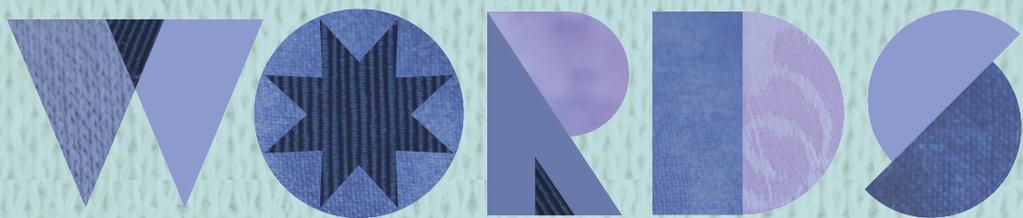
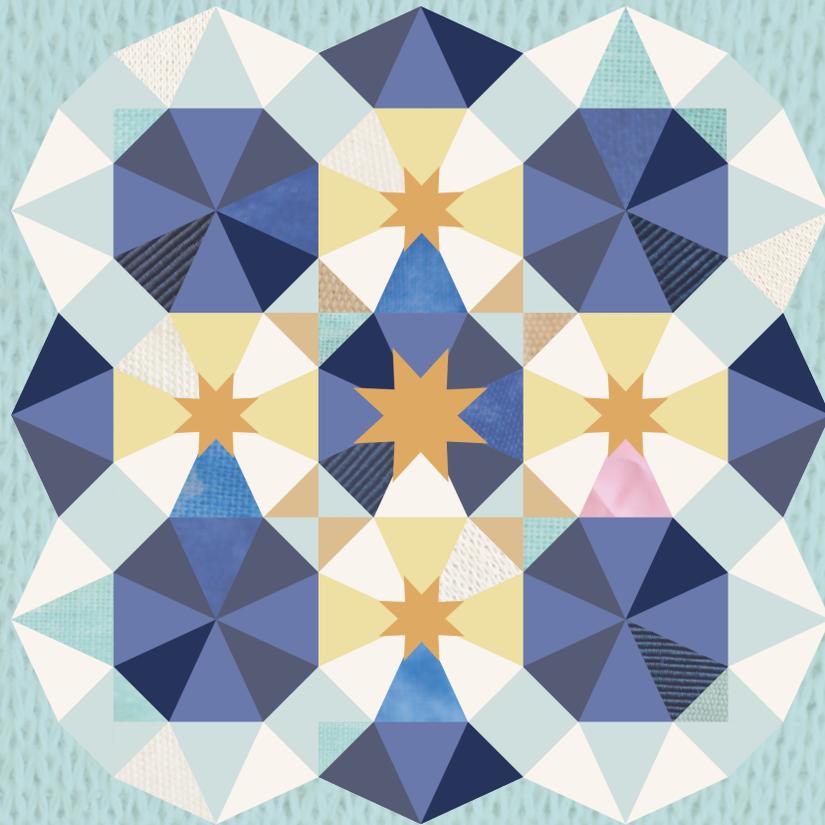


AN ADVENT DEVOTIONAL



FOR THE **Be**GINNING

Art, Poetry, &
Reflections
for Advent

 *a Sanctified Art*
sanctifiedart.org



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Advent is a season of endings and beginnings. As the calendar year comes to a close, a new church year begins. Christ's birth ushers us into new ways of living and loving; and yet, the world as we know it spins madly on. In many ways, pregnant Mary was surrounded by endings—large and small, personal and political. But Mary proclaimed hope in a God who was and is making all things new. Christ's birth offered a beautiful new beginning for shepherds and Magi alike—all the while, King Herod tried to bring Christ's story to an end. When we ourselves navigate seasons filled with endings and beginnings, we need reminders. We need words that can feel like steady ground, like a path for our feet to find as we step forward into the unknown.

This devotional is shaped around several reminders we all need from time to time: *you are a blessing; we can't go alone; do the good that is yours to do; hope is worth the risk; love knows your name; don't forget to laugh; the road isn't straight.* These reminders root us in the fundamental truths of our faith. Many of them are life lessons we teach to children—lessons that adults continue to learn and relearn. They may resemble the blessings we impart to loved ones during special ceremonies like weddings or baptisms. And so, we invite you to move through this Advent season as if you are entering a sacred new chapter, holding fast to the reminders that will bolster you for the journey ahead.

Read, look, and sing your way through the pages of this devotional. Each week offers art, reflections, poetry, and hymns to give you strength, courage, and grace. As you journey through this season, may you find words for belovedness and hope. May you find words for beginning again. For no matter what you are facing, no matter what this new day brings, love is your beginning.

Artfully yours,

The Sanctified Art Creative Team

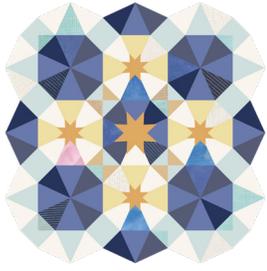
Rev. Lisle Gwynn Garrity

Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed

Hannah Garrity

Rev. Lauren Wright Pittman

Rev. Anna Strickland



ABOUT THE CREATIVE TEAM

REV. LISLE GWYNN GARRITY

Founder | Creative Director of SA

Lisle Gwynn Garrity (*she/her*) is a Pastorist (pastor + artist) and creative entrepreneur seeking to fill the church with more color, paint, mystery, and creativity. Her faith is rooted in creative practices that help her break free from perfectionism and control and participate in creating a more whole, just world.

REV. LAUREN WRIGHT PITTMAN

Director of Branding | Founding Creative Partner of SA

Lauren (*she/her*) is an artist, graphic designer, and theologian. She uses paint, metallic inks, linoleum carving tools, and her trusty Apple pencil to image the layered complexity she experiences in scripture texts. Visual exploration offers her a holy space to ask questions, find her voice, take risks, and make bold statements.

HANNAH GARRITY Founding Creative Partner of SA

Hannah (*she/her*) is the Director of Christian Faith, Life, and Arts at the wonderful Second Presbyterian Church in Richmond, VA. She also serves as liturgical artist for the Summer Worship Series at Montreat Conference Center (Montreat, NC). Hannah is currently pursuing a Master's of Divinity and Master's of Christian Education at Union Presbyterian Seminary in Richmond, VA.

REV. SARAH A. SPEED

Founding Creative Partner of SA

Sarah (Are) Speed (*she/her*) is the Head of Staff/Senior Pastor at Second Presbyterian Church of Kansas City, MO. Sarah feels called to welcome people into the church by using her energy and passion for beautifully-scripted words, raw and relevant liturgy, and hands-on worship experiences to engage our longing for God and the need for justice in this messy world.

REV. ANNA STRICKLAND

Creative Partner | Operations Support

Anna Strickland (*she/her*) looks for the Divine in the everyday like treasure in clay jars and first encountered God in the integration of her spiritual self and artistic self. She is a former teacher and college minister, a proud Texas Longhorn and graduate of Iliff School of Theology, a Baptist to the core ministering in ecumenical spaces, and a lover of chaos anchored by the belief that the Spirit is most active in the spaces between us.



ABOUT OUR GUEST CONTRIBUTORS



GUEST WRITER Kayla Craig

Kayla Craig (*she/her*) is a former journalist who brings deep curiosity and care to her writing. She's the author of two books: *Every Season Sacred: Reflections, Prayers, and Invitations to Nourish Your Soul and Nurture Your Family throughout the Year* and *To Light Their Way: A Collection of Prayers & Liturgies for Parents*. Kayla graduated from Drake University with a B.A. in Magazine Journalism from Drake's well-known School of Journalism & Mass Communication. She minored in Sociology and English, and has been writing professionally for more

than 15 years. With a poetic, prophetic voice, she created the popular "Liturgies for Parents" Instagram account, which Christianity Today named an "essential parenting resource." Kayla's nuanced and accessible reflections, essays, and prayers are featured in various books, devotionals, and Bible studies. Kayla lives in a 115-year-old former convent in her Iowa hometown, where she hopes to create spaces of welcome alongside her four children, two dogs, and husband, Jonny. kaylacraig.com | @liturgiesforparents | @kayla_craig



GUEST ARTIST Rev. Nicolette (Faison) Peñaranda

Rev. Nicolette "Nic" (*she/her*) is a pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America serving as the Program Director for African Descent Ministries. Nic is the creator of MONadvocacy, a racial justice resource grounded in play, as well as the "Talks at the Desk" series which celebrates the voices of leaders in the ELCA African descent community: livinglutheran.org/2022/02/a-love-letter-to-african-descent-communities.

She is passionate about queer Black liberation, cultivating diverse leadership in faith spaces, and the art of creation. She is also the illustrator of *God's Holy Darkness*, written by Sharei Green and Beulah Selnick (Beaming Books, 2022). The book deconstructs anti-Blackness in Christian theology by celebrating instances in the story of God's people when darkness, blackness, and night are beautiful, good, and holy. She resides in the Chicagoland area with her spouse, two daughters, and two cats, Penne Pablo and Rigatoni Braxton.



The Fourth Sunday of Advent
WORDS FOR THE BEGINNING
HOPE IS WORTH THE RISK

DESPITE IT ALL

What's to love?

she asked.

I understood the question.

I've seen the riot gear,
the tear gas,
the names of children
wiped from this
war-stained world.

I've seen the spray paint Swastikas
and the Proud Boys with their flags.

I've heard grandmothers at church
pray in urgent, desperate whispers.

And I've watched young mothers cry,
because teachers carry guns.

I've felt the tremor of an earthquake.

I've felt the heat of climate change.

I've seen the temple curtain tear in two.

But despite it all,
the bell that wouldn't stop tolling,
the words that won't stop clanging through my heart,
are, *so much*.

There is so much left to love.

So much left to hope for.

Poem by

Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed

HOPE IS WORTH THE RISK

READ Matthew 1:18-25 | Luke 1:46-55

REFLECTION | Kayla Craig

Hope isn't flimsy—it's a force that propels us toward God's presence and redemptive plan for all creation, for all time.

It's vulnerable to hope. The more we hope, the more we can be disappointed. For those of us who bear scars from the hurt of this world, hope can feel scary—too risky, too unrealistic. Cynicism seems like a safer, more straightforward path. But cynicism doesn't change the world—*hope* does.

Hope challenges us to declare, “It can be better,” and empowers us to make it so.

Our weary world doesn't need any more cynics and scoffers—but as wars rage and divisions heighten, we desperately need hope-bearers who point us to a better way, one where life is made new and lies of shame and fear don't have the final say. Our hope is a reflection of God's plans for the world—plans for renewal and restoration in the face of death and despair.

Joseph and Mary hoped against hope. In the face of impossibilities, they believed in the possibility of a better world. They placed their trust in God alone. Their stories, as recounted in Matthew 1:18-25 and Luke 1:46-55, are testaments to the transformative power of hope still accessible to us today. Joseph acts with hope. Mary proclaims it. And their choice to trust God has reverberations that echo into eternity.

When an angel appears to Joseph in a dream, he is told not to fear taking Mary as his wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. Joseph's decision to embrace this divine assurance—rather than succumb to societal expectations to untangle himself from his pregnant fiancée—is a radical act of hope.

“The language of a dream is the language of hope,” writes Bishop Michael Curry.⁷ Propelled by this hope, Joseph uses his position not just for personal faithfulness, but as an act of profound communal responsibility by choosing to protect and stand by Mary. Instead of living out of fear for what others may say or think, Joseph places his hope in something bigger than himself.

Every day, we have the chance to choose hope and enter into God's redemptive dream for the world—even when it disrupts our understanding and expectations (perhaps especially then).

Mary's response to her calling is equally revolutionary. In light of all that has been foretold, she sings a hopeful anthem for the ways God turns our world upside down and brings it right side up by bringing down the mighty, exalting the humble, filling the hungry, and sending the rich away.

As she sings, Mary weaves a vision of the world as God intends it, stitching together a pattern of justice and mercy in her words. Her hope in the promise of God transcends time and space, extending a sacred invitation and inspiring us today to live out our faith in tangible, transformative ways. Mary’s words hark back to imagery seen throughout the Hebrew Bible. Theologian Walter Brueggemann writes: “The hope articulated in ancient Israel is not a vague optimism or a generic good idea about the future, but a precise and concrete confidence in and expectation for the future.”⁸

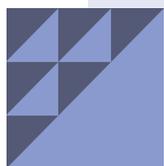
Reflect on how you can embody hope in uncertain times. How can you, like Joseph, use your influence to protect and uplift? How can you, like Mary, voice a hope that challenges the status quo and sings of a reality where justice and mercy reign?

As you light the final Advent candle, let it symbolize the hope that Christ brings into our world—a hope not just for peaceful times, but also for moments of darkness and difficulty. May the steady flame of hope renew your courage and inspire you to act as you enter into an extraordinary story of redemption and love.

In this season of hope, may you find the courage to hold onto hope and act on it, to let the divine trust of Mary and Joseph weave through the fabric of your life.

BLESSING

Lies of cynicism are loud, and so are the voices of others—but, beloved, hope is worth fighting for. May the Spirit of God surround you this season so that you might trust like Joseph and sing like Mary. The same hope they held is still alive today, transforming creation into God's will for justice and peace. As you prepare your heart for Christ's arrival, may you make room for God's presence, and may your actions reflect God's hope for humanity.



BREATH PRAYER

INHALE: *Lead me, O God,*

EXHALE: *My hope is in you.*

⁷ Michael Curry and Sara Grace, *Love Is the Way: Holding onto Hope in Troubling Times*, (Avery Publishing Group, 2020), 73.

⁸ Walter Brueggemann, *Reverberations of Faith: A Theological Handbook of Old Testament Themes*, (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2002).



Joseph's Dream | Lauren Wright Pittman
Hand-carved block printed with oil-based ink on patterned paper

HOPE IS WORTH THE RISK

READ Matthew 1:18-25

FROM THE ARTIST | Lauren Wright Pittman

The angel holds Joseph as his dream unfolds in quilted vignettes. At the top, Mary gazes ahead, pondering her role in welcoming the Son of God into the world. Below, a squishy baby Jesus peacefully rests as his glory shines on a longing world eager to soak up the light of Emmanuel. Just as a dream holds layers of meaning, this image reflects more than the sum of its parts.

I'm fascinated by symbology. Stars have come to represent both Mary and Jesus in liturgical art, so I decided to research stars in quilting. It turns out that quilting holds its own wealth of symbology through choices in color, shapes, patterns, etc. A star quilt holds significance in a number of different cultures, including the Lakota. Star quilts are given at important moments throughout one's life, including birth, and the eight-pointed morning star "represents fulfillment, the release from darkness, [and] ushering in a new day."⁹

This brings me to another fascination of mine, Biblical numerology. One of my most well-worn resources is a glossary of common liturgical symbols in European Christian art called, *Symbolism in Liturgical Art*. In it, the writers describe that the eight-pointed star is often used in imagery of Christ as an allusion to the eighth day of creation when Christ rose from the dead, "a beginning of days outside of time."¹⁰ It delights me that this eight-pointed star is made up of triangles with three sides. The number three references the Trinity, and therefore, the communal fullness of the Divine.

In researching imagery for Mary, I realized that both stars and lilies are often used in European art to celebrate Mary's purity. My glossary reads: "Her bearing of Christ without loss of her virginity is seen as similar to stars sending out their light without loss of brightness."¹¹ Of all the things we can lift up about Mary, such as her courage, strength, or steadfast love, why emphasize her virginity? This feels incredibly limiting and dismissive and misses how incredible and multifaceted Mary is. In my image, I want to reclaim the imagery of stars and lilies to represent how Mary is a brilliant, shining example of radical faithfulness in the face of every possible earthly fear. Lilies are resourceful, hearty plants which represent rebirth across cultures. I would argue that Mary is resilient in the face of an impossible task, and in many ways, the entire story of the people of God is reborn through Mary's bravery.

PRAY

Breathe deeply as you gaze upon the image on the left. Imagine placing yourself in this scene. What do you see? How do you feel? Get quiet and still, offering a silent or spoken prayer to God.

⁹ A quote from Kevin Locke, Lakota Sioux. nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/evolution-expression

¹⁰ Appleton, LeRoy H, and Stephen Bridges *Symbolism in Liturgical Art*. New York: Charles Scribner, 1959. Pg. 97

¹¹ Ibid. 96.



Magnify | Hannah Garrity
Acrylic painting with mixed media on canvas

HOPE IS WORTH THE RISK

READ Luke 1:46-55

FROM THE ARTIST | Hannah Garrity

The central image in this quilt square design is of Mary's soul, an abstract and concentric shape that begins to look like an eye. It originates as an outward spiraling abstraction of the soul magnifying God. For Mary's soul magnifies her creator. In her song, Mary honors her God who mirrors the life her son will live: lifting up the lowly, filling the hungry, coming to the aid of God's people, bringing down the powerful, sending the rich away empty, and scattering the proud.

One Advent, the art team at my church created a set of banners based on the story of Elizabeth and Zechariah in Luke 1. In the design, Elizabeth (Mary's cousin) stood, full with child. Surrounding her were patterns of tablets and writing tools (representing muted Zechariah's need to communicate through writing) and patterns of hands (representing Elizabeth's caretaking in raising up her son, John). The banners hung in the sanctuary throughout the whole Advent season. On December 24th, the pastor told me, "It's Christmas eve; I have to preach the Magnificat. Elizabeth will have to be Mary today."

It occurs to me that we are all Mary today, dreaming of a better world and working toward it through right relationships and healthy communities. So why does it seem that the world keeps falling apart? Where is the "arc of justice" of which Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke?¹² Can you see it? Can you feel it? Why does it seem so far out of reach? Like Moses on the mountaintop, can you see the promised land? As global politics heat up, it feels so far away.

Mary is on the verge of delivering God's depth and beauty into the world; God will be embodied by a child. Mary, the earthly mother of our incarnate God, can see it. She can see hope, justice, and right relationships. In the Magnificat, she speaks the way of God into being, just before Jesus is born. Like my mother whispering in my ear when I was a child, calling forth whom I shall become, Mary speaks her dreams into existence.

PRAY

Breathe deeply as you gaze upon the image on the left. Imagine placing yourself in this scene. What do you see? How do you feel? Get quiet and still, offering a silent or spoken prayer to God.

¹² "We shall overcome because the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice." –Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., from his speech, "Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution," delivered at the National Cathedral, March 31st, 1968.

A Sanctified Art LLC is a collective of artists in ministry who create resources for worshipping communities. The Sanctified Art team works collaboratively to bring scripture and theological themes to life through film, visual art, curriculum, coloring pages, liturgy, graphic designs, and more. Their mission is to empower churches with resources to inspire creativity in worship and beyond. Driven by the connective and prophetic power of art, they believe that art helps us connect our hearts with our hands, our faith with our lives, and our mess with our God.

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