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An image telling part of the Nativity story is reflected on the Cathedral of St. Paul in St. Paul, Minnesota, Dec. 17. (CNS/ The Catholic Spirit/Dave Hrbacek)

by Rebecca Collins Jordan

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In the large-scale tragedy, unrest and anxiety of this year, many, including myself, have likened it to an apocalypse moment. There are the jokes — the murder hornets, the monolith — and then the real tragedies. Dec. 16 alone saw 3,400 deaths from COVID-19, a record number in the US. Unemployment has begun to skyrocket, and businesses shutter constantly. The staggering extent of the political divide has become a casual table topic, along with concerns about the stability of democratic norms.

People speak of the pandemic in the way they speak of a war — long, arduous and requiring sacrifice. We worry about the over-extended hospitals and periodic scarcity of supplies, and even at the dawn of the day of the vaccine, we watch for the bitter road ahead. The world just seems more fragile this year, more collapsible than we might have known before.

Apocalypse comes from the Greek word for "uncovering," and perhaps, beyond the anxiety and collapsibility, what this year has done more than anything is uncover for many white people what was always there: racial injustice.

In the days and months following the deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor and George Floyd, people who had ignored violence against Black and brown people in the United States could no longer avert their eyes. The unveiling came late, but it came in full force. It continued through the civil demonstrations, through the escalations in police and militia force against racial justice protesters, through the election, and through the ongoing racial divide in COVID-19 deaths.

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When the vaccine reaches the majority of the population, and when the deaths subside, as we all have been assured that they will, the crisis of racial injustice and the centuries-long legacy of enslavement, genocide, displacement and exclusion on this continent will remain. The greatest tragedy, and the greatest sin, of this year would be to willfully forget its lessons and reckonings.

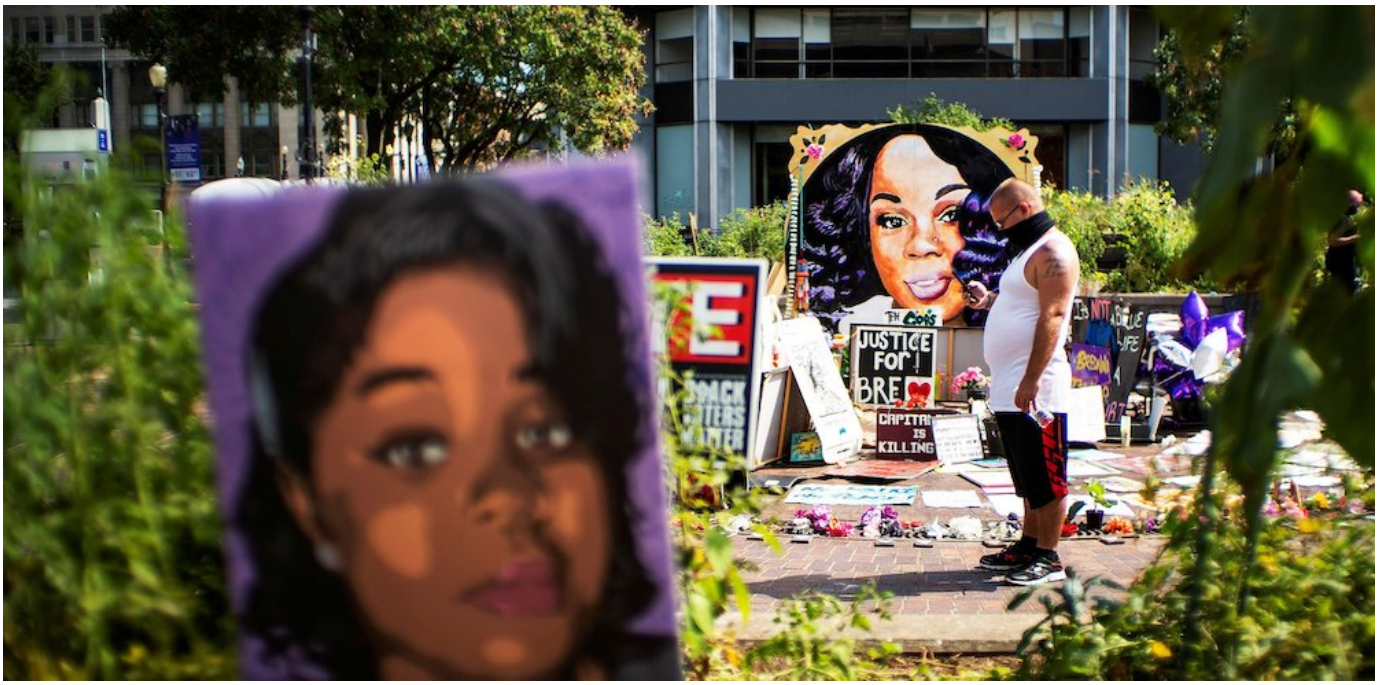
We live now in a season of waiting and hoping. I always see Advent as a season of immense restraint, and even more so this year. It doesn't seem quite fair right now to restrain myself from the celebration of the birth of Jesus, to focus on fasting and hope before celebration — either that, or it seems so natural, so routine, that it has

lost its novelty.

We're naturally waiting these days, for vaccines and outings and reunions with family and live music and normalcy, whatever that once was. I remember when waiting felt countercultural and new, when I had to intentionally pause my life. But I don't feel that way this year. The need for the Nativity is so clear to me this year—is it clearer for you, too?

As we go through these last few months of waiting, let us remember the uncovering that we collectively witnessed this year. Let us remember and never forget this as the year our society unraveled and, hopefully in its unraveling, began to pull out its ugliest knots.

More than anything, let us use this time of waiting to produce justice. In the midst of winter, we come together each year to celebrate the birth of an unlikely savior, a defenseless baby the world could hardly bother to make room for. Wasn't that, too, an apocalypse moment, an uncovering of God into the world? We live in a world pregnant with possibility, in a time of waiting that follows the story of Mary's auspicious pregnancy. This is the time in which "creation waits with eager longing" and, in the Christian tradition, people gather around values of kindness and community (Romans 8:19).



Memorial for Breonna Taylor in Louisville, Kentucky, Sept. 25 (CNS/Reuters/Eduardo Munoz)

Throughout the ages, Advent and Christmas have called people to meditate on what we all are collectively bringing to birth. What might we uncover? How do we birth a kinder, gentler, more just world this year? Advent offers a moment each year to be midwives to new visions of justice, visions revealed in the traumas of the waning year.

As a white person, I hope that before white people set this year down and run away, joking about fleeing its perils in memes and glib asides, we truly see and remember what it has taught; we remember that George Floyd called out for his mother, and that Ahmaud Arbery simply wanted to go for a run, and that Breonna Taylor was an essential worker getting needed rest in her own bed.

And in this memory, in this grief, we continue to commit to justice, to seeing justice reborn and to caring for it through protests and reparations, letters and hard conversations, inner transformation and humility, moments of silence and moments of courage. Perhaps then, this apocalypse will not be a collapse, but an uncovering that begins again the healing process.