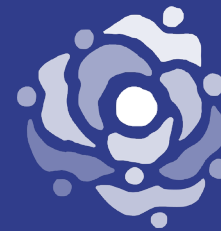


A Sanctified Art LLC is a collective of artists in ministry who create resources for worshiping communities. The Sanctified Art team works collaboratively to bring scripture and theological themes to life through film, visual art, curriculum, coloring pages, liturgy, graphic designs, and more. Their 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.



FROM
GENERATION
TO GENERATION...
An Advent devotional

Art, Poetry, &
Reflections for the
Season of Advent



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

FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION...

SABBATH IN THE KITCHEN

As a Sabbath activity, follow this family recipe or prepare another favorite dish.

CREMAS

A family recipe shared by Carmelle Beaugelin

Crema (Krema or Crema) is a popular drink in Haiti and is served regularly at social events and during the holidays. The beverage possesses a creamy consistency similar to a thick milkshake, eggnog, or a thicker Puerto Rican Coquito, and varies from off-white to beige in color. Crema is a great holiday dessert drink alongside another traditional Haitian dish, soup Joumou,⁹ which has been eaten since the victory of Haitian independence against France in 1804. Traditionally, all ingredients are added over very low heat to allow for the melding of flavors, strained, and allowed to sit and cool for 4-6 hours, then finished with fresh lime with rum added in last.

INGREDIENTS

- 1 can of unsweetened condensed milk *(or vegan condensed milk)*
- 2 cans of sweetened condensed milk *(or vegan condensed milk)*
- 1 can of cream of coconut
- 1 teaspoon grated nutmeg
- 1 teaspoon of cinnamon *(or a cinnamon stick over heat)*
- 1 teaspoon star anise extract *(or star anise over heat)*
- 1 teaspoon of almond extract
- 1 teaspoon of vanilla extract
- 1 teaspoon of lime juice *(zest optional)*
- 1 cup of rum *(for authentic flavor, use dark Barbancourt Haitian Rum) or 1-3 tbs of rum flavoring (for a non-alcoholic version)*

INSTRUCTIONS

In a bowl, mix 1 can of unsweetened condensed milk and 2 cans of sweetened condensed milk. Add the cream of coconut and mix the ingredients thoroughly. Add vanilla and almond extracts, star anise, cinnamon, and nutmeg to the mixture. Add the lime juice to the mixture to slightly thicken it. Finally, add the dark rum into the bowl and mix thoroughly. Let the ingredients sit for a few minutes, then use a funnel to pour the mixture into bottles. The mix should fill a 750 ml bottle. Adjust the sweetened condensed milk to your preferred sweetness. It is best served over ice, chilled. Enjoy!

⁹ Soup joumou is a pumpkin-based soup. Prior to independence, Haitian slaves were forbidden from eating the soup. Since the revolution, the soup has become a symbol of freedom and is often enjoyed on New Year's Day.





Scan to hear the tune!

Always Seeking

Angels from the Realms of Glory

Text: Anna Strickland (2022)

Music: Henry Thomas Smart (1866)



As the wise men scanned the hea - vens
 When they reached King Her - od's pal - ace
 Flee - ing from the wrath of Her - od
 Seek - ing signs or seek - ing pow - er



There they saw Christ's na - tal star
 Ask - ing where to find the child
 Jos - eph led his fam - i - ly
 Seek - ing safe - ty, seek - ing home



Then be - gan the long pro - ces - sion
 Her - od schemed in all his mal - ice
 Seek - ing in the des - ert a - rid
 Day by day and hour by ho - ur



Seek - ing him in coun - try far Al - ways seek - ing,
 This new king him - self to find
 Safe - ty there as ref - u - gees
 We press on toward the un - known



mov - ing on - ward Fol - low - ing where God may lead

The stories, scriptures, and traditions of the Christmas season have been passed down to us throughout the generations. Many of us enter this season with a swell of memories and emotions as vast as the cultural and religious rituals this holiday holds. Like a tapestry woven throughout time, the Christmas story weaves us in—to remember how God has shown up in the past, to continue the work of collective liberation, to behold the presence of God in flesh and bone.

In this daily devotional, we invite you to take a closer look at how the Christmas story unfolds. We encourage you to pay attention to each of the characters in these familiar narratives and ask: *What did each person pass on or contribute? How did they either participate in God's liberation and love—or try to thwart God's justice? What can we learn from them and what is our role now? What will we pass on to the next generation?*

As creatives, we've contemplated these questions and themes while revisiting the stories surrounding Christ's birth. In response, we've created visual art, written reflections, poems, hymns, and journaling prompts. And, because many of us connect to our ancestors through the food they've passed down to us, we've shared family recipes for you to prepare as an act of Sabbath rest. Day by day, we invite you to journey through the reflections and prompts in this devotional with wonder and curiosity for the ways God is speaking to you.

From Generation to Generation... reminds us of the ways our lives, histories, actions, and stories are interconnected and woven together. The work of God is always unfolding—in and through us. This Advent, may you remember that you belong—to a story etched into the wrinkles of time, to generations that have come before and will come after, to a love that won't let you go.

Artfully yours,

The Sanctified Art Creative Team

- Rev. Lisle Gwynn Garrity
- Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed
- Hannah Garrity
- Rev. Lauren Wright Pittman
- Rev. Anna Strickland



REV. LISLE GWYNN GARRITY

Founder | Creative Director of SA

Lisle Gwynn Garrity (*she/her*) is a Pastorist (pastor + artist), retreat leader, and creative entrepreneur seeking to fill the church with more color, paint, mystery, and creativity. She founded A Sanctified Art with the conviction that, in order to thrive, the church needs more creative expression and art-filled freedom.

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, and Apple pencil to image the layered complexity she experiences in scripture texts. She also helps faith communities share their vibrant stories through branding & design services.

HANNAH GARRITY Founding Creative Partner of SA

Hannah (*she/her*) is an artist and an athlete, a daughter and a mother, a facilitator and a producer, a leader and a teammate. She is an art teacher at a middle school in Richmond, VA, a Sunday school visual choir facilitator at Second Presbyterian Church in Richmond, VA, an art in worship workshop leader wherever she is called, and a liturgical installation artist at the Montreat Conference Center, Montreat, NC.

REV. SARAH A. SPEED Founding Creative Partner of SA

Sarah (Are) Speed (*she/her*) is the Associate Pastor for Young Adults and Membership at Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York City. 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

Operations Support | Content Creator

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 native Austinite and graduated from the University of Texas where she now works as a college minister, especially serving LGBTQ students.

Thursday | FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION...

We keep seeking

READ Matthew 2:13-23

FROM THE ARTIST | Rev. Lauren Wright Pittman

Our ancestors forge pathways that become a part of who we are. It is difficult to break those patterns, even if you aren't keenly aware of them. In this context, one of the most defining ancestral narratives of an Israelite's life would be the Exodus narrative. Joseph is advised to move in direct opposition to the way his ancestors moved. He must go toward Egypt instead of away. It takes great courage to consider the ingrained patterns of your history and blaze a new trail.

Joseph must uproot his family from their home to ensure their son will become who he was made to be. In this image, the Holy Family escapes the wrath of Herod in Bethlehem and faithfully travels toward the looming unknown in Egypt. They are flanked by flowers: on the left are Star of Bethlehem flowers and on the right are stylized lotus flowers you might see in Egyptian art. In the background are shadowy figures. On the left, they represent Herod's men seeking to kill Jesus, and on the right, they represent the weight of the past—God's enslaved people and their oppressors. The menacing silhouettes surround the family, personifying the inherent risk in either path they choose to take. The angel of God envelops the Holy Family in an embrace, comforting them from the grief of leaving home and shielding them from the fear of what is to come. In other icons of this pilgrimage, the Nile River often flows below, teeming with fish, but I chose to fill the water with lotus flowers, Egypt's national flower and a symbol of regeneration. God is writing a new story, transforming their destination, which swells with generational trauma and pain, into a haven of refuge and rebirth.

PRAY

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.



Flight to Egypt | Lauren Wright Pittman
Digital painting

ABOUT OUR GUEST CONTRIBUTORS



Guest Writer

Dr. Christine J. Hong

Christine J. Hong (*she/her*) is Assistant Professor of Educational Ministry at Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, GA. Her interests include anti-colonial and decolonial approaches to religious and interreligious education and life. Hong's interests also include Asian American spiritualities, and the spiritual and theological formation of children and adolescents among BIPOC communities. A Teaching Elder in the Presbyterian Church (USA), she has spent time as both a religious educator and youth and young adult minister in New York and Southern California. She is the author of numerous articles, chapters in books, and two monographs, the first is, *Youth, Identity, and Gender in the Korean American Church*, published by Palgrave, and the second is, *Decolonial Futures: Intercultural and Interreligious Intelligence for Theological Education* from Lexington Press. Dr. Hong has received a BA from Univ. of Washington, a ThM and MDiv from Princeton Theological Seminary, and a PhD from Claremont School of Theology. ctsnet.edu/faculty/hong-christine-j/



Guest Artist

Carmelle Beaugelin

Carmelle Beaugelin (*she/her*) describes herself as an "Afro-Latin, West-Indian, Haitian-American, Miami-an" artist currently residing in Princeton, NJ. Her daily work swims in the waters of human flourishing and spiritual formation at the intersection of Christian Spirituality & Innovation. She strives to create work that engages some form of "God-talk." Her art moves towards the exploration of Visio Divina (divine vision) via theological themes related to redemptive transformation, the concept of "home," hyphenated ethnic identities of diasporic communities, and human flourishing as a continued expression of divine creativity (Imago Dei). Her larger vocation is to point to the dignity, self-awareness, and spiritual connectedness of creative expression in the lives of those who carry hyphenated identities, particularly those navigating within what it means to both black and foreign in America. She is the founder of BeauFolio Studio, an art house at the intersection of sacred art, human-centered design, & restorative equity for the creatively curious. carmellebeaugelin.com

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Wednesday | Journal Prompt

FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION...

We keep seeking

Consider the Magi and what it means to be a seeker. In the space below, name what you are seeking as you begin a new year.



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We keep seeking

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ROOM

I asked God—
what about my
fingernail-biting habit
or the way I leave all
the cabinets
open in the kitchen?

What about the way I can
be dramatic,
drumming up a fight, only to
hand out apologies like
souvenirs?

What about the way I
second-guess myself,
let shame drive,
or stay quiet when I
have something to say?

What about the way I
chase accomplishments
like a dog with a bone?

What about the doubt,
or the fact
that I'm terrible at prayer and
cannot help but yawn
during church?

What about
What about
What about?

My baggage might be too
big for the van.

But then
God called me by my first
and middle name,
which always means
business,
and said:
Who told you that you
were too much?
Sugar, there is so much
room for you here.

So that's when I grabbed
a seat
and we hit the road
and I knew right then
that the rumors were true.

There is room.
There is room.
There is room.

*Poem by
Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed*

READ Matthew 2:1-12

FROM THE ARTIST | Carmelle Beaugelin

Imagine the whispers in the town of Bethlehem. The relatives of Mary and Joseph, curious about the absence of the soon to be young mother, grateful to have a sense of distance from the silent scandal of an unwed wife and a man who remains with her in her apparent dishonor. Members of the community whispering of Herod's increasing anxiety over the birth of one of their own. Those learned in the ways of the stars gazing up to search the dark skies for a prominent golden orb, over which the elders have been speculating.

The Feast of the Epiphany celebrates the pilgrimage of three distinguished individuals to the newborn revelation of God revealed in the Christ child. Whether there were only three wise men, or kings, or Magi does not matter. However many of them made the harrowing pilgrimage to the newborn Jesus, they were most likely foreigners and outsiders.

Often the community we begin a journey with is not the same community that supports us throughout our journey's length. *The Golden Pilgrimage* depicts the kind of surrogacy that occurs when a friend, a sibling, a neighbor, a father, or a pastor steps in as a much-needed friend. Even in the story of our Savior's birth, it is not a matter of whether blood is thicker than water. Instead, what matters are the bonds that tie a community together when love and acceptance flow like the healing frankincense and myrrh of the gift-bearers.

PRAY

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.

There's room for every story

READ Matthew 1:1-17

COMMENTARY | Dr. Christine J. Hong

Just as Christ's genealogy reveals the relationships across time and space in his life, many of our names also tie us to the generations who come before us and those who will come after us. Matthew lists the names of Jesus' forebearers as a marker of hope finally realized. Even today, names are the seeded hope of one generation planted in another. They are the thread that connects our histories, stories, and futures. We are the hopes of those who've come before, and we live in hope for those who will come after us.

In the Korean tradition, male babies are named by the oldest patriarch on the father's side of a family. My paternal grandfather died before I was born, so it was my maternal grandfather who built my name. Even before I was born, he declared he would build a meaningful name for me (even though I was not a boy). I would receive a name with intention from the oldest living generation to the newest. He gave me the name *Jin*, which when paired with my surname, becomes *Hong Jin*, meaning "something precious in the wide expanse." When I was born, he was not sure when he would get to meet his granddaughter with the vast ocean separating South Korea from California. In those days, it was not so easy or affordable to fly internationally. The name represented the connection he felt to me and my parents, despite what felt like an insurmountable distance between us. What is the Spirit of God if not the hope against hope in our lives?

My grandfather knew about hope against hope; he died at 101 years old, a survivor of war and displacement, excruciating trauma and loss. Yet, I knew him as a loving human with a joyful disposition, a spiritual and humble man, my biggest fan, the person who left me the gift of my name—connecting me through that name to the hope he bore through so much tragedy. Three years ago, I passed the gift of the name *Jin* to my daughter, *Tae-Jin*, giving her the part of the name my grandfather built for me. Her name means "precious light." Through her name, she is connected to her great-grandfather, to his stories, his hopes, his spiritual presence. As she grows, she will become part of a larger story by weaving in her own stories as seeds of hope against hope for someone new.



The Golden Pilgrimage | Carmelle Beaugelin
Acrylic, gilding paint, canvas collage on handmade reclaimed paper

We keep seeking

READ Matthew 2:1-23

COMMENTARY | Dr. Christine J. Hong



Genealogy of Christ | Lauren Wright Pittman
Digital Painting

A better world for all means to enter deep solidarity and accountability with one another. In the decade after the Korean War ceasefire, my grandparents and my parents would tell me about the many ways neighbors helped one another survive. In fact, when I was growing up, I had great aunts and great uncles whom I later learned were not biologically related to me. They were neighbors who raised children together, cooked together, lived together at times, and became one another's adoptive families in the wake of the loss everyone experienced when one Korea suddenly became two.

When my parents became immigrants in the United States, their experience of being welcomed by the Korean American community was what grounded them during a bewildering and tumultuous time. In the Korean American church, they sustained life together, preserving culture and language for their children, and processing the many ways racism affected their lives. For them, in the Korean American church there were no strangers, only extended family.

When we consider Mary, Joseph, and Jesus' story as refugees, fleeing from an enraged despot, I wonder about the people who came alongside them. We know the example of the Magi, who protected the Holy Family by going home another way. Yet, surely, there were others too. People who helped the new parents and their child hide along the way to Egypt. Neighbors who helped settle the small family in a new country, among a new people. Friends who helped them learn a new language, and new ways of life. Jesus probably had many aunts and uncles who were not his blood relations but were family all the same. I give thanks for all my great aunts and great uncles via war and displacement, for all the Korean American church aunts and uncles who raised me, and for the aunts and uncles in Jesus' life those thousands of years ago. I give thanks for the strangers who became friends and family through solidarity with the Holy Family, wanting a better world, not only for themselves, but for a refugee family too.

Sunday | FROM GENERATION
TO GENERATION...
We keep seeking

A BLESSING FOR THE SEEKERS

Blessed are you who turn your face up to the sky,
who open your arms to feel the wind,
who notice all the things that we should notice.
Blessed are you who are fluent in wonder
and familiar with awe.
Blessed are you who, even now, dream dreams,
who have not lost hope,
who swear the glass is still half-full.
Blessed are you who plant trees
and sing the harmony,
who tell the children how this world can be magic.
Blessed are you who
walk and seek
and turn over every stone,
pointing out all the corners and colors
that God lives in.
Blessed are you.
Amen.

*Poem by
Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed*



Tuesday | FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION...
There's room for every story

READ Matthew 1:1-17

FROM THE ARTIST | Rev. Lauren Wright Pittman

As I began this piece, I was inspired by the composition and movement of the *From Generation to Generation...* logo. In this image, I chose to represent Christ using a rose at the center of the composition. The women mentioned in the genealogy are imaged as foundational leaves building and upholding Christ. All of the women are looking at the viewer and holding objects to represent the fact that they took their life and survival into their own hands. They were catalysts who propelled the lineage forward. In the bottom left, Tamar holds her father-in-law's insignia, which represents how she assumes his role as the leader of the tribe of Judah and continues its lineage.¹ Moving counterclockwise, Rahab holds the red cord which she lowered to ensure the safety of her family after supplying Israelite spies enough information to achieve victory in Jericho. Next, Ruth holds the wheat that she gleaned from the field. She knows that she must marry again in order to be protected, and so she takes initiative with Boaz. Bathsheba's name isn't even mentioned in Christ's genealogy; she is referred to as the "wife of Uriah." She withstands abuse from King David, survives the murder of her husband, and ensures that her son Solomon takes the throne. She takes matters into her own hands, becoming, as scholar Dr. Wil Gafney writes, "the queen mother of the united monarchy of Israel."² Finally, there is Mary who looks adoringly at the rose which represents her son. Here she holds the love and pride of a beautiful lineage that leads to the birth of her son, the Messiah.

These women only wanted to ensure safety for themselves and for their children; in the process they ensured the continuation of the lineage of Christ. Without their brilliance, passion, ingenuity, resourcefulness, creativity, and sacrifice, the lineage would have ended.

PRAY

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.

¹ Attridge, Harold W. From the footnote for Genesis 38:15-19. *The HarperCollins Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version*. (San Francisco, CA: Zondervan, 2006). 62-3.
² Gafney, Wilda C. *Womanist Midrash: A Reintroduction to the Women of the Torah and the Throne*. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017). 220.



Wednesday | Journal Prompt

FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION...

There's room for every story

In Matthew's genealogy (Matt. 1:1-17), each name contains a story, threading together a lineage that leads to Christ. In the space below, record the story of someone who came before you—a relative or friend—who changed your life.

Saturday | *God dwells with us*

FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION...

SABBATH IN THE KITCHEN

As a Sabbath activity, follow this family recipe or prepare another favorite dish.

MIYEOK-GUK

A family recipe shared by Christine J. Hong

Miyeok-guk is a traditional postpartum meal for new mothers and a traditional Korean birthday meal. Korean people make and eat *Miyeok-guk* to celebrate growing a year older and to honor the labor of their mothers who brought them into the world.

INGREDIENTS

- 1 ounce of dried *miyeok*/seaweed (*you can find this in the dried goods section at a Korean grocery store like H Mart*)
- 1 pound of beef brisket sliced into small pieces (*you can substitute any shellfish*)
- 1 packet of bone broth or anchovy and dried kelp broth (*you can find both kinds of broth ready-made and packaged at a Korean grocery store—bonus, they are shelf stable—or you can make your own*)
- 1-2 teaspoons of toasted sesame oil, to taste
- 1-2 tablespoons of soup soy sauce or light soy sauce, to taste (*you can substitute fish sauce*)
- 4 minced cloves of garlic

INSTRUCTIONS

Soak your *miyeok*/seaweed in cold water. It will rehydrate. Once rehydrated, drain, and cut it up into small bite-sized pieces. Prepare your brisket by cutting it up into small pieces. To a pot, add 6 cups of water and the *miyeok*. Cover and boil on high for about 10 minutes. Add in the brisket and boil at medium heat for 35-40 minutes. Stir occasionally. The beef will slowly become tender. Stir in your garlic, bone broth, and soup soy sauce and boil for 10 more minutes. Stir in the sesame oil. For a full meal, serve alongside or over hot rice with kimchi on the side. Serves 3-4 people.



Scan to hear the tune!

God Became Flesh With Us to Dwell

The First Noel

Text: Anna Strickland (2022)

Music: Traditional English carol



From Ga - li - lee to Beth - le - hem Did
A - bid - ing in the fields that night The
The shep herds went as the an-gels had said To a



Ma - ry and Jo-seph their jour-ney be - gin Many
shep - herds saw a ra - diant light When
man-ger in town with haste they sped And



miles from home with - out a room Em -
an - gels came to fill the sky Break-ing
there as earth and heav-en con - verged They



man - u - el came forth from Ma - ry's womb
in - to earth from heav-en on high No -
shared with the par - ents all that had oc - curred



el, no - el, no - el, no - el God be-came flesh with



us to dwell

READ Luke 2:15-21

FROM THE ARTIST | Hannah Garrity

The hope that Mary was pondering inspired the concept and flow in this watercolored paper lace work. Are you, as I am, most taken by the sense that Mary has given birth to the hopes and dreams of a people who are hurting?

During the pandemic, as I watched the news, I saw so much creativity bubbling up. I saw people imagining a world that could be, a world that should be. The hope that was emerging was palpable. Then, as a teacher, I went back to the classroom this year. Hope seemed absent among my students, among the faculty, among the parents. I began to research the science of hope. Perhaps it's teachable, I wondered. I watched a TED talk titled, "Hope is the Most Powerful Force in the World," by Somnieng Houern⁸ who runs a school for girls, putting concepts of the science of hope into action. He says that he focuses on one person. The ripple effect of hope was the power of which he spoke.

I was already putting this one-person-at-a-time focus into action before I saw this TED talk, however, understanding more about the science of hope has helped me realize that my work is making a difference. Relationships are improving, students are reconnecting with their studies, students are speaking up about their needs. The students need to know how to generate hope, how to create it, how to expand it in their daily lives—one person at a time.

In the midst of a difficult life, "Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart" (Luke 2:19). One of these treasures was the hope that her womb had brought forth for the world to return to again and again—and to pass on, like a ripple, one person at a time.

PRAY

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.



War No More | Lisle Gwynn Garrity
Silk painting with digital drawing and collage

⁸ Houern, Somnieng. "Hope is the Most Powerful Force in the World." *TEDxStMarksSchool*. November 11, 2015. youtu.be/i63givEPq7E.

There's room for every story

READ Isaiah 2:1-5

FROM THE ARTIST | Rev. Lisle Gwynn Garrity

When I started this art series, I returned to a familiar medium: silk painting with gold resist and ink dyes. I photographed my creative process, capturing the wrinkled fabric, the wet lines of gold, the inks bleeding into one another. I've collaged photographs of my silk painting into the backdrops of these digital drawings. The silk background represents a tapestry of time, like an interconnected web of beauty and story traced through the generations.

As I reread this familiar passage in Isaiah, I paused at my favorite line about swords that become plowshares and spears that transform into pruning shears. In the past, I've marveled at the poetry of tools for destruction becoming instruments for cultivation. This year, I contemplated the ways these tools are used and realized that this vision holds gritty promise. Iron plows, mattocks tools, adzes—these are used to break apart rock-hard (often long-neglected) soil so it might receive water, nutrients, and roots. Plowing the earth is a physically intensive process of deconstruction that gives way for seeds to be planted, to be nurtured, and—with all the right elements and some luck—to grow into something worth harvesting.

Pruning is a seasonal act of trust; it feels so risky, especially when it takes months for that new life to begin to appear. But pruning away what is dead or in excess allows the plant to direct its energy into growing new shoots and branches once spring comes.

In other words, I realized that both of these tools are used in the process of regeneration, but they are not in themselves symbols of a bountiful harvest. Like gardening, “learning war no more” is a daily practice requiring dedication and lots of trust that we are truly cultivating an environment for God’s peace to one day bloom. And so, in this Advent season, what needs to be plowed or pruned? What daily acts of regeneration will provide for you and the generations who come after you?

PRAY

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.



Ponder | Hannah Garrity
Paper lace with watercolor



Scan to hear the tune!

Through the Ages

Away in a Manger

Text: Anna Strickland (2022)

Music: James R. Murray (1887)



Oh down through the a - ges and gen - er - a -
From A - bra - ham, Is -aac, and Is - ra - el's
And still through the a - ges our sto - ries will



- tions From God in the gar - den to
line How Ra - hab and Ruth and Bath -
find Be - long - ing in God's sto - ry



Je - sus the son Each sto - ry was wo - ven, each
- she - ba sur - vived From ex - ile in E - gypt to
of hu - man - kind From God in the gar - den to



one has a place With - in the great
Bab - y - lon far Christ's lin - e - age
e - ter - ni - ty We're wo - ven to -



tap - es - try tell - ing God's grace
shows how com - plex sto - ries are
- geth - er as one tap - es - try



Wednesday | Journal Prompt

FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION...

God dwells with us

The holiday season can be full of emotional highs and lows. In the space below, offer any gratitude or grief that is swelling for you. Close in prayer, knowing that God dwells with you no matter what you are feeling.

Saturday | *There's room for every story*

FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION...

SABBATH IN THE KITCHEN

As a Sabbath activity, follow this family recipe or prepare another favorite dish.

NANA'S VINAIGRETTE

A family recipe shared by Hannah Garrity

There are many versions of this dressing, including the simple olive oil and salt version with which Nana (my grandmother) dressed up our salads when she and I visited France in the autumn of 1999. Her first time there, in the 1950's when my mother was young, became the inspiration for many of the recipes that we then inherited. Perhaps this dressing is such one. My memories of our salad dressing span decades and are drenched in joy. I was finally old enough to sit with the older cousins and adults. With thirty people surrounding the table, the salad was always already dressed. It was my favorite part of the meal. The dressing would slide under the rice on my plate, creating a unique delicacy that I would recreate in my college dining hall as comfort food years later. Sounds of laughter and repeated stories, feelings of love and warmth would flood back at the first taste. No one in my family makes the dressing just like anyone else. Every time it is a little bit different for everyone. So, as a snapshot of a moment in a long and fluid span of time, here's the recipe Nana made, as I remember it, on that distant day when I thought to take note.

INGREDIENTS

- ½ cup olive oil
- ⅓ cup balsamic vinegar
- 2 tablespoons dijon mustard
- 1 teaspoon basil
- ½ teaspoon of salt
- A pinch of pepper

INSTRUCTIONS

Shake or stir the dressing. Dip a piece of lettuce in it. Taste it. Add salt if needed. Dress and toss the whole salad. Serve with any meal. Enjoy.



LOVE COMES RUNNING

I remember
the first time I was afraid.
I was a child.
It was a nightmare.
(*You remember those pesky
monsters under the bed.*)
I remember
minutes felt like hours.
I begged
the sun to rise.
(*Fear always begs
the sun to rise.*)

Eventually,
after minutes that felt
like hours,
I cried out.
My dad came running.
He sat at the edge of my bed.
He said there is no reason
to be afraid.
He checked the closet and
the floorboards.
He rearranged my pillows.
He said, "*I can stay.*"

And that's when I learned
that when you are afraid,
love always comes running.
Love says, "*I can stay.*"

That's what God does for us.
God sits at the edge of
the bed.
God checks the closet
and the floorboards.
God says, "*Be not afraid.*"
God stays until sunrise.
Love always comes
running.

*Poem by
Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed*

READ John 1:1-14

FROM THE ARTIST | Rev. Lauren Wright Pittman

In John's cosmic, mysterious creation narrative, the description of the "Word" that particularly sparked my imagination was in verses 3 and 4: "All things came into being through him... in him was life, and the life was the light of all people." How does one image a concept so abstract and consequential to the Christian tradition? I find myself asking this question a lot. The words of the text themselves stretch to their limits while attempting to encapsulate the breadth of who Jesus is.

As I considered visual metaphors that might illuminate this text, I thought about a prism. I remember the first time I used this seemingly magical, transparent stone. I held it to the light, which I could not see, and to my surprise the light was broken down into the vibrant colors of a rainbow. It was natural for me to think the stone was creating something that wasn't there, but this medium revealed the complex truth that light is in fact made up of all the colors in existence.

In my image, Jesus is a prism.⁶ The light that is life that comes from the Creator shines through Jesus, and it is through him that we can see the fullness and beauty of who God is. It is through him that all of Creation came into being. I decided to paint the colors of the rainbow in the order I learned as a child: ROYGBIV.⁷ It was when picking paints that I realized there are seven colors in a simplified rainbow, and there are also seven days of Creation. In this block carving, each of the days of Creation is referenced through simplified patterning in each of the colors of the rainbow. It is through Christ that all things came into being, and it is through him that we experience the abounding saturation of God, who chose to dwell among us.

PRAY

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 realized when creating this image that I was subconsciously inspired by an image by iconographer Kelly Latimore called "Christ the Light." In Latimore's image, Jesus is the light, and the Holy Spirit is the prism. I'm grateful for his influence and hope you will also check out his work: kelly-latimore.pixels.com.

⁷ An acronym for the order of hues in the rainbow: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet.

God meets us in our fear

READ Luke 1:26-38

COMMENTARY | Dr. Christine J. Hong

The story of the annunciation has always held dissonance for me. After all, the angel's exclamation that Mary should not be afraid is terribly unrealistic. How could Mary not have felt fear when confronted with a celestial being? How could she avoid feeling afraid after hearing the angel's message about her pregnancy? Later, Mary's son, Jesus, also felt fear at Gethsemane when faced with betrayal and capital punishment. As she watched him suffer and die, the fear and anguish she must have felt!

As a young child, I remember whenever my brother or I were very ill I would hear my mother praying in Korean, "*Jeh-gah dae-shin*" ("Take me instead"). My mother bargained with God to ease her children's pain. In my time as a chaplain and pastor to parents with sick children, sometimes with life-threatening illnesses, I have heard many parents whisper the same prayer, "Take me instead."

What if the dissonance is what we are meant to sit with? Every day, people are faced with untold grief and pain, and the gospel, or the good news, is not enough to take that pain and fear away. Hope sounds hollow to those who are enduring the wretched parts of life. Rather than gloss over the dissonance, can we sit with Mary? Yes, the Magnificat, her song of courage, is a mark of her bravery. Still, we know—because we too are human—that courage rises despite our fear, not in its absence. Those who have suffered loss know this.

Perhaps this story and the dissonance of the angel's command are an invitation to sit with those who are experiencing the dissonance of a world moving on despite their personal struggle—a world that says, "Cheer up! Move on!" while they are still grieving. Perhaps the dissonance invites us to accompany people moving through their pain, as Mary and Jesus accompanied one another through life events only the two of them understood. Despite the dissonance, they moved through the liminal and tender space of their lives together. In other words, God moved through the liminal and tender spaces of God's human life with Mary, even as they were both afraid.



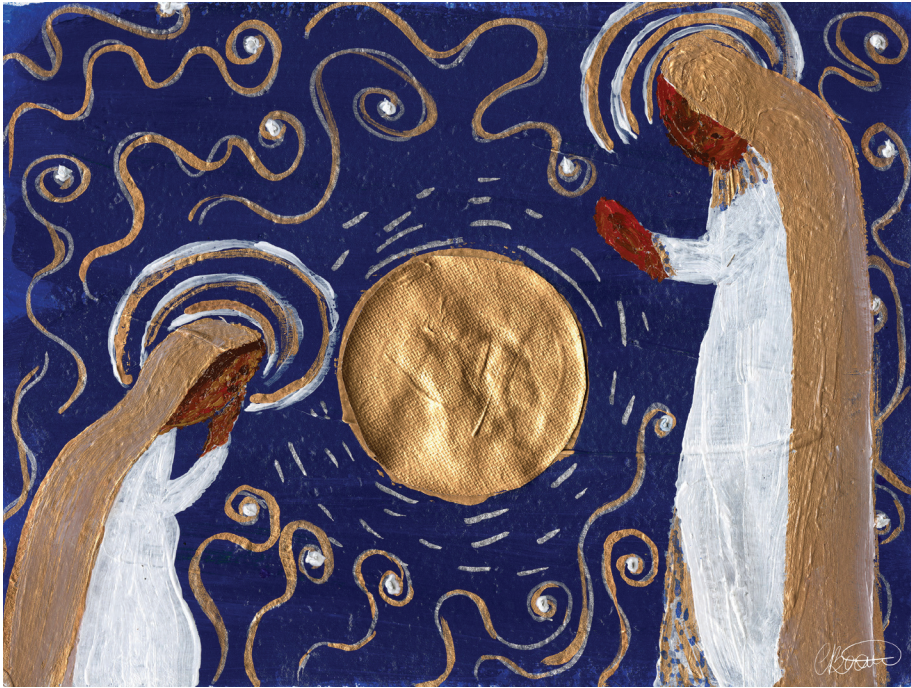
Through Him, All Things | Lauren Wright Pittman
Block print with oil-based ink over gouache painting

READ John 1:1-14

COMMENTARY | Dr. Christine J. Hong

During Christmastime each year, I reflect on the faith of my ancestors, a faith forged in fire. I think especially about my grandparents who are no longer with me, who passed their faith down to their children and grandchildren. As internally-displaced people after the Korean war ceasefire, they built a life for their family out of nothing. Despite their faith, at times they despaired. I remember my grandmother telling me about those early days as they found their footing in a forever changed Korean peninsula. She spoke about the waves of grief that would wash over her. As they fled the northern part of the peninsula, their newborn died. She never got to say goodbye to her siblings or parents. Her younger brother was conscripted into the North Korean army, and after letters that would arrive here and there over those first years, the correspondence suddenly stopped coming and she could only assume the worst about his fate. She spoke about one episode of grief that hit her while sweeping the kitchen. Grief washed over her, and she crumpled to the floor, swallowed by it. She wanted to pray but no words would come. As she struggled, she had a vision of two giant hands open and beckoning her. She felt held by those divine hands as she moved through her grief. God did not try to remove her grief but held her through it.

When I consider my grandmother's story during Christmastime, the testimony of her life in post-war Korea, I cannot help but also reflect on Mary, who pondered all she bore witness to in her heart. The twin feelings of relief in welcoming the healthy birth of her child, and the anguish of what was coming for him. As she held Jesus, did she also feel held by the Divine presence—a presence that held her throughout her life as she moved through joy, anticipation, terror, and grief? Surely, she was also held by the hands of her ancestors, those who knew her by name, and would help her move through what life would soon bring.



Mary's Golden Annunciation | Carmelle Beaugelin
Acrylic, gilding paint, canvas collage on handmade reclaimed paper



EVERYWHERE AND ALWAYS

Right here.
That's where God is.
In the sun that turns our bedroom gold,
in the creaks of this old house, and in birthday candles on
the cake;
in clean sheets, sock feet, and porch-sitting;
in pancakes for breakfast and pancakes for dinner;
in the swell of a lit candle, in fireplace conversations;
in your grandmother's carrot cake, and the smell of evergreen.
God is in the seed-starters on the porch,
and the space between my bones;
in garlic butter, early mornings, and twinkle lights.
Certainly in dancing and laughing, in cups of coffee,
in the art hung on the fridge, snail mail, long phone calls,
and *oh how I love yous*. God is right here.
God pulled up a seat. God has traveled all the way to the heart.
Tell the next generation.

*Poem by
Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed*

READ Luke 1:26-38

FROM THE ARTIST | Carmelle Beaugelin

Mary's Golden Annunciation explores the moment of encounter between Mary and the angelic messenger. This unusual encounter may have been startling to young Mary—a soon-to-be teen bride turned, possibly, unwed mother. Yet, with holy bravery in the face of communal isolation, she accepts the call to be a surrogate mother to a son who is to be the savior of her people and the son of God.

There is not much commentary regarding Mary's consent to motherhood. She is often portrayed as a humble, yet passive, "accepter" of a fate predestined for her. But I wonder, what if the angel had appeared to Mary and she had declined? Would her name be erased from historic and religious memory in favor of another willing young virgin?

Mary's Golden Annunciation depicts not only a remarkable encounter, but also the moment that divinity in human form was conceived. It is my speculation that the divinity of God entered Mary's body no sooner than Mary's "yes" went out from her mouth. In a time when women had few options other than marriage, Mary's consent to a potentially unwed motherhood is a brave act of subversive agency. In Mary's "yes," uttered in her Magnificat, we see the transformation of a young teenage girl from fearful to determined, from simply accepting to deciding, from passivity to agency, from betrothed to surrogate mother of God—an honor rarer than gold. Perhaps the most remarkable annunciation in this passage is not the messenger's revelation to Mary, but Mary's "yes" to the call.

PRAY

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.



Wednesday | Journal Prompt

FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION...

God meets us in our fear

When the angel Gabriel comes to Mary, she is perplexed and confused—and no doubt, afraid. And yet, the angel's news is: "Do not be afraid." In the space below, reflect on a time when you were afraid, but said yes to an invitation anyway.

Saturday | FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION...

We tell this story

READ Luke 2:1-20

FROM THE ARTIST | Rev. Lisle Gwynn Garrity

This year, I come to this story with deep reverence for the complexity and beauty of childbirth. At the time of creating this art, I am about 6 weeks away from giving birth to my first child—who will be born in the same hospital where my mom died from cancer 20 years ago. My daughter will take her first breath in the same place where I heard my mother's last exhale. Much of my pregnancy has been a journey of healing—of inviting joy into the house where my grief lives, of preparing to become a mother as a motherless child. The more I learn of others' experiences around birth, I realize how closely joy and grief can coexist in each of our stories.⁵

And so, as I return to Jesus' birth story, my imagination leads me to wonder about how Mary experienced both grief and joy. Apart from Elizabeth, did she have support throughout her pregnancy? Was her own mother involved? Did she have generational trauma she needed to grieve? Did the stress of their travels to Bethlehem cause her labor to happen sooner than expected? As she labored, did a midwife come? Was she afraid?

In this image, as if looking past a curtain, we peer into this threshold moment when excruciating pain gives way to ecstatic joy as Mary draws her baby to her chest and he takes his first breath. As Mary holds her baby, additional hands reach in to support them both. Maybe these are the hands of strangers, of Joseph, or of a midwife who was summoned. Perhaps they are simply the hands of angels.

Each year, we tell this story because it is raw with joy, pain, and the complexities of being human. No matter how your story is unfolding, may you find that this sacred story holds space for you. For this is how God shows up—in a child who cries, in hands that hold, in human flesh, in life and in death.

PRAY

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.

⁵ If you have pain, grief, trauma, or longing related to pregnancy and childbirth, we hold space for you. In this Christmas season, may God meet you in grief and joy and every moment in between.



How God Shows Up | Lisle Gwynn Garrity
Silk painting with digital drawing and collage



Ancestral | Hannah Garrity
Paper lace with watercolor

Friday | FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION...

We tell this story

READ Luke 2:1-20

COMMENTARY | Dr. Christine J. Hong

Different cultures have different birthday rituals. In Korean culture we practice the tradition of eating *Miyeok-guk* on your birthday. *Miyeok-guk* is a nutritious and delicious seaweed soup made with beef or seafood broth. The flavor is rich and savory, and when you eat it with a bowl of hot rice and kimchi, it's a comforting and homey meal. Korean people eat *Miyeok-guk* on their birthdays because it is an age-old tradition to eat *Miyeok-guk* after women give birth. The iodine and vitamin-rich seaweed soup restores energy, cleanses the blood, and increases the rate of physical healing from the trauma of giving birth. It also increases the flow of breastmilk. Korean women will sometimes eat *Miyeok-guk*—and only *Miyeok-guk*—until they are a few months postpartum. It is usually your mother or grandmother who makes *Miyeok-guk* for you.

We eat *Miyeok-guk* as the first meal on our birthdays not only to celebrate growing another year older, but also to remember and honor the labor of our mothers. Now, as an adult, on the rare occasion that I get to eat *Miyeok-guk* made by my umma's (mother's) hands, I feel a deep sense of gratitude with each bite. Now, I make *Miyeok-guk* for my children on their birthdays, a tradition I'm passing down because it connects my children to their Korean culture and to the ancestral ties alive in this simple and delicious soup. This soup provides an intrinsic connection—like an umbilical cord—to mothers, grandmothers, and great-grandmothers who used and tasted the same ingredients throughout their lifetimes.

After the birth of Jesus, we turn our attention away from Mary who labored to give birth to the infant in the manger. Yet can we keep our eyes on Mary too? Can we offer her some nourishment? Can we remember her as the person who carried salvation in her womb? On Christmas Eve, let's look to the ancestral ties Jesus leaves with us on earth by focusing on his mother and her courage and vulnerability—a woman who needed postpartum care, a good meal, compassionate partners, and rest. When we remember the birth of Jesus, let us also remember Mary as mother, our hearts full of gratitude.



EVERY YEAR

My heart and I have an agreement.
Every year we show up here—
here in the sanctuary,
here with the candles and the tall ceilings,
here with the creaky church pews
and the songs of silent nights.

My heart and I have an agreement.
Every year we show up here—
at the end of the year,
after another 12 months
of humanity, of me
trying to
keep it all together,
trying to
keep my head above water,
trying to
keep up appearances.

Every year we show up here.
We drop it all.
We leave it at the door.
We come into this space
and I could swear it feels different.

Maybe it's God.
Maybe it's hope.
Maybe it's love.
But whatever it is,
I need it
every year,
so we show up here.
Tell us again the story of tonight.

My heart needs it.

*Poem by
Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed*

READ Isaiah 11:1-10

FROM THE ARTIST | Hannah Garrity

This illustration explores the idea that perhaps the oppressor is not so far away. The lion and the calf, the cheetah and the goat, the wolf and the lamb, the ox and the bear—each predator shares a face with its prey. Each pair of animal faces is connected to the root line of the stump of Jesse. Each generation has been challenged to forward the radical call for peace in this Isaiah text.

As I read this text, I was drawn most closely to the idea of the roots, the past history, the ancient texts from the ancient times expressing the human condition and its possibilities. The practice of culturally responsive teaching comes to mind for me, a public school teacher in Virginia.

Culturally responsive teaching is a humanizing approach that allows for the boundaries of culture to meld, firmly giving way to incredible curricular access for all students, regardless of their backgrounds. As I walk in each day as the face of oppression, the world arrives, too. My school has 48 languages spoken. We have many recent immigrants. I have a new student added to one of my classes once every couple of weeks. The only way to connect across barriers is to remove barriers with honor and reverence for the collective wisdom of humanity.

My white skin represents the oppression of centuries. With a culturally responsive approach, I can lead with love. I can honor each student's ancestry, lived experience, and daily presence in my classroom.

Perhaps the asp and the adder not injuring the child and the infant are a metaphor for this. In this image, the child and the infant are represented by the roots. The viper represents the asp and the adder. The threat looms, yet the roots thrive and the sprout emerges from the stump. The prey and the predator are on equal terms; no longer is one superior to another. We must humanize one another. We must honor each other's ancestry.

PRAY

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.

God meets us in our fear



Scan to hear the tune!

Here I Am

Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence

Text: Anna Strickland (2022) Music: Traditional French carol (17th cent.)



An - gel Ga - briel came to Ma - ry
 Though his words were filled with glo - ry
 Week by week in Ma - ry's bel - ly
 Whe - ther we may feel we're rea - dy



In the hills of Ga - li - lee Ap - pre - hen - sion
 Still the mes - sage brought great fear "Who am I to
 God was grow - ing flesh and bone As her life and
 For the task be - fore us laid God will streng - then



and con - fu - sion Filled her, won - d'ring what's to
 bear the sav - ior With the path - way so un -
 path were chang - ing Ne - ver was she left a -
 and up - hold us Ev - en when the fear won't



be "Do not be a - fraid," the an - gel told the
 clear?" "Here I am," she pledged; the an - gel Gab - riel
 lone With her all the while was Ma - ry's ho - ly
 fade We say, "Here I am," to God's tran - scen - dent



maid "God has high - ly fa - vored thee"
 fled Quick - ly as he had ap - peared
 child Pledge of "Here I am" of God's own
 plan Trust - ing God to lend us aid

We see God in each other

READ Luke 1:46-55

FROM THE ARTIST | Hannah Garrity

Passed down from generation to generation, my grandmother's painting palette still had watercolors on it when I opened it the other day. She placed them there so long ago. I think that the last painting classes she took were in 2005. Like her mother before her, she was a painter. Nana loved watercolor. She and I traveled to France during my gap year between high school and college. Despite her hip that needed replacing, we walked to the Mediterranean water's edge every day. I carried many of her things and would get her set up to paint. She painted *en plein air* on the banks while I swam, or drew, or took photographs, or watched her paint. It sounds like a poem as I write these words. What a gift; I can't believe it, really.

The brushes we used for this Magnificat painting were one of the few gifts I received from her over the years, and certainly the most personal and precious. She gifted me two watercolor brushes; she saw the artist in me. My mother, my daughter, and I added water to the paint that Nana had placed on her palette so many years ago. We took turns with the brushes. Adding water, letting generations flow into one another, we painted.

As I studied the text, I was drawn into the energy of praise. "My spirit rejoices..." (Luke 1:47) Drawing inspiration from long exposure images of dancers, I overlaid three poses, which made the flow of light become abstract. The front foot steps forward while the figure leans back. The dancer leaps, one knee pulled up toward the chest, head and hands forward. The head almost touches the toes in a 'c' shape while the arms spin outstretched. The energy of Mary's soul creates a trinitarian flow as she rejoices in the hope, the healing, and the freedom from oppression that her son will provide as a precedent for generations to come.

PRAY

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.

Saturday | *God meets us in our fear*

FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION...

SABBATH IN THE KITCHEN

As a Sabbath activity, follow this family recipe or prepare another favorite dish.

DECORATED CHRISTMAS COOKIES

A family recipe shared by Lisle Gwynn Garrity

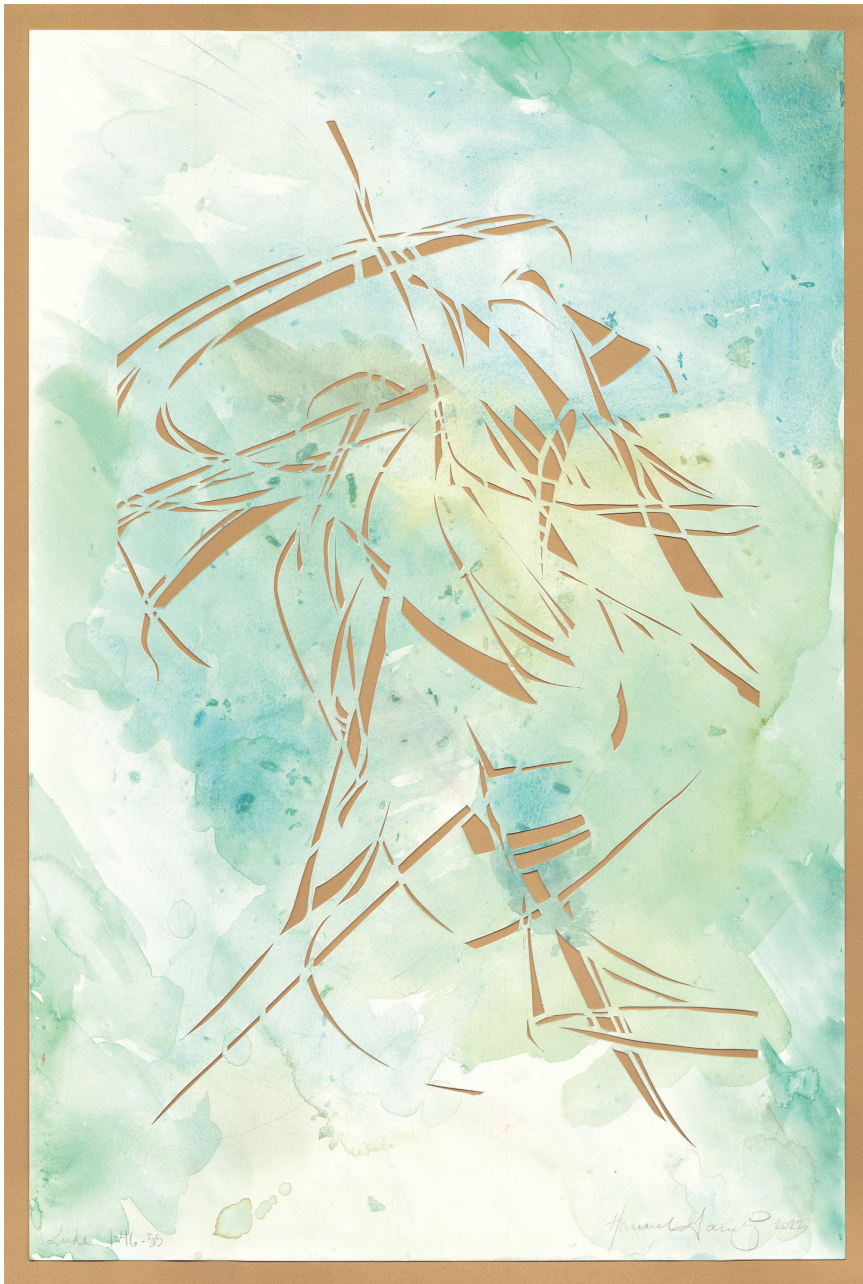
As a child, Christmastime always promised us a tradition that was an otherwise forbidden activity: the chance to play with our food. My grandmother's kitchen table became an art studio splattered with flour and sprinkles when, each year, she retrieved the metal tin filled with Christmas-themed cookie cutters, and we spent the afternoon crafting edible Christmas treats. To my knowledge, we never made these cookies from scratch because my grandmother was admittedly not much of a cook, and because pre-made convenience allowed us to devote ourselves to the art of cookie sprinkles. We would spend hours rolling the dough, clapping our hands into flour clouds, and discovering how many red and green sugar crystals could fit on reindeer-shaped patties. And so, for this Sabbath Saturday recipe, I give you permission to focus less on baking and more on playing. I hope you'll buy pre-made sugar cookie dough, get your kitchen messy, and decorate Christmas cookies with little humans leading the way.

INGREDIENTS

- Store-bought, pre-made sugar cookie dough (*or bake from scratch if the word "pre-made" makes you wince*)
- Sprinkles—as many kinds and colors as possible
- Store-bought icing

INSTRUCTIONS

With a rolling pin, flatten the cookie dough in between handfuls of flour. Use cookie cutters to cut the dough into fun shapes—or use a knife to freehand Christmas-themed creations. Sprinkle abundantly. Bake until your kitchen swells with sweetness.



Dance of the Soul | Hannah Garrity
Paper lace with watercolor

Sunday | FROM GENERATION
TO GENERATION...
We can choose a better way



INSTRUCTIONS FOR A HARD CHOICE

First, you must take a deep breath.
Let oxygen dance through your lungs.
Exhale it slowly. Allow the hurt, the shame,
the anger to rise up in you. Let your mind run wild,
like a million loose horses. Let the narratives unfold, unroll,
a river of choppy water. Ask yourself how you got here. Look
down at your feet. Roll your shoulders back. Remember who you
are. Take another deep breath. Then, walk it back to the beginning.

Instead of looking at your feet, look at hers. Imagine where she
stands. Imagine what he needs. Dry the river of false stories
in your mind. Turn rushing water into a dry creek bed,
certainly not clean enough to drink. Call the horses.
Bring them home. Watch as they shake off
the dust of the day. Name what you're feeling.
Inhale again. Now you are ready
to choose a better way.

*Poem by
Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed*

Tuesday | FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION...
We see God in each other

READ Luke 1:39-45; 56-58

FROM THE ARTIST | Carmelle Beaugelin

Mary and Elizabeth have found in each other a sisterhood amid their precarious and unusual circumstances. An older Elizabeth (perhaps losing hope of ever nursing a child at the loss of her monthly cycle) welcomes a young Mary (pledged to be wed at the first sign of her cycle, yet seemingly pregnant before she has even wed). Despite their difference in age, the two cousins find comfort in each other in the midst of the unconventional timing of their expanding families. All along, as the two women whisper together of the growing promises hidden in their wombs and unconventional lives, Mary and Elizabeth themselves are cradled by the guiding arms of the God who moves them beyond cousins into sisterhood.

Reminiscent of Haitian folk art figures, Mary and Elizabeth are portrayed wearing traditional Afro-Caribbean style headdresses as their silhouettes face one another in a stoic greeting. For new Haitian mothers, a tradition of preparing sacred tea leaves, as well as postpartum herbal baths, offers solidarity between the more seasoned women and a new mother. Often—as displayed by the relationship between the two women in this story—grandmothers, cousins, and other close female community members act as surrogates in this sacred practice for those who have been displaced from their own families.

The Golden Cradle expands on the imagery of Mary's golden "yes" to her call, meeting Elizabeth's "yes" to a holy birth of her own. In their meeting, the promises they carry leap for joy at this first encounter, offering us a picture of the kind of communal solidarity we often find along the journey of the unfolding story of God in our own lives. Even in moments of isolation, we often encounter surrogates who step in with divine provision when we need it the most.

PRAY

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.

We can choose a better way

READ Matthew 1:18-25

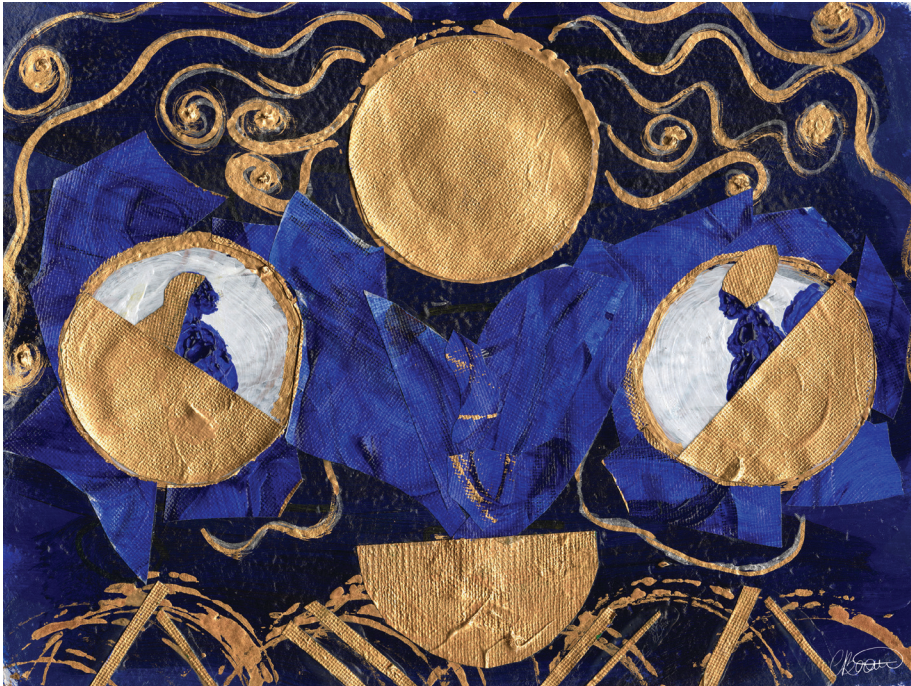
COMMENTARY | Dr. Christine J. Hong

This story always raises a question for me. Why did it take divine intervention for Joseph to choose the better way? It took a vision and a celestial being for Joseph not to abandon his partner. Part of me is frustrated with Joseph. It took the hand of God for him to choose a better way; however, when I reflect upon my frustration, I realize in many ways we are each Joseph. Each day we are faced with opportunities to do and be better in our relationships with one another and the world. Yet, when we are faced with opportunities to put our privilege and power at risk—to do what is right—we often decline to engage. Risk discomforts power.

Too often, I witness white folx evade doing the right thing in justice work. When the opportunity rises for white folx to do and say the right thing, which ultimately puts their relationships, jobs, or reputations at risk with other white folx, polite excuses arise—excuses that claim to “make room” for BIPOC³ voices by declining to use their own voices. Why is it that room for BIPOC is made only when it serves the interests of white folx taking the least amount of risk? How about risking solidarity with us? I sometimes wonder about and wish for divine intervention in these moments. What would happen if the divine would intervene and demand white folx take the better way? Why should doing the right thing take divine intervention?

I wonder about Mary and Joseph’s relationship in the aftermath of the dream. What was in Mary’s heart and on her tongue as Joseph told her about the dream that changed everything? What did Mary’s face look like as Joseph confessed that saving her and the baby took the work of a divine dream and command? I hope he eventually realized that doing right by her shouldn’t have necessitated divine intervention. I hope we might be people who do not need convincing that there is a better way. Let’s choose the better way and risk solidarity with one another.

³ An acronym for “Black, Indigenous, and People of Color.”



The Golden Cradle | Carmelle Beaugelin
Acrylic, gilding paint, canvas collage on handmade reclaimed paper

We see God in each other

READ Luke 1:39-58

COMMENTARY | Dr. Christine J. Hong

My parents are Korean immigrants. My mother used to say that back in the days of their immigration, whoever met you at the airport decided your destiny. In other words, whoever greets you at the threshold as you become a new immigrant determines the direction your life moves. I remember her words and reflect on them whenever I reach significant impasses in my life—a new job, a move, when I became a parent for the first time. Each significant milestone feels like a threshold. When I prepare to cross those thresholds, I look for the people and communities waiting on the other side, people and communities to anchor me and hold me in the nebulous spaces of change, uncertainty, and fear.

When my parents crossed over from being Korean to being Korean American, it was the local church pastor (also a Korean immigrant) who greeted them at the threshold, after they made their way through borders and customs at LAX.⁴ He picked them up in his car and took them to an apartment complex to get them housed. Next, he took them to meet members of his church who worked at ticketing at LAX. My parents worked the next few years at Korean Airlines ticketing and baggage claim, hourly jobs that paid the bills and gave them footing in a new country. The final stop was the Korean immigrant church that would be their community as they settled in a new country, with a new language, and, in some ways, a new understanding of Christian faith. It was the Korean immigrant church folk who anchored them to this new land. My parents arrived and were greeted by Korean American people who embraced them, settled them, and invited them to participate in building sustaining faith and peoplehood together.

Elizabeth greets Mary on the threshold, not only of her door but the threshold of something new in Mary's life and for the world. Mary is met by her cousin who greets her with welcome, anticipation, and a powerful blessing. So rich was the blessing that the baby in Elizabeth's womb leapt up and greeted Mary and the baby in Mary's womb. Any fear Mary had was met with the contagious courage of Elizabeth, courage enough for them both. They were one another's spiritual midwives—birthing together transformation, grounded in one another's courage and steadfastness. They wondered together in liminal space, on the threshold of a new world. And through their spiritual and relational partnership, Mary and Elizabeth framed the path of partnership for their children too.

⁴ The Los Angeles International Airport in California.



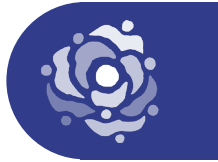
The Courageous Choice | Lisle Gwynn Garrity
Silk painting with digital drawing and collage

Sunday | FROM GENERATION
TO GENERATION...
We see God in each other

WHERE I SAW GOD LAST

The dimple in your right cheek, the child playing peek a-boo from his stroller, the abuelita who spends her afternoons in the park by 86th; the teenagers on the subway who cannot control their laughter; Neil, my neighbor, who always asks about you, the mother who whispers a dozen times a day, “*thank you, Jesus, thank you, Jesus, thank you, Jesus*”; the saxophone player at 42nd street, the poets, the artists, the garden volunteers; the metro car driver who sticks his head out the window to make sure we’re all aboard; the man who gave up his seat on the subway, the kid in the dinosaur pajamas who cannot be convinced they’re not school attire; the teachers, the nurses, the taxi cab drivers; the woman at the end of the block with her yappy dogs and her books in the window, the lovers that lay sprawled out on park blankets, the runners, the daydreamers, the sidewalk chalk artists; John from upstairs whose favorite flowers are yellow tulips, the Persian man at the grocery who tells me to be safe when I leave, my grandmother in Georgia; my neighbor, the stranger; *thank you, Jesus, thank you, Jesus, thank you, Jesus.*

Poem by
Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed



Tuesday | FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION...
We can choose a better way

READ Matthew 1:18-25

FROM THE ARTIST | Rev. Lisle Gwynn Garrity

When Joseph learns that his engagement has turned into a scandal, he decides to dismiss Mary quietly. While this choice may seem like a compassionate one, it’s also a passive choice, one with little cost to Joseph but great consequences for Mary. As an unmarried mother, she and her child would be incredibly vulnerable, shunned by society, perhaps cut off from family support and resources. This choice means Joseph’s reputation remains unharmed while pregnant Mary will live on with mounting shame and threats cast upon her.

While Joseph is thinking about all of this, perhaps deliberating about how he will delicately manage the social perceptions of this unexpected turn in his life, an angel comes to him in his dreams. What I find most interesting is that the angel doesn’t command Joseph; instead he simply says, “Don’t be afraid.” He essentially says: “Don’t be afraid of the social stigma. Don’t be afraid to become a parent through adoption. Don’t be afraid to experience a love greater than you have ever known. Don’t be afraid to make the courageous choice, the one that will not only change your life, but the lives of Mary and Jesus and so many generations who will come after you.”

In this image, I’ve captured Joseph in the liminal space where his dreams will soon shape his reality. He rests his head on a folded blanket, which represents the woven tapestry of his ancestors who also made difficult choices for good. Gold interconnecting lines, like the roots and branches of a family tree, envelop him, symbolizing the beautiful web of regeneration that will come from his courage.

As we reflect on the Christmas story through Joseph’s experience, may we, too, have the courage to choose a better way.

PRAY

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.



Wednesday | Journal Prompt

FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION...

We can choose a better way

Reread the poem, "Instructions for a Hard Choice" by Rev. Sarah Speed (pg. 21). In the space below, reflect on a time when you made a difficult decision. How did you find your way to the choice you made? How was God at work in that experience?

Saturday | *We can choose a better way*

FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION...

SABBATH IN THE KITCHEN

As a Sabbath activity, follow this family recipe or prepare another favorite dish.

PEANUT'S PECAN PIE (ADAPTED FOR POPPA) A family recipe shared by Lauren Wright Pittman

Peanut was my Poppa's (my maternal grandfather) little sister who was born in 1944. Peanut learned to cook early on because she wasn't able to work in the fields with the rest of her family. Her pecan pie was my Poppa's absolute favorite. Her pie was a seasonal treat because she had to wait for the pecan trees to drop the nuts, and she cracked them each by hand. It was hard work, so she tried to make it easier in some other ways. She adapted a recipe to use a whole bottle of Karo syrup so she could use up the whole bottle and have it yield two pies. Peanut knew this was also one of my mom's favorite recipes, so when my mom got married in 1984, Peanut gave her the recipe. As my Poppa grew older, he lost his teeth and wasn't able to enjoy all the foods he used to. My mom decided to start chopping up the pecans almost to dust so he could taste his favorite pie once again. I lost my Poppa this year. At his celebration of life, we shared his favorite pie and our gratitude for his life with hundreds of his family and friends. I will cherish this recipe for the rest of my life, and will certainly pass it on.

INGREDIENTS

- 6 eggs
- 2 cups of pecans
- 1 bottle dark Karo syrup
- 4 tablespoons of butter melted, or a 1/2 stick
- 1 cup of sugar
- 2 pie shells

INSTRUCTIONS

Mix the ingredients well and pour into the pie shells (*be careful not to mix hot butter with the eggs; let it cool first*). The recipe makes 2 deep dish pies or 3 regular pies. Bake at 350 degrees for 45 minutes. If using a deep dish, bake for 65 mins.

We can choose a better way



Scan to hear
the tune!

A Better Way

God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen

Text: Anna Strickland (2022)

Music: Traditional English carol (18th cent.)



When Jo - seph learned of Ma - ry's state he
He planned to leave her qui - et - ly and
Said Ga - briel, "Jo - seph, do not fear to
Like Jo - seph woke from sleep to find his



pon-dered her dis - grace He cal - cu - lat - ed
not cre - ate a scene But Ma - ry still would
make Ma - ry your wife She bears in - side her
path - way had been changed Still here to - day God



all the shame the scan - dal would cre - ate But
grow with child; what then would her fate be? When
womb the hope of ev - er - last - ing life The
calls us all to choose the bet - ter way Be -



not con - tent to see her stoned he of - fered her some
Jo - seph went to sleep that night an an - gel in - ter -
son that she will bear to you is Je - sus the Mes -
- yond our wild - est dreams is still a call - ing that re -



grace
- vened Oh there is a bet - ter way, God's bet - ter way Oh
- siah"
- mains



we can choose the bet - ter way

We can choose a better way

READ Isaiah 35:1-10

FROM THE ARTIST | Rev. Lauren Wright Pittman

Hope is difficult to come by these days; the wilderness seems to expand toward the horizon with no end in sight. “The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing” (Is. 35: 1-2). How does one cling to the nonexistent, vibrant purple petals of a crocus flower as they crouch in a barren, dusty wasteland? How does one reach for the cool relief of clear springs in a parched haunt of jackals?

Have you ever looked through a kaleidoscope? A kaleidoscope doesn’t expose your eye to anything that isn’t there. It takes what is in view, and with light and mirrors, creates a new, dynamic, luminous image. The overlapping, novel perspectives, light, and movement transform mundane and even unappealing subjects into vibrantly dancing masterpieces. Now, how does this relate to this text? I think it’s possible that when we face difficult seasons that seem unending, if we immerse ourselves in the light of the voices of prophets, move to a new vantage point, and try new perspectives, we just might be able to see the wilderness bloom.

In this image I chose a few of the many vivid visuals from the text and created a kaleidoscope of sorts. Starting in the center, crocuses bloom, weak hands are strengthened, eyes are opened, bodies leap with joy, burning sand becomes a pool, swamps are formed, and the light of gladness radiates from the entire composition.

We need prophecies like this. Please don’t get me wrong; there are certainly seasons of disappointment, devastation, and grief in this life, but we need not make our homes there. We could choose to shy away from such optimism during particularly difficult times while getting endlessly lost and settled into apathy and despair. Or, we could choose a better way, and hold fast to the stories of the joy that is to come.

PRAY

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.



Wilderness Blossom | Lauren Wright Pittman
Digital painting