

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?



Christmas Eve | What do you fear?
GOOD NEWS IS LOUDER THAN FEAR

Honeysuckle

There is an abandoned house on my block.
Maybe someone owns it and is just waiting to fix it up,
or maybe it belongs to a family that simply cannot let it go.
Either way, the yard is an overgrown tangle of weeds—
crabgrass and yellow nutsedge, horsetail and clover—
unforgiving and entrenched.
Over the summer, a honeysuckle bush crept
from that forgotten house over the fence and through the yard.
It spilled out in broad patches on the sidewalk. As a result,
you could not pass that mess of a house without the taste of honey
in your mouth.
You could not pass that mess of a house without being engulfed in
the sweet scent of something good.
It was almost as if the earth was saying, sure,
things are chaotic here,
but pause for a moment. Pull a flower bud off in your fingers.
Break the stem.
Slurp the tiny bead of honey at the base. Remember that even
when bad news is unforgiving and entrenched, good news grows
out of its cage, across the sidewalk, just to get to you.

Poem by
Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed

Christmas Eve | What do you fear?
GOOD NEWS IS LOUDER THAN FEAR



Read Luke 2:1-20

Reflection | Rev. Dr. Boyung Lee

It's easy to believe that fear is louder than good news.

Just turn on the TV, scroll your feed, glance at the headlines—fear dominates.

It spreads quickly, echoes loudly, and lingers long.

In a media world driven by algorithms and attention, fear thrives because it sells.

It taps into our instincts. Studies show that it takes five positive messages to outweigh one negative one.

Fear is sticky—it clings.

But on this night—this holy, trembling night—Luke dares to tell us otherwise.

Into a world defined by empire, surveillance, and oppression, a birth breaks in.

Not in a palace, not under protection, but in the shadows of census and displacement.

Jesus is born in the time of Caesar Augustus, under an imperial system that controls bodies through taxation and travel.

Luke isn't writing a neutral tale—he's offering a counter-narrative to Roman propaganda.

Rome claimed peace through domination. Luke proclaims peace through incarnation.

And into this fragile moment, the heavens split open.

A messenger appears not to the powerful but to shepherds—people overlooked, underpaid, often mistrusted.

The text tells us they were terrified (*phobeō*). And rightly so.

The Greek word for “host” (*stratia*) used to describe the angelic multitude is military language.

To an occupied people, an army doesn't usually mean peace.

So when the angel says, “Do not be afraid,” and then declares “good news of great joy for all people” (Luke 2:10),

it is not a sentimental moment—it is a revolutionary one.

This “good news” (*euangelion*) echoes Roman proclamations of conquest and dominion. But Luke reclaims the word:

Here, good news is not Caesar's victory, but God's vulnerability—made flesh in a newborn wrapped in bands of cloth and laid in a feeding trough.

Good news is not always louder than fear. But it is stronger.

That's the tension we live in.

Like Mary—young, uncertain, and asked to carry more than she could have imagined.

Like Joseph—choosing to show up, even when it costs him reputation and comfort.

Like the shepherds—shaken awake in the night by glory and confusion.

The fear was real.
The risk was real.

The circumstances of Jesus' birth—poverty, displacement, estrangement—are not erased by the angel's song.

And yet,
the good news comes anyway.

It comes with sound—loud and full of light.

It comes with bodies—angels taking up space in the sky, shepherds running through streets proclaiming glory, Mary holding pain and promise in her arms.

It comes through fear,
not after it.

Luke's story insists that the good news of God has weight and presence. But it needs to be amplified. Proclaimed.

In a world where fear is curated and fed to us,
proclaiming good news is a countercultural act.

In a world that tells marginalized communities to be quiet,
that punishes joy and rage alike,
joy becomes resistance.

The church is called to be like the angels:
not polite, not palatable, but public.
Not cautious, but courageous.

“Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace. . .”—
this is not a whisper.
It's a chorus.

And yet,
the good news ripples outward in quieter ways, too.

The shepherds return glorifying and praising God—
they become the first evangelists.

They tell anyone who will listen.
And the good news spreads—
not through Caesar's decrees,
but through trembling, joyful witnesses.

Tonight, we are invited to do the same.

Not because our fear is gone—
but because good news still breaks in.

Even when it's quiet.
Even when it's messy.
Even when it feels like the darkness
will never end.

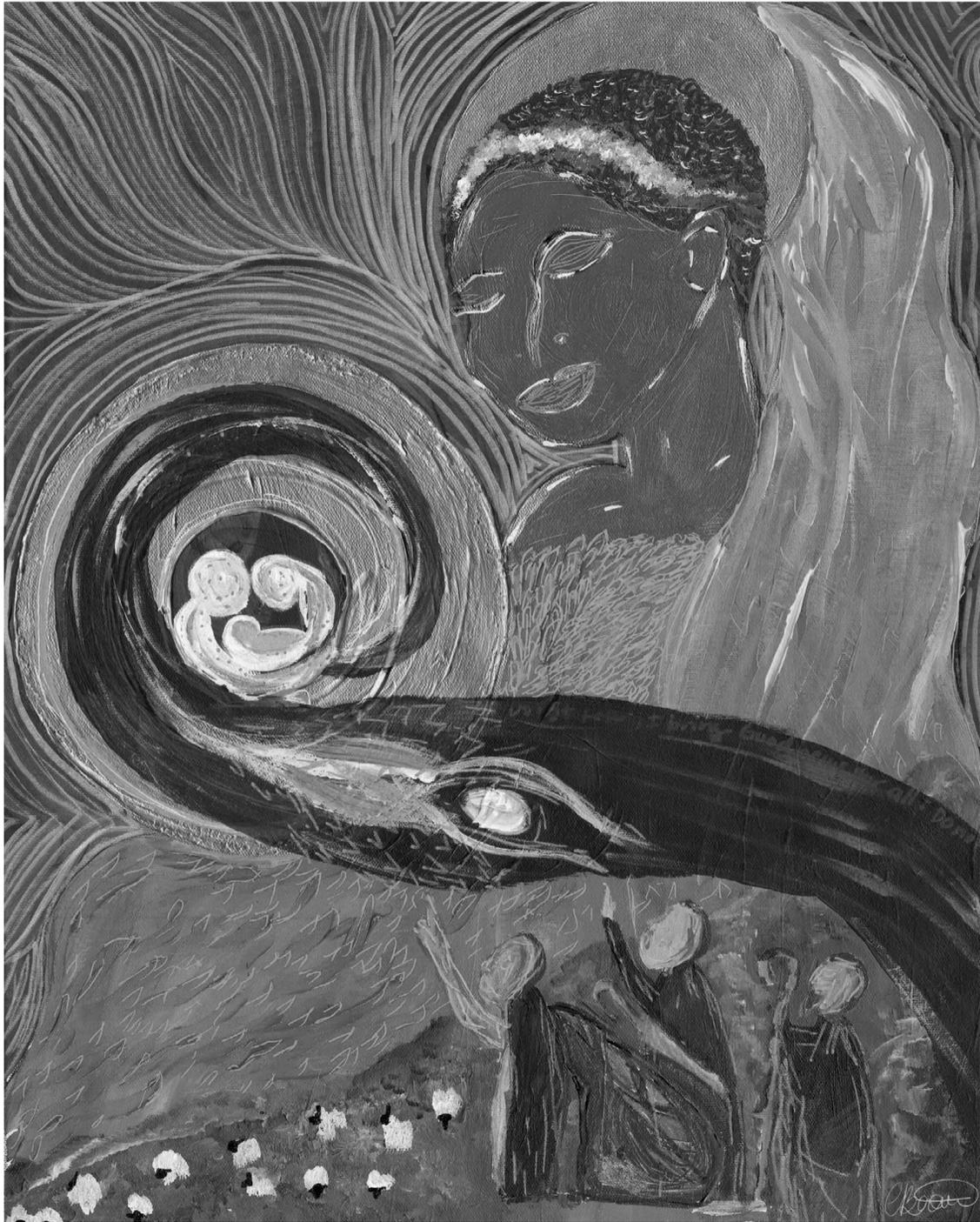
This is the shape of God's dream:
news born in vulnerability,
joy proclaimed by the overlooked,
power shown not through force,
but through flesh.

So let us proclaim the good news loudly.
Let us make space for joy that shakes
the walls.

Let us resist fear's domination
by bearing witness to light, to peace,
to Christ among us.

Because tonight, we remember:

Fear may be loud, but love is
louder.
Violence may be strong, but
hope is stronger.
And the good news—God is
here—will not be silenced.



Good, New | Carmelle Beaugelin Caldwell
Acrylic on canvas

Christmas Eve | *What do you fear?*
GOOD NEWS IS LOUDER THAN FEAR

Read **Luke 2:1-20**

Reflection | **Carmelle Beaugelin Caldwell**

We often link fear and anxiety to bad news. But what about the moments when the news is good—almost too good to believe? The dream job offer arrives. The long-hoped-for pregnancy test is finally positive. The illness goes into sudden remission.

Euphoria, the fear of good news, often stems from past losses, fear of change, or the pressure of new expectations. Joy and relief may come first, but they're often followed by a quiet dread. *What now? What could this mean?*

In Luke's Nativity story, even angelic news stirs overwhelm. The shepherds tremble. Mary ponders. As she wraps her newborn in cloth, what thoughts rise in her heart?

The word "new" is nestled in "good news"—a reminder that even the best gifts lie beyond our control. In the birth of Jesus, we witness the mystery of it all: the terrifying, the unexpected, the good, and the new that hope often brings.

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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