



# Hope for the world

## The Hope Of A Newborn Baby

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Advent is about waiting – hopeful waiting. But waiting is hard. Ask any four year-old who is trying to get to sleep on December 24th!

And of course, we wait for bad things as well as good things – possible redundancy, the next round of chemo, as well as the birth of a baby, or Christmas – not that that's good for everyone.

And there are many ways of waiting – patiently or impatiently, despairing or optimistic, anxious or excited, resigned or hopeful. The psalms speak often of waiting in the context of a loving God, who hears and answers prayer. Psalm 5 says, 'In the morning Lord, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait expectantly'.

Sometimes the waiting has a predictable outcome. About a year ago we decided to visit St Helena, on which tiny island deep in the South Atlantic, a new grandson had just been born.

After five days at sea, with no other vessels and scarcely any birds for company, the morning scheduled for arrival in Jamestown Harbour dawned. Impatient people at the best of times, we were up on deck well before sunrise, staring intently into the pale distance – until finally the faint outline of sheer cliffs rising abruptly from the ocean was discernable against the soft grey of the sky. Arrival! Hopes realised, this particular waiting over, a baby to meet!

Often, however, we do not see what we hope for as quickly as we want – sometimes not for many months, or even years. Indeed, many of the things we long for most deeply may not become reality in our lifetime.

Having listed some of the great giants of faith, the writer to the Hebrews reminds us, 'All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance' (Hebrews 11.13).

Hope becomes rooted in a God who is true to his promises when we have to take those promises on trust – instead of seeing what we long for.

A few weeks after the St Helena adventure, we spent some time at the A Rocha centre in Watamu on the Kenyan coast. Since the year 2000, a dedicated team of scientists and volunteers has been working to conserve forest and marine habitats under severe threat from both tourism and poor communities struggling to survive in this coastal area by chopping down the forests for timber and firewood.

The story of ASSETS is a wonderful illustration of how restored relationships between human communities, fragile ecosystems and the Creator of all things, can make visible the hope of countering the drastic environmental degradation and loss of biodiversity in beleaguered corners of creation like this.

Such long-term commitment, however, requires hopeful waiting on an altogether different scale, demanding courage, perseverance, endurance, hard work, robust faith and powerful motivation – in this case the conviction that, 'The earth is the Lord's and everything in it' (Psalm 24.1) – and a sense of vocation born out of a deeply personal response to the Creator whose world is being destroyed.

One day we spent seven hours in a jeep, bumping over bright red dirt roads, dodging massive potholes, to visit the small A Rocha reserve in Dakatcha woodland, and the newly-established office in Marafa from which the conservation team visits five neighbouring villages each week to teach creation-friendly methods of farming, and help implement practical conservation programmes.

We have seen for ourselves how maize is twice as high and twice as big if you grow it God's way! We have seen many nurseries where endemic trees and plants are being cultivated. This in itself doesn't, of course, resolve the systemic problems of environmental degradation, loss of biodiversity and poverty in Dakatcha woodland.

But the visible impact of a small, dedicated team – motivated by love for God and equipped by their scientific training to carry out community-based conservation in particular places, with particular human communities, who rely on their immediate environment for survival – is surely a sign of hope. We returned to Watamu inspired and thoughtful.

Perhaps today, a little over halfway through Advent, you could spend a moment or two identifying what it is you hope for most of all. Is it a short-term longing, or one that will require long-term patience, endurance and trust in a loving God?

Lay your hopes before him again, remembering that the end of Advent is the birth of a baby in whom all our deepest yearnings find their truest hope.



With her husband Peter, Miranda was involved in setting up A Rocha field study centres in Portugal and France. They continue to serve the A Rocha family.

[advent.arocha.org.uk](http://advent.arocha.org.uk) (Miranda Harris – 15th December)



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