

Advent Daily Devotional

2025



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Cover Art: "Ordinary Glory" by Lauren Wight Pittman | A Sanctified Art LLC | sanctifiedart.org
Artist Reflection can be read on page 20.

Welcome

Welcome to the 2025 Advent devotional booklet. The beautiful season that leads us to Christmas is a time for us to dwell in our awareness and anticipation of God breaking into the world in the fully human person of Jesus. The invitation this season is for you to spend a little time each day reading and or reflecting on texts, images, and prayers. You will notice a cadence to the devotions that begin each week on Sunday with the Gospel and end each week with a hymn. In between are a variety of reflection prompts including art, stories, symbols, and prayers.

Each day offers an opportunity to set aside a period of time to pause. You may light a candle, make a cup of tea, find a favorite place to sit, and after a few deep breaths, read or observe the devotion in the spirit of curiosity and wonder.

We look forward to dwelling with you in spirit and hope as we make a way toward Christmas.

Welcome to Advent.

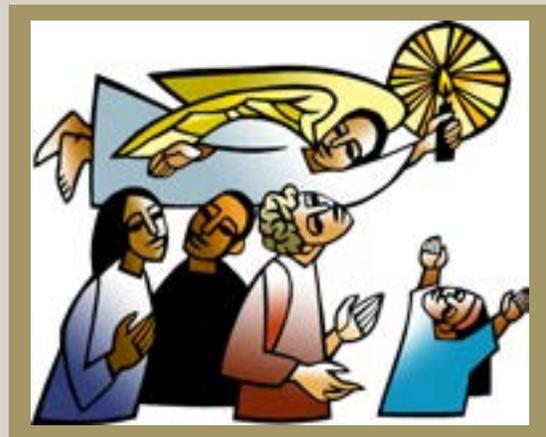
Advent Daily Devotional

Sunday, December 30

Today's Gospel: Matthew 24:36-44

³⁶ "But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³⁷ For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸ For as in the days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, ³⁹ and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so, too, will be the coming of the Son of Man. ⁴⁰ Then two will be in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken, and one will be left. ⁴² Keep awake,

therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. ⁴³ But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁴ Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.



Monday, December 1

Yesterday's Gospel reading was an invitation to consider Jesus' future return. Considered an apocalyptic text, or one that expresses a future reality, yesterday's reading from Matthew calls the disciples to stay alert and awake. As you consider the artwork pictured here, how does it invite you to stay awake and to get ready for the birth of Jesus? You can read the artist's reflection on page 20.



"Prophecy" by Hannah Garrity | A Sanctified Art LLC | sanctifiedart.org

Tuesday, December 2

A Reflection on “The Grinch”

Dr. Seuss’ timeless children’s story, “How the Grinch Stole Christmas,” was written in 1957 and it has become an American Christmas classic. Most of you know the story, but as a reminder, it is the tale of a grouchy character named The Grinch who dislikes Christmas due to a heart that is much too small. Believing that he will cancel Christmas by stealing his neighbors’ decorations and gifts, he is transformed when he hears the residents of the town sweetly singing Christmas morning, even after all their Christmas trimmings had been stolen. In hearing their voices, The Grinch’s heart is transformed and he returns the decorations and gifts and joins the Christmas celebration.

It’s said that Dr. Seuss wrote “The Grinch” because in the mid-1950s he was experiencing his own apathy and ‘grinchiness’ about the Christmas season.

“How the Grinch Stole Christmas” continues to warm hearts, and for many, it is a reminder to remember the true meaning of the Advent and Christmas seasons. As we continue dwelling in Stories of Home, the story of the Grinch’s transformed heart inspires generation after generation to consider all the ways in which we celebrate the season.



Wednesday, December 3

Today, Pastor Peter looks ahead to the Gospel reading for this coming Sunday. Coming from Matthew 3, it is the first of two readings about John the Baptist.

“Jesus Came to Dwell and We Respond in Song”

John the Baptist always shows up on these early weekends in Advent. It is jarring to reflect on John as he looks to Jesus’ baptism before we even get to Christmas and Jesus’ birth. Yet, John arrives to help us prepare for Jesus who comes to dwell with us. We know something about preparation as we make plans to celebrate Christmas in our own ways.

John has quite a message out in the wilderness. If we stay with preparation as one of the themes, there is much to ponder in John’s call to repent. There is a deep sense of mending that is part of the ancient word for repentance. As we prepare for our own Christmas celebrations, what needs to be mended? Where do you need mending? Where do you see the need for mending in the lives of family, friends, and neighbors? Where do you see the need for God to provide divine mending? As we ponder Jesus coming to dwell with us, how is the promise of God’s home with you and your home with God one way to prepare and reflect on God’s mending presence?

After you have had a chance to ponder, you are invited to turn to the Gospel reading for this weekend. When you are ready, offer your prayers and respond in song with two stanzas of the famous Advent hymn, “On Jordan’s Banks the Baptist’s Cry” (page 11).

Thursday, December 4

A Reflection on Advent Wreaths

Wreaths with candles are an ancient tradition often used in December as pagans anticipated the Winter Solstice. Candles were lit in increasing numbers to mark the passing of time as communities waited for the Winter Solstice to pass and for sunlight to return.

In the 1600s, the tradition of the wreath migrated over to what we now know as an Advent Wreath. We light a candle each week to mark the passing of the Sundays that lead to Christmas. Over time, we have added names to each of the candles: joy, hope, peace, and love. The wreaths have become a beautiful Christian symbol of the Advent season.

What memories do you have of an Advent wreath?

Why do you imagine they often include evergreens? Why are they in the shape of a circle?

What other "countdown" symbols and instruments can you think of?

Friday, December 5

A Prayer from the Rev. Meta Carlson

The sacred call "Prepare!" does not ask for lists or logistics. We do not "Keep awake!" only to ensure we are not forgotten at the rapture. Nor is the stillness sedentary.

So do not simply go looking for a candle scent to capture what it means to Ponder, or a gift to prove your love, or a tall tree to announce, "Joy to the World!"

Advent lays bare visions of time bending into already and not yet by the God who tears apart the hustle, the heavens, the temple curtain! with no intention of mending back together our favored boundaries.

This is the thin space where stillness is powerful and God is changing our hearts, so sacred Ponder, Love, and Joy can birth and shelter.

The miracle grows with slow strength in the one place we have all called home, where we do not yet know another way, while our fullness is being prepared, carried, and nourished by the One who says, "Yes."

Amen.



Saturday, December 6

“Wake, Awake for Night Is Flying” ELW 436

Reflect on the hymn from Sunday. You can simply read or speak the text, or you can scan the QR code below to sing along.

- 1 Wake, awake, for night is flying,
the watchmen on the heights are crying;
awake, Jerusalem, at last.
Midnight hears the welcome voices,
and at the thrilling cry rejoices:
“Come forth, you maidens! Night is past.
The bridegroom comes! Awake;
your lamps with gladness take!”
Alleluia!
Rise and prepare the feast to share;
go, meet the bridegroom, who draws near.
- 2 Zion hears the watchmen singing,
and all her heart with joy is springing.
She wakes, she rises from her gloom.
Her dear friend comes down, all glorious,
the strong in grace, in truth victorious:
her star is ris’n; her light is come.
Now come, O Blessed One,
Lord Jesus, God’s own Son.
Sing hosanna!
Oh, hear the call! Come one, come all,
and follow to the banquet hall.
- 3 Gloria! Let heav’n adore you!
Let saints and angels sing before you,
with harp and cymbal’s clearest tone.
Gates of pearl, twelve portals gleaming,
lead us to bliss beyond all dreaming,
with angel choirs around your throne.
No eye has caught the light,
no ear the thund’ring might
of such glory.
There we will go: what joy we’ll know!
There sweet delight will ever flow.



Scan to sing along



Sunday, December 7

Today’s Gospel: Matthew 3:1-12

¹In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, ²“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” ³This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, “The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.’”

⁴Now John wore clothing of camel’s hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region around the Jordan were going out to him, ⁶and they were baptized by him in the River Jordan, confessing their sins.

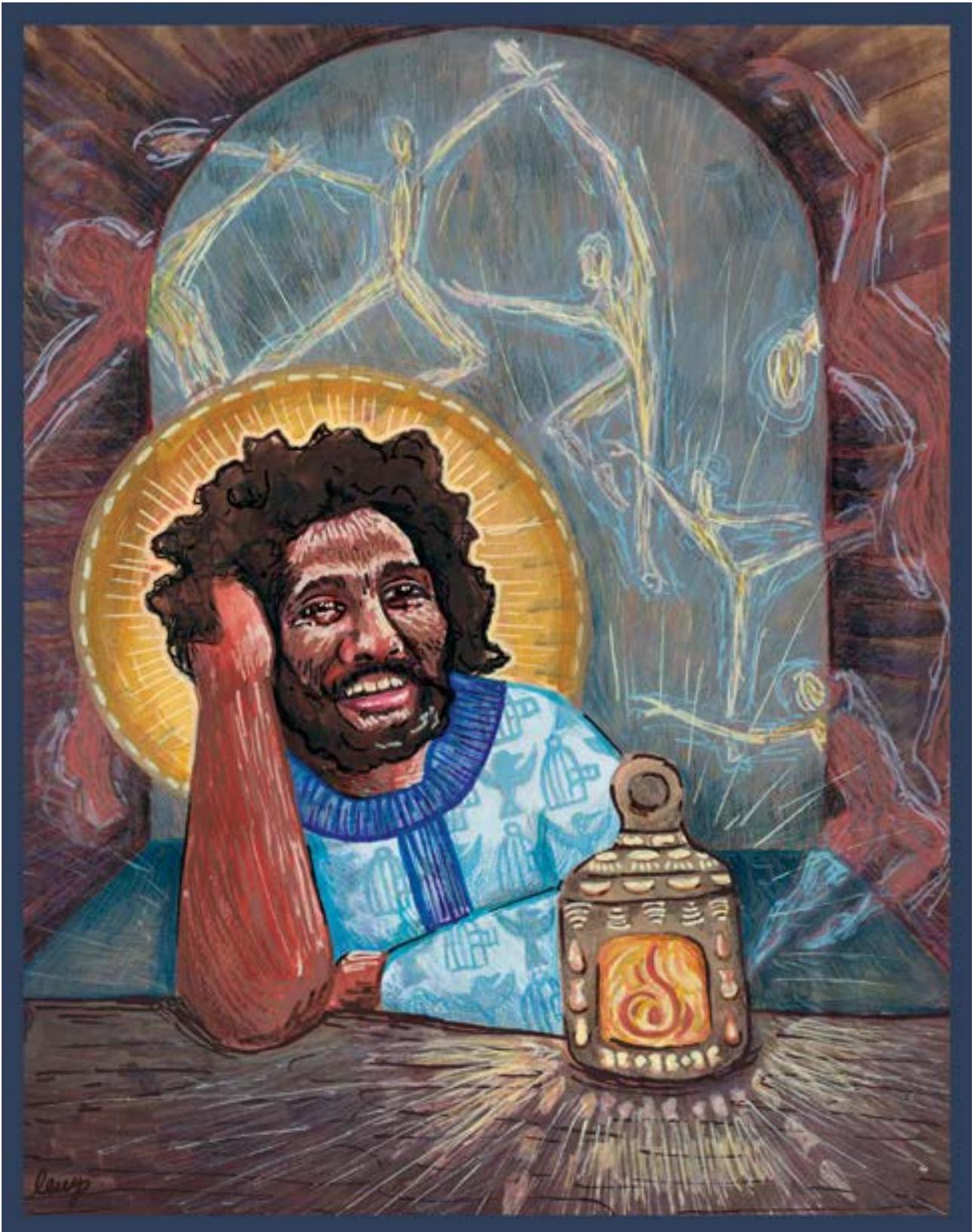
⁷But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for his baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? ⁸Therefore, bear fruit worthy of repentance, ⁹and do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our ancestor,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. ¹⁰Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

¹¹“I baptize you with water for repentance, but the one who is coming after me is more powerful than I, and I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

¹²His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.

Monday, December 8

Yesterday's Gospel introduced John the Baptist. There are few images more vivid than that of John the Baptist. Do you ever wonder why the Gospel writers included so much detail about John? How does his described appearance influence what you think and feel about John's message and ministry? You can read the artist reflection on page 21.



"Hope like a Dancer" by Lauren Wight Pittman | A Sanctified Art LLC | sanctifiedart.org

Tuesday, December 9

A Reflection on “The Polar Express”

The Polar Express was published in 1985 and it was made into a movie in 2004. While a secular book and film, its undertones of ‘believing’ suggest there is more to the story than meets the eye and the ear. The Polar Express is the story of a boy who has stopped believing in Santa Claus and as a result becomes dismissive of and disillusioned with Christmas. Then, on Christmas Eve, he experiences a mystical trip to the North Pole where he meets Santa and experiences the reality of joyful giving, radical hospitality and unconditional love (Sound familiar?).



Just before leaving the North Pole, the boy is chosen by Santa to receive the first gift of Christmas and he is transformed. His disbelief turns to belief and he is ready to return home with his faith intact and a bell from Santa’s sleigh, which he quickly loses because of a hole in his pocket.

When he rises on Christmas morning without his bell, he wonders with skepticism about his experience the night before. But when an unknown package appears beneath the tree from Mr. C, his faith is forever restored.

The Polar Express is a beautiful story of home in which belief and faith are birthed and fostered by family, community, and our need for relationship.

Wednesday, December 10

Today Pastor Brian looks ahead to the Gospel reading for this coming Sunday. Again, we meet John the Baptist. He is in prison now and wondering about Jesus and whether or not he is the one for whom the world had been waiting.

“Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”

Power and powerlessness, greatness and humility. These are ongoing tensions that exist both in our individual lives and the general human condition. They are also significant themes throughout the two testaments in Scripture. The tension of faithful people with freewill and a desire to follow God’s will. A God, all powerful, who will make all things new one day, and, a God who is a suffering servant, offering grace and healing. In Advent, thoughts naturally turn to the birth of baby Jesus; God becoming human, vulnerable, and powerless. And yet, the lectionary readings for these first weeks of Advent feature stories about John the Baptist. John the Baptist is the last of the old covenant prophets to prepare us for this new and final message of grace and salvation. Advent deals not only with Jesus’ first coming as the babe of Bethlehem, but also with his second coming of Christ. Advent prepares us not merely to welcome the baby Jesus, but to accept Jesus’ call for us to take up the cross and follow him. Power made perfect in vulnerability and weakness. John and Jesus risk their own power, prestige, and position. John and Jesus preach the same message: that Jesus is the agent of the coming kingdom of God, where injustice is banished, the oppressed are released, all death conquered, and the faithful are raised to eternal life. Our lives are marked by this call to follow their path of servanthood as best we can.

Thursday, December 11

A Reflection on Bells

Bells have long been associated with the Advent and Christmas seasons. Used to summon and draw people in, bells are rung to capture our attention and to make an announcement or a proclamation. Think about the well-known phrase 'ring in the holidays' or 'ring in the new year.'



We often associate bells with the angels' announcement of Jesus' birth and the proclamation of peace.

What are your early memories of bells? How were they used?

In the space below, draw a picture or write down words that you associate with bells.

Friday, December 12

A Prayer from Paul, deacon of Apulia, 8th Century

Hair of the camel furnished a course raiment
To your blessed members; leather your girdle;
You drink the cold spring, food for you wild honey
Mingled with locusts.

All other prophets, in their hearts divining,
Sang of the light coming to the people;
your finger touched the Lamb of God who takes
Sin from the world.

None has arisen in the mighty spaces
Of round earth's borders holier than John was;
Great was his grace who poured the mystic waters
O'er the Redeemer.

Amen.



Saturday, December 13

“On Jordan’s Bank the Baptist’s Cry” ELW 249

Reflect on the hymn from Sunday. You can simply read or speak the text, or you can scan the QR code below to sing along.

- 1 On Jordan’s bank the Baptist’s cry
announces that the Lord is nigh;
awake and hearken, for he brings
glad tidings of the King of kings!
- 2 Then cleansed be ev’ry life from sin;
make straight the way for God within,
and let us all our hearts prepare
for Christ to come and enter there.
- 3 We hail you as our Savior, Lord,
our refuge and our great reward;
without your grace we waste away
like flow’rs that wither and decay.
- 4 Stretch forth your hand, our health restore,
and make us rise to fall no more;
oh, let your face upon us shine
and fill the world with love divine.
- 5 All praise to you, eternal Son,
whose advent has our freedom won,
whom with the Father we adore,
and Holy Spirit, evermore.



Scan to sing along



Sunday, December 14

Today’s Gospel: Matthew 11:2-11

² When John heard in prison what the Messiah[a] was doing, he sent word by his disciples ³ and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?” ⁴ Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: ⁵ the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, those with a skin disease are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. ⁶ And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.”

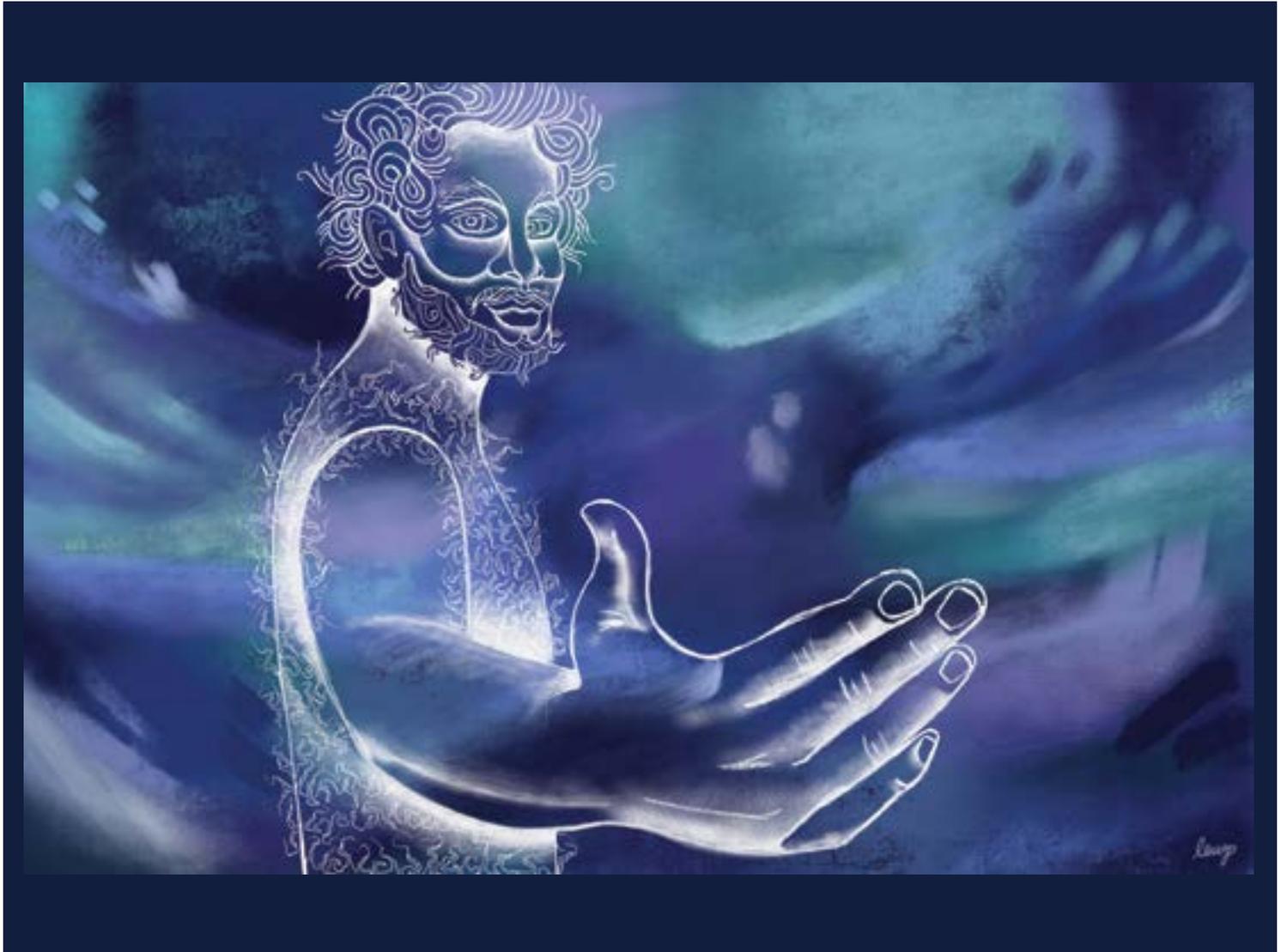
⁷ As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? ⁸ What, then, did you go out to see? Someone[c] dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. ⁹ What, then, did you go out to see? A prophet?[d] Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ¹⁰ This is the one about whom it is written,

‘See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way before you.’

¹¹ “Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist, yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

Monday, December 15

Yesterday's Gospel opened us to another image of John the Baptist. This time, John is in prison and is asking whether or not Jesus is the one for whom the world had been waiting. The echos in the voices of Jesus and John are powerful statements about the coming Kingdom of God. In this artwork by Lauren Wright Pittman, what do you see and how does it invite you into the new world Jesus brings? You can read the artist's reflection on page 21.



"One with Mystery" by Lauren Wight Pittman | A Sanctified Art LLC | sanctifiedart.org

Tuesday, December 16

A Reflection on “A Christmas Carol”

Charles Dickens’ “A Christmas Carol” is one of the most beloved stories in the canon of Advent and Christmas literature. Published in 1843, it is the story of Ebenezer Scrooge whose ‘bah humbug’ attitude toward Christmas is transformed by three ghosts who appear to dear Ebenezer in a dream, to help him remember and embrace the love and joy of Christmas.

Next to the telling of Jesus’ birth, “A Christmas Carol” is thought by many to be the most often retold story of Christmas. It was first filmed in 1901, and since then, hundreds of artists have captured this timeless story in animation, film, and live stage performances.

A remarkable story of home, “A Christmas Carol” reminds listeners of the transforming possibility and reality of the Advent and Christmas seasons.



Wednesday, December 17

Today Pastor Melissa looks ahead to the Gospel reading for this coming Sunday. Note that in Matthew’s Gospel, the angel of the Lord appears to Joseph in a dream. The angel tells Joseph that Mary is expecting a child who will fulfill the prophesy of Isaiah.

The Gospel of Matthew is very direct about how the birth of Jesus took place. We get all the genealogy before this bit of scripture, and the Wise Men come directly after this. We get to hear in Matthew from the perspective of Joseph. Poor Joseph finds out that his fiancée is pregnant and he has to figure out what to do next, how to respond. He easily could have made an example of Mary. The whole town wouldn’t believe the story about her being pregnant from the Holy Spirit. It was kind of Joseph to plan to keep these things quiet. He could tell the story he needed to and walk away from this mess. It was difficult and sad, and it was a plan.

The angel of the Lord sets Joseph right. The angel lets Joseph in on what Mary already knows. This isn’t your average baby and their lives would never be the same. The angel even gives Joseph the name for the baby. Joseph wakes up and does it. No questions, no doubts, no back and forth. It is done. Joseph sounds like a man with a plan. He is able to figure out next steps, but also able to receive instructions and follow through. When the holy family gets back to Nazareth, all of these skills will be helpful with a newborn in the house.

Thursday, December 18

Reflecting on Nativities

No matter your age, there is something about a Nativity set that sets our hearts and minds on Christmas. The wonder of a Nativity is its ability to teach through touch. When we think about the Advent and Christmas stories, we think about the stories we hear and the stories we've seen because of movies, plays, and pageants. A Nativity allows you to experience the story in 3D and for those who learn best by using their hands, a Nativity set brings the story of Jesus' birth to life in ways that reading, singing, and visualizing cannot.

Especially for children, a Nativity is an essential symbol of Advent and Christmas because it allows the children to touch and interact with the characters. Children who have never seen a barn experience the genuine reality of a stable, a manger and the cast of characters. The sheep and shepherds, the cows and camels, and dear Mary and her new baby are in children's hands. The characters can be touched, moved, and embraced.

What are your earliest memories of a Nativity?

Could you touch it or was it not to be touched?

Friday, December 19

A Prayer from Susan Palo Cherwien, *Mary*

In the time of waiting
In the time of hoping
one of the bright and swift messengers of God
went to a village called Nazareth
greeted and startled
a young woman named Mary with a message of a
new dawning.

Swift over crag
Scambling over valley floor
Bright with expectation
Mary, Miriam,
went to a village in the hill country
greeted and startled her kinswoman named
Elizabeth
whose child within her danced with knowing.

And thus assured
And thus filled
Mary sang
"My soul magnifies the LORD."
Mary sang
"My spirit rejoices."
Thus Mary sang forth
the sun
for a time of dawning.

Amen.



Saturday, December 20

"All Earth Is Hopeful"

ELW 266

"Toda la tierra"

Reflect on the hymn from Sunday. You can simply read or speak the text, or you can scan the QR code below to sing along.

- 1 All earth is hopeful, the Savior comes at last!
Furrows lie open for God's creative task:
this, the labor of people who struggle to see
how God's truth and justice set ev'rybody free.
- 2 People of Israel, you heard the prophet tell:
"A virgin mother will bear Emmanuel";
she conceived him, "God with us,"
our brother, whose birth
restores hope and courage to children of
this earth.
- 3 Mountains and valleys will have to be
prepared;
new highways opened, new protocols
declared.
Almost here! God is nearing, in beauty and
grace!
All clear ev'ry gateway, in haste, come out
in haste!
- 4 We first saw Jesus a baby in a crib.
This same Lord Jesus today has come to live
in our world; he is present, in neighbors we
see
our Jesus is with us, and ever sets us free.



Scan to sing along



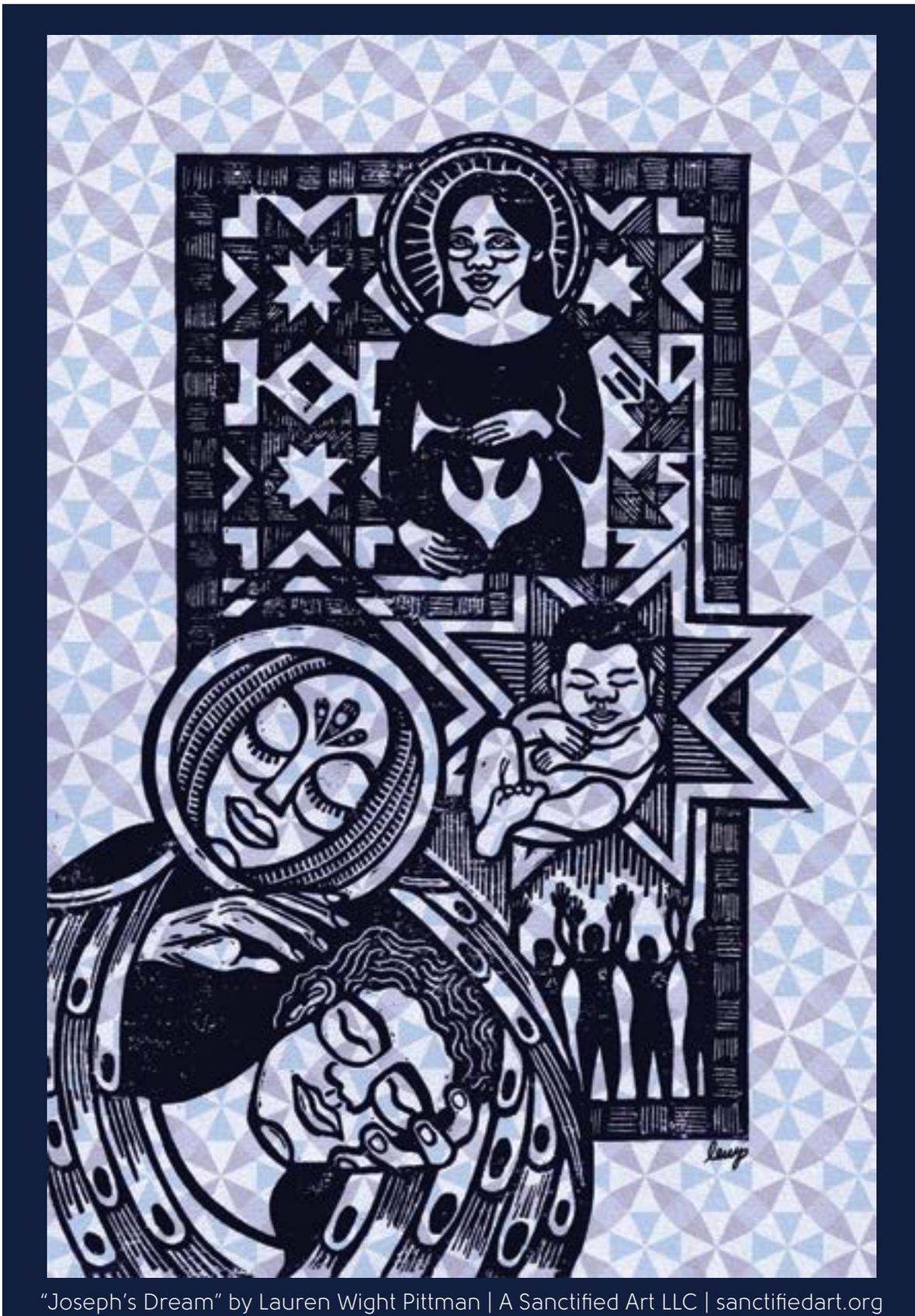
Sunday, December 21

Today's Gospel: Matthew 1:18-25

¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be pregnant from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to divorce her quietly. ²⁰ But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." ²² All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ²³ "Look, the virgin shall become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us." ²⁴ When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife ²⁵ but had no marital relations with her until she had given birth to a son, and he named him Jesus.

Monday, December 22

Note that in Matthew's Gospel, it is Joseph who learns of Jesus birth. Unlike the angel appearing to Mary, Joseph meets the angel in a dream and learns that his beloved Mary is about to have a child who will save the people from their sins. Joseph is told to name the baby Jesus, and Joseph does as the angel of the Lord commanded. You can read the artist's reflection on page 22.



"Joseph's Dream" by Lauren Wight Pittman | A Sanctified Art LLC | sanctifiedart.org

Tuesday, December 23

A Reflection on "Amazing Peace"

Celebrated American Poet, Maya Angelou, wrote a poem that was read at the lighting of the National Christmas Tree in 2005. Her words capture the essence of a chaotic and unpredictable world using images like thunder, lightning, and snow to represent the unknown elements and surprises in life that often catch us off guard and make us afraid. She questions God. She asks, "Are you there?"

Her words then soften and she introduces and proclaims the promise of transformation. Transformation comes in the groundswell of Christmas. Angelou names this transforming time "The Glad Season," reminding us that Christmas comes and the thunder is silenced, the lightning sleeps, and the snow becomes a cushion.

As we prepare to celebrate Christmas again, may we all experience the transformation that is for all in the presence of God and the birth of the Christ child.

"Amazing Peace" (A Christmas Poem by Maya Angelou)

"Thunder rumbles in the mountain passes
And lightning rattles the eaves of our houses.
Flood waters await us in our avenues.

Snow falls upon snow, falls upon snow to avalanche
Over unprotected villages.
The sky slips low and grey and threatening.

We question ourselves.
What have we done to so affront nature?
We worry God.

Are you there? Are you there really?
Does the covenant you made with us still hold?

Into this climate of fear and apprehension, Christmas
enters,
Streaming lights of joy, ringing bells of hope
And singing carols of forgiveness high up in the bright
air.
The world is encouraged to come away from rancor,
Come the way of friendship.

It is the Glad Season.
Thunder ebbs to silence and lightning sleeps quietly in
the corner.
Flood waters recede into memory.
Snow becomes a yielding cushion to aid us
As we make our way to higher ground.

Hope is born again in the faces of children
It rides on the shoulders of our aged as they walk into
their sunsets.
Hope spreads around the earth. Brightening all things,
Even hate which crouches breeding in dark corridors.

In our joy, we think we hear a whisper.
At first it is too soft. Then only half heard.
We listen carefully as it gathers strength.
We hear a sweetness.
The word is Peace.
It is loud now. It is louder.

Louder than the explosion of bombs.

We tremble at the sound. We are thrilled by its presence.
It is what we have hungered for.
Not just the absence of war. But, true Peace.
A harmony of spirit, a comfort of courtesies.
Security for our beloveds and their beloveds.

We clap hands and welcome the Peace of Christmas.
We beckon this good season to wait a while with us.
We, Baptist and Buddhist, Methodist and Muslim, say
come.
Peace.

Come and fill us and our world with your majesty.

We, the Jew and the Jainist, the Catholic and the
Confucian,
Implore you, to stay a while with us.
So we may learn by your shimmering light
How to look beyond complexion and see community.

It is Christmas time, a halting of hate time.
On this platform of peace, we can create a language
To translate ourselves to ourselves and to each other.

At this Holy Instant, we celebrate the Birth of Jesus Christ
Into the great religions of the world.
We jubilate the precious advent of trust.
We shout with glorious tongues at the coming of hope.
All the earth's tribes loosen their voices
To celebrate the promise of Peace.

We, Angels and Mortal's, Believers and Non-Believers,
Look heavenward and speak the word aloud.
Peace. We look at our world and speak the word aloud.
Peace. We look at each other, then into ourselves
And we say without shyness or apology or hesitation.

Peace, My Brother.
Peace, My Sister.
Peace, My Soul."

Christmas Eve, Wednesday, December 24

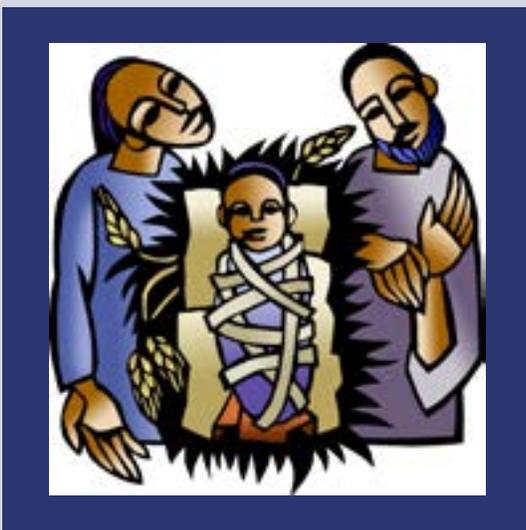
Today Pastor Stephanie reflects on the Gospel reading for today, Christmas Eve (Luke 2:1-20).

Christians around the world will read and hear the words of Luke 2 today. The story of Mary and Joseph traveling to Bethlehem will be shared. The wonder of Mary giving birth in a stable will capture people's hearts. After weeks of waiting and preparation, Christmas Eve is here again and we will gather. We will gather in awe at the babe; we will gather in song with the angels; and we will gather to proclaim the good news with the shepherds.

As you get ready for the day, what are the images and memories that ground you in faith and love? How has your life been molded and shaped by your relationship with Jesus who the world meets anew every year at Christmas? Who are the saints from your life who opened you to the possibility of a life guided by and anchored in Jesus – Immanuel, God with us?

Today invites gentle and humble celebrations. It is a day when the four essentials of the Advent season come together in a beautifully blended song of joy, hope, peace, and love. These essentials are for you to give and receive as you are called to be a follower of Jesus, born for you this day.

¹In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ²This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. ⁵He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. ⁶While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no place in the guest room.



⁸Now in that same region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for see, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹²This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." ¹³And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

¹⁴"Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"

¹⁵When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." ¹⁶So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the child lying in the manger. ¹⁷When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child, ¹⁸and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them, ¹⁹and Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, just as it had been told them.

Christmas Eve, Thursday, December 25

A Prayer from Susan Palo Cherwien

*In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.*

*He was in the beginning with God.
All things came into being through him,
and without him not one thing came into being.*

*What has come into being
in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.
The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did
not overtake it...*

*And the Word became flesh and lived among us,
and we have seen his glory,
the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.*
-John 1: 1-5; 14



"The Word Before Time"

Before the world was
Before the spoken word was
Before the world of words was
God was.
God spoke the unspoken Word –
With God from the other side of time –
Truthful, loving, beautiful, wise.
The Word, truthful,
Sounded and
Light!
light and darkness.
Time was
The Word, wise,
played and
Sky!
Sky and World.
Space was.
Sun and Moon.
Sea and land,
Plants and animals,
Matter was.
The Word beautiful,
rang out across
the field of stars,
of secondary stars –
Grace upon grace.
The Word, loving,
sang out across
the newborn time,
Across unfolding space,
Of humus formed human –
Grace upon Grace.
Trust, wisdom, beauty, love.
Still the Word resounds,
forming us still –
like a great loving song,
forming us still.
Grace upon grace.

Amen.

Artists' Reflections

Ordinary Glory

Digital painting

By Lauren Wright Pittman

Inspired by Luke 2:1-20

In this familiar narrative, what stuck out for me in this reading was the juxtaposition of human and divine, the mundane and extraordinary, the humbleness of a manger and the glory of a multitude of heavenly hosts. I wanted to image this dichotomy with the everyday, intimate, tender scene of new parents and their yawning baby, enveloped by the glittering, awe-striking magnificence of God.

The holy family is framed by an almond shape called a mandorla. Mandorlas have been used in Christian art to signify the glory of God, and can also represent the intersection and fullness of two things, like heaven and earth or spirit and body. Likely, the most familiar instance of this concept is the shape made between the overlapping circles in a Venn diagram. I wanted to use this shape because this is the moment when human and divine intersect in the person of Jesus, and when the glory of God is birthed into the world. The golden field surrounding the mandorla is filled with my interpretation of the six-winged seraphim from early Christian art, representing the heavenly hosts filling the air with tidings of peace (imaged by olive branches). A seven pointed star hangs over the heads of the family, surrounded by seven other stars, a number that represents completeness.

Prophecy

Oil paint, charcoal, and copper leaf on canvas

By Hannah Garrity

Inspired by Luke 1:67-80

This painting engages the flow of Zechariah's prophecy. I painted in oil on canvas; the copper leaf represents God's healing love. Copper has qualities that interact with its surroundings. When coiled, it can harness electricity out of thin air. When used in body wrapping, it can support internal self-repair. When used in pots and pans, it disperses heat evenly. When used in the womb, it causes the blood to flow monthly. When used in piping, it allows clean water to flow.

Over the years, I have been drawn to taking away plastics in my artwork. It is not always possible because acrylic paint and PVC pipe are such accessible media. But the natural materials draw me in physically, emotionally. In my work, I return to copper to hold banners up, to build sculpture, to create motion, and to capture light in an installation. It is a natural material that is prevalent in buildings. You can buy it at your local hardware store.

Here, the copper represents aspects of discipleship. It represents the presence of God in our lives and our actions—the presence of God in Zechariah's prophecy and in John's life and work.

The image is inspired by waters meeting one another. This intersecting flow portrays Zechariah's words meeting John the Baptist's life. It is a crashing toward, a central meeting place, a potential energy meeting a kinetic being.

Holy Mother, your love is mighty—more powerful than all of the forces that act to barricade justice, to block righteousness. Guide us like you guided Zechariah in your ways of peace, in your strength of courage, in your acts of love. Amen.

—Hannah Garrity

Hope Like a Dancer

Gouache, paint pens, colored pencils, and ink on paper

11"x14"

By Lauren Wright Pittman

Inspired by Matthew 11:1-11

John the Baptist was thrown in prison after publicly questioning the legality of Herod's marriage (Matthew 14:3-5). He was not afraid to go toe-to-toe with the powerful, and perhaps he expected Jesus' ministry to look more confrontational and politically strategic. In questioning Jesus, I wonder if John sought a particular answer to hang his hope on, that maybe the Messiah would be how he'd imagined him. Maybe Jesus would bust him out of jail and take things straight to Herod, but Jesus offers something else.

In this image, John sits in prison, letting the disciples' testimony settle in. People with hearing, visual, and physical impairments experience new senses and mobility. Those with skin diseases are cleansed. Those with little material comfort are offered irrepressible hope, and the lungs of the dead are filled with the breath of life. I decided to image this good news through the dancing light of a lantern¹ in John's prison cell. I chose dancing figures because dancing feels like a primal response to the radical healing taking place outside the prison walls. As these six dancers illuminate the cell, I imagine John, even if for a moment, breaking into a bit of laughter at the magnitude of Jesus' ministry. Jesus was quite literally doing the unimaginable. He was removing barriers so that the marginalized were no longer reduced to begging and sitting on mats, shoved to the edges of society. He was not only healing physical ailments; perhaps more importantly, he was restoring people to community.

Out of all the miraculous actions mentioned, the news did not include "release of the captives" (Luke 4:18-19).² With this message, John would know that he was not going to be freed,³ and so, the number

¹ The lantern has very simplified shapes representing each of the miracles (received sight: eyes opening; walking: footprints; cleansed: bowls; hearing: volume symbols; raised: butterflies; good news: jar and anointing oil drops representing the Messiah).

² John's clothing includes open bird cages and birds taking flight, which represent how "release of the captives" is missing in the message he receives from Jesus.

³ Bonnie L. Pattison points this out in her commentary on Matthew 11:2-19 in *Feasting on the Gospels: Matthew, Volume 1*, edited by Cynthia A. Jarvis and E. Elizabeth Johnson (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 286.

One with Mystery

Graphic image

By Lauren Wright Pittman

Inspired by Matthew 3:1-12

A curious, odd, status quo-threatening man emerges in the wilderness of Judea. He shouts in the place of desolation—a dangerous place where God has repeatedly shown up throughout Israel's history. John lifts up his voice, entreating people to make an about-face from the things that keep them from God, and move toward the new thing God is doing. He invites people to dip their weary bodies into the river, wade into mystery, and to tell the truth—taking on a posture of confession and surrender.

This eccentric man wears the clothes and eats the food of one living at the mercy of the land. His embodiment is that of an outcast, defined by common elements—camel hair, locusts, and honey. This is the one entrusted with introducing the world to God's incarnate self. John's cries bring the powerful to the edges of society where Jesus would spend his life and ministry. John points us to where God is to be found—in the wilderness, at the margins of power, at the periphery of looming, destructive systems, where the waters of Baptism ripple and swirl, where grace is abundant and God draws near. I drew John at one with the wilderness. His shape is hardly distinguished from the powdery textures and deep, cool colors of the waters of the Jordan. He is at one with the wonder and mystery of the coming Messiah. He holds out his hand, inviting the viewer to choose trust and dive fully into the unknown.



JOSEPH'S DREAM

by Lauren Wright Pittman

Inspired by Matthew 1:18-25

Hand-carved block printed with oil-based ink
on patterned paper

The angel holds Joseph as his dream unfolds in quilted vignettes. At the top, Mary gazes ahead, pondering her role in welcoming the Son of God into the world. Below, a squishy baby Jesus peacefully rests as his glory shines on a longing world eager to soak up the light of Emmanuel. Just as a dream holds layers of meaning, this image reflects more than the sum of its parts.

I'm fascinated by symbology. Stars have come to represent both Mary and Jesus in liturgical art, so I decided to research stars in quilting. It turns out that quilting holds its own wealth of symbology through choices in color, shapes, patterns, etc. A star quilt holds significance in a number of different cultures, including the Lakota. Star quilts are given at important moments throughout one's life, including birth, and the eight-pointed morning star "represents fulfillment, the release from darkness, [and] ushering in a new day."³

This brings me to another fascination of mine, Biblical numerology. One of my most well-worn resources is a glossary of common liturgical symbols in European Christian art called, *Symbolism in Liturgical Art*. In it, the writers describe that the eight-pointed star is often used in imagery of Christ as an allusion to the eighth day of creation when Christ rose from the dead, "a beginning of days outside of time."⁴ It delights me that this eight-pointed star is made up of triangles with three sides. The number three references the Trinity, and therefore, the communal fullness of the Divine.

In researching imagery for Mary, I realized that both stars and lilies are often used in European art to celebrate Mary's purity. My glossary reads: "Her bearing of Christ without loss of her virginity is seen as similar to stars sending out their light without loss of brightness."⁵ Of all the things we can lift up about Mary, such as her courage, strength, or steadfast love, why emphasize her virginity? This feels incredibly limiting and dismissive and misses how incredible and multifaceted Mary is. In my image, I want to reclaim the imagery of stars and lilies to represent how Mary is a brilliant, shining example of radical faithfulness in the face of every possible earthly fear. Lilies are resourceful, hearty plants which represent rebirth across cultures. I would argue that Mary is resilient in the face of an impossible task, and in many ways, the entire story of the people of God is reborn through Mary's bravery. —Rev. Lauren Wright Pittman

³ A quote from Kevin Locke, Lakota Sioux. nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/evolution-expression

⁴ Appleton, LeRoy H. and Stephen Bridges. *Symbolism in Liturgical Art*. (New York: Charles Scribner, 1959). 97.

⁵ Ibid. 96.

Thank You

Thank you for walking through the season of Advent using this devotional. We pray that you will walk in the light of Christ in these early days of Christmas and continue to live in God's love as we move into Epiphany. You bless the world with your presence and your prayers, and we celebrate now as we move into the season of Joy.

Credits

"Wake, Awake, for Night Is Flying"

Text: Philipp Nicolai, 1556-1608; tr. composite

Text © 1999 Augsburg Fortress.

Prayer from Paul, Deacon of Apulia

An Advent Source Book. 1988 Archdiocese of Chicago; Liturgy Training Publications

"On Jordan's Bank the Baptist's Cry"

Text: Charles Coffin, 1676-1749; tr. composite

"All Earth Is Hopeful"

Text: Alberto Taulé, b. 1932; tr. Madeleine Forell Marshall, b. 1946

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