

W1 | D2

# CHRISTMAS IN WARTIME

---

DANIEL DARLING

is an author and pastor. He is the director of the Land Center for Cultural Engagement at Southwestern Seminary and author of several books, including *The Characters of Christmas*.

---

**W**e drove down busy streets, sirens intermittently breaking up the feigned normalcy of a city in wartime. Ukrainians worked and shopped, worshiped and worried throughout Kyiv, miles from the front but seconds from a missile strike.

We toured a children's hospital with an entire ward reduced to a pile of rubble, the target of a Russian bomber. We visited an underground shelter where students, at a moment's notice, could leave their desks and go study while the world burned. We spoke with Ukrainian children rescued from kidnapping and exploitation by the Russians and now cared for by an evangelical Christian ministry.

But it was the final scene in Kyiv last December that brought a steady flow of tears to my eyes. As we dragged our luggage through the train station and readied ourselves to board for an overnight trip to Krakow, we heard a Ukrainian band belting out Christmas carols. It seemed an act of defiance by these sturdy people, as if to say, *We will celebrate Christmas. Not even war will erase our hope.*

The festivity and joy of this season is always, every year, juxtaposed with the backdrop of brokenness. This year is no different. Economic uncertainty in the West. Civil war, again, in Sudan. A Middle East aflame.

How can Christians possibly, audaciously, pause for Advent in a world so dark? A lyric of a favorite hymn says

it clearly: “A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices.” The birth of Jesus came at a time no less troubled than our own, to a people pressed down and weary, to a world on edge. Accompanying Jesus’ birth was the jealous slaughter of young boys by the mad monarch, Herod. Violence. Poverty. Corruption.

When will this cycle ever end? Yet those who believed knew the birth of this baby boy to a peasant couple was the beginning of something new. Zechariah said as much in his prayer:

Because of our God’s merciful compassion,  
the dawn from on high will visit us  
to shine on those who live in darkness  
and the shadow of death,  
to guide our feet into the way of peace.  
(Luke 1:78–79, CSB)

As the prophet Isaiah foretold, those who have walked in darkness will now see a great light. This Light, John would later write, has come into the world and the darkness will not overcome it. It will not overcome him.

You may not be feeling the light this Christmas. Your world may seem dreary, full of grief and woe. I’ve known this feeling. I’ve walked among those who could see only darkness. Yet Advent offers us genuine hope inside our groaning. God became flesh, inhabited our world, and—by his life, death, and resurrection—defeated the darkness that envelops the world, envelops us.

**WE WILL CELEBRATE  
CHRISTMAS. NOT EVEN WAR  
WILL ERASE OUR HOPE.**

It's audacious, really, to celebrate Christmas, to sing "Joy to the World" in the midst of war. We can, though, for we know that the baby who lay in that dark cave is the King of the world. He is light, and in him is no darkness at all. A new world awaits. ✨