

AN ADVENT DEVOTIONAL



What do you fear?

INSISTING ON HOPE THIS ADVENT

Art, Poetry, &
Reflections
for Advent

 *Sanctified Art*
sanctifiedart.org



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



© 2025 | A Sanctified Art LLC | All Rights Reserved.
May be reproduced for congregational and local use only,
provided each copy carries this notice.
May not be reproduced for profit or monetary gain.

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

Rev. Lisle Gwynn Garrity

Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed

Hannah Garrity

Rev. Lauren Wright Pittman

Rev. Anna Strickland



About the SA 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

Rev. Dr. Boyung Lee

Boyung (*she/her*), a native of Korea, serves as Professor of Practical Theology at Iliff School of Theology in Denver, Colorado. From 2017 to 2022, she held the roles of Senior Vice President of Academic Affairs and Dean of the Faculty at Iliff.

GUEST ARTISTS



Rev. T. Denise Anderson

Denise (*she/her*) is a minister in the Presbyterian Church (USA) and the Director for Compassion, Peace, and Justice Ministries at the Presbyterian Mission Agency. A graduate of Howard University School of Divinity, she is the former Co-Moderator of the 222nd General Assembly (2016) of the Presbyterian Church (USA).

@tdandersonart



Carmelle Beaugelin Caldwell

Carmelle (*she/her*) is a Haitian-American multi-disciplinary artist whose visual lexicon fuses gestural abstraction and theology to explore themes of diaspora, faith, and cultural memory. Borrowing her use of color from the vibrancy of Haitian artistic traditions, Carmelle's art pulses with movement and mysticism.

@beaufoliostudio



Rev. Nicolette Faison

Rev. Nicolette “Nic” (*she/her*) is a pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America serving as the Illinois Outreach Director for Faith in Place. She is passionate about queer Black liberation, cultivating diverse leadership in faith spaces, and the art of creation.

Table of contents

Prompts for Reflection _____ 1



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

Poem "In the Time of Herod" by Sarah Speed	3
Hymn "In the Time of Herod" by Anna Strickland	4
Commentary Luke 1:5-13 & Lamentations 3:55-57 by Boyung Lee	5
Art & Reflection Luke 1:5-13 by Hannah Garrity	7
Art & Reflection Lamentations 3:55-57 by Carmelle Beaugelin Caldwell	9



The Second Sunday of Advent | What do you fear?
**WHEN WE'RE RUNNING OUT OF HOPE,
GOD IS AT WORK**

Poem "God in the Kitchen" by Sarah Speed	11
Hymn "Looking Out a Prison Window" by Anna Strickland	12
Commentary Matthew 11:1-11 & Isaiah 43:19-21 by Boyung Lee	13
Art & Reflection Matthew 11:1-11 by Lauren Wright Pittman	15
Art & Reflection Isaiah 43:19-21 by T. Denise Anderson	17



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

Poem "The First Step" by Sarah Speed	19
Hymn "O Come, Take Heart" by Anna Strickland	20
Commentary Luke 1:26-39 & Jeremiah 1:4-10 by Boyung Lee	21
Art & Reflection Luke 1:26-39 by Lisle Gwynn Garrity	23
Art & Reflection Jeremiah 1:4-10 by Hannah Garrity	25



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

Poem "Tethered" by Sarah Speed	27
Hymn "We're Not Alone" by Anna Strickland	28
Commentary Matthew 1:18-25 & Isaiah 41:5-10 by Boyung Lee	29
Art & Reflection Matthew 1:18-25 by Nic Faison	31
Art & Reflection Isaiah 41:5-10 by Lauren Wright Pittman	33

INSISTING ON HOPE THIS ADVENT



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

Poem "Honeysuckle" by Sarah Speed	35
Hymn "Shout!" by Anna Strickland	36
Commentary Luke 2:1-20 by Boyung Lee	37
Art & Reflection Luke 2:1-20 by Carmelle Beaugelin Caldwell	39



Christmastide | What do you fear? LET FEAR FUEL A FIRE FOR JUSTICE

Poem "Until We Reach the Sun" by Sarah Speed	41
Hymn "Let the Fires of Justice Grow" by Anna Strickland	42
Commentary Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23 by Boyung Lee	43
Art & Reflection Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23 by T. Denise Anderson	45



Epiphany Sunday | What do you fear? FEAR DOESN'T STOP US

Poem "Choices to Make" by Sarah Speed	47
Hymn "We've Seen God's Face" by Anna Strickland	48
Commentary Matthew 2:1-12, 16-18 by Boyung Lee	49
Art & Reflection Matthew 2:1-12, 16-18 by Nic Faison	51



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?



Christmastide | What do you fear?
LET FEAR FUEL A FIRE FOR JUSTICE

Until We Reach the Sun

Buffaloes are the only animals that run into a storm.

They can smell the snow coming. They can feel the temperature change—
deep in their bones. So they gather together, a pack on the plains.
And with their large lumbering bodies, they run.

They run through snow and ice, wind and rain. They do not stop
until they reach the sun.

When you are afraid, because this world is cruel and harsh,
or because humans are deported and shot without reason,
or because we cannot remember how to talk to each other civilly,
I will be your pack. I will stay by your side. I will run with you
until we reach the sun.

Poem by
Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed

Christmastide | What do you fear? LET FEAR FUEL A FIRE FOR JUSTICE



Read Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23
Reflection | Rev. Dr. Boyung Lee

Christmas is not a conclusion—
it is a beginning.

The manger glows with peace and
promise,
but the world around it remains
dangerous.

In Matthew's Gospel,
the good news of Jesus' birth is
immediately met with a violent
response from the empire.

Herod, threatened by the news of a
new king,
responds with fear turned lethal.

Once again, fear drives people into flight.

Joseph, warned in a dream,
takes Mary and Jesus and flees to Egypt.

This is no small journey—
it is a border-crossing,
a dislocation,
a story of becoming refugees in a
foreign land.

Matthew's account intentionally
echoes the story of Moses:

a tyrant ordering babies to be killed,
a child of promise narrowly
escaping death, and
God's presence moving through
exile toward liberation.

What do we do with fear in this story?

We often imagine fear as something
to overcome or silence.
But here, fear becomes a catalyst for
movement.

The Holy Family's flight to Egypt is
born of fear—
but it is also born of love,
of protection,
of resistance to unjust power.

Fear becomes fuel:
adrenaline that turns potential
energy into action.
It doesn't freeze us;
it propels us.

Matthew's Gospel doesn't ask us to
pretend that Herod is gone.

By the time the family returns,
Herod's son Archelaus is on the throne,
and Joseph, again warned in a dream,
reroutes the journey to Galilee.

The danger remains.
And still—God is present, guiding,
whispering, showing another way.

Fear can be holy
when it draws us to protect others.

It reveals what we love,
what we value,
what we are willing to risk.

The gospel does not spiritualize fear.
It names political evil for what it is.

Herod's fear is the fear of losing power—
fear turned into destruction.

But Joseph's fear is for the safety of
a child.
It is fear that leads to compassion,
rooted in love.

Matthew's Gospel constructs a community not by bloodline, but by shared commitment to God's justice, by family formed through faith and solidarity.

The Holy Family becomes a model for us— not because they lived without fear, but because they allowed fear to move them toward justice, safety, and protection.

So how might our fear do the same?

There are people in our communities living in fear every day:

immigrants and asylum seekers fearing deportation, trans and queer youth fearing rejection or violence, Black and Brown parents fearing for their children's safety, people living in war zones or under constant threat of violence, fearing that the conflict will never cease.

Their fear is not born of irrationality, but of injustice.

And if we allow ourselves to listen—truly listen, we may find that our fear is not something to push away, but something to transform.

Fear is energy. And when grounded in love, it can lead to fierce compassion, courageous solidarity, and the fire of justice.

In Luc Olivier Merson's painting, *Rest on the Flight into Egypt*,¹¹ Mary rests in the arms of a sphinx—an unlikely source of safety.

The image disturbs and unsettles traditional sensibilities, but it beautifully captures the truth that hospitality often comes from unexpected places.

Those who flee from violence often find shelter in the arms of strangers.

What stories of unexpected kindness do we hold?

What new alliances, what new communities of care, might our own fear lead us to build?

God does not leave the Holy Family alone in their fear. And God does not leave us alone either.

The Christmas story does not promise us a world without Herods, but it does promise us Emmanuel—God with us—even when we're running.

The presence of God does not remove the threat, but transforms how we respond to it.

So this Christmas season, let us ask not only:

“What do I fear?”

But also:

“Whose fear am I called to notice?”

And may our fear, like Joseph's, become movement. Become action. Become protection. Become fire.

11 Luc Olivier Merson, *Rest on the Flight into Egypt*, 1879, oil on canvas, 71.8 x 128.3 cm, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, collections.mfa.org/objects/31734.



Stay With Me | T. Denise Anderson
Acrylic on canvas board

Christmastide | What do you fear?
LET FEAR FUEL A FIRE FOR JUSTICE

Read Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23

Reflection | T. Denise Anderson

I used to think my mother was cheap. When we'd go on road trips, she'd spend the night before preparing food for the trip. I thought it was because she didn't want to spend money on fast food. She didn't. But her reasons had nothing to do with a drive-thru.

My mother was a Black child in the U.S. in the 1950s and 60s. When they went on road trips, they had to leave in the dead of night with everything they'd need for the trip. For Black folks, there was no casual stopping along the way. If you stopped at the "wrong" place, you might not make it home. Her elders taught her what they had to learn themselves, often the hard way. My mom grew up in the Steel Belt, but the family had moved there after leaving the Jim Crow South during the Great Migration for greener (and ostensibly safer) pastures. Her preparations were vestiges of a circumspect upbringing designed to keep her safe.

I was well into adulthood when I realized my family had been refugees in their own country.

The story of the Holy Family's flight to Egypt takes new significance as I consider not only the experiences of dear ones around the world, but also my own ancestors. My piece focuses on a parent's desperate grip of their child's hand as they escape a despot's fiery wrath, possibly in the dead of night. The colors subtly recall the Pan-African, Palestinian, and Sudanese flags. I remember those left behind, and the lower part of the composition depicts the anguish of mothers whose children were not spared. Rachel still weeps (Matthew 2:18).

Our fears aren't unfounded. Salvation may have arrived, but the world still isn't safe. How will we remember Rachel's children as we resist and rebuild?

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.



   @sanctifiedart | sanctifiedart.org | contact@sanctifiedart.org