

For the first time in years, I bought an Advent calendar – the inexpensive kind you can pick up in a grocery store where you push open a little paper door everyday to reveal a Christmas picture and of course a piece of candy.

I bought it at Whole Foods – which should have told me something – and it was produced by a fair-trade chocolate cooperative in Costa Rica. And the candy was vegan chocolate. I wasn't sure how that would taste, but whatever.

On the first day of Advent my husband and I – with some excitement, I might add – opened up the first little door. But instead of an angel or a miniature Santa or a snowflake... there was just a fact:

Women cocoa farmers do a lot of the fermenting and drying which makes chocolate so delicious.

And each day after – another fact about our world:

Globally there are more honeybees than other types of bees or pollinating insects, making the honeybee the world's most important pollinator of food crops.

The average cocoa farmer earns less than \$1 day – less than half of what is required for a living income.

I admit, I was disappointed – even slightly annoyed. It's Christmas, for pity's sake! Some frivolity, please! Candlelight and Hallmark movies and gentle snow and beautifully decorated trees and fun Advent calendars – things that will take us out of the real world and its problems for a while.

The thoughts were no sooner in my head when I realized that despite what our culture tries to tell us, Christmas is the last season for escapism.

The Christmas story, rightly read, is the Christian story least detached from human life. The Incarnation is the opposite of "escapism" – it's God making a beeline for our world and entering it in a time and place of great need: a political empire subjugating people and torturing and killing dissidents, men and women barely eking out a living, children threatened by disease – a world in pain and ripe for redemption. Into that world God breaks in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

And into our world God continues to come at Christmas and every day – a world where women and men still sweat to eke out a fair living, where children still die of hunger and disease, and communities are wracked by violence.

God continues to stand with us, calling those of us who might like to turn away from the reality of this world to more pleasant things to hang around.

And help.

I have promised myself this Advent that I will let the calendar remind me everyday that Christmas isn't an escape from the world.

It's the redemption of the world.

May the God who enters our life and redeems it – every day – give you joy and peace this Christmas and always.

Lori

P.S. Vegan chocolate is excellent