took a shortcut along the side of the highway. It was a little precarious, with not a lot of room on the shoulder, but we made it to our accommodations before the rain came!

This was just one part of the story. It rained for much of our journey, and there were several times when we got completely soaked. But then the sun would come out. We would see a beautiful view, meet a lovely person, or find a place to stop for a warm cup of coffee.

In Mark 4, the disciples find themselves in a storm of their own. They are in a boat when a furious squall comes up, and the waves begin breaking over them. Their response is understandable: "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"
Jesus calms the storm, but then asks them, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

OUTRUNNING THE STORM

It's tempting to read this story as a promise that if we trust Jesus enough, he will calm every storm. But that's not always our experience. Sometimes the storm passes. Sometimes we find a way around it. And sometimes we get soaked. Faith isn't about figuring out how to outrun every storm. It's about trusting that Jesus is with us whether the skies are clear or the rain is coming down. The disciples didn't know who Jesus would prove to be in the storm. But they discovered something along the way: Jesus was already in the boat.

As we journey toward Christmas, we remember that Emmanuel means God with us. God's presence isn't dependent on our circumstances being calm. So when the road ahead looks stormy, perhaps the question isn't always, "How do I get out of this?" Sometimes it is, "Where is God with me in this?"

What storm are you trying to outrun right now? What might you notice along the way if, instead of focusing only on reaching the other side, you looked for the places where God is already meeting you?

PRAYER: GOD, WHEN THE ROAD AHEAD FEELS DIFFICULT, HELP ME REMEMBER THAT I DON'T HAVE TO FACE IT ALONE. GIVE ME WISDOM TO KNOW WHEN TO MOVE, WHEN TO WAIT, AND WHEN TO SIMPLY KEEP WALKING. OPEN MY EYES TO NOTICE YOUR PRESENCE ALONG THE WAY, IN THE PEOPLE I MEET, THE BEAUTY I SEE, AND EVEN IN THE STORMS I CANNOT AVOID. THANK YOU FOR BEING EMMANUEL, GOD WITH US. AMEN.

WHEN GOD CHANGES OUR PLANS

By Cezarina Glendenning

Proverbs 16:9 (NIV)
"In their hearts humans plan their course, but the LORD establishes their steps."

Before setting out on the Camino, I had made a commitment to our Eurasia Region that our journey would become the inspiration for an Advent devotional. Having read about the Camino as a place where people process difficult emotions, seek clarity, or navigate important transitions, I had prepared questions for us to discuss in pairs. My plan was simple: we would walk, reflect, share our thoughts, and eventually turn those conversations into devotions.

But by the second day, my carefully prepared plan wasn't working.

Here we were, six women who were simply delighted to be together. We laughed constantly, shared stories, and enjoyed each other's company. There weren't necessarily deep emotions to process or life-changing questions demanding answers. We were simply experiencing the joy of being together.

However, I felt the pressure inside me to fulfill the commitment I have made. I had promised a devotional, and I wasn't sure how we were going to produce one if we weren't following the plan. So one evening, I gathered the ladies and said, "Girls, we need to figure out how we're going to do this!"

As we talked, something beautiful emerged. Instead of beginning each day with assigned questions and trying to guide our experiences toward a particular outcome, what if we simply paid attention to what God was already providing? Perhaps it would be a conversation with a stranger, an unexpected act of kindness, a beautiful landscape, or something that caught our attention. Each evening, we would come together and share what we had noticed, what had touched us, and where we had encountered God.

And that changed everything.

The devotions began to emerge naturally from the journey itself. We discovered that God was already providing the stories; we simply needed to recognize them. Proverbs 16:9 reminds us that while we make our plans, it is the Lord who establishes our steps. Planning is not wrong. In fact, it is often an expression of faithfulness and responsibility. But sometimes our attachment to the plan can prevent us from recognizing what God is doing beyond it.

Mary's story reminds us of this during Advent. She certainly could not have anticipated the extraordinary invitation God would bring into her ordinary life. Yet her response was one of openness and surrender: "I am the Lord's servant. May your word to me be fulfilled" (Luke 1:38).

WHEN GOD CHANGES OUR PLANS

Advent is a season of expectation, but perhaps it is also an invitation to reconsider what we are expecting. We often approach Christmas with plans, traditions, responsibilities, and ideas of how the season should unfold. But what if, instead of trying to make every moment meaningful, we learned to notice the meaning God is already revealing?

That doesn't mean abandoning our responsibilities or refusing to plan. It means holding our plans with open hands, as we make room for God to surprise us. Looking back, I realize that the devotional we had promised was never going to come simply from the questions I had prepared. It would come from six women walking together, paying attention, and discovering Emmanuel in the ordinary and unexpected moments along the way.

REFLECTION: WHAT EXPECTATIONS OR PLANS MIGHT YOU BE HOLDING TOO TIGHTLY THIS ADVENT? WHAT MIGHT CHANGE IF, INSTEAD OF ASKING GOD TO BLESS WHAT YOU HAVE PLANNED, YOU BEGAN EACH DAY ASKING, "LORD, WHAT ARE YOU INVITING ME TO NOTICE TODAY?"



DISCOVERING EMMANUEL

BECAUSE SOMETIMES THE MOST MEANINGFUL GIFTS AREN'T ITEMS WE GIVE. SOMETIMES, THEY ARE THE WAYS WE GIVE OURSELVES TO ONE ANOTHER.

WORDS FROM THE CAMINO

CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE
EURASIA

CAN I JOIN YOU?

By Cezerina Glendenning

John 13:35 (NIV)
"By this everyone will know that you are my disciples,
if you love one another."

Walking the Camino with five extraordinary women was one of the greatest gifts of the journey. Each brought her own personality, gifts, experiences, and stories. And when we came together, there was laughter. Lots of laughter!

We seemed to attract attention everywhere we went. Not because we were trying to, but because we genuinely enjoyed being together. There was something contagious about the joy we shared.

I remember our first evening after a long day of walking. Our feet were tired, so we pulled up some chairs around a table outside, took off our shoes, and settled in barefoot. The intention was to spend some quiet time journaling and reflecting.

As I sat talking with one of the ladies, a young man approached and asked if he could join us. Of course! We began talking, learning about his journey and sharing some of our own stories. Soon the other ladies joined us, and the laughter began again. Before long, another young man approached and asked the same question: "Can I join you?"

What struck me was that this wasn't an isolated experience. Throughout the Camino, people seemed naturally drawn toward our little community. We weren't doing anything extraordinary. We were simply enjoying life together.

As a pastor, that experience made me reflect on how we approach ministry. We spend so much time developing strategies, organizing events, and creating opportunities to connect with people and share the love of Christ. And there is value in all those things. But sometimes I wonder whether we overlook something much simpler and perhaps more powerful: the witness of a community that genuinely loves doing life together.

Jesus told his disciples that the world would recognize them by their love for one another. Not primarily by their programs, buildings, or carefully organized activities, but by the way they loved.

In Acts 2, we see a picture of the early Church sharing meals, gathering in homes, worshiping together, and living with glad and sincere hearts. Their life together was a testimony to the transforming presence of Christ.

That evening on the Camino reminded me of the kind of communities I want our churches to become. Places where people genuinely enjoy one another, where laughter and tears are welcome, where relationships are authentic, and where someone looking from the outside feels comfortable enough to ask, "Can I join you?"

CAN I JOIN YOU?

As we journey through Advent, we remember that God did not choose to love humanity from a distance. In Jesus, He came to dwell among us. Emmanuel, God with us. And perhaps one of the most beautiful ways we can reflect that love is through communities where people experience belonging, joy, and genuine care.

This Advent, before asking how we can bring more people into our churches, perhaps we should ask ourselves whether we are cultivating communities where people love being together. Because sometimes the most powerful invitation isn't a carefully planned event. It's the simple joy of a community that makes someone want to say, "Can I join you?"

REFLECTION: WHAT DOES THE WAY WE LIVE TOGETHER COMMUNICATE ABOUT THE LOVE OF CHRIST? ARE WE CREATING COMMUNITIES WHERE PEOPLE EXPERIENCE SUCH GENUINE LOVE, JOY, AND BELONGING THAT THEY NATURALLY WANT TO BECOME PART OF THEM?

WHEN THE TOWN FED US

By Erin Ketchum

Matthew 1:23 (NIV)
"They will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").

We expected to find Emmanuel in the rolling waves of the Atlantic, the steady rhythm of our steps hitting the boardwalks, and the life discussions along the way. But one place we didn't expect to find him was at a small table, in an unassuming little town, among strangers eager to serve us.

When we arrived at the guest house in the little village of Esposende, we realized that getting groceries for dinner that evening meant walking back down—and then back up—the hill we had just climbed. While walking the Camino, you quickly learn not to waste any extra steps that take you farther away from your final destination, so this would require a little sacrificial backtracking.

Making our way down the hill, we walked past an open garage where a few elderly women were bent over a small grill, cooking meat. The room next door looked like a small storefront, filled with tables and plastic chairs, with people of all ages sitting inside. After exchanging friendly smiles, one of the women gave us what must be the universal sign for food, pointing toward her mouth and waving for us to come in.

We kindly declined the offer and continued toward the grocery store, debating whether we would stop in on our way back up. Their enthusiasm for us to join them was inviting. After all, we were tired and hungry, but we were also hesitant foreigners.

Deciding to take the risk, we went inside to discover what we might find. Warm smiles welcomed us. Two small round tables were pushed together, and the one person who spoke English was designated as our waiter. Within minutes, they began placing local dishes on our table: stewed gizzards and olives, homemade sausages, and fresh bread. Every dish was offered with pride and enthusiasm for us to taste.

Yes, the food was good, but it was the welcome, the generosity, the conversations, and the shared presence that made it sacred.
Perhaps Emmanuel is sometimes found not where we expect him, but in the places where someone makes room at the table.

In Luke 1:46–55, Mary sings of a God who lifts up the humble and fills the hungry with good things: "He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things."

PERHAPS THAT IS PART OF THE INVITATION OF ADVENT: NOT ONLY TO LOOK FOR GOD IN THE SPECTACULAR, BUT ALSO TO LEARN TO RECOGNIZE EMMANUEL IN THE SIMPLE AND UNEXPECTED.

PLEASANTLY SURPRISED BY THE ORDINARY

By Reetu Height

Genesis 28:16 (NIV)
"Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it."

Every year, thousands of people walk the Camino de Santiago. For many, it is a once-in-a-lifetime experience, something they spend months preparing for and anticipating. Yet for the pilgrims walking those same paths, it eventually becomes just another day on the Camino.

I remember realizing this as our group made its way across Portugal. What had initially felt like an extraordinary adventure slowly began to feel like our everyday routine.

We woke up, put on our walking shoes, and started walking. Some days we were surrounded by beautiful coastlines, with views that made us stop and take everything in. Other days we found ourselves walking through forests, with mud on our shoes and no idea what the weather might bring next. There were rainy days filled with ponchos, wet socks, and the hope that eventually the skies would clear.

And then, of course, there were the blisters. Aching feet became normal. Blister tape became an everyday necessity. Running into other pilgrims along the path became as ordinary as passing someone on the street. Even the laughter and conversations within our group became part of the familiar rhythm of each day.

Somewhere along the way, I realized that what had once seemed so extraordinary had become ordinary.

But here's what surprised me: the ordinary was still beautiful.
Not every day was comfortable. Not every view was breathtaking. Not every moment felt particularly meaningful. Yet there was something special about the simplicity and unpredictability of it all. We didn't always know what the day would bring, but we kept walking. And we discovered that even the most ordinary moments could hold something worth appreciating.

In Genesis 28, Jacob finds himself stopping for the night during a journey. He takes a stone for a pillow and falls asleep. Nothing about the setting seems particularly remarkable. Yet during the night, God reveals Himself to Jacob in a dream. When Jacob wakes, he says, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it."

I wonder how often we could say the same thing.
We move through our everyday routines: going to work, caring for our families, running errands, and dealing with whatever unexpected challenges the day brings. Life becomes familiar, and sometimes we stop noticing the beauty or significance of what's happening around us.

Advent invites us to see the familiar with fresh eyes.

PLEASANTLY SURPRISED BY THE ORDINARY

Every year, we hear the Christmas story. We know about Mary and Joseph, the journey to Bethlehem, the shepherds, and the baby lying in a manger. We've heard it so many times that it's easy to overlook just how extraordinary this story is. The Creator of the universe chose to enter the world through the ordinary experience of a baby who was born into a family navigating the uncertainties and responsibilities of everyday life.

Emmanuel. God with us.

Not just in the breathtaking moments, but also in the muddy paths, the aching feet, the laughter, and the unexpected challenges of life.

The Camino reminded me that something doesn't have to be new or spectacular to be meaningful. Sometimes the most extraordinary thing about an ordinary day is recognizing that God has been present in it all along.

This Advent, may we not become so familiar with the Christmas story that we lose our sense of wonder. And may we not become so accustomed to our daily routines that we overlook the presence of Emmanuel walking alongside us.

Reflection: What has become so ordinary in your life that you may have stopped noticing God's presence in it? How might you approach this Advent season with a renewed sense of wonder?

PRAYER: EMMANUEL, GOD WITH US, THANK YOU FOR WALKING WITH ME IN EVERY PART OF MY LIFE - BOTH THE INCREDIBLE AND ORDINARY. MAY YOU GIVE ME EYES TO SEE HOW YOU ARE AT WORK IN MY LIFE AND IN THE WORLD AROUND ME TODAY. AMEN.

CHOOSING TO BE ALONE, BUT WITH OTHERS

By Kelsey Hendrix

Proverbs 18:1-2 (NIV)
"An unfriendly person pursues selfish ends
and against all sound judgment starts quarrels.
Fools find no pleasure in understanding
but delight in airing their own opinions."

Proverbs 18:1 says, "An unfriendly person pursues selfish ends", magnifying the importance of being friendly and living in community. How do we balance a healthy community life with the call to come away and be with God?

Community has always provided a sense of protection and a reminder that we aren't alone. We live in communities and do life together in community. Our spiritual journey takes place both in community and individually with God in our hearts and minds. In our spiritual journeying, thre are days, hours, and moments when God invites us to "come away" and be alone with Him. When Jesus looks at the disciples with their five loaves and two fish, he says, "Bring them to me." Bring the hours, the minutes, and time you don't think you have enough of. Bring it to me. Watch what I do with it Time alone is not really alone - it is time with Jesus.

Walking the Camino along the coastal path is an opportunity to hear the sound of the waters nearby, to hear the rain running down your jacket hood, to hear God's voice saying: "Here on this path, I am with you here too. The quiet times of hearing God, alone, is where understanding comes from. Proverbs 18:2 says "Fools find no pleasure in understanding but delight in airing their own opinions." Continual time in community is time where people share their own thoughts and ideas. But time alone is where we hear Gods thoughts and ideas. Taking time to be alone with God, transforms our thoughts and ideas into Gods thoughts and ideas for He fills us with ideas that he wants us to have and thoughts he wants us to know. Its alone we hear his voice saying I am with you.

Each of us came to the Camino wanting to hear God speak into different areas of our lives. Each of us took time while in community to step away and walk with God. Being a part of community makes it possible to step away and devote time to being alone with God. A community can say, "I'll cook this food or wash these dishes, so you can be with God for a time."

IN COMMUNITY WE CAN WALK TOGETHER, AND ALSO WALK ALONE WITH GOD AS OUR COMMUNITY CARES FOR US.

LITTLE GIFTS ALONG THE WAY

By Reetu Height

Luke 2:10 (NIV)
"But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.'"

When I think about the gifts I received while walking the Camino, I don't immediately think about the beautiful scenery, the food, or even the experience of completing the pilgrimage. I think about the five women I walked with along our journey.

Our group consisted of six missionary women living and serving in different countries. We came from different backgrounds, carried different responsibilities, and were at different stages of life. But for those few days, we shared the same path.

And somewhere between the kilometers, the aching feet, and the endless conversations, I began to recognize that each woman was giving me a gift I hadn't necessarily expected.

With Kelsey, I received the gift of reflection. As a life coach, she encouraged me to think about boundaries, the systems we build into our lives, and how we balance our work with everything else that matters. Our conversations challenged me to consider what I wanted to change in my own work-life balance.

With Erin, I received the gift of wisdom and encouragement. Having grown up as a missionary kid and then raising her own children while serving as a missionary, she had walked a road I am still learning to navigate. I admired her maturity, kindness, and patience. As someone who is often more comfortable supporting others, being on the receiving end of her encouragement was especially meaningful.

With Cezi, I received the gift of dreaming. Although we work together regularly, the Camino gave us time to step away from our usual responsibilities and talk not only about daily work and life, but also about what could be. I was reminded what a gift it is to have a leader who listens, encourages, and makes room for shared dreams.

With Tatiana, I received the gift of perspective. Her life experiences were so different from mine, and I loved hearing her stories, learning about the challenges she had faced, and discovering parts of her journey I had never known. She reminded me of how much wisdom we can gain when we take the time to listen to someone else's story.

And with Kristin, I received the gift of time. She is one of my closest friends, but we live in different countries and most of our conversations happen over the phone. Having an entire week together, walking, talking, and simply enjoying each other's company, was a gift I deeply appreciated.

Five women. Five different gifts. And not one of them came wrapped in a package.

LITTLE GIFTS ALONG THE WAY

In Luke 2, an angel appears to shepherds watching over their flocks and announces good news of great joy: the Savior has been born! It was an extraordinary announcement delivered to ordinary people, revealing that God's greatest gift was not reserved for a select few. Jesus had come for all people. That is the wonder of Advent. We celebrate the gift of Emmanuel, God with us. And while nothing compares to the gift of Christ himself, I believe we can also recognize glimpses of His love and care through the people He places along our path.

Sometimes that gift looks like someone who challenges us to grow. Sometimes it's a person who shares wisdom from a journey we've yet to walk. Sometimes it's encouragement to dream bigger, sharing a different perspective, or simply the presence of a friend who knows us well.

The Camino reminded me that the people we journey with are not simply companions along the way. They can also be gifts, offering us something we didn't even realize we needed.

As we prepare for Christmas, a season often filled with shopping, wrapping, and exchanging presents, perhaps we can pause to recognize the gifts that cannot be purchased.

The wisdom someone has shared. The encouragement that came at just the right time. The friend who made space for us. The person who listened, challenged, or simply walked alongside us.

And perhaps we can also consider what gifts we might offer to those around us. Because sometimes the most meaningful gifts aren't items we give. Sometimes, they are the ways we give ourselves to one another.

Reflection: Who has been an unexpected gift in your life this year? What have they offered you through their wisdom, encouragement, friendship, or presence? And how might you be that kind of gift to someone else this Advent?

PRAYER: LORD, THANK YOU FOR THE PRESENCE OF YOUR HOLY SPIRIT IN MY LIFE AND FOR THE GIFT OF CHRIST'S PRESENCE ON THAT VERY FIRST CHRISTMAS. THANK YOU FOR THOSE WHO YOU HAVE GIFTED ME WITH IN MY LIFE - TO ENCOURAGE, CHALLENGE, AND WALK WITH ME. AND FOR OTHERS, MAY YOU EQUIP ME TO BE A BLESSING TO THOSE I INTERACT WITH THIS WEEK THROUGH YOUR POWER AND GRACE. AMEN.

UNEXPECTED PROVISION AND UNANSWERED QUESTIONS ON THE JOURNEY

By Tatiana Cantarella

Matthew 6:32, (NIV)
"Your heavenly Father knows that you need them."

I'm not a camper and don't own a sleeping bag or a rain poncho. And since I probably wouldn't need them again anytime soon, I didn't invest in buying good ones like some of the others in our crew did. I borrowed mine. The rain jacket I borrowed was almost a disposable plastic one, but it served its purpose.
The first day was warm and sunny, even hot at times. On the second day, the weather began to change, and by Day three, we were walking in the rain more often than not. That's when I regretted not investing in a proper poncho that could be pulled quickly over my head and backpack. My flimsy rain cover wasn't big enough, so every time the rain stopped, I had to take off my backpack and rain cover because I was getting too hot, only to put everything back on when the rain started again. And it kept starting and stopping! Eventually, one sleeve of my cheap rain cover tore off.

By then, it was raining pretty hard, and we were walking through natural areas with no towns or shops in sight. I sighed and accepted the fact that I was probably going to get wet that day. Then we came across a tiny, old shack in the woods that turned out to be a Camino rest stop. It was crowded with pilgrims trying to find a little shelter from the rain. To my complete surprise, this rather unpromising shack had inexpensive but much sturdier rain jackets for sale! In the middle of an unpleasant surprise, I had found an unexpected provision. I left that little shelter with a much better rain jacket and a grateful heart.

Jesus reminds us that we don't need to live consumed by worry about tomorrow. Our heavenly Father knows what we need, and we can trust Him to care for us. Sometimes, His provision comes in the most unexpected ways—even in a tiny shack in the middle of the woods!

But our Camino also brought a different kind of surprise. During a transfer, my borrowed sleeping bag was lost and never recovered. I had to buy a new one to return to my friend. Unlike the rain jacket, this problem didn't have a happy, unexpected solution. I had to accept the loss and deal with the consequences. Perhaps this is an important lesson for our journey of faith. Trusting God doesn't mean that every difficulty will disappear or every problem will be resolved as we hope. Sometimes we experience unexpected provision; other times, we must keep going despite disappointment and unanswered questions.

Sometimes God provides in ways we could never have anticipated, even in the middle of an inconvenient or discouraging situation. At other times, the difficulty remains, and we must accept the loss and find a way forward. Advent teaches us to trust Emmanuel in both circumstances—not because every problem will have an easy solution, but because God knows our needs and remains with us along the way.

WHERE DO YOU NEED TO TRUST EMMANUEL TODAY—
IN AN UNEXPECTED PROVISION OR IN A DIFFICULTY
THAT REMAINS UNRESOLVED?



BECOMING PILGRIMS

EMMANUEL, GOD WITH US, IS NOT ONLY PRESENT IN EXTRAORDINARY MOMENTS BUT WALKS WITH US WHEN THE JOURNEY ENDS, WHEN THE EXCITEMENT FADES, AND WHEN ORDINARY LIFE BEGINS AGAIN.

WORDS FROM THE CAMINO

CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE
EURASIA

JUST KEEP GOING

By Erin Ketchum

With hopeful spirits and plenty of motivation, we stepped out on the final and longest stage of our Camino journey. We had barely left the city before needing to pull on our rain jackets and make our way through the industrial outskirts toward the more scenic boardwalk path.

Much of the day was spent squinting into the wind, hoods pulled tight, pushing forward against the rain. We changed our socks a few times to help prevent blisters and find a little temporary comfort. But as the hours passed, we began to care less about the rain and more about simply being able to keep walking. Conversation became less frequent, the scenery less inspiring, and our focus narrowed to one thing: just keep moving.

Life can feel that way too. Moving forward can be hard when the road ahead feels long and uncertain: the future of our children, financial uncertainty, instability in our communities, or perhaps the empty church pews we long to see filled. Mary, too, began her journey not knowing all that lay ahead. Sometimes I wonder if we move too quickly through Mary's story in Luke 1. We can read her response as though faith came easily, but Scripture tells us that she was "greatly troubled" and wondered what Gabriel's words could mean. Mary was not handed a map of the road ahead. There were no yellow arrows or seashells marking each turn, no clear explanation of how everything would unfold. In that moment, Mary responded with surrender: "I am the Lord's servant… May it be to me as you have said."

Mary's "yes" did not mean the road ahead would be easy. She still had much she could not see or understand. Her faith was not found in knowing exactly where the road would lead, but in trusting the One who was leading her. Perhaps this is what a faithful journey looks like: trusting God with the next step.

In Advent, we light one candle at a time, walking one step at a time toward Bethlehem. Some steps may feel small and slow, as though we are hardly moving at all. At other times, the wind and rain seem determined to push us in the opposite direction. Yet Advent reminds us that we do not need to see the whole road ahead; we are simply called to keep walking toward Christ.

LIKE MARY, MAY WE SURRENDER EACH NEXT STEP TO GOD, TRUSTING THAT HE WILL LEAD US AND HOLDING ON TO THE PROMISE THAT EMMANUEL, GOD WITH US, IS COMING.

STEPPING INTO NORMAL LIFE

By Reetu Height

Luke 2:20 (NIV)
"The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen."

During our journey on the Camino, I learned several "trail" lessons that have also proven wise in my daily, normal life. For example, I learned that it was okay to slow down. When my feet were tired and the rest of the group continued walking ahead, I could choose to walk at my own pace. That might not sound like a significant revelation, but for someone who struggles to rest, say no, or simply take a break, it was an important one. I didn't have to keep up with everyone else to be moving forward.

I also learned to stop for the little things that brought me joy. Sometimes that meant enjoying yet another "pastel de nata" as we passed through a town. And believe me, I ate plenty of them! Were they the healthiest choice? Probably not. But they brought me joy, and I was learning that not every moment needed to be measured by its productivity or efficiency.

Then there were the conversations. Working in ministry finance and accounting, my days are often filled with numbers, logistics, and getting straight to the point. I appreciate efficiency, and sometimes conversations without a clear purpose feel unnecessary. But on the Camino, we spent hours talking about anything and everything. Some conversations were meaningful, others were completely ridiculous, and many left us laughing. I grew in appreciation for how even conversations that seem pointless can have a purpose: they create space for friendship and connection.

When the Camino ended, I imagined returning to normal life. But normal life wasn't exactly waiting for me. Instead, we came home, packed our bags, and prepared to spend the next three months in the United States on Home Assignment.

There was no quiet return to routine. We were simply stepping from one journey into another.

Looking back, I realize how important those days on the Camino were before entering that next season. I needed to learn that it was okay to stop, to rest, to enjoy the moment, and to make room for relationships without always worrying about what needed to be accomplished next.

And during those following three months, I had opportunities to put those lessons into practice. Sometimes that meant choosing to spend time with my extended family instead of sitting down to answer more emails. Other times it meant intentionally taking a quick road trip to visit my college roommate rather than using those days to get ahead on my responsibilities.

Those choices might seem small, but for someone who naturally gravitates toward productivity, they were meaningful. I was learning that time spent with people I love isn't time taken away from something more important. Sometimes, it is the important thing.

STEPPING INTO NORMAL LIFE

In Luke 2, the shepherds experienced something extraordinary. They encountered the newborn Savior and heard the announcement of the angels. Yet Scripture tells us that afterward, they returned home. They went back to their everyday responsibilities, but they carried with them the wonder of what they had witnessed.

Advent reminds us that Emmanuel means "God with us." Not just God with us on a pilgrimage, during a retreat, or in moments when we feel especially close to Him. He is with us when the bags need packing, the diapers need changed, the schedule is full, and when life doesn't slow down simply because we need it to. As we prepare for Christmas, perhaps we don't need to wait for life to become less busy before we begin noticing God's presence. Perhaps we can learn to walk a little slower, enjoy something simply because it brings us joy, and linger a little longer in conversations with the people around us.

The Camino taught me that the journey isn't always about how quickly we reach our destination. Sometimes it's about what we learn to notice along the way. And perhaps that's true of Advent, too. The goal isn't simply to arrive to Christmas Day. It's to recognize Emmanuel, our God with us, in ordinary and unexpected moments leading up to it.

Reflection: As you prepare for Christmas, what is one thing (or person) you could choose to slow down for? Is there a person, conversation, or small moment of joy you've been putting off because something else feels more productive?

PRAYER: DEAR GOD, THANK YOU FOR NOT BEING TOO BUSY FOR YOUR DAUGHTERS AND SONS. THANK YOU FOR YOUR PRESENCE IN MY LIFE. HELP ME TO GROW IN CHRIST-LIKENESS AND TO APPRECIATE THE SLOW RHYTHMS OF LIFE. MAY YOU GUIDE ME INTO MOMENTS OF REST, REFLECTION, AND UNPRODUCTIVE CONVERSATIONS WITH MY NEIGHBORS, CO-WORKERS, AND LOVED ONES. AMEN.

CREATING SPACE

By Kristin Burchfiel

Luke 24:17-19, 28-32 (NIV)
"He asked them, 'What are you discussing together as you walk along?' They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, 'Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?' 'What things?' he asked. 'About Jesus of Nazareth,' they replied. 'He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people.' As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. But they urged him strongly, 'Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.' So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. They asked each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?'

I can tend to be a very task and goal-oriented person. I love people, but I often have to choose to slow down and pay attention to those around me, making time for connection and conversation, to help or be helped, and to create space for relationships.

One of the best things about walking the Camino as a group was that my whole task and goal for the day was simply to get up and walk. Put one step in front of the other. That left a lot of space for connection, conversation, and hospitality along the way.

While I loved my Camino companions, I also loved the people we met along the way. One pilgrim walked with us for most of two days. We ate together, shared our stories, and formed a bond. Another woman seemed to keep appearing wherever we went, until we ended up sharing a room on our final night.

We also had opportunities to extend hospitality to pilgrims traveling on their own, those who were struggling, or those who simply needed some encouragement. It reminded me that perhaps the priority is people and connection, and that our tasks and goals are meant to serve those things, not the other way around.

CREATING SPACE

Luke 24 tells a story that sounds remarkably similar. Two disciples are walking, processing their disappointment and talking together, when a stranger joins them. Jesus listens. He walks alongside them. They invite him to stay, and they share a meal together. Only afterward do they realize who had been with them all along: Jesus. They said, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road?"

The holy encounter didn't initially look particularly holy. It looked like two disappointed people walking down a road, talking with a stranger who joined them. How often do we imagine that encountering God requires us to arrive somewhere special, when God may already be present in the conversation we're having along the way?

As we journey toward Christmas, perhaps Advent invites us to create a little more space, to slow down, listen, welcome, help, and receive help. We may discover that Christ has been walking with us all along.

Who might God be inviting you to notice today? What might happen if you made a little more space for connection, conversation, or hospitality along the way?

PRAYER: GOD, SLOW ME DOWN ENOUGH TO NOTICE THE PEOPLE YOU PLACE ALONG MY PATH. GIVE ME THE WILLINGNESS TO LISTEN, WELCOME, HELP, AND RECEIVE HELP. OPEN MY EYES TO RECOGNIZE YOUR PRESENCE IN ORDINARY CONVERSATIONS AND ENCOUNTERS. MAY I DISCOVER, LIKE THE DISCIPLES ON THE ROAD TO EMMAUS, THAT YOU HAVE BEEN WALKING WITH ME ALL ALONG. AMEN.

TRAVELING AS A COMMUNITY

By Kelsey Hendrix

Traveling: "The word (travel) comes from the old French word 'travaillier', which meant to toil, labor, or suffer through hard work." (Merriam Webster). In our modern world, traveling doesn't require hard work or suffering as we move about on planes, trains, and cars. We go from one place to another with coffees in hand and smiles on our faces. It's why the walking the Camino is so important as we go back to walking as our method of traveling. In walking we experience in our body the energy and work it takes to physically move from place to place.

Traveling done in communitiy means a sharing in the work, in the steps, and in the stories. And the sharing creates lightness. It's this lightness that propels us forward, as the community wraps us up and carries us on days we don't want to go. Luke 1:39 says, "At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth." The Wesleyan Bible Commentary writes that "this would have meant a journey of over 80 miles on foot." We see Mary hurrying to see her cousin Elizabeth because she wants to share her journey with her cousin. Mary and Elizabeth, who are simultaneously on their own pregnancy journeys, are propelling forward the larger journey for all Christians throughout eternity. So Mary walks 80 miles - in haste! - and, as they find each other, they create community.

Are we hasting to find a community to journey together with? Have we done the work of finding a community that we know is willing to walk a long road? Being in community for the purpose of traveling requires commitment, proper footwear, patiience, and forgiveness. What would it require of you to find a group of people, or even just one person, who are committed to traveling and laboring together? When we were on the Camino, Tanya was our physical therapist. She would help tape people's sore muscles and massage out muscle cramps. She is also a fellow traveler in both theology, community development, and church planting. She does the hard work of walking alongside the people in her community to help them in grow in their walk with God. In a similar way, she walked alongside of each of us and made it possible for everyone to stand up and take our next steps each day.

Mary hurried to Elizabeth. Our team hurried to Tanya. Who do you want to be a part of your community? Who do you know that is traveling the same path, and is committed to the labor? How can you hurry to them?

YOU DON'T HAVE TO TRAVEL ALONE,
THERE ARE OTHERS AROUND YOU,
WANTING TO BE HURRIED TO.

AFRAID TO STOP

By Cezarina Glendenning

Matthew 11:28 (NIV)
"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and
I will give you rest."

It was the last day of our Camino, and we had more than thirty kilometers ahead of us, the longest stretch of our journey. Not long after we started walking, it began to rain. And it kept raining.

My shoes weren't waterproof, although they had managed to keep most of the water out until that day. Eventually, the rain found its way in, and my feet were completely soaked. With every kilometer, I could feel blisters forming, and each step became more uncomfortable. But instead of slowing down, I began walking faster.

I knew that if I stopped, the pain might become unbearable when I tried to start again. So I kept moving. At one point, I even walked ahead of the others, determined to reach our destination before my feet decided they had had enough.

Looking back, I find myself wondering how often I approach life in exactly the same way.

There are seasons when responsibilities seem endless, when the demands of work, family, ministry, or circumstances keep coming. We feel tired, perhaps even wounded, but we convince ourselves that stopping isn't an option. What if we lose momentum? What if things fall apart? What if, once we stop, we discover just how exhausted we really are?

So we keep walking.

Jesus offers a different invitation in Matthew 11. He doesn't call the weary to prove their strength by pushing through. He invites them to come to him and find rest. This is not an invitation to abandon our responsibilities or stop being faithful. It is an invitation to discover that our strength does not have to come entirely from ourselves.

And perhaps this is something Advent invites us to remember.

We are preparing to celebrate the coming of Emmanuel, God with us. The One who entered our world did not come merely to give us another destination to reach or another responsibility to fulfill. He came to dwell among us, to share our humanity, and to invite us into a different way of living.

Sometimes we confuse perseverance with never stopping. We measure faithfulness by how much we accomplish, how much we endure, or how far we can push ourselves. But Jesus reminds us that rest is not the opposite of faithfulness.

AFRAID TO STOP

That rainy day, I kept walking because I was afraid of what would happen if I stopped. And although I eventually reached the destination, the experience left me with a question that reaches far beyond the Camino.
What if I could learn to trust God not only with the next step, but also with the moments when I need to stop?

REFLECTION: IS THERE AN AREA OF YOUR LIFE WHERE YOU KEEP PUSHING FORWARD BECAUSE YOU ARE AFRAID OF WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN IF YOU STOP? WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE TO RECEIVE CHRIST'S INVITATION TO REST WITHOUT FEELING THAT YOU ARE ABANDONING YOUR CALLING?

RETURNING, BUT NOT THE SAME

By Tatiana Cantarella

Luke 2:20 (NIV)
"The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told."

Day five of our journey had a bittersweet taste. We had finally arrived at our last destination: Caminha! All the challenges and fatigue, sore legs and blistered feet, getting soaked by the rain and burnt by the sun, desperately looking for a bathroom where there was none and settling for some random bushes, the lost sleeping bag, the torn raincoat and leggings—all of that was behind us.

We could finally relax and savour the satisfaction: We did it! Just one more night together, and then everyone would head in their own direction, back to their families, who I'm sure had missed them and were eagerly awaiting their return. And yet, there was a bittersweet feeling about the end of the journey. It meant an end to all the laughter—and I mean LOTS of laughter! An end to those lovely, meaningful conversations that we weren't sure when we would have the chance to continue in person. An end to unhurried walks through the most beautiful scenery: ocean beaches, lush green forests, paths winding through beautiful hills, cosy little towns, and tiny cascading streams. It seemed like an endless variety of beauty. There were so many heartwarming moments of sharing what we had with one another and with others, meeting people from around the world, and hearing their stories.I don't know about others, but I often find it difficult to stop after a long journey and return to what can seem like a boring or stressful routine, ordinary reality or mundane tasks.

Imagine being one of the shepherds on that extraordinary night when Jesus was born. Angels had appeared, announcing the birth of the Saviour, and they had found the baby just as they had been told. And then they returned to their fields and their ordinary lives.

The Bible doesn't tell us that they tried to prolong the experience or that their everyday lives suddenly became spectacular or they began dreading them. It simply tells us that they returned, glorifying and praising God for what they had witnessed. They went back to ordinary life, but they did not return unchanged.
Perhaps this is the purpose of our special journeys and mountain-top experiences—not to escape ordinary life forever, but to return to it with renewed eyes, grateful hearts, and a deeper awareness of God's presence.

As our Advent journey brings us to Christmas, we, too, will eventually return to our everyday routines. The celebrations will end, the decorations will come down, and life will carry on. But the wonder of Christmas is not something we have to leave behind. Emmanuel, God with us, is not only present in extraordinary moments but walks with us when the journey ends, when the excitement fades, and when ordinary life begins again.

INSTEAD OF HOLDING ON TO EVERY SPECIAL MOMENT, WE CAN CARRY ITS JOY INTO THE DAYS THAT FOLLOW AS WE WALK WITH EMMANUEL AND CARRY HIS LOVE INTO THE DAYS TO COME.

The Journey Is Not Over

Walking the Camino together was undoubtedly one of the highlights of our year. Six women, each with her own story, gifts, and personality, sharing days filled with laughter, meaningful conversations, unexpected encounters, rain, tired feet, and the joy of simply being together. We loved every part of the experience, even the difficult moments. And yet, we didn't finish the Camino.

After five days of walking, we arrived in Caminha, knowing that Santiago de Compostela was still ahead of us. We had completed only part of the journey, and we left with the promise of returning the following year to finish what we had begun.

But we also left with another commitment: to carry the lessons of the Camino into our everyday lives. Because the truth is, the journey never really ended.

We may have taken off our walking shoes, unpacked our backpacks, and returned to our responsibilities, but we are still pilgrims. The journey continues in our homes, our workplaces, our churches, and our relationships. We continue learning to walk with God, perhaps a little more attentively, a little more deeply, and a little stronger in faith.

We have learned to recognize his presence in unexpected encounters, to appreciate the gift of community, to share our burdens, to listen more carefully, and to trust him when the road ahead is uncertain. These are not simply memories from five days in Portugal. They are lessons we hope will continue shaping who we are becoming.

And perhaps this is what Advent reminds us of as well.

We are all in the middle of a much greater journey. We celebrate that Christ has come, that Emmanuel has entered our world, and that God's kingdom has already broken into human history. Yet we continue to wait for the day when Christ will return and make all things new.

We live in the already, but not yet.

Already experiencing God's grace, yet still being transformed. Already part of his kingdom, yet still longing for its fullness. Already walking with Christ, yet still journeying toward the fulfillment of all he has promised.

Like our unfinished Camino, our Christian pilgrimage invites us to look back with gratitude, live faithfully in the present, and look forward with hope.

The apostle Paul reminds us that the One who began a good work in us will carry it on to completion (Philippians 1:6). What a beautiful promise for pilgrims who are still on the way! Our confidence is not in our ability to walk every step perfectly, but in the faithfulness of the God who walks with us.

We hope to return to the Camino and eventually reach Santiago. But even when we do, our pilgrimage with God will continue.

As we close this Advent journey together, our hope is that these stories have encouraged you to recognize Emmanuel in your own journey. Not only in the extraordinary moments, but also in the ordinary days, the unexpected interruptions, the relationships you share, and the challenges you face.

May we all continue with the hearts of pilgrims, grateful for what God has already done, attentive to what he is doing today, and hopeful for what is yet to come.

The journey is not over.

And we do not walk alone.











lino printing

Linocut printmaking is a form of relief art, like stamp making, in which an image is carved by hand into linoleum, inked, and pressed onto paper. Much like walking the Camino and journeying through Advent, it is a step-by-step process requiring intentionality, patience, and sometimes several attempts. Along the Camino, pilgrims collect stamps as reminders and evidence of their journey. The images in these prints were inspired by photos and memories from our Camino in May, each connecting our experience to Christian symbols and the Advent journey.

Week 1 - Preparing the Way: The circular arrangement of feet echoes the Advent wreath, symbolizing God's eternity.

Week 2 - Sharing the Load: The backpack represents the practical preparations and shared burdens of pilgrimage. The walking sticks also recall the shepherd's staff.

Week 3 - Becoming Emmanuel: An image of a pilgrims' meal we ate of sardines and soup, the fish connects to one of the earliest symbols of Christianity, representing Jesus Christ.

Week 4 - Becoming Pilgrims: As we enter the final week of Advent, this print reminds us that, like the Camino, our journey of faith is one of continuing forward, drawing closer to the celebration of Christ's coming.



CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE
EURASIA

2026