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.

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AN ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

Until the Dawn

ACTIONS FOR THE WORK OF ADVENT

Art, Poetry, & Reflections for Advent

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Read Matthew 2:1-12

Artist Statement | Carmelle Beaugelin Caldwell

In Haiti, bringing new mothers *fèy*—the gift of herbs for teas and postpartum baths—is a tradition rooted in generations of Indigenous Caribbean and Vodou healing practices. A grandmother or elder woman carries on these traditions by teaching new mothers this healing wisdom, serving as a kind of "garden mother" at birth. As they journeyed from the East, I imagine the Magi carrying a similar sacred wisdom in their gifts to the newborn Christ.

Magos/Magoi, often translated as 'wise men' in Matthew, are terms more closely associated with 'magicians' or 'sorcerers' across scripture. While the Magi are traditionally assumed to be men, scholars trace them to the Persian priestly caste, which included both women and men practitioners.

Rev. Dr. Boyung Lee offers a feminist reading of Matthew 2,[25] which helps us imagine what it would mean to Mary if women were among these traveling diviners. Under Levitical law, Mary was now ceremonially unclean from childbirth, and it would be forbidden for men in her culture to come near her. But what about women from the East bearing gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh—like garden mothers in the night? Imagine these Magi kneeling beside and tending to a young mother still recovering from the holy, exhausting work of bearing God's light into the world.

Mère De Jardin et Twa Solèy (Garden Mother and Three Suns) imagines both that act of care and the cosmic announcement in the night sky, borrowing dramatic imagery from the Apostle John's vision of a cosmic woman giving birth to a child who will rule the nations in Revelation 12.

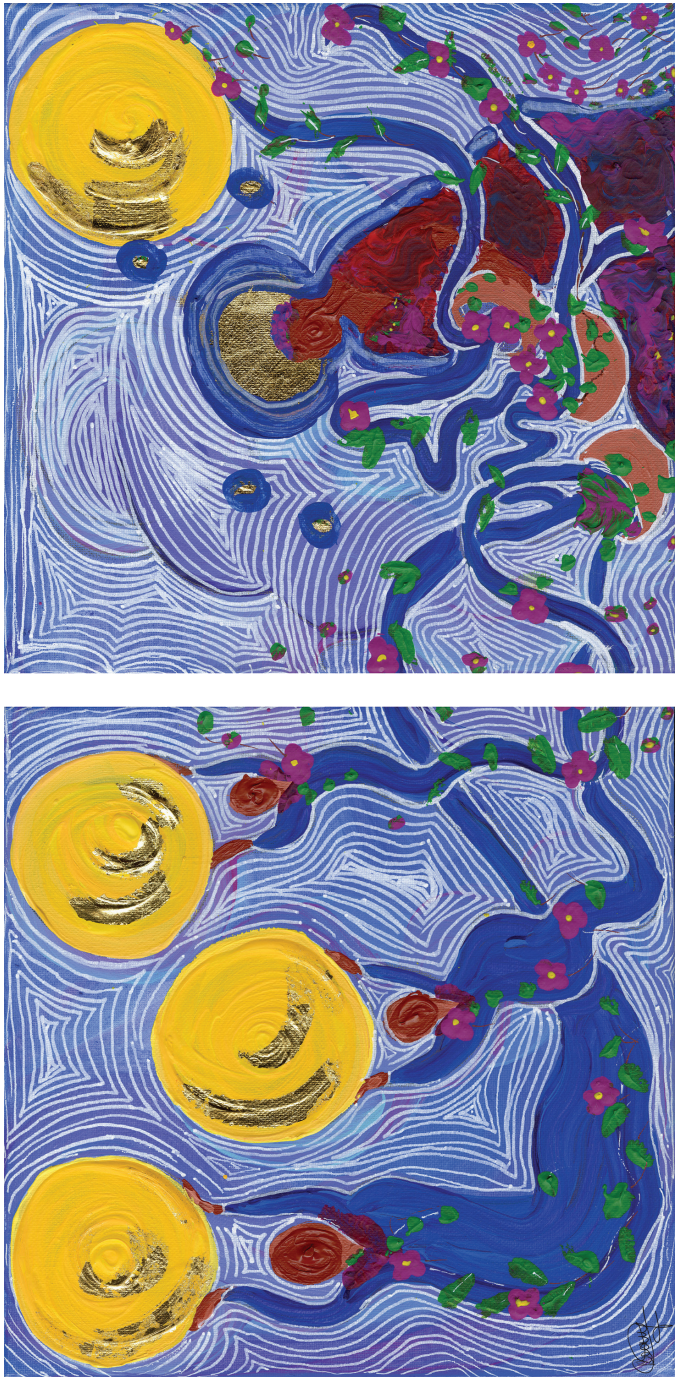
Christ's in-breaking into human history allowed the Magi to become among the first to recognize the cosmic shift of all shifts. God's willingness to reveal Christ to us, even in the unlikeliest of ways, is an extension of grace far more expansive than our ability to comprehend. May we journey by faith, as the Magi did, through the darkness as we seek the newborn king with joy, until dawn.

Praise be to God.

Look

Contemplate all of the figures in this piece—the Magi and the Garden Mother. What story do you imagine for them?

25 "The Magi, A Feminist Lens (A Bonus Commentary by Boyung Lee). *A Sanctified Art.* August 14, 2025. sanctifiedart.org/blog/the-magi-a-feminist-lens-a-bonus-commentary-by-boyung-lee



Turn your booklet 90 degrees to the right to view the art.

Mère De Jardin et Twa Solèy (Garden Mother and Three Suns) | Carmelle Beaugelin Caldwell
Acrylic and gold leaf on canvas (diptych)

Every Advent, we light candles and speak of hope. We wait for the good news that God is born. We prepare with pageants and presents. Yet, in the midst of our busy waiting, we know all too well that the world is not as it should be. Wars rage on, violence persists, new tragedies unfold. God's promises are real, *and* God's promised day has not yet come. This tension keeps us yearning—for a new day, a new way, a world made new.

This devotional focuses on the actions we can take as we move through the night with hope for tomorrow. Night is a time when the way forward may seem unclear, when our senses are heightened and fear may creep in. And the darkness also brings gifts—rest, regeneration, dreams, intimacy with God. In our sacred stories, angels often arrive in the night, calling for courageous action and singing good news. In the night, Mary's labor pains crescendo and Christ is born. In the night, shepherds and Magi follow the stars to get closer to God. And so, in the metaphorical night, we will carry on with the work that is ours to do.

Each week of this devotional offers art, reflections, poetry, and hymns to help us resist despair and put our prayers in motion. As we move through the season, we will cry out, start somewhere, speak up, take courage, build up, and choose joy. Until the day when God's love reigns and all the earth echoes shalom, let us keep moving, singing, resisting, and rejoicing—trusting that God joins us in the work of Advent.

Artfully yours,

The Sanctified Art Creative Team

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

About the SA Creative Team

Rev. Lisle Gwynn Garrity

Founder | Creative Director of SA

Lisle *(she/her)* is a Pastorist (pastor + artist) and creative entrepreneur seeking to fill the church with more color, paint, mystery, and creativity. Her faith is rooted in creative practices that help her break free from perfectionism and control and participate in creating a more whole, just world.

Rev. Lauren Wright Pittman

Director of Branding | Founding Creative Partner of SA

Lauren *(she/her)* is an artist, graphic designer, and theologian. She uses paint, metallic inks, linoleum carving tools, and her trusty Apple pencil to image the layered complexity she experiences in scripture texts. Visual exploration offers her a holy space to ask questions, find her voice, take risks, and make bold statements.

Hannah Garrity

Founding Creative Partner of SA

Hannah *(she/her)* is the Director of Christian Faith, Life, and Arts at the wonderful Second Presbyterian Church in Richmond, VA. She also serves as Art Ministry Director at Montreat Conference Center (Montreat, NC). Hannah is currently pursuing a Master's of Divinity and Master's of Christian Education at Union Presbyterian Seminary in Richmond, VA.

Rev. Sarah A. Speed

Founding Creative Partner of SA

Sarah *(she/her)* is the Head of Staff/Senior Pastor at Second Presbyterian Church of Kansas City, MO. Sarah feels called to welcome people into the church by using her energy and passion for beautifully-scripted words, raw and relevant liturgy, and hands-on worship experiences to engage our longing for God and the need for justice in this messy world.

Rev. Anna Strickland

Creative Partner | Operations Support

Anna *(she/her)* looks for the Divine in the everyday like treasure in clay jars and first encountered God in the integration of her spiritual self and artistic self. She is a former teacher and college minister, a proud Texas Longhorn and graduate of Iliff School of Theology, a Baptist to the core ministering in ecumenical spaces, and a lover of chaos anchored by the belief that the Spirit is most active in the spaces between us.

Because at the same time, that same star unsettles a king. Herod hears of it and is afraid because he understands that a new kind of power is entering the world—one that does not rely on domination or fear. And he responds the only way empire knows how: with control, with violence, with the desperate attempt to preserve itself. The Magi move toward the light with joy, while Herod moves against it with fear.

That contrast reveals something about the world we live in: Joy isn't neutral. In a world that runs on anxiety and scarcity, joy can feel disruptive because it loosens the grip of fear, reminding us that another way is possible. It refuses to let despair have the final word.

This is why joy is not something we stumble into by accident or finally reach once our lives are in order. It's something we learn to notice, to practice, to follow. Like the Magi, we're invited to pay attention to the small lights that appear along the way—the moments that draw us forward, the glimpses that remind us we are not alone.

Epiphany is a time of revelation, when what has been hidden begins to come into view. But revelation is not always comfortable. The same light that guides also exposes, showing us where we have been looking for power in the wrong places, where we've mistaken control for security, where we've overlooked the sacred because it did not arrive the way we expected.

The Magi follow the star to a child, not a throne. To a presence that doesn't demand attention but invites recognition. And this is where Epiphany leaves us—with a choice.

Will we, like Herod, cling to what keeps us feeling powerful, even if it costs us our humanity? Or will we, like the Magi, allow ourselves to be led by joy, even when it takes us somewhere unfamiliar?

Because the light is still here, flickering in unexpected places. It appears in the overlooked, in the subtle movements of love and truth that refuse to be extinguished. Our task is not to manufacture it, but to notice it. To trust it enough to follow. And when joy finds us—suddenly, unexpectedly, like a sky full of stars breaking through the dark—we do not turn away. We let it lead.

Epiphany
Until the Dawn
CHOOSE JOY

Commentary | Kat Armas

Read Matthew 2:1-12

Joy shows us that another way is possible

I remember the first time I escaped the glare of city lights and was introduced to the sky as it really is. It felt like wiping a smudge from my vision. My little sister loved space, so she taught me how to find the Big Dipper, the Little Dipper, Orion's Belt—tiny constellations printed on a paper map. But something shifted when I saw them stretched wide above me. While on a family beach trip, with my back pressed into the sand, I knew, without having language for it, that I was looking at something ancient and alive.

You may have heard it said that we are stardust. I used to think that was just a poetic phrase, something you'd find tucked into a song lyric. But it's true. The elements that make up our bodies were formed in the heart of stars that lived and died long before we ever existed. In a very real sense, what we see when we look up is not separate from us. We belong to the same story.

Maybe that's why something in us responds so instinctively to the night sky. There's a kind of recognition there, a remembering.

The Magi knew that kind of attention. They had spent their lives studying the sky and learning its patterns, so when something shifted, they noticed. They followed the star because it spoke in a language they understood, one shaped by their own curiosity and devotion. It's striking that God meets them there, not outside their passion, but within it. The very thing they had given their lives to became the path that led them toward Christ.

And when they saw the star, they were overwhelmed with joy. Not when they arrived. Not when they held certainty in their hands. But when they caught sight of the light beckoning them forward.

There's something subversive about that kind of joy.

About Our Guest Contributors



GUEST WRITER

Kat Armas

Kat *(she/her)* is a Cuban American writer, speaker, and theologian from Miami, FL. She holds a ThM from Vanderbilt Divinity School, and a dual MDiv and MAT from Fuller Theological Seminary where she was awarded the Frederick Buechner Award for Excellence in Writing.

Her first book, *Abuelita Faith: What Women on the Margins Teach Us About Wisdom, Persistence and Strength*, sits at the intersection of women, decolonialism, the Bible, and Cuban identity. Her second book, *Sacred Belonging: A 40-day Devotional on the Liberating Heart of Scripture* invites readers to encounter the Bible through a decolonized lens, lifting up themes of creation, wisdom, spirit, the body, and the feminine. Her third book, *Liturgies for Resisting Empire: Seeking Community, Belonging, and Peace in a Dehumanizing World*, examines the ideologies of empire that infiltrate daily life and offers a pathway toward liberation. **katarmas.com** | **@kat_armas** | **katarmas.substack.com**

GUEST ARTISTS



Carmelle Beaugelin Caldwell

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



Ashley Slade

Ashley *(she/her)* is a painter, illustrator, and collage artist based in Pasadena, California. She is interested in the use of various materials to examine the difference between her interior world and the reality in which we live. She is inspired by afro and retrofuturism, solarpunk, surrealism, midcentury illustration, and her rural upbringing in Virginia. **@ashleysladeart**

Table of Contents

Prompts for Reflection _____ 1

The First Sunday of Advent
Until the Dawn
CRY OUT

Poem | "Mockingbirds" by Sarah Speed _____ 2
Hymn | "Restore Us, God" by Anna Strickland _____ 3
Commentary | Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19 & Isaiah 64:1-9 by Kat Armas _____ 4
Art & Reflection | *Bread of Tears* by Hannah Garrity _____ 6
Art & Reflection | *Heavens Torn & Transformed* by Lisle Gwynn Garrity __ 8

The Second Sunday of Advent
Until the Dawn
START SOMEWHERE

Poem | "A Multiple-Choice for Beginning" by Sarah Speed _____ 10
Hymn | "Closer to Peace" by Anna Strickland _____ 11
Commentary | Mark 1:1-8 & Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13 by Kat Armas _____ 12
Art & Reflection | *At the Water's Edge* by Lauren Wright Pittman _____ 14
Art & Reflection | *Balance* by Hannah Garrity _____ 16

The Third Sunday of Advent
Until the Dawn
SPEAK UP

Poem | "The Things We Must Say" by Sarah Speed _____ 18
Hymn | "Raise Your Voice" by Anna Strickland _____ 19
Commentary | John 1:6-8, 19-28 & Isaiah 61:1-4 by Kat Armas _____ 20
Art & Reflection | *Sharing the Light of Another* by Ashley Slade _____ 22
Art & Reflection | *Oaks of Righteousness* by Lisle Gwynn Garrity ____ 24

The Fourth Sunday of Advent
Until the Dawn
TAKE COURAGE

Poem | "All Along" by Sarah Speed _____ 26
Hymn | "To a Common Village" by Anna Strickland _____ 27
Commentary | Luke 1:26-38 & Luke 1:46b-55 by Kat Armas _____ 28
Art & Reflection | *Choosing the Courageous One* by Ashley Slade ____ 30
Art & Reflection | *Liberation Song* by Lauren Wright Pittman _____ 32

Until the Dawn
CHOOSE JOY

Scan to hear the tune!

What Yonder Star

GREENSLEEVES *("What Child Is This")*

Words: Anna Strickland (2026) Music: Traditional English melody



Epiphany
Until the Dawn
CHOOSE JOY

Our Mother Tongue

They say the world is on fire,
and I suppose it is.
We are drowning in warships and warplanes.
We ask AI how to be human.
We listen to machines more than we listen to our bodies.
Where is the joy in all of that?

Maybe we should put down our phones
and try whisking some eggs.
Add cinnamon, flour, sugar. Bake at 350.
Maybe we should throw a birthday party,
right here in the middle of winter.

Maybe we should teach our children songs like
"This land is your land, this land is my land"[24] and
write down every beautiful thing that happens today.

Maybe we should wear bright colors,
paint the walls of our house butter yellow,
spend way too long hugging one another
during the passing of the peace.

Maybe we should look for joy, like we look for four-leaf clovers.
And when we find it, *because we will*,
we should tell everyone it exists.

For when the world is on fire,
joy is nothing less than a miracle.
It's oxygen at high altitude
and a baby's first breath.
It's returning to our bodies
and remembering our mother tongue.
When the world is on fire,
joy is the insistence that despite it all,
we will keep going.
So keep going
and going
and going.

Poem by
Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed

24 "This Land is Your Land," words and music by Woodie Guthrie. Copyright 1956.

Until the Dawn
ACTIONS FOR THE WORK OF ADVENT

Christmas Eve
Until the Dawn
ANGELS SING

Poem | "Still They Sing" by Sarah Speed ____ 34
Hymn | "Sing!" by Anna Strickland ____ 35
Commentary | Luke 2:1-20 & Psalm 96 by Kat Armas ____ 36
Art & Reflection | *Sing Love* by Hannah Garrity ____ 38

Christmastide
Until the Dawn
BUILD UP

Poem | "Reminders from the Geese" by Sarah Speed ____ 40
Hymn | "Work Toward the Dawn" by Anna Strickland ____ 41
Commentary | Luke 2:22-40 by Kat Armas ____ 42
Art & Reflection | *Anna the Prophet* by Lauren Wright Pittman ____ 44

Epiphany
Until the Dawn
CHOOSE JOY

Poem | "Our Mother Tongue" by Sarah Speed ____ 46
Hymn | "What Yonder Star" by Anna Strickland ____ 47
Commentary | Matthew 2:1-12 by Kat Armas ____ 48
Art & Reflection | *Mère De Jardin et Twa Solèy*
by Carmelle Beaugelin Caldwell ____ 50

The Work of Advent
PROMPTS FOR REFLECTION & ACTION

Until the Dawn
FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

CRY OUT

As Advent begins, identify any grief that lives inside you. Cry out to God—through prayer, journaling, weeping, or embodied movement. Notice who else is crying out in your midst. What prayers are on their lips? Trust that lament is good and necessary work, and that God can handle our messy, angry, or unpolished prayers.

Until the Dawn
SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT

START SOMEWHERE

Consider an issue you care about, one that feels vast or insurmountable. Identify small ways you can contribute to a movement of people working to repair or solve this problem. What actions can you take, trusting that no task is too small or insignificant?

Until the Dawn
THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

SPEAK UP

Pay attention to where God is at work in the world. Then, tell about it. Through storytelling, conversation, or public witness, use your voice to speak of hope, good news, and love. How will you speak up?

Until the Dawn
FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT

TAKE COURAGE

In this season of your life, what courageous actions is God calling you to take? Like Mary, consider what questions you need to ask or what information you need in order to say "yes." Who can journey with you to offer you support along the way?

Christmastide

Until the Dawn
BUILD UP

Scan to view more images of the artwork!

Read Luke 2:22-40

Artist Statement | Lauren Wright Pittman

For this painting of the prophet Anna, I referenced my grandmother, Reba Ann Love. One of my favorite photographs is of her at 83, when she first met my son.[19] As I studied her face and considered Anna, the parallels overwhelmed me.[20]

My nanny always builds me up.[21] She gets genuinely enthused about my artwork and shares it any chance she gets—even with complete strangers. She is a prolific watercolor artist, painting primarily in sizes she can easily mail to someone she loves. Every time my son receives one of her paintings, I can tell it feels like magic.

She works diligently on our family genealogy, bringing our ancestors' stories forward. She's quietly, fiercely faithful. My Poppa died almost four years ago, and instead of letting the impossible weight of his absence slow her life to a stop, she continues leading with courage and curiosity—finding steady purpose through remembering her people and spreading beauty in the world.

Simeon receives the Messiah as an end to his journey. Having met salvation, he is ready to die. He can serve as an archetype for a faith understood as individual pursuit—once personal salvation is achieved, nothing else matters. He endured a long life of waiting, but when the moment arrived, instead of joining the work, he finished his pursuit.

Anna, however, comes with eager anticipation. At 84,[22] after years of praying and fasting in the temple, she does not receive Jesus' arrival as a signal to throw in the towel. She immediately begins to share the good news—sending beauty outward, finding renewed purpose.[23]

When the world might count you out, keep pressing forward. You have so much yet to give. Share beauty. Build up the beloved community. Keep moving toward the dawn, and one day you may look back upon the landscape of a life well-lived.

Look

Notice the sunrise (or sunset) in the windows behind Anna and compare it to the background in the artist's other piece, Liberation Song (see page 32). In this piece, what does the sky signify to you?

19 My Nanny does this game with my son where she touches different parts of his face while speaking a rhyme. She did this to me as a child as well. In this image, she is about to do this, but her finger points to the hand of God speaking in the top right corner, like any good prophet would do.

20 My Nanny always wears a brooch. In the image, Anna wears a pink rose which can represent grace, the meaning of the name Anna. The red head covering represents the Holy Spirit, prophecy, and ardent devotion. The covering matches the vivid red lipstick my Nanny always wears.

21 The pattern in the background represents people holding one another up. The people are modeled after a drawing my son drew on his feet, which we fondly call his "feet people."

22 Some argue Anna was 105 years old: biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/people-cultures-in-the-bible/people-in-the-bible/anna-in-the-bible

23 This article prompted me to look more closely at the differences between Simeon and Anna's actions after meeting Jesus: library.biblicalarchaeology.org/article/mary-simeon-or-anna/



Anna the Prophet | Lauren Wright Pittman
Gouache, acrylic marker, and colored pencil on paper

As you read through this devotional, return to these weekly prompts to reflect and discern what actions you will take as you move through the season. You can use these questions for journaling, contemplation, or conversation.

Until the Dawn
ANGELS SING
CHRISTMAS EVE

In response to Christ's birth, angels sing, "Peace on earth! Glory to God!" In the deepest night, God is singing: *love is born, Christ is here*. Attune yourself to wonder and awe. Listen for the angels in your midst. How can you join their song of praise and repeat its sounding joy?

Until the Dawn
BUILD UP
THE WEEK AFTER CHRISTMAS

Reflect on the people in your life who have named your gifts and encouraged you to share them. If possible, send them messages of gratitude. Then, identify three people you can affirm and uplift. Reach out to them, name the gifts you see in them, and encourage them to share those gifts in particular ways.

Until the Dawn
CHOOSE JOY
THE WEEK OF EPIPHANY

Happiness is not a prerequisite for joy; instead, joy can interrupt our grief, uncertainty, and pain, and invite us into a deeper relationship with God. In a fearful and heavy world, joy is a resilient, faithful practice for the journey. Where is joy surprising you? How will you let joy lead you in this new year?

The First Sunday of Advent

Until the Dawn

CRY OUT

Mockingbirds

There is a mockingbird nest in the backyard.
Late into the evening,
even after midnight,
the mother will perch in the branches,
her little neck extending,
mouth opening,
chest proud,
songs pouring out.

I lie in bed with the windows open
trying to distinguish her hymns from her ballads,
each one a collection of trills and rasps,
swells and melodies.
This is how I fall asleep.

Did you know that a mockingbird can learn over 200 songs?
I never catch all of them.
But what I know is that
late into the night,
when no else is listening,
God hears
every
one.

Poem by
Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed

up with her own. And so she moves, compelled by relationship and guided by care. This, I think, is what faithfulness looks like.

And this is also what we see in Luke, when Mary and Joseph bring the infant Jesus to the temple. There, two elders—Simeon and Anna—have spent years waiting, watching, praying, showing up day after day without knowing if they would ever see the promise fulfilled in their lifetime. They do not control the outcome or try to shape the timeline. They simply remain.

When the child is finally placed in their arms, they recognize what others might miss. Simeon speaks blessing over him, naming a future he himself will not live to see. Anna, after decades of devotion, begins to tell anyone who will listen that redemption is near. Like the hummingbird, they carry what they can—attention, hope, witness—reminding us that the work of healing a fractured world is not carried by a few powerful hands, but by many small, faithful ones. This is how the kingdom of God is built: through presence, through people who keep showing up, who keep naming what is good, who keep tending to what is right in front of them.

So perhaps the invitation is not to be powerful, but to be faithful. To carry what water we have. To trust that what we bring—no matter how insignificant—belongs to something larger than we can see. To believe that God has always worked through the smallest wings, the most ordinary lives, the people the empire never thought to notice.

And when we pay attention, we begin to see that we are not alone in this work. That all around us are others carrying their own drops of water, moving toward the same fire, participating in the same resistance against despair.

So we keep going. Not because we know the outcome, but because we belong to one another, and because love compels us forward. One drop at a time.

Christmastide
Until the Dawn
BUILD UP

Commentary | Kat Armas

Read Luke 2:22-40

God works through people who show up and name what is good

There is a story the Quechua people tell about a hummingbird. In the story, the Great Forest catches fire. Flames move quickly, devouring trees that have stood for generations, and the animals scatter in panic as the world they know begins to collapse around them. "What can I do?" cries Buck. "The fire is too big, and I am too small!" howls Fox. The scale of destruction is too vast to imagine confronting.

But above the chaos, a small hummingbird hovers. She flies to a nearby stream, gathers a single drop of water in her beak, and carries it back to the fire. Back and forth she goes—from the stream to the flames—one drop, then another. The other animals watch, confused, until Bear finally asks, "Little Hummingbird, what are you doing?"

She answers simply: "I am doing what I can."

It is a small, almost insignificant, act in the face of a roaring blaze. And yet, it is still an act. Because sometimes survival—personal, communal, planetary—does not begin with grand solutions or sweeping change. Sometimes it begins with something smaller and far more stubborn: a single drop of water carried toward the fire.

I think about that hummingbird often, especially in a world that feels like it is always burning. The fires may look different—systems of injustice, ecological devastation, wars, violence—but the feeling is the same. The scale is overwhelming, and the need is constant, and it can be easy to believe that what we carry is too small to matter. We are told, both subtly and explicitly, that impact must be measurable or scalable in order to count.

But the hummingbird tells a different story.

With no illusion of grandeur, no access to power or scale, she does what she can. Not because she believes she can extinguish the fire alone, but because she understands something deeper about belonging: the forest is not separate from her—its survival is bound

Until the Dawn
CRY OUT

Scan to hear the tune!

Restore Us, God

ST. LOUIS *("O Little Town of Bethlehem")*

Words: Anna Strickland (2026) Music: Lewis H. Redner (1868)



The First Sunday of Advent

Until the Dawn
CRY OUT

Commentary | Kat Armas

Read Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19 | Isaiah 64:1-9

Lament is a necessary step toward justice

Nearly fifteen thousand feet above sea level, somewhere along an unplanned weeklong trek through the Andes, I found myself struggling for breath as our group slowly made its way toward Machu Picchu. The air felt impossibly thin, each step heavier than the last, and my guide, Manco—a Quechua man native to the land—noticed my pace begin to falter. He stopped with me without urgency, as if there was no need to rush what the mountain itself was setting. Gently, he pressed coca leaves into my hands and encouraged me to breathe deeply, to feel the ground beneath my feet rather than fight against it.

As we neared the summit, a sudden roar filled the air. Instinctively, I turned, expecting jets overhead, but instead I saw a flock of birds sweeping across the sky. The sound of their wings echoed through the mountains in a way that stopped me in place. I sank onto a rock, overcome by it. Manco looked at me as tears welled in my eyes and asked, "Is the earth speaking to you?" I nodded. He smiled gently. "Good," he said. "It means you're listening."

When we finally reached Machu Picchu, its breathtaking beauty—the stones fitted so precisely without mortar, and terraces carved into mist-covered mountains—stood in stark contrast to the history of conquest, smallpox, and destruction that followed its abandonment. The splendor did not soften that history; it made it more visible.

I fell behind the group again, this time not from exhaustion but from the weight of it all, weeping as I walked—grieving the fall of the Inca, the systems that commodify land and life, and my own place within them. In that moment, I began to understand my tears not as a sign of weakness but as an act of witnessing, a refusal to look away. It meant I was listening.

Scripture tells us that all of creation mourns, and the prophets speak of the land itself languishing under the weight of injustice. In Jeremiah, God declares, "I will weep and wail for the mountains,"[1] offering us an image not of a distant deity unmoved by suffering, but

Until the Dawn
BUILD UP

Scan to hear the tune!

Work Toward the Dawn

ADESTE FIDELES *("O Come, All Ye Faithful")*

Words: Anna Strickland (2026) Music: John Francis Wade (1743)



Christmastide
Until the Dawn
BUILD UP

Reminders from the Geese[18]

I have been a pilgrim before,
feet sore,
skin freckled.
I have walked for miles with one simple question on my tongue.
I have begged the sky for answers,
shaking my fists at the wind.
I have laid against the Earth's curve and wondered
if God could find me in all this wild openness.

And in the morning,
when the song of giving up chanted my name,
God sent me a flock of geese.
They flew overhead, eyes on the horizon,
cheering each other on with
all their obnoxious honking.
And I could not help but to stand,
and clap,
and cry,
and remember—
we were never meant
to walk this road alone.

Poem by
Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed

18 This poem alludes to the poem, "Wild Geese," by Mary Oliver in *Dream Work* (New York: Grove Press, 1986), 14.

of one who grieves the scorched fields and empty skies alongside us. This kind of divine sorrow is deeply revealing: a visceral picture of grief not as a failure of faith but as an expression of love. It's a way of remaining open, of resisting indifference by staying connected to what's being lost.

Standing in those mountains, I realized that lament is a necessary step toward justice, because we cannot repair what we do not name.

Grief has a way of clearing our vision. It breaks through the illusion that everything is fine, and refuses to let beauty distract us from what is being harmed. The unraveling of the natural world is not happening somewhere outside of us; it mirrors the violence we have learned to live with—both within ourselves and toward one another. In that light, lament becomes an honest response. To move too quickly past sorrow is to quiet the voice of the earth and, with it, something essential within us. God's own tears remind us of this. If divinity mourns creation, then grief is not failure or lack of faith; it is fidelity. It's the refusal to normalize devastation, the willingness to feel what exploitation costs. Only by offering our weariness, anger, and heartbreak to God can we discern the next faithful step—and in doing so, find that we aren't the first to pray this way. The Psalmist cries, "Restore us, O God; make your face shine" (Psalm 80), and the prophet pleads, "O that you would tear open the heavens and come down" (Isaiah 64).

These aren't polished prayers. They are the language of people who have run out of explanations but not out of longing. And maybe that's what lament does: it refuses to let despair have the final word. It holds the tension between what is and what should be, and it dares to believe that God is still listening in the middle of it.

Restoration doesn't begin with pretending things are fine. It begins with telling the truth about what's broken—and discovering, even there, that we're not alone.

1 Jeremiah 9:10



Bread of Tears | Hannah Garrity
Paper lace and graphite overlaid acrylic on paper

Christmas Eve

Until the Dawn
ANGELS SING

Scan to view more images of the artwork!

Read Luke 2:1-20 & Psalm 96

Artist Statement | Hannah Garrity

"Hark! the herald angels sing..." In this work of paper lace over acrylic, singing angels (inspired by images of clouds) appear four times within the cut-out border of circular motion. Woven around the outside border, doves fly upward, imagining the presence of the Holy Spirit. A musical staff with notes of the hymn, "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing,"[16] dances around a central image of Madonna and child.

"Mild [Christ] lays his glory by, born that we no more may die, born to raise us from the earth, born to give us second birth."
Sing to God a new song.

Most years, we return to the same Luke text during Christmastide. This year, Psalm 96 poses the reminder that God yearns to be among us. They are born this day because they want to be close to humanity. God wants to be one with humanity.

As we continue in our present day toward greater and greater economic disparity due to unbridled capitalism,[17] it is all too obvious that God chose the antithesis of worldly wealth and power: an impoverished, unwed teenage mother. Mary and Joseph endured economic hardship similar to a vast majority of the world today.

Why would God yearn for such pain, for such hardship, and to experience the human condition? Why would they wish to live a fully human life?

Sing to the divine a new song. It is holy to do what is right, to live a life modeled after God's incarnate life. Glory to the newborn Christ, born this day.

Look

Focus on the graphite drawing in the center of the piece. How does the paper lace border change the way you experience the portrait of mother and child?

16 Author: Charles Wesley (1739). Tune: MENDELSSOHN. hymnary.org/text/hark_the_herald_angels_sing_glory_to
17 In his book, *Caring for Souls in a Neoliberal Age* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), Bruce Rogers-Vaughn argues that the global expansion of capitalism has negatively impacted social, psychological, and interpersonal health.



Sing Love | Hannah Garrity
Paper lace and graphite overlaid acrylic on paper

The First Sunday of Advent

Until the Dawn

CRY OUT

Scan to view more images of the artwork!

Read Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

Artist Statement | Hannah Garrity

O holy God almighty,
creator of heaven and earth,
with such abundance at your fingertips, why do you offer us bread and a cup overflowing with tears?

War, hate, dictatorship, authoritarianism, starvation, blockades, human rights rollbacks, environmental deregulation. How is it that you, with all your might and power, would not just fix it?

Is it that your power moves through creation? The wind and the rain, yes, but more subtly, the roots and the sun? Is your slow growth the greatest power? As we become further separated from you and from all of creation, are we harming one another because we are lost without you? Restore us, O God, to the close relationship we once had with you and creation.

The colors in this art piece are the colors of the shining sun, your fiery anger, and your dried-out soil. Our dried-out souls.

The image shows tree roots growing inward, becoming trails of our tears. As the roots arrive at your presence, your face, O God, they become shining loaves. The psalmist asks: Why do you give us only our tears to eat and drink, only our tears as our bread and wine?

Perhaps, O God, it is because your face shines on us, but not from the places and spaces where we look for your power. Perhaps your face shines on us from the surface of the deep,[1] from the dew on the petal, from the glow of the sun reflected on the river, from our very own tears falling within the creation that bears your presence.

Restore us, O God.

Look

Let your eyes follow the roots in the image. Now imagine them as tears flowing into the loaves of shining bread. What do you notice in your body as you look closely at the art?

1 I preferred "surface" for my translation of פָּנֶיךָ (pā·ne·ḵā) in Psalm 80:19, which is the same word used in Genesis 1:2 to describe the darkness that hovers over "the surface of the deep." Instead of "Let your face shine," I prefer "Let your surface shine." Truly, translators agree that a personified use of פָּנֶיךָ (pā·ne·ḵā) would be translated in English as "your face" or as "your presence" because we are talking about God here. However, this alternate translation caught my attention. Do we see God's brilliance in the faces of others, the way we might see the reflection of sunlight on the water or on the windows of our neighbors' houses?



Heavens Torn & Transformed | Lisle Gwynn Garrity
Oil pastel on cambric fabric, stretched on wood panel with gold leaf; framed with white oak

Long before Bethlehem, there was another song rising on the other side of impossibility. When the Israelites crossed the Red Sea after escaping their oppressors in Egypt, Miriam took a tambourine and led her community in dancing and song. Their bodies moved with the relief of survival, and their voices carried both the weight of everything they had just endured and the thanksgiving for the life God had spared (Exodus 15).

The Bible shows us that praise is an embodied response to God's presence. To dance, to shout, to rejoice is to embody the promise of salvation and the hope of new life. It is to proclaim the newness of God's kingdom in the flesh.

In our own lives, the call remains the same: move, sing, and testify. Let your body carry the song of hope. Let your voice rise in praise. In doing so, it joins the chorus that stretches across generations—from Miriam's tambourine to the angels' song, to a small living room where a woman, worn but unshaken, lifts her voice and reminds us all: life is still here, and so is God.

Christmas Eve

Until the Dawn
ANGELS SING

Commentary | Kat Armas

Read Luke 2:1-20 | Psalm 96

Let your body carry the song of hope

There's a memory etched in my mind. Abuela had just come home from one of her first chemotherapy sessions after being diagnosed with colon cancer. She walked slowly through the door, arm in arm with my mom, her body visibly worn from the treatment. Before anyone could ask how she was feeling, she looked at me, lifted her voice, and sang: *¡Aleluya, gloria a Dios!*

Her song filled the living room, steady and alive. In that moment, she held two truths: the weight of what her body was enduring and the joy of being alive another day. Her voice, shaped over decades of singing in church choirs and community gatherings, carried resilience, devotion, and hope. Psalm 96 calls us to "sing to the Lord a new song," and Abuela did just that, intuitively testifying to the light, even when life felt dark. This was a moment that belongs to a pattern woven deep into the story of God and God's people.

Out in the fields outside Bethlehem, under a night that must have felt like any other, a group of shepherds kept watch. They were ordinary people tending to ordinary work, and then, without warning, the darkness split open. Voices—loud, unrestrained, impossible to ignore—filled the sky: *Glory to God in the highest!*

Like Abuela's, it was a song rising where you wouldn't expect it, among bodies that know something about fragility, declaring that God is still here. And it moves the shepherds to respond—to leave their fields and go, and then to tell others what they have seen and heard.

Praise spills over. It becomes movement and testimony, because that is the nature of it: it does not sit still. It refuses to remain private or contained. Instead, praise presses outward, demanding to be lived. Praise is not passive or shallow or naive. It is, in fact, deeply disruptive. To sing in the face of suffering is to resist the lie that suffering has the final word. To move, to celebrate, to give thanks in the dark is to declare that God is near, that life is still unfolding, and that hope has not been extinguished.

The First Sunday of Advent

Until the Dawn
CRY OUT

Scan to view more images of the artwork!

Read Isaiah 64:1-9

Artist Statement | Lisle Gwynn Garrity

As soon as I read the opening line of this passage from Isaiah, a bolt of desperation surged through my body and I repeated the prophet's prayer in my own words: "Please, God, tear open the heavens and come down. End the wars. Protect those in fear. Stop the suffering. Save us!" The Hebrew word translated as "tear" (*qara`*)[2] is almost always used to describe the ancient grief practice of rending one's garments. In that sense, the prophet is pleading for God to lament with us.

I began this piece with that concept in mind. I stretched a night sky of black fabric on a wood panel, and with oil pastels I dappled the horizon with light, as if the dawn were ablaze with fire. When I finished, I admired my creation, a tribute to a world filled with couple-color and pied beauty.[3]

Then it came time to rend God's garment. I delayed and grieved this step, yet I felt the prophet's plea urging me onward. I ripped the fabric, tearing the heavens and mountains open. In the space between, I added gold leaf—a glimmer of God's presence in the gaping wound of the world. To finalize the artwork, my husband created a frame using white oak—a nod to the "oaks of righteousness," the brokenhearted who mourn yet who receive God's comfort and blessing in Isaiah 61:1-3.

As I worked on this piece, I contemplated what grief does to the body. In my experience—having lost my mom to cancer when I was a child—grief begs to be metabolized. I must find ways to acknowledge, release, and transform it; otherwise, it steeps in my body like a poison. Therefore, I came to realize that Isaiah is not calling for God to destroy the earth, but to dramatically transform it. Though we may "fade like a leaf,"[4] the prophet makes a hopeful turn: leaves decompose into the clay of the earth, which then gets reshaped in the potter's hands.

In a war-torn world filled with dappled beauty, we cry out for God to come down and radically transform us into a new creation. May it be so.

Look

Study the colors and textures within the sunrise. What do you feel?
Now study the torn edges of the fabric. What do you feel?

2 biblehub.com/hebrew/7167.htm
3 See the poem, "Pied Beauty" by Gerard Manley Hopkins. poetryfoundation.org/poems/44399/pied-beauty
4 In the weeks I was working on this piece, I collected several decaying leaves, admiring the intricate lacework of their exposed veins, which is not so unlike the veins visible in my own skin. I experimented with adding the leaves to my artwork, but I was unsuccessful in finding a way that revealed their aesthetic appeal. However, I marveled at how something so beautiful was fading into dirt.

The Second Sunday of Advent

Until the Dawn
START SOMEWHERE

A Multiple-Choice for Beginning

You could lace up your shoes, put on your jacket,
and walk out the door.
You could pause, close your eyes, and bow your head in prayer.
You could preheat the oven, send the invites,
and add chairs to the table.
You could start with seeds, add water,
and place them by the windowsill.
You could add the yeast and give it time to rise.
You could make the sign and learn the protest songs.
You could hold out your hand, or link arms with mine.
You could ask the question, or tell your story.
You could put one toe in the water, or cannonball in.
It doesn't matter how you begin, but start somewhere.
Start today.

Poem by
Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed

Until the Dawn
ANGELS SING

Scan to hear the tune!

Sing!

BRING A TORCH *("Bring a Torch, Jeanette, Isabella")*

Words: Anna Strickland (2026) Music: Traditional French carol



Christmas Eve
Until the Dawn
ANGELS SING

Still They Sing

You may have to lean your head out the window,
mute the news,
stand under a sky full of stars.
You may have to place yourself in the presence of children,
in the presence of art,
or on an old church pew.
You may have to stand,
cold and hopeful,
in front of the rising morning sun.
If you do that,
and if you listen,
if you *really* listen,
then I am convinced,
you can hear angels sing.

We drown them out with our
fighting and our noise,
but behind it all, still they sing:
Glory to God in the highest!
Have you ever heard anything
more beautiful than that?

Poem by
Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed

Until the Dawn
START SOMEWHERE

Scan to hear the tune!

Closer to Peace

CRADLE SONG *("Away in a Manger")*

Words: Anna Strickland (2026) Music: William J. Kirkpatrick (1895)



The Second Sunday of Advent

Until the Dawn
START SOMEWHERE

Commentary | Kat Armas

Read Mark 1:1-8 | Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13

Keep participating in what nourishes

We lost our bees during Storm Fern, which tore through the Southeast US in the winter of 2026. When we finally made it out to check the hives, we found them—forty thousand bees—still huddled together in a tight cluster around their queen. They had frozen to death like that, holding their formation, protecting the life at the center of their world.

For first-time beekeepers, losing a hive isn't unusual, but it still felt like a tragedy. There is something disorienting about tending to life—trying, in small and imperfect ways, to care for the earth—and still watching it slip through your hands. Especially when so many of us are doing what we can: reusing, planting, composting, thrifting, saving bees. Trying to live gently within a system that is not gentle.

At the same time my bees died, bombs were falling in distant places. War tears through body and soil alike, leaving devastation in its wake. Children bear the cost of decisions they did not make, caught in the machinery of power that grinds forward without pause. Empire has an insatiable appetite that is never satisfied. And in the face of that scale, the small things we do can begin to feel almost laughable—like gestures too fragile to matter.

But the bees do not know any of this. They do not know about empires or wars or greed. They are not immobilized by the magnitude of destruction beyond their hive. They simply do what they were made to do. In their tiny, intricate bodies, they carry out an essential task: they tend to life. Even in the cold, even at the end, they cluster together and protect what they can, and there is something in that which echoes far beyond the hive.

Long before Jesus of Nazareth began his public ministry, another voice appeared in the wilderness. John the Baptist moved along the banks of the Jordan River, calling people to repentance, inviting them into the water as a sign of turning toward something new. The land around him was heavy with the presence of the Roman

The Fourth Sunday of Advent

Until the Dawn
TAKE COURAGE

Scan to view more images of the artwork!

Read Luke 1:46b–55

Artist Statement | Lauren Wright Pittman

"For God has looked[9] with favor on the lowly[10] state of his servant" (Luke 1:46).

Mary is not speaking in hyperbole or false humility. She is a poor, young, unmarried Jewish woman living under Roman occupation in first-century Palestine, who is now with child. In just about every category, she is at the bottom of society.[11] The implications of God's promises realized would mean everything to her.

This song is an act of radical trust and audacious hope. She cannot afford to wait around to find courage, so she takes it. She sings as though her life—and the lives of her people—depend on it, because they do. Mary sings of the overturning of injustice: the lowly are lifted up, the proud scattered, the powerful brought down, the hungry filled, and the rich sent away empty.

For me, the boldness of Mary's song echoes Miriam's in Exodus.[12] Miriam sang at the water's edge, reveling in the tangible, dramatic, miraculous liberation of her people from the bonds of slavery. She had witnessed the impossible become real, and her body could not contain it. Mary sings with that same fervor and full-bodied conviction—as though she has already stood at that water's edge herself, already witnessed God's victory, and is singing from the other side of it.

I have imaged the Magnificat before, portraying Mary as overjoyed, thoughtful, unsure, even aggrieved. In this reading, I found her resolute. In this painting, an upside-down landscape representing God's desired reality urgently presses in around her, refusing to wait.[13] She sings through the night[14] and boldly dances across the golden edges of her desired future, where the sun is already rising in a new way.[15]

What would it look like to stop waiting, and to take courage this Advent? How might we make confident progress toward realizing God's desired reality for all of creation?

Look

Focus on Mary's posture. As she dances forward, where is she headed? What does she leave behind?

9 This is represented in the painting by the eye in the tambourine. The three primary colored ribbons represent the Triune God, for all colors can be realized through red, yellow, and blue.

10 STRONGS G5014: Definition of tapeinósis: depression (in rank or feeling):—humiliation, be made low, low estate, vile.

11 To learn more about Mary's societal status, read "Mary, Mary, quite contrary," by Elizabeth Johnson. *U.S. Catholic*. January 27, 2011. uscatholic.org/articles/201101/mary-mary-quite-contrary

12 In my artwork, Mary dances with a tambourine inspired by Miriam. The curved shape around Mary mirrors the parting of the Red Sea to further reference Miriam's song. See Exodus 15:20-21.

13 This visual metaphor was inspired by Dr. Melva Sampson's lecture titled: "Digital Insurgent Homiletics—Afro-Womanist Futurist Methodologies for Preaching" at the Columbia Theological Seminary (Decatur, GA) 2026 Alumni Reunion.

14 The night contains 6 stars. The number 6 represents incompletion or imperfection.

15 Her clothing holds the colors of the sunrise, patterned with lilies which represent blessedness. The tassels are the same primary colors of the Trinitarian tambourine ribbons.



Liberation Song | Lauren Wright Pittman
Gouache, acrylic marker, latex paint, colored pencil, and block printing on paper

Empire—soldiers lining the roads, taxes extracting what little people had, power consolidating in the hands of the few while ordinary lives were growing increasingly burdened. John did not have the means to overthrow any of it. He did not gather an army or ascend to political power. Instead, he stood in the wilderness with a river and a message: prepare the way. Turn around. Make space for something different.

He had no clear view of how the story would unfold. He could not see what would come next in full. But he could see enough to act. And so he did what was in front of him—one baptism, one voice crying out, one small act of hope and resistance at a time.

The ancient poets of Israel imagined restoration in similarly grounded ways. When they spoke of a healed world, they did not describe escape, but renewal—justice and peace kissing, divine presence dwelling once again in the land. What they envisioned was embodied, lived.

John cries out in the wilderness. The bees cluster together against the cold. Neither dismantle the empire in a single act. And yet, both bear witness to a different way of being: one that refuses to concede that small acts are meaningless.

Perhaps that is the invitation before us. In a world shaped by forces far larger than we are, it can be tempting to give up or to believe that only the grand, visible, and immediate can make a difference. But life does not always move that way. Sometimes it is sustained in simpler forms—in the tending, the noticing, the choosing to care, even when the outcome is uncertain.

So we do what we can. We plant gardens. We tend to our neighbors. We refuse to numb ourselves to suffering. We cry out for restoration, for repentance, for a reordering of the world toward life. We keep participating in what nourishes, even when so much around us does not.



At the Water's Edge | Lauren Wright Pittman
Digital drawing with collage

The Fourth Sunday of Advent

Until the Dawn

TAKE COURAGE

Scan to view more images of the artwork!

Read Luke 1:26-38

Artist Statement | Ashley Slade

I was anxious when tasked with depicting Mary at the moment she was contacted by the angel Gabriel. Mary is one of the most painted figures in the history of art. How could I look at her story with fresh eyes? I began looking through artistic depictions of Mary over the centuries. One valuable source was Vanderbilt University's Art in the Christian Tradition (ACT) Database.[8] I noted how many artworks have shown Mary as a soft, demure figure, often with her eyes cast down. Is this the Mary that God found favor with and chose for such a heroic endeavor? Perhaps. But I decided to think about her differently. What if the reason God chose Mary was because she was confident, her shoulders rolled back and her head held high? What if she was already known for her courageous nature? I love the idea of Mary walking through her village and the neighbors whispering, "There goes that girl with all the attitude!"

There's a hint in the text that might support my version of Mary. When Gabriel tells her not to be afraid and explains that she will carry a holy child, Mary doesn't exclaim: "Why me? Choose another!" She simply asks: "How?"

Mary is bold enough to ask for the facts, which leads me to believe she was bold in all aspects of her life.

Another moment that caught my attention in the text is when Gabriel first speaks to Mary. She is perplexed and wonders what kind of greeting this might be. I wondered that myself. How would an angel speak to a person? With words, thoughts, or something else we can't quite articulate?

In this piece, I attempted to show both Mary's courageous nature and the otherworldliness of her "conversation" with Gabriel. I used bits of variegated metal flakes and paint to symbolize the light of Gabriel's message as it traveled from the celestial being into Mary through her mind, down her throat—becoming part of her voice—and eventually into her heart as she accepted her assignment from God.

Look

Why do you think the artist chose to portray the angel with the darkness of the night sky? What meaning do you glean from this choice?

8 act.library.vanderbilt.edu/search



Choosing the Courageous One | Ashley Slade
Gouache on canvas paper with variegated metal leaf & digital illustration

The Second Sunday of Advent

Until the Dawn

START SOMEWHERE

Scan to view more images of the artwork!

Read Mark 1:1-8

Artist Statement | Lauren Wright Pittman

I had every intention of carving and block printing this image—I'd already rubbed the traced lines onto the linoleum block before realizing it was too detailed and too small to carve. I wasn't sure how to move forward.

When I shared it with colleagues[5] the next day, I was frustrated that so much effort had only produced what felt like a rough sketch. Unexpectedly, they said it was nearly finished. They felt connected to the looseness and freedom of the mark-making, finding it evocative of the text and the theme, "Start Somewhere." I wrestled with the urge to rework it, but over time, I realized they were right.

When I read the text, I was struck by the sheer mass of people trekking through the wilderness to be baptized. John must've been quite the force—inspiring an entire region to abandon comfort, endure the wilderness, and approach the unknown at the water's edge.

I wonder what they were thinking when they arrived. What circumstances would drive you through the wilderness to find some semblance of hope? Perhaps you know those circumstances well.

The people in the foreground hold different postures toward the water—unsure, pensive, excited, reflective—but each has found the courage to start somewhere. Native plants[6] of the Jordan River region frame them: the crowds come to the wilderness to find footing like wildflowers take root in the desert. The Spirit descends as golden light reflects off its feathers and dances in the ripples of the Jordan. God's presence meets the wilderness wanderers in the flowing current.

This image represents the early stages of my creative process—the moments after overcoming the fear of the blank page. In everything we do, we must overcome inertia in order to begin. That forward momentum, however it materializes, often is enough.

Look

If you could be one of the figures in this image, who would you be?
What do you feel as you come to the water?

5 During the creative phase of our resources, the artists of A Sanctified Art meet with our guest artists to share the progress of our work, ask questions, seek advice, and cross-pollinate ideas.
6 Anemones and cyclamen are native to the Jordan River region; oleander and reeds thrive along the Jordan River's edge.



Balance | Hannah Garrity
Paper lace overlaid acrylic on paper

Mary lived under the weight of the Roman Empire—a world shaped by surveillance, hierarchy, and control over bodies like hers. She was young, poor, and from Nazareth, a village on the margins of power. Her life existed in the spaces that the empire tends to overlook, and yet it is precisely there that she said yes with active, embodied courage: Mary asks questions. She seeks out her cousin. And then she sings.

The Magnificat is far from a gentle hymn. It is a declaration that the powerful will not remain unchallenged, the lowly will not remain unseen, and the hungry will not remain empty. It is a song that names reversal as reality already breaking in.

Mary's courage is not only in the fact that she carries Jesus as a young, unmarried woman—though even that alone would have placed her in real danger. It's in her refusal to shrink in the face of what is being asked of her. It's in her willingness to trust both God and her own body, and to speak a truth that unsettles the order around her. In doing so, she becomes a witness to another order already breaking into the world.

And this is what makes her story more than memory—it becomes a bold invitation. Because courage is not found in the absence of fear. I saw this in my own labor—the strange, holy strength that arrives right in the midst of it. In Mary's story, I see it named with clarity: courage is born in disruption, carried in the body, and spoken into the world even when the outcome is uncertain.

The same God who moved through Mary is still at work—speaking into fear, forming life in hidden places, and calling ordinary people into extraordinary trust.

In Mary's *yes*, we learn that even now, in our own moments of trembling, something new can still be born.

The Fourth Sunday of Advent

Until the Dawn

TAKE COURAGE

Commentary | Kat Armas

Read **Luke 1:26-38** | **Luke 1:46b-55**

The same God who moved through Mary is still at work

As my insides quivered like a fault line, I whispered out loud: *I'm scared*. After ten months of preparation—reading about labor, learning the stages, reminding myself that panic in transition was normal—nothing prepared me for the moment when control slipped beyond my reach. *I can't do this*, I said to my doula, my voice shaking. She met my fear with a simple invitation: *Your body is doing what it's meant to do. Trust her.*

Moments later, I was in the tub with my child's head crowning, visible beyond my own body. Each contraction came like something ancient breaking open inside me—a sound I didn't recognize, a force I couldn't manage or contain. Birth felt like being carried into another world that was at once terrifying and holy, where I was more undone and more alive than I had ever been. I had never been more out of control and more fully present at the same time. Birth is its own liturgy—wholly physical and wholly spiritual—a reminder that flesh and spirit were never meant to be divided.

Months later, at Christmas, I returned to the story of Jesus' birth with that memory still lodged in my body. I wasn't thinking about polished images or quiet nativity scenes. I was thinking about what it actually takes to bring life into the world: the trembling, the surrender, the courage, the way the body stretches beyond what feels possible and still continues anyway.

And in that light, the story of Mary became something else entirely.

At the center of her story is an encounter. The angel arrives to announce something that will reorder everything she knows. It is a word that interrupts ordinary time, carrying both disruption and invitation. She is not given a map or a strategy, only a message. And her response is born not from a place of certainty, but of courage.

The Second Sunday of Advent

Until the Dawn

START SOMEWHERE

Scan to view more images of the artwork!

Read **Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13**

Artist Statement | Hannah Garrity

חסד(ḥe·seḏ) is the steadfast lovingkindness of God in the Hebrew Bible. It is the form of love that God offers to us time and again throughout its pages. The type of love that abounds from God toward all of creation in the refrain, "slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love." In Psalm 85, the statements of hope are frank and clear. God's hot anger is withdrawn, faithfulness springs up, the land will yield, and justice will lay the stones for God's path.

Balance is integral to this image and to this scripture. The psalmist yearns for restoration that only God can imagine, only God can create. Yet, at the end of the passage, the psalmist begins to name pairings: "Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other" (Psalm 80:10). Often, pairings in the Hebrew Bible set up broad chasms with much in between. This rhetorical tool, called merism, opens space for the receiver of the words to journey between these dichotomies. In contrast, steadfast love, faithfulness, righteousness, and peace are similar. The space between them is slim and their actions in verse 10 imply an even closer connection. All that space the merism usually gives is carefully honed into a streamlined vision here in God's imagined world. In this art piece, balance is achieved by holding these closely related ideals together.

God's day of restoration will feel like steadfast love, faithfulness, righteousness, and peace drawn tightly together. Like God, restoration is always arriving. It is here in the חסד (ḥe·seḏ).

Look

What does the fire imagery symbolize for you? What other images do you see and how do they convey steadfast love, faithfulness, and righteousness?

The Third Sunday of Advent

Until the Dawn
SPEAK UP

The Things We Must Say

He waited by the door, checking his watch,
weight shuffling from foot to foot.
I watched him lean against the wall,
then stand up straight, failed attempts at looking calm.
And when she arrived, when she ran inside,
shaking her umbrella and whisking away damp bangs,
she offered him the kind of smile that you don't forget.

I don't know a lot about science,
but I could recognize the gravity.
They created their own orbit.

We'll take a table for two, they said,
keeping eyes on each other as they moved through the room.
And from my corner booth, I wanted to say,
Call it gravity. Call it sacred. Call it what it is. Call it love.

I hope, at the end of my days,
if you show up drenched from the rain,
and God is sitting in the corner booth,
that I take you in my arms and I say it out loud.
You are oh so loved.

Poem by
Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed

Until the Dawn
TAKE COURAGE

To a Common Village

CRANHAM *("In the Bleak Midwinter")*

Scan to hear the tune!

Words: Anna Strickland (2026) Music: Gustav Holst (1906)



The Fourth Sunday of Advent

Until the Dawn
TAKE COURAGE

All Along

There are parts of me that are easy to find—
the bangs in my eyes, the corners of my elbows,
the twinge in the bottom of my foot,
the thoughts swirling in my head
about to-do lists and tomorrows.
There are parts of me that are easy to find,
and then there are parts of me that I have to dig for—
excavate, summon like a talisman.

There are parts of me that I have to open all the windows
of my home for and beg to come in,
wooing with treats and promises of belly scratches.

Those are parts of me that wouldn't mind
staying curled up in bed
or free on the wind, but sometimes life requires us
to open the windows.

So I open the windows. I push the bangs out of my eyes.
I turn the house upside down looking for my courage,
and when I find it, I see she was with me all along.

Poem by
Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed

Until the Dawn
SPEAK UP

Scan to hear the tune!

Raise Your Voice

MENDELSSOHN *("Hark! The Herald Angels Sing")*

Words: Anna Strickland (2026) Music: Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy (1840)



Commentary | Kat Armas

Read John 1:6-8, 19-28 | Isaiah 61:1-4

Honesty is one of the clearest expressions of love

Growing up, every Saturday night belonged to dominoes at Abuela's house—it was the center of our week. By evening, her small duplex would begin to fill until it overflowed; twenty of us squeezed into a space that somehow always made more room. The adults gathered around the table for a two-on-two tournament that had been going on for decades, long before any of us were born, back when this was simply life in Cuba before migration reshaped everything. The games stretched for hours, sometimes until sunrise, the room thick with laughter, raised voices, and the sharp crack of tiles hitting wood.

"¡Por qué tiraste esa ficha!" (Why did you play that domino!)

"¡Te gané con la misma ficha tuya!" (I beat you with your own domino!)

To an outsider, it might have sounded like conflict. But it wasn't. It was intimacy—because nothing was hidden, nothing softened for politeness.

What I came to understand over time is that two-on-two dominoes are never just individual play. You cannot win alone. You are bound to your partner's attention as much as your own. You have to read the table together, remember what has already been played, anticipate what remains, and stay attuned to the smallest signals—hesitation, confidence, a glance that says more than words. As a child, I was fascinated by how effortlessly the adults did this, as if they shared a single awareness stretched across the table. And when someone broke that rhythm—when a partner played carelessly or out of sync—it didn't feel like a small mistake. It felt like a rupture in trust, a break in the shared attention they had built together. To play well, you had to be fully present, accountable not only to your partner but to the game itself.

Scan to view more images of the artwork!

Read Isaiah 61:1-4

Artist Statement | Lisle Gwynn Garrity

During the many months we were working on this Advent series, I woke up each morning with eyes ready to study the sky. I paid closer attention as the horizon moved from ink to indigo to cerulean—some days with wisps of gray, rose, or golden ocher painted into the clouds. The sun would reach me through the branches of the oak trees outside my bedroom window—the same oak trees that have grown for a hundred years and miraculously stayed upright when Helene hit.[7] Through this morning ritual, I began to envision the composition for this piece: oaks of righteousness illuminated by the dawning of God's good news.

The prophet Isaiah speaks surprising words to people whose world has been ripped into ruins. Once I finished my pastel drawing, I ripped the fabric, severing the composition into fragments. As I tore, I said a prayer for people currently living in ruins: those devastated by war in Gaza, Iran, Lebanon, and for my neighbors still rebuilding after the storm. Within the fissured fabric, I added gold leaf. I contemplated the Japanese art of *Kintsugi*—the practice of repairing shattered pottery with gold lacquer. In the same way, my art has golden scars which honor both the beauty and brokenness of "those who mourn."

To finalize the piece, my husband created a frame from white oak—a hardwood known for its durability and strength. While we waited for the frame's wood glue to dry, we took our young daughters on a hike to a nearby trail. We soon discovered the trail was a graveyard of trees—an area hit particularly hard by wind and rain eighteen months earlier during Helene. As we followed a path weaving through the ruins, the forces of destruction from months past were still palpable. Yet, on that day in early spring, shoots and leaf buds pushed forth from fallen limbs. Trees with their roots facing the sky had branches filled with green. I couldn't make sense of it—the astonishing force of regeneration. I clipped a few budding branches from a hickory tree and took them home, later attaching them to the frame of my pastel piece like a garland.

For the oppressed and brokenhearted, this piece speaks of good news—through cracks lined with gold, through branches that burst forth from ruins, through dawn that breaks on a weary world.

Look

Notice the interplay between the leafless branches drawn into the composition and the budding hickory branches attached to the frame. What meaning do you glean from these elements?

7 On September 27, 2024, hurricane Helene devastated much of Western North Carolina.



Oaks of Righteousness | Lisle Gwynn Garrity
Oil pastel on cambric fabric, stretched on wood panel with gold leaf; framed with white oak & live hickory branches

Somewhere in all of that, without anyone ever sitting me down to explain it, amid the laughter and the shouting, I learned something that has stayed with me: honesty is one of the clearest expressions of love. Trust is formed by returning to the table again and again, and refusing to look away from what is right in front of you.

When I later read the writings of John the Baptist, something in me recognized that same posture. John stands at his own kind of table—not a private one in a home, but a public one in the wilderness. He is attentive to what others overlook, reading the moment with a kind of holy awareness, calling out the violence of the powers around him and pointing toward a different kind of life breaking into the world. Like my family around those domino tiles, he stays fully present to what is unfolding, refusing silence when truth is at stake.

And it is not only confrontation—it is also hope. The vision in Isaiah 61:1–4 speaks of good news to the oppressed, healing for the brokenhearted, and restoration for what has been ruined. In its own way, domino night carried something of that imagination. It was not an escape from a complicated history of exile and displacement, but a practice of presence within it—a weekly return to a shared table where attention, correction, laughter, and care all had space to exist.

I realize now that domino night was training me in the same way John the Baptist and Isaiah train us: to pay attention, to speak truth, to remain even when it is difficult. Prophetic life is not abstract. It is this kind of attentiveness: learning not to look away, staying accountable to one another, telling the truth about what is broken while also recognizing what is still good. And in that space, something like light begins to reappear in the ordinary. Not all at once, not dramatically, but slowly and stubbornly, life is made whole again.



Sharing the Light of Another | Ashley Slade
Gouache on canvas paper with digital illustration

The Third Sunday of Advent

Until the Dawn

SPEAK UP

Scan to view more images of the artwork!

Read John 1:6-8; 19-28

Artist Statement | Ashley Slade

What struck me about this story is John's willingness to be the one to testify to what is to come when there is so much temptation for him to claim the role of Messiah for himself. When the priests ask him who he is, he *confesses* (in the NRSVUE translation) that he is not the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet. He later explains: ". . .the one coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the strap of his sandal" (John 1:27). It takes a strong sense of faith and humility for John to take on the role of bearing witness to the light we come to know as Jesus, instead of claiming this light as his own. However, he knows the power of the truth, of making way, and of sharing the story—even to questioning ears.

When I completed this piece, I began to reflect: Am I willing to hear the truth of the light when it is shared, whatever the light means for me? Am I willing to speak up and share that truth? Perhaps as you sit with this artwork, you might contemplate your own answers to these questions.

Look

The Christ figure inside the lantern points to John the Baptist as he, in turn, bears witness to the light of Christ. What meaning does this hold for you?