

AN ADVENT DEVOTIONAL



What do you fear?

INSISTING ON HOPE THIS ADVENT

Art, Poetry, &
Reflections
for Advent

 *Sanctified Art*
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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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Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed

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About the SA creative team

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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?

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.



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 Third Sunday of Advent | What do you fear?

EVEN IN OUR FEAR,
WE ARE CALLED FORWARD

The First Step

Watch any parent. It starts with the first step.

They kneel down. They smile with anticipation.

They reach for their baby, calling and cooing them forward.

And then before they know it, they're running behind a bike.

They're yelling,

"Keep pedaling! You got it! I'm right here!" And they're jumping up
and down,

because that little red helmet passed the mailbox.

And then, just like that, they're driving circles in the church parking lot.

They're giving instructions about easing on and off the pedal.

They're having conversations about curfew and heartbreak.

And then, before they know it, they're standing in a hospital room.

Their heart is bursting. And they say, *"Put her head right here.*

Rock her gently. Do you remember the nursery rhymes?

You were born for this."

The first step is always the hardest,

but you, beloved, were born for this.

Poem by

Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed

The Third Sunday of Advent | What do you fear?
EVEN IN OUR FEAR,
WE ARE CALLED FORWARD



Read Luke 1:26-39; Jeremiah 1:4-10
Reflection | Rev. Dr. Boyung Lee

When the angel Gabriel appears to Mary, her response is not immediate acceptance but confusion, resistance, and fear.

The text says she is “greatly troubled” (*diatarassō*)—a word that intensifies *tarassō*, suggesting not just inner disturbance but a deep, bodily dissonance.

Mary is not simply puzzled—she is shaken, thrown off-balance, possibly afraid for her life.

And with good reason.

Mary was young, unmarried, and living under the weight of imperial and patriarchal control.

To be told—without warning—that she would bear a child by divine initiative wasn’t just a spiritual shock; it was a profound social and bodily risk.

Her “yes,” then, cannot be read as simplistic or naïve. It emerges from a complex matrix of vulnerability, trust, and survival.

That’s why it matters that Mary questions.

“How can this be?” is not doubt—it is agency. It is a boundary drawn around her body, a claim to her own understanding before offering consent.

Gabriel does not rebuke her.

Instead, he offers a promise: divine initiative (“the Holy Spirit will come upon you”) and shelter (“you will be overshadowed”).

These words carry no hint of coercion; they speak of protection, not domination.

Still, her consent remains essential.

Mary listens, considers the impossible, and then responds with courage:

“Let it be with me according to your word” (Luke 1:38b).

This is not fear erased—it is fear acknowledged and moved through.

A choice made with trembling faith.

Mary’s story resonates with the call of the prophet in Jeremiah 1:4–10.

“I am only a boy,” Jeremiah protests, gripped by the fear that he is too young to speak for God.

Like Mary, he hesitates—aware that answering the call will come at a cost. And like her, he hears these words of reassurance:

“Do not be afraid . . . I am with you” (Jeremiah 1:8).

What connects them is not a lack of fear,
but a deep, trembling resolve to
move forward anyway—
not with certainty, but with open hands
and the courage to say yes, even in
the unknown.

Neither Mary nor Jeremiah embody
boldness as spectacle.
Their strength lies in quiet resolve—
in the holy, hesitant yes
that dares to trust.

This week's texts remind us:

Call often comes when we're just
trying to survive.

Mary, like so many marginalized women,
was likely trying to make it through
the day,
avoiding shame, violence, and invisibility.

Survival mode leaves little space for
dreaming—
let alone imagining oneself "blessed
among women."

And yet God's call interrupts that
quiet survival—
not to exploit it, but to awaken her
to a fuller, riskier, more radiant self.

This call is not without cost.

Mary's "yes" will bring silence,
estrangement, and pain.
She will bear not only the Christ child,
but the burden of imperial suspicion,
poverty, and loneliness.

Still, she says yes.

We're often taught that fear is failure—
something to silence or push through.

But this Advent, we're invited to see
fear as information.

Some fear protects us.

But some fear is the threshold of
transformation—
the fear that comes when we are on
the edge of saying yes to God.
The fear that signals deep
vulnerability, and deep possibility.

Too often, dominant Christianity
defines courage through heroic
masculinity—
loud, bold, certain.

But Mary and Jeremiah model a
different courage:

the courage to ask questions,
to hesitate,
to need more time,
to take just one uncertain step.

And they do not walk alone.

After her yes, Mary runs to Elizabeth,
who meets her with joy and affirmation:

"Blessed are you among women"
(Luke 1:42).

Elizabeth becomes confirmation and
community.

This too is part of calling—
we are not meant to walk forward alone.

God calls us not only to action,
but to become fully ourselves.

Fear doesn't disqualify us—it's part of
the process.

And God promises to walk with us,
every trembling step.

This Advent, we ask:

What fear are you carrying?
What invitation are you resisting
because you feel inadequate?
What would it mean to say yes—
not fearlessly, but faithfully?

Mary's words can become our own:

"Let it be with me."



Mary's Yes | Lisle Gwynn Garrity
Photography with digital drawing

The Third Sunday of Advent | What do you fear?

EVEN IN OUR FEAR, WE ARE CALLED FORWARD

Read **Luke 1:26-39**

Reflection | **Lisle Gwynn Garrity**

In the *sixth month* of Elizabeth's pregnancy, the angel goes to Nazareth to find Mary. I was six months pregnant with my second daughter when I reread this scripture and began this image, so at first, this detail seemed like a happy coincidence. But as I pondered it, I wondered if Elizabeth's pregnancy might have everything to do with Mary's willingness to say yes to this wild, wonderful—but risky and terrifying—undertaking.

Elizabeth's pregnancy provides reassurance that Mary can trust the angel's impossible news. By the sixth month, Mary will be able to see for herself that Elizabeth is truly pregnant. By the sixth month, Mary can place her hands on Elizabeth's belly and giggle as the baby leaps and kicks. By the sixth month, the risk of miscarriage has significantly decreased. By the sixth month, Elizabeth will be emotionally, mentally, and physically preparing for birth. Her miracle is real, even as it is yet to be born. Therefore, Mary can rest her hope in an emerging—not empty—promise.

Mary's willingness to say "yes" is also fortified by the assurance that she is not stepping forward alone. Even as fears surely surround her, Mary will go to Elizabeth for protection and comfort. She won't fulfill her calling without support. Her hope will be strengthened in solidarity.

In this image, we see the angel greeting Mary in the form of dappled light.⁶ Mary's back is turned to the angel, but we see her in the process of pivoting toward the warmth of the cascading light. I imagine this is the moment after the angel responds to her initial question, "How can this be?" After hearing the angel's response, Mary closes her eyes, imagining her cousin Elizabeth and perhaps her many ancestors holding her up as she prepares to step forward. The wrap around her head carries the angel's good news, anointing her with the promise that fear won't stop her. Embroidered along her neckline is Mary's willing response: "Here I am." Her lantern earring is a sign to each of us, to anyone who is fearful. It's as if Mary herself becomes a lantern, emanating courage in the face of a fearful calling, lighting a way forward.

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.

⁶ I captured these textures by photographing the shadows cast by a lantern.



To Build and to Plant | Hannah Garrity
Paper lace and graphite drawing, backed with cyanotype print

The Third Sunday of Advent | What do you fear?

EVEN IN OUR FEAR,
WE ARE CALLED FORWARD

Read Jeremiah 1:4-10

Reflection | Hannah Garrity

This scripture is Jeremiah's call story. Jeremiah is a prophet just prior to the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon. Once Jerusalem falls, Judea's ruling class is taken into exile in Babylon. We learn of their story through the book of Ezekiel. Jeremiah stays as a prophet for those left behind in Jerusalem. At that time, the major theological question of the people was whether or not God was present without the temple and the Ark of the Covenant. In Jeremiah chapter 31, the prophet delivers a new covenant from God, written on the hearts of the people. "Fear not; God is with all people always" (Jeremiah 30:10-11).

As I explored the process of cyanotype printing for this piece of art, the visual metaphor of negative and positive space offered a parallel to this major theological question: Is God gone?

First, I painted a photosensitive solution on the paper in a dark room, then it dried in the dark as well. Once dry, I placed leaves, buds, blossoms, and branches on the paper and took it outside. These natural forms created a negative image as the paper was exposed to the sun. Just as Jeremiah will eventually offer the new covenant when the people fear that the absence of the tangible means the absence of the divine, so it is that in this artwork the absent spaces become deep and dark with color. The present spaces, where items were placed, become void of color, creating a negative image.

On top of the cyanotype, I overlaid a paper lace image of leaves, branches, buds, and blossoms weaving around the hand of God reaching out to touch the lips of Jeremiah. There are boxes too, portraying the building up after the tearing down. Do not fear. Like Jeremiah, we are but children ill-equipped for the call, but God reaches out and calls us anyway. So let us prepare ourselves for the planting and the building of God's justice. The temple is gone. Hard work is ahead.

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.



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