

AN ADVENT DEVOTIONAL



# What do you fear?

INSISTING ON HOPE THIS ADVENT

Art, Poetry, &  
Reflections  
for Advent

 *a Sanctified Art*  
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What do you fear?  
INSISTING ON HOPE THIS ADVENT

## A Step Toward Home

I will not tell you to buck up,  
to tough it out, to ignore the fear  
rattling around in your chest.  
I will not tell you that *all shall be well*  
or that morning will come quickly.  
I will not ask you to march into danger  
without first repeating your name in my prayers.  
But if fear stops you in your tracks,  
if fear makes it hard to breathe,  
hard to move,  
hard to think,  
then I will remind you  
that even one step with shaking knees  
is a step toward home.

Poem by  
Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed



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Luke's Gospel begins the story of Jesus with this opening line: "In the time of Herod. . ." This detail may seem minor to modern readers; however, it reveals layers of information about the fearful world Jesus entered, one filled with rampant oppression, economic disparity, uncertainty, and instability. A world not so unlike our own. And yet, throughout the stories of Christ's birth, we hear the whispers of angels delivering a surprising message: "Do not fear." When Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, and the magi are each called into God's redemptive story, they do not deny their fears—they move through them. They ask questions, hold fast to courage, trust in good news, and say, "Here I am, Lord." When we find ourselves in fearful times, can we acknowledge our fears while also insisting on hope?

This Advent devotional takes seriously the angels' message and trusts that Christ's birth truly is good news of great joy for all people. The weekly art and reflections look closely at the fear and terror looming in the background during the time of King Herod and invite us to consider the fears we hold now. Fear can divide and paralyze us and even be used as a tool for oppression. But what if we formed a different relationship with fear? Can we acknowledge fear without letting it rule us? Might we catalyze our fears into love and action? What if naming our fears helps us see more clearly how God is breaking in and where God is at work?

Each week of this devotional offers art, reflections, poetry, and hymns to give you hope in a fearful world. As you journey through this season, may your hope become gritty and resilient. May you remember: hope that trembles is still hope. This season, let us insist on hope and trust that good news is greater than fear.

Artfully yours,

**The Sanctified Art Creative Team**

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# INSISTING ON HOPE THIS ADVENT



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# Prompts for reflection



## IN THE TIME OF HEROD, WE LONG FOR GOD TO BREAK IN

*As you enter the Advent season, what deep longings do you hold? Offer these yearnings and desires to God and trust that God hears and holds each one.*



## WHEN WE'RE RUNNING OUT OF HOPE, GOD IS AT WORK

*Name what makes you feel hopeless. Offer your emptied hope to God. Then name where you perceive the unfolding of God's dreams. What do you hear? What do you see?*



## EVEN IN OUR FEAR, WE ARE CALLED FORWARD

*Reflect on a time when you said "yes" to an invitation that scared you. How did you move through your fears? What did you learn or gain through that process?*



## WHEN YOU'RE AFRAID, GIVE ME YOUR HAND

*When have you been a companion to someone through a fearful and challenging time? When has someone offered you the gift of accompaniment?*

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*Throughout the season, return to these prompts to reflect on the weekly themes in this series. Use these questions to guide your journaling or discussions with others.*

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## GOOD NEWS IS LOUDER THAN FEAR

*Rev. Dr. Boyung Lee writes: "In a world where fear is curated and fed to us, proclaiming good news is a countercultural act." What joyful, good news do you want to lift up today?*



## LET FEAR FUEL A FIRE FOR JUSTICE

*Reflect on a time when fear protected you from danger. As you enter a new year, commit to one action you can take to make the world more safe and just for everyone.*



## FEAR DOESN'T STOP US

*List all of the fears that are bubbling up for you right now. Are there any that are holding you back or keeping you from living fully? Which fears are you acknowledging and moving through? Which fears might be at the threshold of transformation?*



The First Sunday of Advent | What do you fear?

IN THE TIME OF HEROD,  
WE LONG FOR GOD TO BREAK IN

## In the Time of Herod

I didn't live during Herod's time—that brutal, murderous king,  
*God save his soul.*

But even hundreds of years later, I know the prayers of his people.

I know the prayers of the mothers and the children under  
his rule.

I know the prayers of the young men under his angry arm.

I know their prayers, because anyone who has ever lived in this  
soft world for more than two days knows how to pray for a miracle.

We rub our hands together.

We fold weary shoulders in,

a cage of bone to protect our bleeding hearts.

We sing, *we shall overcome* and *bind my wandering heart to thee.*

We walk across bridges and in front of powerful buildings.

We cover our cars in stickers that scream, *we will not give up!*

We allow a hungry cry to slip from our lips,

giving our lament a life of its own (with room to dance!).

And when all of that is said and done, we whisper to our creator,

*God, break through the yelling and the fear. Break through the  
violence and the oppression.*

*Get past the Herods of this world, and come be here.*

Like every bleeding heart before, we pray for a miracle.

Poem by

Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed

The First Sunday of Advent | What do you fear?  
IN THE TIME OF HEROD,  
WE LONG FOR GOD TO BREAK IN



Read Luke 1:5-13; Lamentations 3:55-57  
Reflection | Rev. Dr. Boyung Lee

“In the time of Herod...” (Luke 1:5)

With these words, Luke’s Gospel grounds the birth of Jesus in a world shaped by violence, occupation, and fear.

This was no golden age of peace or spiritual clarity—it was a time of survival under empire. Herod, the Roman-appointed ruler of Judea, governed with paranoia and cruelty. His power, secured through imperial alliance, was maintained by coercion, surveillance, and brutality.

Luke situates the story of Jesus within these political realities. His Gospel is not only spiritual but political—resistance in the face of empire.

Amid this context, Luke introduces Zechariah and Elizabeth—an aging priestly couple not marked by prominence, but by longing.

They had no child. In their time, barrenness was often interpreted as divine judgment. Elizabeth’s childlessness brought not just personal grief but public shame.

Yet, Luke insists: they were righteous. Their faith endured, even in waiting.

It’s tempting to rush ahead to the angel’s announcement and the joy of John’s birth.  
But Luke slows us down,  
inviting us to notice the interruption.

While offering incense in the temple, Zechariah encounters a divine messenger. His response is not relief or joy—but fear.

Luke uses the Greek verb *tarassó*—to be troubled, disturbed, or agitated.

This is no fleeting startle. It evokes deep inner shaking, a disruption of body and spirit.

*Tarassó* is the soul’s recoil from the unexpected, the mind’s clamor in the face of uncertainty, the body’s trembling at the threshold of something it cannot control.

Fear, in this context, is not failure. It is a natural human response to divine disruption.

But fear can become more than a reaction. It can take root and become a way of being.

In John 14:27, Jesus says,  
“Let not your hearts be troubled (*tarassó*), and do not be afraid (*deiliaó*).”

The second term, *deiliaó*, implies a shrinking of heart, our spirit—a fear that inhibits action and diminishes courage.

Together, these words describe fear that doesn’t just visit—it settles. Fear that shapes our posture toward the world.

Many of us know this kind of fear.  
Especially in “Herodian times”—eras  
marked by empire, oppression, and  
uncertainty—fear becomes embedded  
in our bodies, relationships, and  
public discourse.

It becomes background noise so  
constant we forget it’s there.

Like Zechariah, we may grow so used  
to disappointment that when hope  
finally arrives, it startles us.  
When God interrupts, we flinch.

So when the angel says, “Do not be  
afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has  
been heard,” it is not a dismissal.

It is a reorientation.  
Your fear is real—but it is not the only  
truth.

God has already been listening.  
God enters the silence, the ache,  
the barrenness—into the very place  
where fear has taken root.

And God’s response begins not with  
a miracle, but with recognition:  
your prayer has been heard.

This is a word for all of us in Advent.

In a season of waiting, we are not asked  
to suppress fear but to face it. To ask:

How does fear live in me?  
What voices has it amplified?  
What longings has it silenced?

Fear, as trauma theologians remind  
us, can be a teacher.  
It tells us that something matters.  
That something is at stake.

It is the voice of our vulnerability  
asking not to be erased,  
but acknowledged.

Advent gives us room to sit with fear—  
not to banish it, but to listen.

What are we afraid to hope for?  
What have we stopped praying for?  
Where has fear caused us to shrink back?

Zechariah’s fear doesn’t disqualify him.  
It marks the beginning of  
transformation.

Even in his silence, he becomes part  
of the unfolding story—  
his life bearing witness to a God who  
hears, disrupts,  
and enters fearful places with grace.

“In the time of Herod...”  
the world was loud with empire’s threats,  
echoing with grief and longing.

And still—God broke in.

In the time of fear,  
God heard a prayer.  
And responded with presence.

This Advent, perhaps the question is  
not how we rid ourselves of fear.

Perhaps the deeper invitation is this:

Can we name our fear honestly—  
and still believe God is near?



Zechariah and the Angel | Hannah Garrity  
*Paper lace and graphite drawing, backed with cyanotype print*

The First Sunday of Advent | What do you fear?

## IN THE TIME OF HEROD, WE LONG FOR GOD TO BREAK IN

Read **Luke 1:5-13**

Reflection | **Hannah Garrity**

Within the political landscape of Herod's time, hope was not on the horizon—that's the point. And Elizabeth had been barren for many years. This miracle visited her—in her body, in her womb—because it was so unexpected.

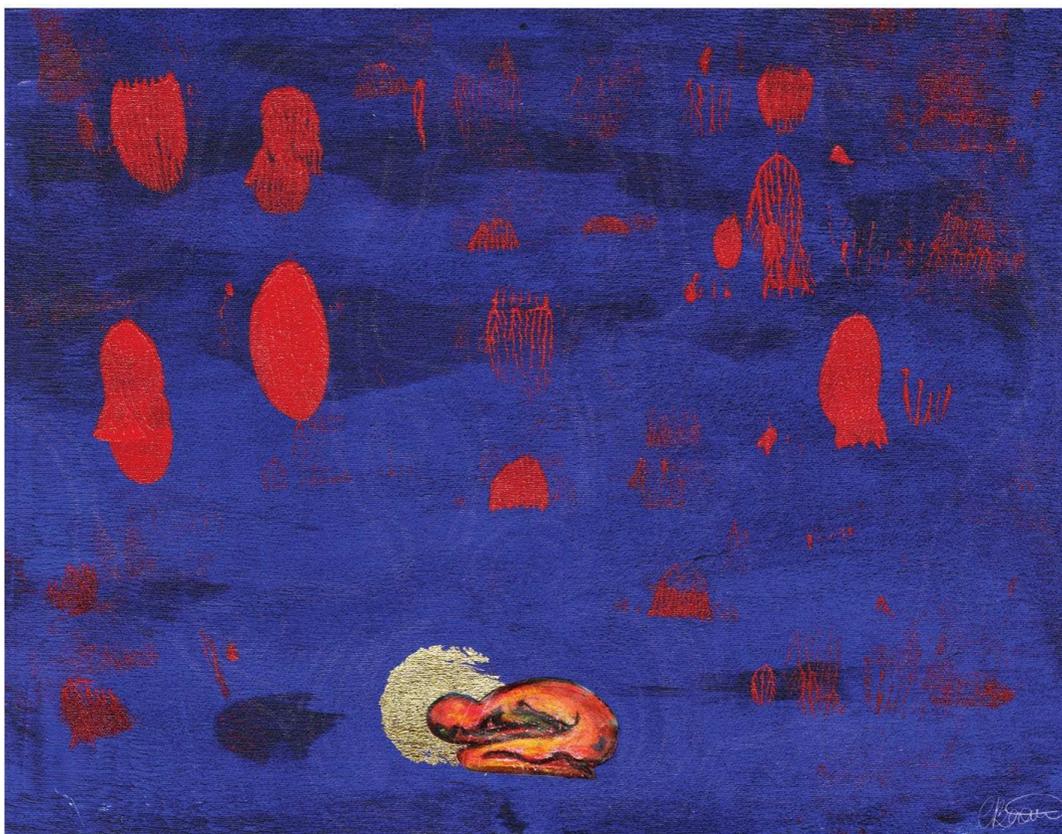
In this piece, I imagine the angel in a female form arriving close to Zechariah in the darkened Temple, surprising him by her presence. His reaction is a fearful one in this image. He leans away, squints his eyes, and covers his head. He protects himself from her, from her presence, from her power, from her words, from her gaze. He hides. The incense swirls around them. In contrast to his fear, her message is one of hope: long-yearned-for-joy and family security. Here the angel's message is represented by the doves and the stars. Her message flows into his space with the same power that invoked his fear. I imagine Zechariah lets his guard down then, and listens to her in shock. I imagine he takes in her words, lets his arm down, meets her gaze, and holds onto joy, despite his ongoing apprehension.

In this image, I placed my paper lace over a cyanotype print, which is created using photosensitive paper, objects, and sunlight. The cyanotype didn't work the first time; I had to paint the light-sensitive solution again and then expose the print for longer in brighter daylight. I really needed plexiglass to hold my branches and leaves tightly to the paper, but I didn't have it. Nonetheless, the final print reflected the flow of energy in this text.

The movement in the cyanotype is horizontal—perfect for the lateral conversation between the angel and Zechariah. Pine needles created shapes that appear to reiterate the angel's words as they are leaving her mouth toward Zechariah's ear. These words, this unexpected and miraculous hope, are the focal point in the text and the art. In the cyanotype, there are deep blues with silhouettes of leaves and stems, but nothing so powerful as these words, these pine needles creating a high-contrast focal point. God is breaking in.

### Prayer

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.



Depths | Carmelle Beaugelin Caldwell  
*Acrylic, oil pastel, metal leaf on canvas*

The First Sunday of Advent | What do you fear?

IN THE TIME OF HEROD,  
WE LONG FOR GOD TO BREAK IN

Read Lamentations 3:55-57

Reflection | Carmelle Beaugelin Caldwell

I am reminded of my love-hate relationship with theme park rides as soon as the ride quiets into a slow, steady climb—creeping toward an edge that seems to vanish. It's at this point that full panic sets in and it hits me: a drop is coming.

It's not the speed or height of roller coasters that scares me. It's the weight—being pulled down by something far heavier than myself, strapped to metal with gravity dragging me into the depths while my stomach scrambles to catch up, my heart left behind in midair.

Many of us, like the writer of Lamentations, know this kind of free fall—in our personal lives, in our ministries, and in a political climate that seems to collapse our sense of security into a bottomless pit. Yet, when the fall ends, when the deepest depths have been reached, who hears us when we call? As we echo prayers from the depths of each of our lives, we can rest in the assurance that we are heard by a God who meets us at rock bottom.

Prayer

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.

A Sanctified Art LLC is a collective of artists in ministry who create resources for worshiping 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.

Learn more about their work at [sanctifiedart.org](http://sanctifiedart.org).



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