

AN ADVENT DEVOTIONAL



What do you fear?

INSISTING ON HOPE THIS ADVENT

Art, Poetry, &
Reflections
for Advent

 *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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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 Fourth Sunday of Advent | What do you fear?

WHEN YOU'RE AFRAID,
GIVE ME YOUR HAND

Tethered

When we were children, we fell asleep
with walkie talkies tucked under our pillows.
All that separated us was a bathroom,
a hallway, a few feet of empty space,
but as children, even small distances can feel like miles.

So after the parents whispered prayers over our skinned knees
and spelling tests, after they kissed our sweaty foreheads
and tucked us into bed,
we'd pull the walkie talkies out from under our pillows.
We'd roll the dial on the top of the transceiver.
We'd sputter that invisible tether to life.

And with a few crackles in the quiet of the night,
you'd whisper my name.
I'd press down the button.
I'd promise I was close.

As an adult, I don't know what ever happened
to those blue-grey walkie talkies.
But I know,
that even today,
if the monsters in the closet feel too real,
and you whisper my name,
I promise I'll be close.

Poem by
Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed

The Fourth Sunday of Advent | What do you fear?
WHEN YOU'RE AFRAID,
GIVE ME YOUR HAND



Read Matthew 1:18-25; Isaiah 41:5-10
Reflection | Rev. Dr. Boyung Lee

Fear flows quietly beneath Matthew's nativity story, though it is never far from view.

It surfaces in Joseph's impulse to "dismiss Mary quietly" (Matthew 1:19), in the angel's first words, "Do not be afraid" (Matthew 1:20), and in the precarious world into which Jesus is born—an unwed mother, a fragile family, and an empire that meets any threat with surveillance, violence, and control.

Joseph's fear is easy to overlook, perhaps because the narrative highlights his dream, obedience, and place in Jesus' lineage.

But his fear is not abstract—it is rooted in a web of social and political risk.

To take Mary in would expose him to public disgrace and religious judgment. In a world where women could be stoned for suspected adultery (Deut. 22:23–24), Mary's pregnancy was more than scandalous—it was dangerous.

And Joseph's response becomes about more than personal integrity; it becomes an act of courageous solidarity.

Joseph could have stepped back. But instead, he steps in.

He does not fix everything.
He does not erase the risk.
But he chooses to share it.

He says, in effect:

"You don't have to go through this alone. Give me your hand."

This is not the language of saviorism but of accompaniment.

It's what we might call a theology of proximity—where faithfulness means drawing near to the vulnerable and aligning ourselves with those at risk, even when we are afraid ourselves.

As the angel reminds Joseph: "Do not be afraid. . . for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 1:20).

God is already at work. Joseph is invited to join in—not as a hero, but as a partner.

In a world defined by empire, masculinity, and honor-shame boundaries, Joseph's posture is striking.

The Gospel opens with a quiet act of resistance: Joseph lays aside patriarchal expectation and legalistic judgment, choosing instead to protect Mary and the unborn child.

In doing so, he becomes a quiet but vital part of God's liberating plan.

But this is not only personal—it's profoundly political.

Herod, Rome's puppet king, is watching.
Any child born and called "King of
the Jews" challenges the status quo.

Herod's response—deception,
surveillance, and eventually violence
(Matthew 2:16)—
follows a familiar imperial pattern.

Yet God responds not with might,
but through dreams, courage, and
embodied resistance.

Joseph becomes not only a guardian
of Mary's dignity,
but a protector of Jesus' life.

We might imagine a quiet moment
between Mary and Joseph.

She has already said yes to God.
But that yes didn't make her fearless.
She still needs a companion.
She still needs someone to walk
beside her.

And Joseph, moved by divine whisper,
reaches through his own fear to offer
his presence.

This story is not just about them.
It is also about us.

There are people in our communities
today who, like Mary,
carry something sacred and heavy—
something that puts them at risk.

Perhaps it's their identity, their truth,
their calling, or their hope.

And there are others, like Joseph,
who hold more security, more safety,
more voice.

Advent invites us not simply to
"be not afraid,"
but to act with love in the midst of fear.

Not to fix everything,
but to show up with courage.
To reach out and say:

"Give me your hand."

This kind of love—grounded in risk,
humility, and faith—
is what Isaiah evokes:

"Each one helps the other, saying to
one another, 'Take courage!'... Do not
fear, for I am with you" (Isaiah 41:6,10).

God's work in the world unfolds not
through lone heroes,
but through the joined hands of
those who choose:
relationship over self-protection,
accompaniment over certainty,
and presence over perfection.

Mary's "yes" mattered.
So did Joseph's.
So does ours.

As we move into the final days of
Advent, we ask:

Who among us is carrying
something sacred and heavy,
quietly in danger?
What fear might we be called to
move through—not for our sake,
but for the sake of others?
How might our love—fragile,
imperfect, but real—become the
ground where God's promise
takes root?

This week, we're not asked to fix
the world.

We're asked to take each other's hands
and walk forward into it—together.



In Too Deep | Nic Faison
Acrylic and marker on canvas

The Fourth Sunday of Advent | What do you fear?
WHEN YOU'RE AFRAID, GIVE ME YOUR HAND

Read Matthew 1:18-25
Reflection | Nic Faison

My inaugural contribution to *A Sanctified Art* in 2023 focused on the relationship between Mary and Elizabeth.⁷ After having a challenging pregnancy, I used my art to explore the divine connections of people who carry pregnancies. But even after reading these pregnancy stories time and again, I have struggled to sit with Joseph and how he processes all of this change. Somehow life is always in alignment with the text, and now, as I process a divorce, I think of what it would feel like for someone else to try to fit into my established family system.

This made me think of a Joseph who can't sleep well at night, as his mind is uneasy with the words of Gabriel in his ear. I wanted Joseph to have an uncomfortable sleep form with a clenched fist that shows us he is tense even while he dreams. His foot is raised up in a way that looks almost as if he could pop up at any moment. His hair, while luxurious, has flowy movement to it, leaning into the uneasiness. I don't think Joseph's role needs to be a cornerstone for the birth story; however, as my own life changes, I can appreciate the importance of his devotion and obedience to God.

In the artwork, the angel Gabriel is talking to Joseph as he sleeps, with silver locs reminiscent of God from the children's book I illustrated, *God's Holy Darkness*.⁸ This is a nod to my own work, which honors holiness as brown, coarse textured, and wise.

The dreamy pregnant body we see in the top left is a nod to Beyonce's 2017 Grammys performance costume for the song, "Love Drought."⁹ At that time Beyonce was pregnant with her twins, Sir and Rumi, and gave one of the most outstanding performances someone so far along could provide. How appropriate for a woman of faith carrying twins—performing a song from an album about betrayal, heartbreak, and reconciliation—to perform at this last supper-like table in such an outfit, knowing her marriage and pregnancy could have killed her. In my painting, the pregnant belly is celebrated with rays beaming from it followed by soft clouds, reminding us this is a dream. The color choices are bright, detailed, and whimsical to keep us in the fantasy. There is vibrancy here because, while Joseph is uncomfortable, this is still something to be celebrated.

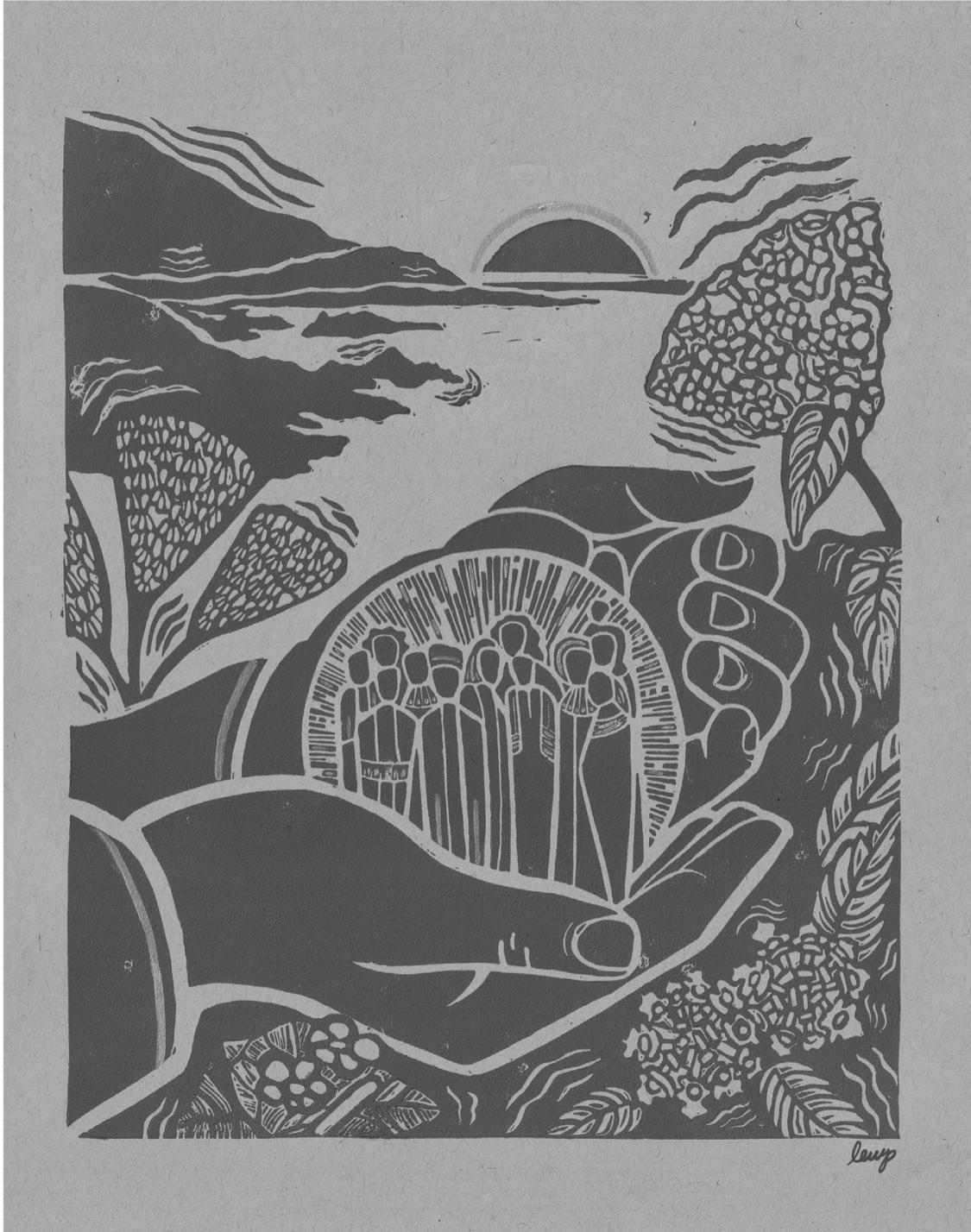
Prayer

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.

⁷ sanctifiedart.org/image-licensing-library-advent/two-mothers

⁸ *God's Holy Darkness*. Written by Sharei Green and Beckah Selnick. Illustrated by Nikki Faison. (Beaming Books, 2022).

⁹ Beyonce. "Love Drought." Track 7 on *Lemonade*. Parkwood Entertainment and Columbia Records, 2016.



I Am With You | Lauren Wright Pittman
Hand-carved block printed with oil-based ink on paper

The Fourth Sunday of Advent | What do you fear?
WHEN YOU'RE AFRAID, GIVE ME YOUR HAND

Read Isaiah 41:5-10

Reflection | Lauren Wright Pittman

Here we find the Israelites far from home, living in Babylonian exile. Fear and uncertainty hang heavy with the looming threat of Persian invasion.

“The coastlands have seen and are afraid, the ends of the earth tremble” (Isaiah 45:5). As some scramble to find courage in idols, God calls those exiled from Judah to be heartened by their rootedness in God’s story.

The image that formed in my mind was a community nestled in God’s hands amid the Mediterranean coastlands—the same lands conquered by the Babylonians, and to which the exiles longed to return.

While I was creating this image, the U.S. President shared an AI-generated video of his “vision” for Gaza, those same coastlands referenced in Isaiah. I was shaken by the contrast between his imagined future and the reality of U.S.-funded devastation. The video transformed rubble and the bone-chilling cries of mothers into panning vistas of high-rise beachfront resorts and casinos, rebranding Gaza as the “Riviera of the Middle East.”¹⁰

This bombastic vision mocks a people clinging to threads of existence. Watching the powerful revel in the demise of the vulnerable is horrifying—but fitting. In Isaiah, God’s people are exiled under the thumb of a world power. Fearful artisans solder golden idols, hoping for security. But God is not found in the hands of the powerful or the shine of idols. God is present amid the rubble, comforting the forsaken and reminding them of their place in God’s story. No matter which empire holds sway, God sides with the subjugated and disenfranchised. Despite the fear that causes the very earth to tremble, God accompanies the downtrodden, upholding them with a steady hand.

From my study of this passage and shock at the video, a counter-vision of hope emerged. Coastal Mediterranean plants—bougainvillea for peace, lantana for liveliness, and red valerian for strength—anchor the shifting sand. God’s hands cradle the community like a fragile flame as their light resiliently radiates. The twelve figures in simplified Palestinian garb represent the exiled Judeans in Isaiah, the Palestinians in modern day Gaza, and all crushed by empire—each cherished by a faithful God. The hands in the image *could* also be ours.

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.

¹⁰ Some of the imagery included: a child holding a golden balloon in the shape of the U.S. President’s head, crowds standing beneath a golden statue of said President, billionaire Elon Musk basking as money rained from the sky, and the U.S. President lounging poolside with the Israeli Prime Minister. While this imagery flashes, a song plays with the lyrics, “No need to fear, Trump Gaza is finally here.”

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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