

Advent assumes that everyone is poor. To enter the spirit of Advent, it helps to think about what we lack. For some people, that's easy. They lack money. They have bills to pay. They have to choose between food and medicines because they cannot afford both. They worry about the cost of gas throughout the winter. They cannot afford gifts for the people they love.

But poverty comes in other forms. Some people can afford clothes, toys and vacations, but they lack other things. They are poor in relationships or in love. They are poor in feeling safe about their home, their health or their country. Or they are poor in faith. Everybody is poor in some way.

As Christmas approaches, ads would have us believe we are rich enough to buy gifts for a lot of other people. But Advent keeps reminding us that even if that is true, we are poor in other ways. If we were not, we would not need a savior, and that is what Christmas is all about.

In today's passage from Isaiah, a prophet says, "The Spirit of God is upon me to bring glad tidings to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives, release to prisoners, and to announce a year of favor." When the adult Jesus began his ministry, he entered the synagogue at Capernaum, opened the scroll of readings from Isaiah and read this passage aloud: "The Spirit of God is upon me." He fulfilled this prophecy.

There were several prophecies about the Spirit. The Spirit would come upon the king. The Spirit would come upon the prophet. The Spirit would come upon the messiah. And the Spirit would come upon the people. All of us have received the Spirit in the midst of our poverty, and all of us are commissioned by that Spirit to bring glad tidings to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and release to prisoners. We bring good news to an imperfect world. However people experience poverty, a savior is coming to the rescue.

Still, this savior does not always rescue the way we would prefer. If we lack wealth, we'd like to have money. If we lack love, we'd like a friend. If we lack faith, we'd like answers to our questions. If we lack clothing, we'd like a new wardrobe. But God rescues differently. Isaiah says God clothes us with salvation and justice, "garments" more radiant than the jewels on a bride. God does not promise jewels; God promises salvation and justice. God thinks those gifts make a better rescue than a gift bond from the mall.

This Christmas the Spirit of God will be upon us as well. God will lift us from our poverty – whatever it is, and enable us to lift up others, forgiving wrongs, bringing justice and announcing salvation.