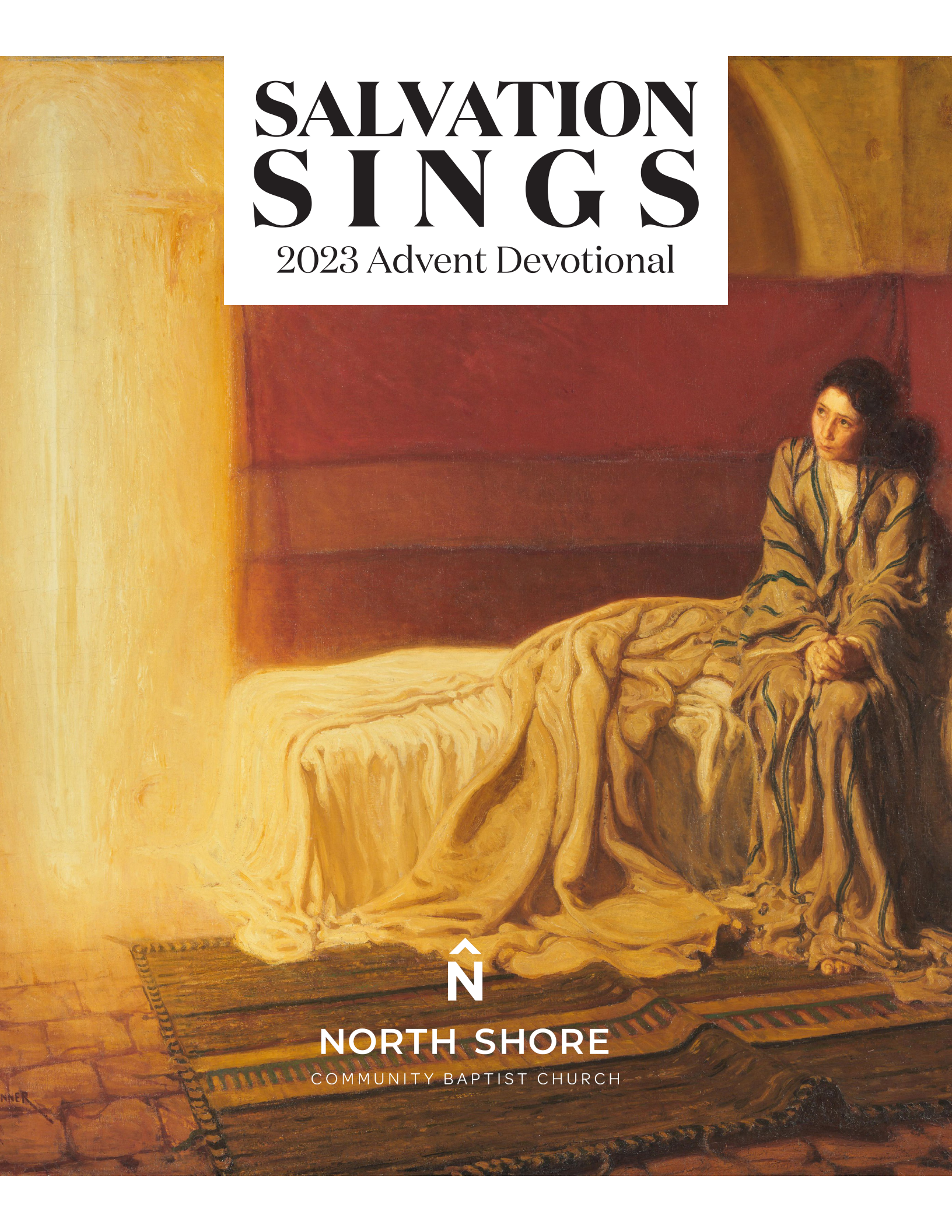




SALVATION SINGS

2023 Advent Devotional



NORTH SHORE

COMMUNITY BAPTIST CHURCH

Contents

Introduction 3

Benedictus (Song of Zechariah) 4

 Bobby Warrenburg: The Light Who Sits in Darkness 5

 Corinne Grant: *Benedictus* 6

 Maddie Hutchison: Holy Remembrance 7

 Johnny Paul-Faina: *Salvation Springs* 8

Like A Curtain 9

 Heidi Olson: Unanswered Prayer and a Gracious Giver 10-11

 Silas Bartley: *To Shine on Those Living in Darkness* 11

 Nathanael Sidmore: Prep Work for the King 12

 Daniel Tuck: *Restoration Rising* 13

 Abby Sidmore: *The Faithful Prophet* 14

Interlude in Ephesians

 Melissa Zaldivar: A Prayer for Strength (Eph. 3:14-21) 15

 Jen Migonis: Singing a Different Song (Eph. 1:3-10) 16

 Elle Migonis: *An Adoption for All People* 17

Magnificat (Song of Mary) 18

The Annunciation by Henry Ossawa Tanner 19

 Addy Weeks: *A Picture of God* | Allie Alcott: *Mary* 20

 Joanne Ersing: Proclaim the Mercy of God 21

 Megan Berger: The Faith-full Follower and the God who Knits us 22

 Kate Hayashi: *Spirit-Filled* 23

 Jessi Rennekamp: *Mary's Song* (a short story) 24-27

 Sarah Tjalsma: Passing Down Good Things 27

 Rita Kearney: Just What did Mary Know? 28

 Julie Funderburk: Embodied Joy 29

 Adam Kurihara: Mary's Song Listening Tour 30-31

 Brian Indrelie: Scattering our Kingdoms 32

 Magdalen Miller: Mary's Question, Marvin's Question 33

Interlude in Ephesians

 Sarah Bartley: Alive by Grace (Eph. 2:4-10) 34-35

 Shauna Anthony: Studies on Seeds 34-35

Nunc Dimittis (Song of Simeon) 36

 Kathy Copan: Peace 36-37

 Betsy Crowe: What are you Waiting For? 37-38

 Shauna Kurihara: *The Light Breaks In* 38-39

 Ken Sawyer: *Prepare Him Room* 40-41

Gloria in Excelsis (Song of the Angels)

 Mark Horvath: Luke 2:13-14 Calligraphy 42

 Tom L.: The Language of our Heart 43

 L. and B.: *Isa Adzakwa Leo* 44

 Esther Weeks: The Shepherds and the Angels 45

 Arely Fagan: *Glory to the Lord in the Highest!* 46-47

Welcome.

We invite you to encounter Luke 1-2 and the Advent season through the lens of artists, complemented by writers sharing from their own lives.

In the first chapters of Luke the Holy Spirit's presence—some might even say, omnipresence—jumps off the page. The Spirit is everywhere. John is filled with the spirit. As is Mary, Elizabeth, Zechariah, and Simeon. When they are filled with the spirit, they burst into song. Songs and poems leap out of the pages. The Spirit overflows from people as works of art.

These 'little' songs (the *canticles* of Advent) have been set to music; sung and chanted for millennia. They come to us through their latin names: *Nunc Dimittis*, *Magnificat*, or *Benedictus*, and *Gloria in Excelsis*. Before beginning each section of this guide, consider listening to them. You can find examples with the music note icon in this guide. Our choir will sing one such *Magnificat* on December 17th.

The *canticles* have served as inspiration for great paintings, such as Tanner's Annunciation, selected for our cover. And they are now inspiring works of art from our congregation, which you will find in the gallery space throughout the church. These artists have kindly provided artist statements to help you reflect with them.

36 people from our congregation and world partners have contributed with devotional reflections and art on the songs that appear in Luke 1-2 and on interludes from Ephesians. We invite you to set aside quiet time to encounter Luke 1-2 and the Advent season through the lens of artists, complemented by writers sharing from their own lives. This guide is uniquely ours; an expression of community as our people share their gifts with one another. We pray their contributions will bless you and serve as opportunities for deeper engagement with one another. As you have opportunity, join us in extending our collective gratitude to all of the contributors to this guide.

Adam Kurihara, Sarah Bartley & Betsy Crowe, Editors

Listen!



Look for this icon for listening links to music throughout this guide!

Bobby Warrenburg

The Light Who Sits in Darkness

Meditation on Zechariah's Song (Luke 1:78-79)

"...because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." – Luke 1:78-79

There is a dungeon in the Scottish Highlands where medieval men and women were doomed to sit in darkness. No light. No warmth. No company. No escape. Centuries later, explorers discovered an impression left in the stone, where prisoners would lean against the wall, and lick moisture seeping in from the moat. It was a godforsaken place.

Zechariah observes in his prophetic song that these people are sitting in darkness. Why are they sitting? Shouldn't they be moving? Shouldn't they search for an exit? When life is dark, sitting feels safe. You can't see. You can't tell where you're going. Moving might make things worse. Sitting is a way of saying, "I don't know what to do. I'm exhausted. Help."

The call came in from a woman in our church. Her daughter had just taken her own life in a 'suicide pact.' She was a sex worker in London and there were concerns about possible police misconduct. The mother asked if I would join her at the station. I found her there; sitting.

On my way, I read from the Apostle John's opening salvo, "The Light came into the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it." Jesus pursued those who were sitting in darkness. He moved towards them because of the "tender mercy of our God." He had already beat me to the side of this sitting-woman. I would be joining *him*.

Surprisingly, and perhaps sooner than we are ready, he aims to get us moving. He "guides our feet into the way of peace." He leads Israel. The people imprisoned from years of idolatry, injustice, and exile he calls once again out of darkness, into his light, so they can be a guide to the other nations. Escape for them leads to shalom for us all.

The explorers who found the dungeon in the Scottish Highlands also found an engraving in the stone of the dungeon wall. Maybe it had been made by a belt-buckle or a shard of iron. The words were a witness and came from Jacob (whose name is Israel), "Surely the LORD was in this place and I knew it not." Those in the dungeon weren't alone. Someone had visited them. Just because we can't see God, doesn't mean that he's not there. And just because we can't imagine a way out, doesn't mean that he can't make a new way.

The best guides are those who have sat in darkness. Those who have found a light where there was no hope. Those who know the way of peace because they have followed his footsteps. No wonder Zechariah burst into song. This is truly good news.

*"Surely the
LORD was in
this place and I
knew it not."*

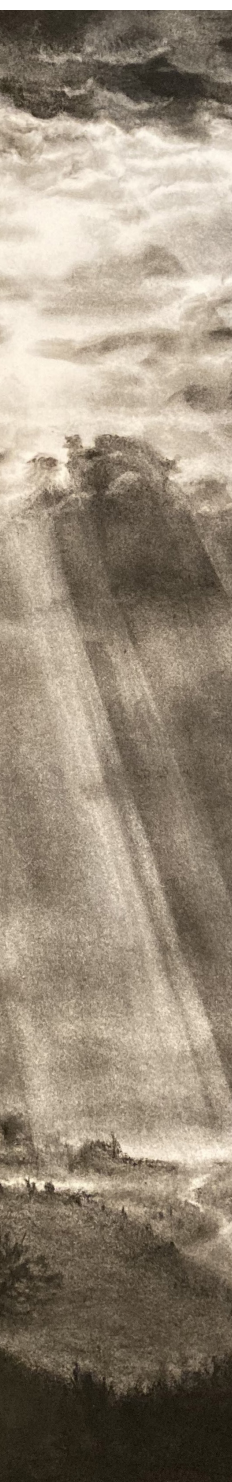
*– Engraving in the stone of a
medieval dungeon wall.*



Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied:

"Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel,
because he has come to his people and redeemed them.
He has raised up a horn of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David
(as he said through his holy prophets of long ago),
salvation from our enemies
and from the hand of all who hate us—
to show mercy to our ancestors
and to remember his holy covenant,
the oath he swore to our father Abraham:
to rescue us from the hand of our enemies,
and to enable us to serve him without fear
in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High;
for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way
for him,
to give his people the knowledge of salvation
through the forgiveness of their sins,
because of the tender mercy of our God,
by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven
to shine on those living in darkness
and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the path of peace."



Maddie Hutchison

Holy Remembrance

Meditation on Zechariah's Song (Luke 1:72-75)

"...because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." — Luke 1:78-79

Sometimes I wonder why memory is so significant to us. What good is it to remember the past—especially when memories are painful?

Zechariah sings a song about remembrance—God's choice to remember his people. He sings that Christ, the horn of our salvation, has come as a remembrance of God's holy covenant, the mercy promised to Israel. Christ is proof that God remembers his promises. Zechariah remembers, too. We can imagine the experiences he has in mind when he sings, "to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear." Zechariah, like so many others, waits for this promise to be fulfilled. The nation has experienced generations of oppression and wandering without a homeland. As he sings these verses, his people are ruled by a violent and powerful empire. Memory was painful for Israel, and for Zechariah too. His own disbelief was—up until this very moment—the cause of his own suffering.

I can relate. My memory is often clouded by pain. A past traumatic event has manifested in depression, brain fog, and even the loss of memories from that period of my life. My body remembers grief, even if my mind wishes to forget. There are days when I would love nothing more than to not remember. But God has begun the work of rewriting these memories for me. It's not that God has caused me to forget them, but God is showing me how to remember them as part of the story He is writing in the world. The trauma and loss that I experi-

enced are reframed by the inbreaking of the Salvation that comes first to the suffering, downtrodden, and weak.

In Zechariah's song, I see that memory is significant because it helps people learn to trust who God is. It is in my memories that I have known great pain. It is also in my memory that I have seen God's great remembering. He kept my feet from slipping. He comforted me with the presence of his Holy Spirit. Most significantly, He remembers my name in the book of life. I cannot look back at that time in my life without remembering the work of his Holy Spirit through those dear to me, who protected me from further harm. The Israelites could not remember their wandering without remembering the Manna from Heaven. I can not remember my story without remembering the Lord sustaining me through His Body, the church. Zechariah could not look back five minutes to his mute-ness, without remembering the provision of a son, and greater still the horn of salvation to come. Through my story, I learned to rely on the horn of my salvation, the one who works protection for those He calls His, and secures His covenant people.

This is true for our church family, too. God remembers his promises to us and in remembering, he is making all things new. Are there memories that we need to ask the Spirit to begin reframing through the lens of God's story? Does God's salvation shape the way we tell our stories? As we remember, we become people who sing, "He has raised up a horn of salvation for us... to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember His holy covenant, the oath that He swore to our father Abraham, to grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days."

Corinne Grant
Benedictus
(On left)

Charcoal on paper
22x30"

Artist Statement – Corinne Grant:

Light shining through darkness is a striking image. I have often regarded the light bursting through clouds of darkness as heavenly rays, which instills a sense of hope. It is a reminder that Christ is in our midst. How long, oh Lord, must we dwell in darkness? And Christ has said, "these things I have spoken unto you, that in me you might have peace. In this world, you shall have tribulations: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." John 16:33



Johnny Paul-Faina (2023)

Salvation Springs

Original poem

*He asked for a writing tablet,
and to everyone's astonishment he wrote,
"His name is John."*

All it takes is one word for salvation to spring
in trembling darkness, in barraging burden...
The Holy Spirit spreads out like a curtain —
with one word He commands Salvation to spring:
'John!' — my hope is suddenly astir and brewing,
alas! the Sun Anointed now slowly dawning.
All it takes is one word for salvation to spring
in trembling darkness, in barraging burden!

*This poem uses the French form Triolet: an eight-line poetic form from the 13th century
that begins and ends with the same two lines.*

Johnny Paul-Faina (2023)

Like a Curtain

colored pencil, 9x12" mixed-media paper

Artist Statement – Johnny Paul-Faina:

In Luke 1:67-80 we hear a brilliant song of praise pouring out of a man filled with the Holy Spirit. While listening to this passage, I saw an image of a translucent curtain descending from heaven. As it rested on Zechariah, it glimmered in countless brilliant colors. *Like a Curtain* illustrates the beauty of the Holy Spirit that dwells within us all. The drawing is vibrant and vivacious, reflecting how the Holy Spirit rushes like a mighty wind (Acts 2:2). But the image is also peaceful and slow-paced, reflecting how God also speaks through a gentle whisper (1 Kings 19:12). As the Holy Spirit rests on us, we are enlivened by the Lord's splendor so that we may appropriately rejoice and praise Him.



Heidi Olson

Unanswered Prayer and a Gracious Giver

Meditation on Zechariah's Song (Luke 1:79)

Some days, the pain of unanswered prayer catches me by surprise. Other days, the longing feels like a persistent, low-grade headache. Can you relate? What are the unanswered concerns you hold before the Lord? A loss, an illness, a dashed dream? In Zechariah's song, we are given a wise pattern for how to allow our yearning to lead us into prayer.

Zechariah and Elizabeth trusted in the Lord, served, and obeyed through what seemed like a lifetime of unanswered prayer. "Righteous in the sight of God" are the first words used to describe their character. Their hope was in the redemption of Israel, yet they had a very personal, very intimate, life-long, unmet desire. They had prayed to have children but remained without. Take a moment and reflect on your deepest longing—the prayer you most often go to. Pause and pray:

Dear Lord, help me to obey and serve even in the context of years of unanswered prayer. I chose to trust you despite my life circumstances and will live my life for your glory.

Despite his very personal unanswered prayer, Zechariah stepped into the presence of God to serve. He performed the priestly duty of burning incense. This was Zechariah's holy moment to stand alone in the presence of God. Did he bring his unanswered prayer into that sacred space and recall the lines from Psalm 141:1-3? "I call to you, Lord, come quickly to me; hear me when I call to you. May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice. Set a guard over my mouth, Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips." Pause—you, too, pray in God's holy presence.

Gracious God, hear me when I call to you. You say in Your Word, "Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life." (Proverbs 13:12) I call to you; come quickly to me. May my prayer be set before you like incense.

It was in this posture of service and petition that Zechariah's answer finally came. An angel of the Lord appeared, startling Zechariah to fright. Even as the angel reassured him, saying "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth," Zechariah expresses doubt. (Luke 1:11-20) His startled reaction and impulsive words revealed unbelief. Pause—reflect, asking the Spirit to show you how fear manifests in unbelief as you wait on the Lord.

Dear Heavenly Father, when have I also looked only at my limits and lack rather than your greatness and abundance? Please remove my unbelief and replace it with faith that leads to hope.

On the day Zechariah and Elizabeth presented their child to the Lord in the temple, they announced his name would be the name given to him by God, a name which means: "Jehovah is a gracious giver." Zechariah's faith grew during his nine months of silence. Upon his return to the temple, his silence was broken with a song: "And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and

"Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life."

— Proverbs 13:12

in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace." (Luke 1:76-79) Pause to reflect on what God has done for you, and for his people.

Praise be to the Lord! You have come to your people, and you have redeemed us. You have given us salvation, shown us mercy, and enabled us to serve you in holiness and righteousness. I thank you for the forgiveness of my sins and your tender mercy. When I experience darkness and the shadow of death, shine on me and guide my feet into the path of peace.

As Zechariah and Elizabeth delighted in their son, they remembered the years of unanswered prayer and disgrace. There had been purpose in the waiting, far greater than they had imagined. As we pray and wait, we can ask the gracious giver for His purpose as well.

Regardless of the outcome, I trust you, God. Your plans and purposes are far beyond what I could ever imagine. "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen." (Ephesians 3:20-21)

Silas Bartley

To shine on those living in darkness (Luke 1:79)

Oil pastels on handmade paper

Artist Statement – Silas Bartley:

Inspired by the line: "to shine on those living in darkness," I drew beams of light. I like to look at the way lights glint in the darkness. They throw little beams in all directions.

I can think of a time when I experienced "light shining in the darkness." It was when I started attending a new school and I didn't have any friends there yet. I felt sad and lonely. A boy named Emmanuel was a light for me. He is empathetic, engaged me in conversation, and was a good listener. After we became friends, I felt more comfortable at school, became more confident, and started doing my work more. He got me to play soccer and we helped each other with class projects.

You can trace beams of light back to their source. I am learning to trace this good friendship back to its source. God is the source of friendship. Thinking about Emmanuel like a beam of light reminds me to thank God for this friendship.

Using the oil pastels allowed me to color in layers of gray and black over the texture of the handmade paper.



Nathanael Sidmore

Prep Work for the King

Meditation on Zechariah's Song (Luke 1:76)

*And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High;
for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him*

Prep work is hard.

We recently had our home professionally painted. Before the painters could apply a beautiful coat of fresh, colonial blue to take the place of a faded, dreary gray, there were several days of scraping old paint, power-washing surfaces, laying down a prime coat, and fixing areas of rot formed by too many years of neglect. So much labor and effort were necessary before the colonial blue could be applied. It was hard work and I'm sure the crew was just dying to get to the good part, to the payoff.

So many real-life scenarios are similar: marathon runners spend months in arduous training for a couple of hours of competition; farmers toil in the ground and nurture plants to maturity for a season of harvest; and large family meals can take hours to prepare before they're enjoyed in a few satisfying minutes.

Zechariah sings this principle over his son John's life. John's calling was to "go before the Lord and prepare his way." Abby Sidmore reflects on this in her artwork as she depicts John rolling out the red carpet, as one might say. I notice that the figure appears worn and scuffed by the task he's undertaken. Managing such a large and heavy roll of carpet has been a challenge—just think how large the roll of carpet was at the beginning! Preparing the way for Jesus, as John was called to do, might have felt like a tremendous challenge.

This calling required huge sacrifice. John chose years of hard living in the wilderness. Elsewhere in the Gospels, we learn he lived on a diet of locust and honey—the food of prophets. John was preparing to fulfill his calling, as he became "strong in spirit" (v 80). And his active ministry was no easier—announcing the need for repentance by both everyday community members and religious leaders. He risked rejection, hostility, and animosity from the unreceptive.

For those who were receptive to John's preaching, it would also be hard. This was part of the prep work too. Many people undoubtedly came to him in rough shape: people with deep relational rifts that needed reconciliation, people needing liberation from sin, people overwhelmed by their circumstances, and people with complacent hearts, long neglecting the need for renewal. Becoming a "people prepared" and "ready for the Lord" (v 17) was the ultimate aim of John's ministry. It required self-examination and humility of spirit leading to repentance before Jesus' arrival.

Advent is literally a season of preparation as we, "prepare him room." In the weeks before Christmas, we open space to consider that preparation sometimes requires hard work. It is important, too, that we don't shrink back from whatever hard things we may need to confront. And yet, we're promised that dealing with the hard things will pay off. John was able to assure the repentant that God is tender and merciful, standing ready to forgive the whole gamut of sin. God would be present with them soon. For us today, we are promised the same forgiveness and healing, through Jesus.

May this Advent season provide time for self-examination. May we allow God's Spirit to uncover the areas that need repair. Yes, the preparation may be hard. And how much richer and joyous will our celebration be on Christmas day!

Daniel Tuck

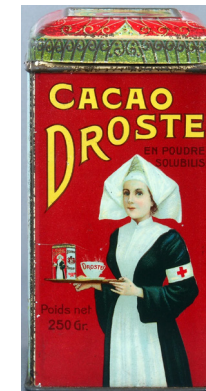
Restoration Rising: Seeing God's Story from Panorama to Close Up Sculpture, wood and mixed media

Artist Statement – Daniel Tuck:

Are you familiar with the Droste effect? It refers to an image that, when you look closely, includes the full image in miniature somewhere inside of it. Often you can see subsequently smaller and smaller versions of the image even deeper in.

I was reminded of this idea as I was considering the narrative of Zachariah and the events that led up to his song of thankfulness, praise, and prophecy. God promises Zechariah and Elizabeth a child. Even though Zechariah is doubtful, his doubt does not stop God's promise, though it leads to an extended period of silence as Zechariah is struck mute. Finally, the promise is fulfilled, Zechariah regains his voice, and immediately sings joyfully of God's redemption, proclaiming that the promised salvation is at hand.

These three movements—God intervening in the midst of brokenness, times of waiting and silence, and a final fulfillment and renewal—make up the main arc of the Biblical story. And, like the Droste effect, we find these elements at work in the lives of many individuals within the story too. The same arc is at work again and again, whether you zoom in or out.



For instance, during the Advent season, we consider the way Israel awaited a promised Messiah while they were oppressed and far from home, and we too wait in anticipation through years of silence. Come Christmas, we will joyfully celebrate the fulfillment of Jesus' birth! Or, consider our own place in God's story, living in the "already but not yet" and eagerly anticipating the ultimate fulfillment and renewal to come.

This sculpture is an endeavor to capture the "story within a story." As you look from afar, you may notice an overall theme of God working fulfillment and renewal out of brokenness, and imagery that suggests God's work in the story of his people. Laid over top and among that, you will find the three movements of Zechariah's story in particular.

This sculpture is tactile and is meant to be experienced using many senses, so feel free to get as close as you'd like. You're welcome to touch it, to feel the textures and explore the little details. As you do, consider how your own story fits into God's story and how your moments of brokenness, waiting, and times of fulfillment and renewal reflect that story to the world around you.

Find this sculpture in the church during the season of Advent.

Zechariah's Song (detail)



Abby Sidmore

The Faithful Prophet

Pencil on paper



Artist Statement – Abby Sidmore:

I created a drawing in pencil based on Luke 1:76. This verse says, “And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High; for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him.” My drawing depicts a young man tattered and worn out, pushing a large roll of red carpet up a hill in the wilderness. The young man represents the prophet being spoken of: John. A red carpet is something that is typically rolled out for someone who deserves glory. So,

the prophet rolling out the red carpet is meant to illustrate the preparation of the way for Jesus’ coming. You can also see that this has been somewhat of a burden for the man. Whether a prophet like John or a Christian today, living out your faith isn’t always easy, but Jesus deserves it and promises great blessings through him. Take this as encouragement this Advent season, as you prepare the way for the Lord.

Interlude

Melissa Zaldivar

A Prayer for Strength

Meditation on Ephesians 3:14-21

So often, I find myself looking for stamina or strength or a sense of something that will help me power through the tasks at hand. And yet, when I pause to consider the aim of my need of strength, it is often for my own sake—not the sake of others.

And I wonder: what happens when we see our faith as something that ultimately ends with us? Surely this is just fine in the temporary. We get what we need and feel refreshed. But in the long run, what good is strength if I only use it to hold myself up?

*What good is strength
if I only use it to hold
myself up?*

Paul prays for strength so that the people of God may live in the abundance of his love and mercy. After all, as part of the family of God, we don’t only belong to ourselves. No, we are in this moment of time but we are part of a richer tapestry of those who went before us and those who come after us.

And every string that is woven adds stability, sure, but it really adds beauty.

For millennia, men and women have sought strength to provide power. They have risen armies and trained militaries and given great speeches in the hope that they might be seen as someone worth following.

And therein lies the paradox of the people of God: we’re not leading this narrative, nor should we. No, we are merely following and pointing others in the right direction. We are asking for strength not to glorify our own ideas and skills and presence, but we are aching for strength because in the end, we need the stamina to carry on and lift one another up toward God.

We’re out here, grasping for a fullness of faith.

Jen Migonis

Singing a Different Song

Meditation on The Song of Christ's Blessings (Ephesians 1:3–10)

Seven years ago when we started our journey into foster care and subsequent adoption we went through a series of training classes and then dove into reports about our family history, background checks, interviews and house inspections. When we were matched with our twins we were prepared. We had all the reports about who they were and where they were coming from. We were shoulder to shoulder with brokenness, hurt, substance abuse and prison sentences.

Sounds like God also knew what He was doing although on a far more grand scale. He started planning his great rescue of us before the creation of the world. He knew things were going to go downhill and that we were a volatile group of people who were not always the most upstanding citizens. Yet he didn't think twice about choosing us. His adoption isn't from a particular noble or royal bloodline but from all nations and backgrounds.

Jesus' genealogies are very good at pointing out the "messy" people in his story. God is not worried about accepting people into his fold who don't have it all together (just look at Matthew 1 for a quick study: Judah slept with his daughter-in-law Tamar when she was posing as a prostitute, Rahab was a prostitute who helped save the spies in Jericho, Ruth was a poverty stricken widow and foreigner and David, known as a man after God's own heart, was an adulterer!).

The Father sent his Son to die for us so that we could mercifully lose every bit of our debts to our prior family and life and be adopted to Him forever. Not only is he going to treat us like his own son but he's going to wipe our slate clean. None of our brokenness scares or surprises Him. He's known about it since before the foundation of the world.

The other day I heard a vastly different kind of ballad from what Paul wrote. If you have a minute search for the hauntingly beautiful and sad song Save Me by Jelly Roll and Lainey Wilson.

*All of this drinkin' and smokin' is hopeless
But feel like it's all that I need
Somethin' inside of me's broken
I hold on to anything that sets me free
I'm a lost cause
Baby, don't waste your time on me
I'm so damaged beyond repair
Life has shattered my hopes and my dreams*

We could be, and maybe we are, that person singing those lyrics. This Advent season my prayer is that you'll sing a different song: the song of the hope we have in Christ which is in stark contrast to the brokenness of the world. We have a God who chose us before the beginning of time. We are not a lost cause or damaged beyond repair. We have a God who is in the business of repairing people whose lives have been shattered. He will adopt us, make us His own and never feel like he's wasting His time on us.

So what do we do about this?
As Charles Spurgeon wisely said:

"We are not sitting here, and groaning, and crying, and fretting and worrying, and questioning our own salvation. He has blessed us; and therefore we will bless him. If you think little of what God has done for you, you will do very little for him; but if you have the great notion of His great mercy to you, you will be greatly grateful to your gracious God."

Listen!



"Save Me" by Jelly Roll
and Lainey Wilson at
nscbc.org/save-me

Elle Migonis

An Adoption for All People

Pen on paper (8.5x11)



Henry Ossawa Tanner (American, 1859–1937)

The Annunciation

Oil on Canvas

Mary's Song

Luke 1:46-55

And Mary Said:

“My soul glorifies the Lord
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has been mindful
of the humble state of his servant.
From now on all generations will call me blessed,
for the Mighty One has done great things for me—
holy is his name.
His mercy extends to those who fear him,
from generation to generation.
He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;
he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.
He has brought down rulers from their thrones
but has lifted up the humble.
He has filled the hungry with good things
but has sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel,
remembering to be merciful
to Abraham and his descendants forever,
just as he promised our ancestors.”



Addy Weeks
A Picture of God
 Crayon on Paper



Allie Alcott
Mary
 Pen on Paper

Artist Statment - Katie Alcott:
For Allie Alcott

Creating artwork for this Advent project was an awesome way to connect Allie, who loves art, with the church.

As we reflected on the passage together, I realized how much we all want to “get it right.” Allie asked me, “Mom, what color clothes did Mary wear? Was she excited, surprised or scared? How did the angel announce themselves? With a horn?” I tried to explain that she was interpreting the passage. As we looked together at lots of different pieces of art that depict Mary’s Song, I noticed Allie’s desire to be told what to do.

I can relate to Allie. As a mom and a Christian I feel that desire too. I want to have all the answers and be told what is right. We often want knowledge. We want to be told exactly what to do, instead of asking for wisdom and insight. I’m learning it’s ok to say “I’m not sure, what do you think?” Making time for wonder, as Mary did, is scary and exciting and I hope to embrace more of that this advent season.

Joanne Ersing

Proclaim the Mercy of God
 Meditation on Mary’s Song (Luke 1:46–47,49–50)

Consider Mary’s situation: a peasant girl, engaged to be married, and pregnant! We might expect her to feel desperate, despondent, or fearful. Yet Mary’s Song of Salvation does not reflect any of those emotions. Mary’s response is to celebrate three characteristics of God her Savior: He is mighty, holy, and merciful.

For he who is mighty has done great things for me – Mary reflects on the greatness of God to her people Israel throughout generations. At this juncture in history, God’s might and power had never before been displayed to the magnitude of the immaculate conception of His Son. The angel came to Mary proclaiming such *might*: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called “holy—the Son of God.”

And holy is his name – Mary continues to acknowledge her mighty God by announcing Him “*holy*.” The highest honor of the One who is without sin. The One who was then and will ultimately bring injustice to an end. The One who contains no impurities.

His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation
 Mary recognizes her position as a sinner and humbly speaks of her unmerited favor that God would choose her to bear and raise His Son. As an Israelite well-familiar with scripture and the teachings of God’s faithfulness to her people despite times of waywardness and rejection of Him as God and King, she admonishes generations to come to fear him. One commentator states our need for God’s *mercy* this way:

“Those who see their need of Christ, and are desirous of righteousness and life in him, he fills with good things, with the best things; and they are abundantly satisfied with the blessings he gives. He will satisfy the desires of the poor in spirit who long for spiritual blessings, while the self-sufficient shall be sent empty away.” (Matthew Henry Concise Commentary; christianity.com)

As we reflect today on Mary’s Song of Salvation, I invite you to pause and ask yourself to check the condition of your heart. Does your heart, like Mary’s, magnify the might, holiness, and mercy of God? When our son Jonathan unexpectedly died five years ago, the outpouring of on-going prayer, cards, and company was a clear reflection of God’s mercy and love amidst unthinkable circumstances.

Action Step: Proclaim to at least one person today a time or event in your life when you saw or experienced the mercy of the Mighty and Holy God at work. “His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.” (Luke 1:50)

*Check the
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Megan Berger

The Faith-Full Follower and the God who Knits us

Meditation on Mary's Song

In years past, I have focused on the triumphant parts of Mary's song: the bringing down rulers from their thrones and the fulfillment of promise to Abraham's descendants forever. This year, Mary's experience hits me differently. I am drawn to the work God is doing inside her—not the knitting together of a baby (though of course this is miraculous and most important), but the making of a faith-full follower who will partner with Him to usher in the Kingdom of God in the flesh. Mary is this partner and, to me, her “yes” response to God's upending her life is nearly as breathtaking as Christ in the manger.

In Tanner's *The Annunciation*, Mary appears rumped, half asleep, and unsure. Often when angels appear in the Bible, they must say, “Do not be afraid.” While this encouragement is understandable, I've contemplated recently if Mary's fear was not so much the surprise at seeing the supernatural messenger of God appear out of thin air, but the frenetic and unspoken whirling thoughts of why and how that began to fill her being. As the angel speaks, I imagine her sinking into the bed. I feel her wondering and trembling inside, as she asks, “Who, me? How could I possibly bear such a thing?” The blue garment symbolizing Mary's ties with Heaven and royalty, which Mary usually wears in artistic depictions of her, is off in the corner. Here, she is simple and raw and human. Did she question if she was good enough, able enough, safe enough? We know that Mary passes the test and moves forward with God's plan. It is important to me, however, that she answers with a statement about identity: not, “I am a true believer” or “I can figure this out,” but “I am the Lord's servant. May your word to me be fulfilled.” Mary responds to her task out of a confidence in God, not herself. If God has ordained this for her, she will do it by and through Him, rather than her own drivenness or righteousness. We all know the story. The road was, literally and figuratively, not an easy one for Mary. Yet she prevailed and became the earthly mother of the Heavenly Son. I am grateful for this reminder that God incorporates normal, fragile, and imperfect things in His eternal work.

As I reflect on Mary's words (v46-49), I love the nearness, the sweetness, the humility of them. *God has been mindful of me. He remembers me, He knows me, He thinks of me, and honors me. Somehow, in all of this world and the millennia of history, God chooses me for this*

Kate Hayashi

Spirit-filled

Embroidery on deconstructed textiles

Artist Statement – Kate Hayashi:

I set out to create a textile using recycled, repurposed blue materials--blue as a direct reference to Tanner's Annunciation, where Mary is not yet wearing her traditional blue garment. While the original goals for this art piece came through in the end product, the process I experienced was far different than what I expected. When I began, I hoped to receive fabrics and sew them together in neat rows and columns. In actuality, I sought textiles, deconstructed them, and abstractly reassembled them in an unforeseen order. I expected the artwork to offer viewers space to reflect on the Magnificat. I did not expect that my artistic process would become a raw and vulnerable reflection on motherhood--a confusing life season for me.

Despite the surprises developing Spirit-filled, I hope you will notice the three main components of this piece: the simple wooden hoop, the deconstructed knitted baby sweater, and the embroidered dove. The art would not exist in the absence of any of the other main components. While each component is distinguishably joined, each is united to completion. Shalom.

insurmountable task, and I will also be blessed through it. This Advent, as we think about God doing big and majestic things in this world, may we also remember that He is mindful of us. We cannot do this thing called life, with its many challenges, on our own. We cannot metamorphose ourselves into heavenly perfect beings who get everything right and are perfectly competent. We can, however, choose--like our sister Mary did--immediate faith in the One who knits all things together, even when we don't know the hows or whys. Even if we are deep-down-inside afraid, we can choose to look upward rather than inward. In other words, by God's grace and by His Spirit working in us, he takes the everyday, the temporary, the human, and weaves and sews it into eternal things. I think of this as I look at the pieces of used fabric and thread, now repur-



By God's grace and by His Spirit working in us, he takes the everyday, the temporary, the human, and weaves and sews it into eternal things

posed in Kate Hayashi's Advent textile into something altogether new. It is symbolic of holding space for the simultaneous hard and the beautiful of life. Perhaps we are all, like Mary in Tanner's painting, tired, having been just startled awake, confused, and wary. But that doesn't mean that God can't wrap us, just as we are, in the blue vestment of Heaven.

Jessi Rennekamp

Mary's Song

A short story based on the time in between Luke 1:38 and 39

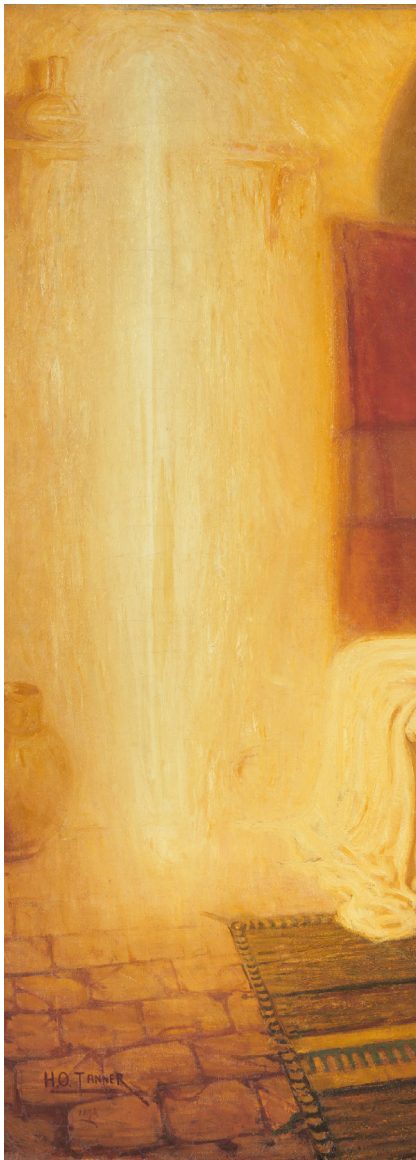
As the last of the blinding light fades from the room, I move a trembling hand to rest on my stomach. Is it my imagination, or is there a small, warm glow gently vibrating in my womb?

Favored one, I mull the angel's words over in my mind. *My son – also, somehow, the Son of the Most High – will sit on David's throne and reign over the house of Jacob forever. The power of the Most High is overshadowing me, bringing about this impossible thing. For in truth, nothing is impossible with God.*

I lean against the wall and slowly sink down into a seated position, the bread dough I'd been kneading forgotten on the table. My flour-dusted fingers leave a handprint on my stomach. I stare at those little smudged fingerprints, marking the place where the Most High has touched me. The small beginning of our people's long-awaited hope, a simple signpost of unrisen bread. This is not how I'd imagined the tables of the world turning or how the salvation of Jacob's family coming about. I breathe deeply to calm the wonder bubbling inside of me. What is God doing, and why did he send his messenger to me – to this little dwelling, in the middle of an ordinary baking day?

Favored one, I think again. *Joseph won't favor me anymore. My parents. Our neighbors.*

I won't be favored by anyone but God. That should be enough. Shouldn't it? I steel myself, resolving to have courage for the lonely path ahead, which hasn't been trod by any woman in history. And yet, some aspects of the path have been experienced by so many of my foremothers. What I wouldn't give to have another woman to guide me with what to expect, what to eat, how to prepare for the coming of my firstborn. So much ancestral wisdom is shared when young women are with child. Will I miss out on all of it?



The angel's words again: *Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month for she who was said to be barren.*

Yes, I know what I must do. I rise from the floor and continue kneading the bread. I will need to take it on my journey to see the only other woman who might understand.

The next morning, I rise early and fill my small pack in the gentle light of the dawn. A single change of clothes, a pouch of drinking water, the bread loaf I'd made yesterday wrapped in a white cloth. On impulse, I add a few of the rags I use during my monthly bleeding, just in case anything unusual starts happening as a result of my new condition. I want to be prepared. Somehow I have to be a good mother to my unborn child even though the responsibility has come to me so unexpectedly. Unbeknownst to anyone besides me, the hopes of my people – and the entire world – are riding on this child.

God is overshadowing me and the child with the wings of a mother bird, but I want to do my part too.

Yesterday, I'd made arrangements to join a small caravan of travelers journeying from Nazareth to Jerusalem. The total journey is about 80 miles and will take nearly a week on foot. When we arrive at Jerusalem, I will walk the final handful of miles alone to Ein Karem, the town in the Judean hillside where Elizabeth lives.

I don my sandals, pick up my bag, and walk to the meeting place in the market where my fellow travelers are gathering. A young man, who looks younger than Joseph but older than me, is buying figs from a nearby merchant to sustain him for the journey. A little family – husband, wife, a young daughter, and an even

younger son – are gathered around their old, frail-looking donkey as the wife slips one more small parcel into the saddlebags. I wonder if the little animal will make it to Jerusalem and back, or if the family is even coming back. Two more men, each traveling alone, round out our group.

As we begin walking the long, dusty path, a few of the pilgrims talk amongst themselves about why they are going to Jerusalem, and I notice the dad pointing out an interesting plant for his children. I keep to myself and get into the familiar rhythm of walking and pondering, pondering and walking.

I find myself thinking of Jochebed, Moses' mom. Just like now, the Israelites in her day were under the iron fist of a mighty empire. Just like me, she had a child of promise destined to lead the house of Jacob to new freedom and a new era.

I imagine how she would have conceived of the plan to buy the highest-quality pitch at the marketplace and turn her best basket into a water-proof cradle. She would have held onto her son as long as she could without being discovered by the Egyptian soldiers. Every day, more of her neighbors' baby boys would have been found and thrown into the Nile River. I feel a chill go down my spine as I look at the toddling boy traveling with us, and I think of all the babies about his age who didn't make it – all the babies who were murdered as God rescued only one. The one who was the key to everyone else's rescue.

Every day, Jochebed would have wondered if she could nurse baby Moses once more, if she could hold him close for one more day. Finally, she knew it was time. Time to put him fully in God's hands and see what the Most High would do.

As that first evening falls, we find a quiet glen to rest where any nighttime travelers, thieves, or bandits would have difficulty seeing us.

Unlike Jacob from the days of old, I opt to rest my head on my pack rather than using a stone for a pillow. Jacob had consecrated that pillow-stone after God had appeared to him in a vision and

said to him: *"All the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and your offspring."*

I don't need to consecrate a stone; the child growing inside me is surely the fulfillment of that promise. I fall into a peaceful sleep, my hand resting gently on my womb.

As I awake the next morning, I feel like my head and stomach are swimming in different directions. I roll over and "consecrate" the ground with a small puddle of yellow vomit. Groaning, I wait for my vision to stop spinning. I slowly rise to my knees, take a small drink from my water pouch, and then repack my bag. I look around and see the wife from the family of four looking at me suspiciously.

My entire body feels like lead, and it's an effort to stand. But I have to keep going. I set my face like flint toward Jerusalem. One foot in front of the other.

Coming up behind us, I hear quick footsteps clanging, each step ringing with the sound of metal. Roman soldiers. It's too late for us to get off the road and out of sight, so we cluster to the side of the path and hope the soldiers will pass by without comment or interference.

There are five soldiers, marching in two rows of two with one man in front. They march past us and then stop abruptly. "Halt!" yells the leader in Latin.

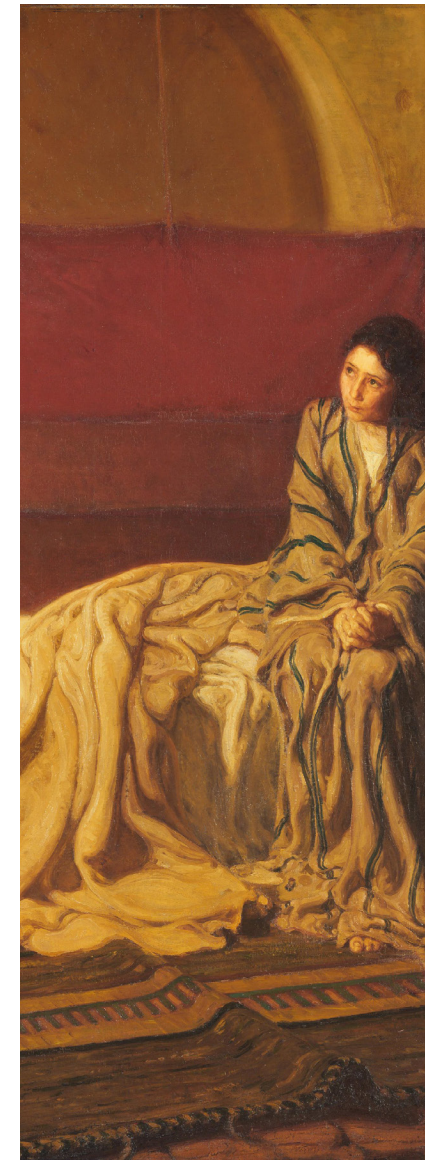
"You –" the man points at the father of the two children. "You will carry my bags to Jerusalem."

One of the solo travelers in our caravan steps forward. "Please," he says in Aramaic. "I will carry your bags. This man must stay with his wife and children."

The soldier's reaction is swift. He strikes the man with a metal-clad fist. "You dare defy me?" he bellows as blood gushes from the man's jaw. I don't know if the soldier even understands Aramaic.

"This man," he gestures again to the father, "will carry my bags."

The father gently squeezes his wife's arm and steps forward immediately. His two children are crying, and the wife picks up



her son. The little girl tries to run toward her father, and I step forward to grab her hand. “Shhh,” I whisper. “Stay with your imma.”

“Abba!” she shouts, weeping and pulling against my hand as she watches her father struggle under the weight of the soldier’s pack and then march away. The band of soldiers, along with her father, soon disappear in the distance.

The two other men in our party approach the injured one, who is still bleeding on the ground. I too step forward, removing two of my clean rags from my pack. I kneel beside the man to bandage his wound as best I can. He winces as I tie the strips of fabric around his head, but grunts “thank you” and tries to smile at me.

When we make camp that evening, I lie close to the woman and her two children, trying futilely to fill the space left by the father who has been taken away. I hear the children quietly crying themselves to sleep – and then, long after the children have fallen silent, the shuddering sobs of the woman.

“Messiah, come quickly,” I hear her whisper.

I pray fervently for the family to be reunited. I pray that the soldiers do not harm the man beyond making him carry their heavy packs. I pray that he will be released, and that his wife knows where to go so they can find each other in the bustling city.

She is strong for her children. As they walk together, she sings songs of the Lord’s deliverance and tells them stories of his faithfulness to Israel. She explains to them that King David once sat on a glorious throne in Jerusalem – “where we are going, and where we will see your abba again” – and that, someday, a descendant of David will

sit on that throne forever and all of our people will be free.

We get closer and closer to Jerusalem, and soon I can see the city outlined against the sky. The city of David.

The road to Ein Karem, where I must turn off and leave the caravan, is near. I quicken my steps to catch up to the woman. In farewell, I squeeze her hand and softly sing a few phrases from Hannah’s song, beloved by so many faithful Israelite women and men for generations: *“He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap; he seats them with princes and has them inherit a throne of honor.”*

She squeezes my hand in return. Without taking her eyes off the road, or her children, or the city skyline, she sings under her breath: *“For the foundations of the earth are the Lord’s; on them he has set the world. He will guard the feet of his faithful servants, but the wicked will be silenced in the place of darkness.”*

Walking the last few miles alone, I wonder what Elizabeth will think when I show up unexpectedly on her doorstep. I’m not obviously pregnant yet, though my morning sickness seems to give me away to women with experience in childbearing. Will Elizabeth think I have run to her in disgrace? Will she even recognize me? How will I even begin to explain what’s happening to me?

My legs are weak from the long road, and my fatigue runs deeper than anything I’ve ever experienced. When I see the house she and Zechariah share looming in the distance, I know I must seek their hospitality no matter what questions or doubts they may have.

After my final trudging steps, I am at their front door. I knock. “Hello? Cousin Elizabeth?” I call.

Immediately I hear a crash from behind the door and a sound as if the wings of a thousand doves are beating inside the house. The door opens, and there stands Elizabeth, gray-haired with a perfect and beautiful round belly.

“Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!” she says in a loud, authoritative voice like the voice of the high priest in the Temple.

“But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” she continues. “As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!”

For the second time in a week, I wonder at such a momentous greeting. But this time, I feel relief; I don’t have to explain anything to her. I feel joy that God has brought us together to share this part of our respective journeys. And I feel a sense of destiny, that the long road I’ve just traveled is only the very beginning of something much larger than me.

I open my mouth to reply, and I feel the doves’ wings inside me, ready to burst forth – flying on the wind of the voices of my people for generations and the covenant promises that God has made and reaffirmed so many times over.

“My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,” I sing in effervescent praise, *“for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me.”*

“Holy is his name!”

Artist’s Statement – Jessi Rennekamp:

When I started meditating on Mary’s song in preparation for writing a piece for NSCBC Advent 2023, I came across a beautiful a capella rendition that features the soprano, alto, tenor, and bass each singing a different line of the Magnificat. I reflected on how Mary’s song is indeed her song but it is also the song of a thousand generations; it is a song about the fulfillment of the Covenant promises God made to Adam and Eve, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to King David, and it is a song that announces themes and refrains that will be repeated throughout the Gospel as well as the church for ages to come. The song also arises out of a fraught sociopolitical context in which Israel is ruled by the mighty Roman empire, and this small seed is truly the hope of the nations. We also know that Mary was a thoughtful and reflective individual, who “treasures and ponders” things in her heart. This piece is an exploration of the voices and historical context she may have been pondering as she reflected on the angel’s message to her just prior to singing her Spirit-inspired Magnificat.

In order to explore the various historical voices that are alluded to in Mary’s song, I chose to focus on the time period in between the Annunciation and the singing of the Mag-

nificat. As it turns out, this time period encompasses Mary’s visit to Elizabeth, a journey of 80-100 miles that took place over 4-6 days on a road that was likely difficult and dangerous. We often think about the challenges Mary and Joseph would have faced traveling to Bethlehem when Mary was 9 months pregnant, but her journey to visit Elizabeth was likely quite challenging as well. Beyond the physical difficulties of the first trimester such as morning sickness and fatigue, Mary would have taken that journey knowing that Joseph, her family, and her community would likely disown her when they found out she was pregnant, and she would have been reeling from the angel’s astonishing pronouncement and its unfathomable significance for her, for Israel, and for the world.

I hope that this imaginative exploration of Mary’s road will inspire meditations on each of our journeys this Advent season. May we understand that we are part of a bigger story that God is writing, that he is with us when we are overwhelmed or downtrodden, that he is a faithful and loving God whose vision of justice and redemption for the world will one day come true.

Listen!



“Magnificat” by Randy Gill •
nscbc.org/magnificat

Sarah Tjalsma

Passing Down Good Things

Meditation on Mary’s Song (Luke 1:50)

“His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation”

Typically when we talk about handing things down from generation to generation, we think of a family heirloom: a bracelet, a picture, dinner china, etc. What if we, like Mary, handed down faith and trust in the mercy of the Lord God almighty, from generation to generation?

Take a moment to think about what was passed down to you from your family--maybe an heirloom, a mindset, a set of values. Are those things you want to pass down to another generation? Perhaps you wish your parents passed something else down.

Mary is aware of God’s mighty acts to her ancestors, and this helps her recognize God’s mighty act in the present, and faithfulness in the future. How can we be a church that hands down good things from generation to generation?

This Christmas season, will we be known for becoming stressed about getting the perfect gift, making time for that family member, or making Christmas more magical than last year for our kids? What if this Christmas season, we are known for giving out of the love God gives to us, treasuring time with everyone we meet, and rooting ourselves in the love of the Father? That is what I want to pass down from generation to generation.

Rita Kearney

Just What did Mary know?

Meditation on Mary's Song (Luke 1:46-55)

Oh how Mary's hymn of praise sings of sweet justice! Almighty God's loving promise to restore justice and fill the hungry with good things will be answered through this child in her womb. Mary's point of view blissfully declares herself blessed because of God's virginal conception in her humble life. In the song, *Mary, Did You Know?*, the writer wonders if Mary knows how profound this Lamb of God in her womb will change the world. For me, I wonder if Mary knew the personal cost, would she still say "yes."

Mark Lowry's song, *Mary, Did You Know?*, ponders if this young teenage girl grasps the magnificent salvation the child in her womb would bring. Did she imagine that He would walk on water, rule nations, give sight and hearing, calm a storm and be her own deliverer from sin? As a testament to Mary's faith in God's miracles, she joyfully quotes the Old Testament's promises of God's mercy to Abraham and his descendants. And yet did she realize the steps to this glory would entail sacrifice of torture, humiliation, and betrayal upon her firstborn son?

If I wrote a song, I would bring up some difficult questions. I'd wonder if Mary realized the excruciating cost that she would pay when she sang, "From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me." Could this young teenager begin to imagine what it would take to travel as a pregnant woman in her third trimester? Biblical geographers describe a four-day journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem—90 miles in four days, averaging a 2.5-mph. As a trip that would require eight hours a day on the back of a donkey! No time to take bathroom breaks, cook or eat meals, or catch her breath. Was it fair to put a teenage girl in this position if she could

not anticipate the difficulty it would entail? Also, did Mary realize the ensuing trauma of running for her son's dear life across a desert in the middle of the night from a blood-thirsty king? Did she anticipate the responsibility and inevitable heartbreak inherent in raising the Savior of the World? As an adult mother, let alone still a child, I could not bear the thought of watching my own child shamed and tortured beyond human comprehension, only to die in my arms, abandoned by the people He came to save.

The amazing thing about Mary's uncompromising submission to her Lord's will is her confidence that no matter the cost, it would be worth it—even a mysterious path of suffering was worth it for the sake of the world's freedom. She was willing to cross whatever desert and valley it took to be a conduit for God's promised glory, help, and salvation. This holy gift would be offered not just for her and her family, but for all people, for all time, for all generations.

One last, perhaps rhetorical, question I would pose: "Mary, did you know your obedient example would also encourage the world that God's freedom, justice, love and hope are worth whatever the mysterious personal sacrifice it takes—known or unknown?" More than anything, Mary's salvation song testifies to her love relationship with her Heavenly Father, and trust in His loving justice. Yes, she counted the cost. Whatever the mystery price would be on her life, Mary was all in because she trusted and loved Father God's promises. I want that too.

Julie Funderburk

Embodied Joy

Meditation on Mary's Song

Sometimes Christmas songs can feel detached from reality. It's not that I don't love the themes of joy, light, hope, and peace, but the longer I've lived, the more I've realized that they don't enter my heart unaccompanied. I've battled the emotions they partner with, frustrated and confused that they would come together, and sometimes shut both of them out. Light and night, affliction and peace, tenderness and injury, life and death. I wanted just one of these, the one that doesn't bring heartache. Yet I've also been learning that in the Gospel, both are welcomed and redeemed.

The Magnificat can initially sound more weighted toward joy, a song of Gospel proclamation, rejoicing, and hope come to life. Mary sings about the coming Kingdom and of the Almighty who was bringing this about, beginning in her own body. But Mary did not know she would be called Our Lady of Sorrows, or that a sword would pierce her soul, as the hope she proclaimed coming at the cost of her son's suffering. None of us can fully anticipate how our lives will unfold, joys and sorrows woven together. It's easier to hold one thing at a time, joy or sorrow, and sometimes the enormity of the experience requires just that. The magnitude of the Annunciation exploded into a song of rejoicing. There are seasons of uninhibited rejoicing.

For many, myself included, weights and wounds change our song, leaving us to wonder if songs of joy can be authentic while we still lament? Do we toss the sadness aside so we can rejoice? Sorrow stops us in our tracks. Grief chisels away at us, drilling into us, and we watch pieces of ourselves dissipate, slices of our heart fall off.



Visitation, Liz Valente (Brazil)

But those who sorrow deeply can also rejoice magnificently. Into the cavern of loss, a rushing stream sounds. A melody that layers, harmonizes with itself, and blends with the songs of lament. The space carved out by the sword of sorrow is now home for a greater symphony to be birthed. The hope of the incarnate Christ is born in each of us.

*But those who
sorrow deeply
can also rejoice
magnificently*

I keep trying to get under these words, to embody Mary's words as my own, and I come up gasping for air. Then I realize, it's because I'm begging my soul to rejoice like it used to when the world felt less complex and songs of praise came easier. What would happen if I made more room for Christ in me? The space that grief has broken can be a fertile ground for a new beauty to be born. When we hold the hope of the kingdom with the suffering and sorrow of our own stories, we are participating in resurrection. In this way, Mary's song is our song—all of our songs. Things die in us and before us, and the weeping merges with the melodic Magnificat, reaching the deep parts of our soul. Christ was incarnated in Mary so he could live in each of us. Some days I don't know how to dwell with Christ—how to climb out of the hole I'm in or see past the gray veil of tasks, but I'm grateful because our God loves us and does this work for us. We are not expected to manifest Christ any more than Mary was. We are asked to let him dwell in us and let our life flow out of that. Christ can hold everything, the vast complexity of being human, the light and the dark, the pangs of death and the breath of new life.

Adam Kurihara

Mary's Song Listening Tour

Many Magnificats; much Marian music making

One thing I love about settings of the Magnificat are how composers throughout the centuries depict Mary's devotion to God through varied interpretations of the text. Some are regal, others joyful and exuberant. Many are in Latin— the historic language of the church, and some more modern settings are in English. While a survey of Magnificats could be this entire booklet, here are a few to get us started:

Palestrina (Italy, 1525-1594) – Palestrina was the master of Renaissance music, which strives for elegant symmetry using strict rules for how voices interact. The result is something that approaches heavenly perfection in music.

J.S. Bach (Germany, 1685-1750) – Bach depicts in music the emotion and drama of text. One example comes in the fourth movement, when singing “all generations”, we hear a cacophony of voices swirling around one another. Bach shows through music how many generations, all distinct from each, from different eras and regions – call Mary blessed. In the last three measures, they finally join together, showing that one day all generations shall together call her blessed.

John Rutter (England, b. 1945) – Jubilant and joyful, interspersed with English prayers and poems chosen by the composer. This is joyful easy listening.

Kim André Arnensen (Norway, b. 1980) – Arnensen creates a sense of wonder, devotion, gratitude, and joy in this lush soundscape reminiscent of a film score.

Arvo Pärt (Estonia, b. 1935) – This Magnificat draws inspiration from the composer's mystical experiences with chant. His methodical compositional technique creates the illusion of the connection of time and timelessness. The composer writes of this technique: “This instant and eternity are struggling within us. And this is the cause of all of our contradictions, our obstinacy, our narrow-mindedness, our faith and our grief.”

Charles Villers Stanford (Ireland, 1852-1924) – Coming out of the choral tradition that emphasized a reserved style with purity of text delivery, Stanford brought new energy to the Anglican liturgies of morning and evening services with his settings of the canticles, including this Magnificat of 1879. He brought theatrical excitement to the text by imagining the organ as an entire symphonic orchestra instead of simply playing a supporting role to the choir. The result is a passionate and dramatic cry for God's righteous justice fitting of Mary's glorious song.

Listen!



visit nscbc.org/listen to find a curated playlist of these six pieces

The NSCBC choir will sing this piece in the worship services on December 17th. As you listen, hear the ways Stanford paints the text:

The piece begins with bright and glorious B-flat major chord and the choir proclaiming with Mary, “My soul magnifies the Lord!” It is pure praise. Then immediately we enter the story of Mary: that God regarded her as lowly in order to show how God exalts the humble. The sopranos alone sing of God's mercy on those that fear God. The men proclaim that God has shewed (an old English spelling of “show” which literally means “to cause to see”) strength with his arm and scattered the proud. As the roar of the choir and organ swell together, we hear how God has put down the mighty from their seats, in direct contrast with the pure melody of the sopranos proclaiming God's exaltation of the humble and meek. Mary's song concludes with telling how God helped (or the old english “holpen”) his servant Israel as he promised from Abraham and through his seed forever. The final doxology: “Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost” draws its melody from earlier in the composition, painting quite literally, “as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be.” The final line, “world without end” reminds us that there is a future hope to which

Mary sings that was inaugurated in Jesus birth but will one day be fulfilled by his glorious return.

Mary's song is a direct echo of Hannah's song (1 Samuel 2:1-10), which proclaims God's deliverance from enemies. In both songs, it is not by strength that one prevails, but by the mercy of God; Because God gives mercy on those that fear him, and because God alone can bring true justice and everlasting peace.

As war rages in the holy land, I can't help but read these words in light of continued destruction. Hannah sings of an immediate deliverance from enemies. Mary's song sings of God's mighty acts in the past—how God brought down the powerful from their thrones and exalted the humble. This is the God we worship. Our God is for the weak, the outcast, the vulnerable. Mary's song shows us that God's favor and blessing no longer rests with one chosen set of people but is extended to all the nations through Christ. In Jesus' birth, we see God's mercy extend to anyone who seeks it. His mercy is on them that fear him throughout all generations.

Hear a performance of Stanford's Magnificat by the NSCBC choir on December 17, 2023 in the worship services

Listen!



Brian Indrelie

Scattering our Kingdoms

Meditation on Mary's Song

This passage in church tradition has an honorific name: The Magnificat. In Roman Catholic Christianity, it has a place of honor as one of the few words we have from Mary herself. In my experience, however, despite being raised in Protestant churches and having several theological degrees, I've only heard this passage preached once. Many Christians seem comfortable with the nostalgic, domestic version of Mary, treasuring the birth of Jesus in her heart, and are unnerved by the bold prophetess we find here.

The truth is that this song is profoundly political and economic in a way that makes some Christians uncomfortable, especially given the ends we go during the holidays to buy gifts and avoid political talks with family members! These politics are unnerving because they are so alien to anything we know in our world. When Mary refers to how God "scattered the proud" and "brought down the mighty from their thrones," we immediately think of the conquest, where God scattered the Canaanites to make a home for the poor, refugee Israelites. Being a poor, refugee Israelite herself, Mary clearly appreciated the parallel, and named her son Jesus, which is the Greek word for Joshua, the one who was in the lead when God brought them into the land in fulfillment of his promises. This conquest is alien to us because, like the one Joshua led, it is not one where the poor seize power and take the spoils. It is not about defeating the powerful, but about breaking power itself. Similarly, this revolution isn't about taking the money, but re-imagining money's purpose.

It's amazing how often well-meaning Christian institutions define success in the same terms as earthly kingdoms, rather than functioning like liberated Sabbath states. In my eight years on the board of this church, we spent more time than I care to remember hashing through every line of the budget and comparably far less on helping the orphan and widow. When it was proposed that we become involved in a local partnership of churches who were providing housing to homeless families, some opposing voices were concerned that we would have to work with churches with different theology than ours. If there was a book on how to be part of the next great Christian movement, we were probably reading it, forgetting perhaps that God's movements are not engineered by humans.

In our economic lives, personal financial security and comfort are fundamental. While most of us aren't led astray by the false gospel of prosperity, the notion of financial peace is a bestseller. A Christian book on money management, baptized with a few choice quotations from the Proverbs, will always find an eager audience. This isn't to say, of course, that there is not a place for financial stewardship in the Christian life, there is. But we need to avoid the temptation to pride ourselves on our wise Christian money management without an equal effort to direct our resources toward the pursuit of justice.

Even in our spiritual lives, it is easy to get this wrong. When I was in high school, I used to put black marks on a calendar every day that I didn't read my Bible. This didn't actually make me closer to God, but led to depression. There is a natural tendency to assume that the person who spends more time with God, volunteers more at church, reads more books, or witnesses to more people is closer to God and a better Christian. We can easily live in a place of guilt about not doing enough when we should be giving up the false belief that more is better, and that the kingdom of God inaugurated by Jesus is about accumulation rather than transformation. It was only when I could let go of the calendar that I was able to be truly close to God.

This advent season, let us take time to reflect on and repent of these failures, that God might scatter our foolish kingdoms and re-establish his shalom among us.

Visitation, Frank Wesley
(1923-2002)



Magdalen Miller

Mary's Question, Marvin's Question

Meditation on Mary's Song (Luke 1:51-53)

In this part of The Magnificat, Mary sings of a Reckoning, conveying the anger and the longing for justice that many of us harbor in our hearts. Where the rest of her song rejoices in the mercy of God, here Mary raises a question—one the rest of Luke will go on to answer. She asks, "How will all things be set right?" without alluding to violence as the answer, which is the only solution our human minds can conceptualize. How will this Great Reckoning of all things, where the mighty fall and the low are made high, come to pass if not by death to the masses and the replacement of one evil with its inverse evil, where the low are raised up to then simply rule as the high had ruled and earned their downfall? The answer lies in the rest of Luke.

Listen to *What's Going On* by Marvin Gaye. Released in 1971, it was written by Obie Benson in the wake of an act of police brutality he witnessed at an anti-war protest. Gaye, inspired by the lyrics, arranged it, sculpted an album, and recorded his heart wrenching vocal delivery of the eventual masterpiece. He had much to draw from: his childhood beatings at his father's hand, his duet partner's recent death to cancer, the world's collective shock at Vietnam and his brother's firsthand accounts. The album, initially rejected as "too political" became the most influential R&B album of all time, the #1 album on the Rolling Stone's top 500 list, and the beginning of the music-industry-altering concept album. He knew it wasn't politics he was singing about. It was life.

He sings:

*Mother, mother there's too many of you crying
Brother, brother, brother,
There's far too many of you dying
Father, father, we don't need to escalate
You see, war is not the answer
For only love can conquer hate
You know we've got to find a way
To bring some loving here today, yeah*

There are plenty of great songs that scream about the unfairness of the world, but Marvin Gaye complexifies this anger. His anger is tinged with sadness. He sees the unfairness and injustice and wants it righted, but wants it done without violence. He wants a bloodless reckoning, one whose weapon is love, the enemy of violence and war as he sees it. He asks a similar question to Mary's, but as great art often does, presents no answer. In theory, there isn't one; how could anything but violence bring about this Reckoning of which he sings? Who could bring about a complete reordering of the world without shedding a drop of our blood? Who could raise the lowest among us off the ground without striking down the highest that keep them there? Would we actually be better off in this reordered world? Ultimately, of course, the Lord's Reckoning was far from bloodless, but in his mercy, his blood was what reckoned all of the injustice of the world. As it is so often in life, He is the only answer.

Listen!



What's Goin On at
nscbc.org/marvin

Sarah Bartley

Interlude: Alive by Grace

Meditation on Ephesians 2:4–10

The letter to the Ephesians celebrates the power of God’s incarnate grace to enliven deadened people—to breathe new life into people who are deadened by the wrong they have done and the wrong done to them. This beautiful passage about grace reminds me of San Quentin, by Johnny Cash.

It is said that Cash “contained multitudes:” a country music artist, a gospel singer, an Air Force Sergeant, a friend of presidents from both parties, and an advocate for peace, prison reform, and native peoples. He knew and sang about both the light and the darkness; his throughline, grace. By 1969, Cash had been performing in prisons for more than a decade, motivated by a sense of personal solidarity with inmates and rooted in his own experiences with law enforcement and addiction.

Listen to San Quentin, a live recording performed in the prison by the same name. He introduces the song saying, “I tried to put myself in your place, and I believe this is how I would feel about San Quentin.” He sings in the voice of every man in the crowd, capturing their experience with a law enforcement system that aims to punish rather than restore.

Reflecting on the album, Cash wrote:

“Listen closely to this album and you hear in the background the clanging of the doors, the shrill of the whistle, the shout of the men...even laughter from men who had forgotten how to laugh. But mostly you’ll feel the electricity, and hear the single pulsation of two thousand heartbeats in men who have had their hearts torn out, as well as their minds, their nervous systems, and their souls.”

Cash had a knack for incarnation: walking grace through the locked doors of a place the world would rather forget. His affectionate solidarity with the crowd is what ignited their response. That connection—the electricity between artist and crowd—is what gives the performance its power. The inmates are contributing artists to a performance that asks

Listen!



“San Quentin”
nscbc.org/cash

you, the audience, to put yourself in the place of people you might otherwise forget. In retrospect, the commercial success of a live prison album is unsurprising. Yet it took six years to convince the record company to produce it. The industry had not seen anything like this before. San Quentin emerged from a creative imagination shaped by grace.

Jesus said that people made alive by grace are like seeds, planted in the ground. They have the potential to blossom into trees, where birds safely build their nests. May our community be rooted and established by grace, such that we grow in affection and solidarity with deadened people. And may those people find refuge and new life in our community.

Artist Statement – Shauna Anthony:

Seeds are the incredible handiwork of our creator God. As an artist who is drawn to plant-life, I am humbled to consider that even my best work is simply an impression or replica of the original by the master artist himself. He is the one who conceived the incredible wild flowers, blankets of ferns, and bark on the birch trees. I began to consider seeds as the essence of this original design. The blueprints of creation neatly tucked into small and sometimes odd looking packages. Everything that is needed to produce and reproduce stunning generations of art to cover the earth since the beginning of time are in tiny, unassuming bundles; like salvation; like our savior himself. Just as a seed holds the end design within its shell, our salvation was written, designed, and planned from the beginning of time by a God who foreknew all. We can add nothing, nor can we take away what he has prepared in advance. We cannot boast at the good works we walk in, for this is what we were created for, and by his grace we can create all sorts of varied replicas of our savior’s work as we imitate Him who was, and is, and is to come. There is nothing better than what He has planned, than what He has done, and than what He will do. When we stand in awe, we can watch the seeds unfurl before our eyes. By beholding we become more like Him who made us and who saved us.

Shauna Anthony
Studies on Seeds
Watercolor

Tunc Dimittis

Song of Simeon

Luke 2:29-32

Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
you may now dismiss your servant in peace.
For my eyes have seen your salvation,
which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:
a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and the glory of your people Israel.”

Kathy Copan

Peace

Meditation on Simeon’s Song (Luke 2:29)

*“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
you may now dismiss your servant in peace.*

What does it take to have complete peace in the face of death?

Whenever I read this song of Simeon I remember the day that I sat for hours with one of my closest friends at the bedside of her young adult son. Her beloved boy had been pronounced dead, and the hospital staff was waiting for his mother to give them word to turn off the life-support machines.

In the midst of her anguish, the hospital chaplain came in and read Luke 2:29-31, “Sovereign Lord, now let your servant die in peace, as you have promised. I have seen your salvation, which you have prepared for all people.”

My friend’s son, who had struggled for years to be able to believe in Jesus, had recently experienced God’s salvation in his life. Though Simeon’s situation was quite different from that of my friend’s son, this passage gave my friend a deep sense of peace as she faced his death. Because of the salvation that came through Jesus, she could have a completely different view of death. While losing him was very hard, and she has experienced deep sadness and grief, at the same time, she has hope and confidence that she will see her son again.

37

This truth comes through beautifully in a song I love from Michael Card called “Simeon’s Song.”

Old man in the temple waiting in the court
Waiting for the answer to a promise
And all at once he sees them in the morning sunshine
A couple come and carry in a baby

Now that I’ve held Him in my arms
My life can come to an end
Let Your servant now depart in peace
I’ve seen Your salvation, He’s the Light of the gentiles
And the glory of His people Israel

Mary and the baby come and in her hand five shekels
The price to redeem her baby boy
The baby softly cooing nestled in her arms
Simeon takes the boy and starts to sing

Now’s the time to take Him in your arms
Your life will never come to an end
He’s the only way that you’ll find peace
He’ll give you salvation
He’s the Light of the gentiles
And the glory of His people Israel.

Listen!



Michael Card’s *Simeon’s Song*
at nscbc.org/simeon

Betsy Crowe

What are you Waiting for?

Meditation on Simeon’s Song (Luke 2:25-32)

Mary and Joseph must have been rather shocked by an elderly man approaching them at the temple in Jerusalem and taking the baby Jesus in his arms. The words he spoke, of ancient prophecies being fulfilled in their newborn son, may have been even more surprising. How did Simeon know who they were and who Jesus was? How did he know to go to the temple at that particular time? How was he so sure that this was the baby who would fulfill all God’s promises in the Old Testament to save not only his own people Israel but all the nations on earth?

We are told Simeon was waiting. Waiting for the consolation (from the word meaning comfort) of Israel – which connotes God’s coming to save and comfort his people (cf. Is. 49:13). It is the same word Jesus used to describe the Holy Spirit in John 14:16. It’s clear he was waiting very actively – expecting God to fulfill his promises, paying attention to the present moment to see what God would do. The Holy Spirit is mentioned three times in these verses:

as being present in his life, revealing things to him, and moving him to go to the temple at the particular time Jesus would be there with his parents.

Simeon lived in expectant attention and eager anticipation to what God was doing in and around him all the time. He believed God’s promises, and he lived accordingly, every day being alert to what the Holy Spirit was doing. As a result, he is ready to respond at the moment the Lord prompted him to go to the temple. And because of his active, expectant waiting, he experienced a joy so overwhelming when he took the baby Jesus in his arms that he could only burst into a song of praise to God.

Reflecting on Simeon’s life has made me think about my own. What am I waiting for? Summer to return? My next trip to see my grandchildren? An upcoming deadline to be over and done with? Sadly, these are sometimes as deep as I go. But to the extent that I am truly waiting for the Lord

Jesus to return and make all things new, the question becomes: How am I waiting? Do I really expect God to be working in and around me, fulfilling his promises here in the present and not just far away in the future? Am I attentive to what he might want to do or say to me through his Spirit at any time?

Waiting is closely connected to hope. When we have a hope great enough and certain enough, we can wait actively and attentively. And there is no more sure or compelling hope than the one we have been given in Jesus, that all things in heaven and earth are being reconciled to and made new in him, through him and for him. Honestly, most other hopes are just wishful

thinking, unable to produce the kind of eager, expectant waiting we see in Simeon.

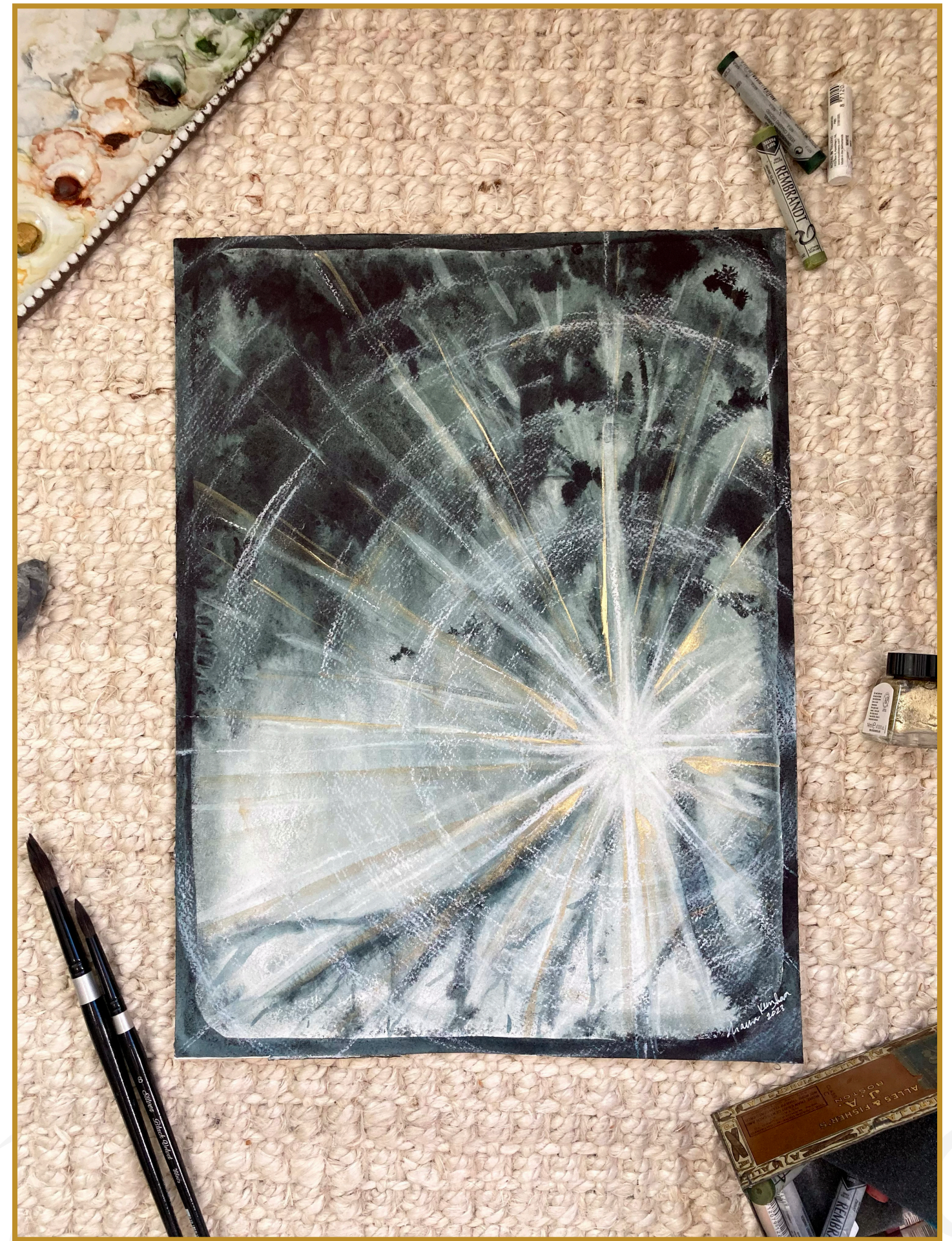
This Christmas season, may you and I so firmly set our hope on Jesus himself that we, like Simeon, will be able to recognize him when we see him, and will overflow in thankful praise to God.

*Do I really expect
God to be working
in and around me,
fulfilling his promises
here in the present
and not just far away
in the future?*

Shauna Kurihara
The Light Breaks In
Mixed media on paper

Artist Statement –Shauna Kurihara:

The light breaks in. As I sat with the various passages we are spending time with this Advent, I found myself constantly struck by this theme of *Light*. We see the light in Zechariah's Song where Jesus is described as the "rising sun from heaven" who will "shine on those living in darkness." We then see the light again in Simeon's Song: "For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a *light* for the revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel." We know and believe that Jesus is this light. We know that he has come, and we also wait in anticipation for him to come again. In this painting, the light (Jesus) breaks into the darkness. What you may not be able to see clearly is the tree behind the light. The light breaks in *through* the tree. There are many layers of interpretation as to exactly what this tree could represent and the important thing is that the light does break into the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.





Artist Statement – Ken Sawyer:

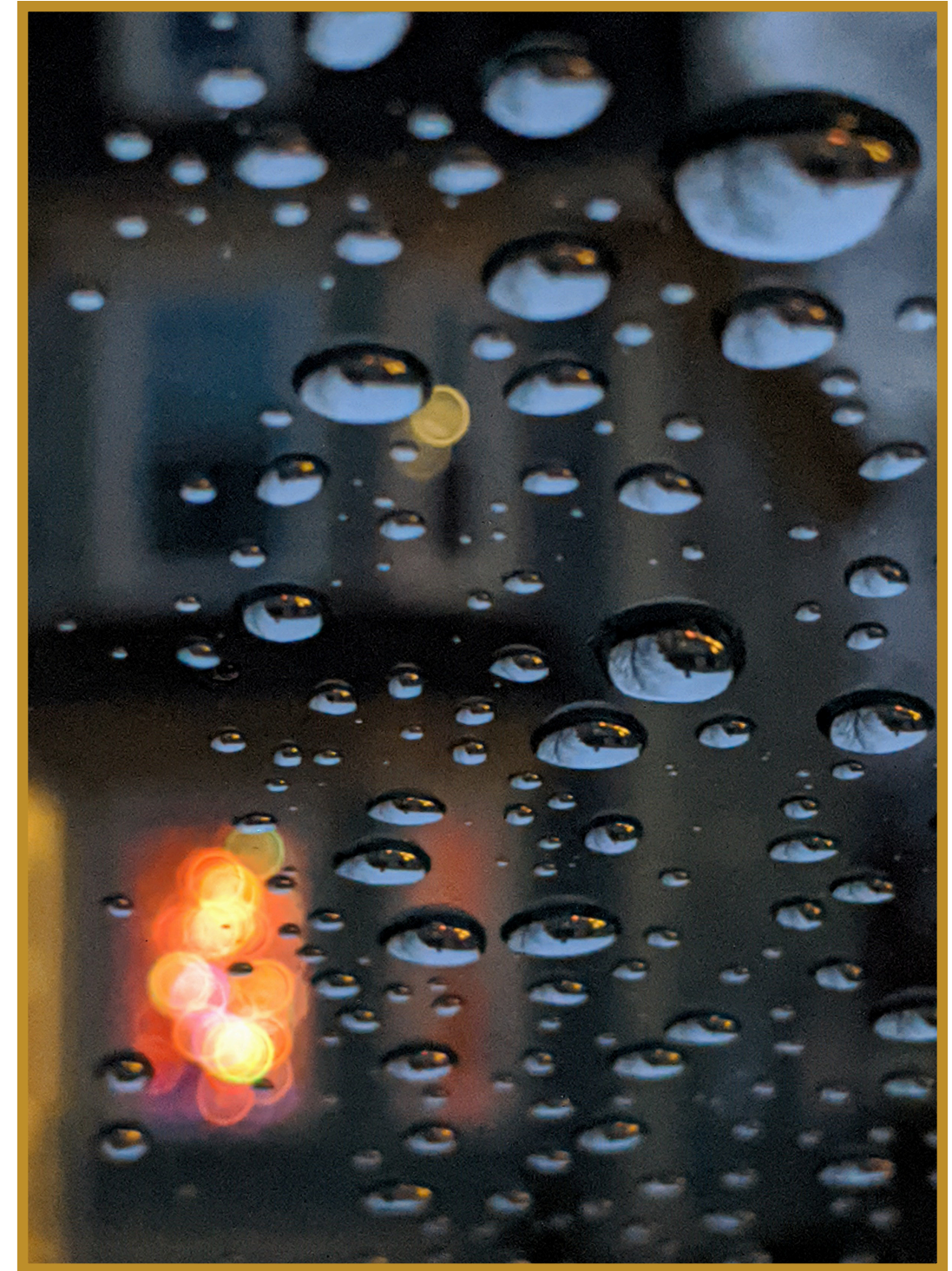
The advent season often brings to mind images of light and warmth. The glow of Christmas tree lights in windows. Light from stores and homes spilling out onto the street. These are such comforting and happy sights to see. I have been reflecting on what it must have been like that dark, maybe cold night in Bethlehem. And the longer I live in New England, the more I think about the need for a shelter from the storm. Those reminders just seem closer here: the old stone harbors, lighthouses, and the dark cold winter months. My first image, a lighthouse, brings into view a need for respite. It pronounces glowing safety.

My second image is a reflection on sight, particularly how a newborn child witnesses the world. I am fascinated by the physics of vision and its parallels to the camera. Here, I am reflecting on the blurry, imperfect vision of a child. We all know there was a child in this story. What did he see that night? How dark was that stable? Those moments in between consciousness and object permanence. There are infinite theological applications in this season. Here, I am reflecting on the simple mystery that the light of the world condescended. That is one I will spend a lifetime attempting to visualize.

Ken Sawyer

Prepare Him Room

Original Photography



Tom L.

The Language of our Heart

Meditation on Luke 2:14

“Gloria In Excelsis Deo!” So goes the Christmas song *Angels We Have Heard on High*, drawing us into another language, another culture, another age. Reminding us that the church is thousands of years old.

Long ago, the church was dominated by one great power, Rome. Its language, Latin, was once the official language of the holy church. Even after the fall of that great empire, the language of the church and particularly the Mass celebration was Latin. All other languages were forbidden.

I don’t often think about that when I sing the Latin words in this song. Instead, I find the foreign words make me think of centuries of continuity—people singing and celebrating the Lord’s birth over generations and passing it on to me. The foreign words are exciting, exotic and festive. But there was a time when the whole song would have been Latin, greatly limiting my ability to appreciate it. Thanks to the internet, I can now quickly discover that “Angels we have heard on high” would be sung “Lapsi caelo super nos” in Latin—which means nothing to me. I’m not even sure how to pronounce it.

On the Islands where I live, most religious songs, especially anything quoted from a holy book, must be in Arabic. Islanders sing, chant and read in Arabic almost daily in their prayers and for every major holiday and event. But most islanders don’t understand Arabic. It is as foreign to them as Latin is to me. Meanwhile, slowly but surely, the work of translation goes forward. In the past few years, the book of Luke has been translated into the local island language, and then checked and rechecked until this year it was finally ready to be published for people to read and hear. This year people can read the account of Luke 2 for the first time in

their own language, and thanks to the work of some talented musicians, they can sing a song that tells the story too.

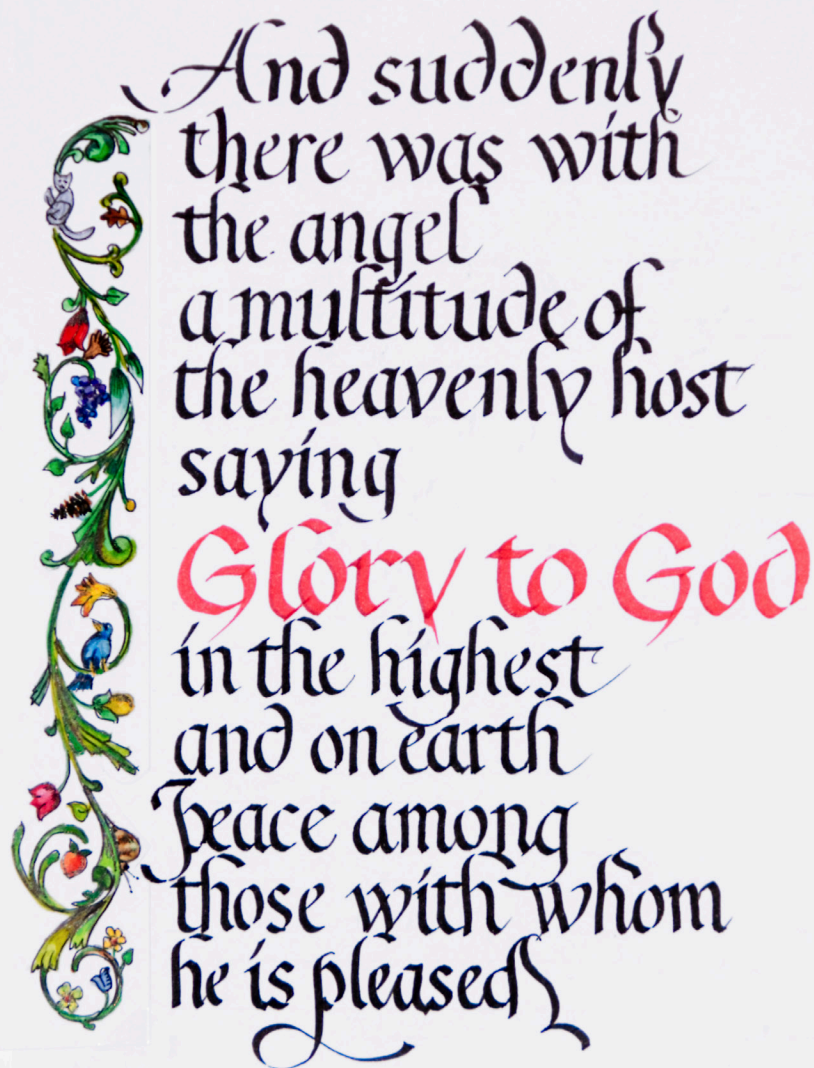
I had the privilege of hearing a gathering of island believers sing the song recently. It is new and they are still getting used to it—and I saw the pride and the joy they experienced as they sang. This was their song, in their language, sung by their people. “Atukuziha Mungu harimwa zimbingu uju.” “Glory to God in the highest,” they sang with joy. “Îsa adzalwa leo!” “Jesus is born today!”

Maybe the next time you sing “Angels we have heard on High” and you get to the chorus, “Gloria In Excelsis Deo,” you can remember that the angels were singing in a language that simple shepherds could understand—the language of their hearts. They sang, “Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased!” God was pleased enough with shepherds to send an angel choir to sing for them in their own language. The angels are still singing—and people all over the world are more and more often hearing their words in the language of their hearts—realizing for the first time, “He is pleased with me, too. He sent Jesus for me, too.” I don’t know about you, but that makes me want to sing, “Glory to God in the highest” just a little bit louder.

Megan and Tom are our World Partners serving in East Africa.

Song of the Angels

Luke 2:14



And suddenly
there was with
the angel
a multitude of
the heavenly host
saying
Glory to God
in the highest
and on earth
peace among
those with whom
he is pleased

Mark Horvath

Luke 2:13–14

Calligraphy on Paper

Listen!

*Listen to this song
at nscbc.org/isa*

Îsa Adzalwa Leo

Oa oa, Îsa adzalwa leo! Oa oa, Îsa adzalwa leo! Îsa
adzalwa leo, Îsa adzalwa leo!

Zamaza za hale karibu na Baitilham
Pvuka watsunga magondzi wakogodjea yamatsunga
yawo uku Malaika ya Rwabi iwapvenushia
Na Utukufu wa Rwabi uwawalia ata wakoria swafi

« Musirie maâna tsimupvingiani
Habari ndjema itsofurahishao swafi umati pia Leo
harimwa umuji wa Daudu
Mudzaliwa Muhuyifu ne d'e al-Masihi uMtukufu »

« Ini d'e iâlama mutsomujuao :
Mutsopara mwana adzalwa apvasa apvaambiwa na nguo
Aladziwa umoni mwa shiranga
Sha hulisa zinyama maâna kapvwaka ndzia angina ya
humladza »

Wakati d'e uwo pvupvenuha malaika nyengi
Zalawa mbinguni, uzo zakomtukuza Mungu ha
hurongoa
« Atukuziha Mungu harimwa zimbingu uju
Na amani shipvandreju mwa ntsi, ju la uwantru ikao d'e
ajiviwao nawo. »

Artists Statement – From Tom L. on behalf of L. and B:

L. and B. wrote this song together. L. is from Britain and B is an islander. L says, "I had been thinking for a while that I wanted there to be some Christmas music in the island language. It made me sad that they don't have that. And then with the release of the printed word, we now have Luke's wonderful gospel. In particular, I've always loved the story of the shepherds, so we just printed out that passage and worked with it. B loved the story. He didn't want to leave any bit of it out, so we turned that section of Luke 2 into a song. We wanted it to sound like an island song, so we listened to island music and selected melodies that fit nicely with this celebratory tone."

First names only are used here to protect the identities of world partners and friends working in dangerous areas.

L. and B.

Isa Adzalwa Leo

Song from the Islands

Jesus is Born Today

Oa Oa, Jesus is born today! Oa Oa, Jesus is born today!
Jesus is born today! Jesus is born today!

A long time ago, near Bethlehem
There were shepherds watching over their sheep by night
The angel of the Lord appeared to them
And the Glory of the Lord shone on them
so that they were very afraid

Don't be afraid because I am bringing you
Good News that will bring great joy to all people
Today, in the town of David
There was born the Saviour, the Messiah, the Lord

This is the sign that you will know
You will find a baby, born now, wrapped in cloth
He is born among the trough
that uis for feeding animals
because there was not another place to lay him.

At that moment there appeared many angels
Who were coming from heaven, they were praising God
and saying "Praise God in the heavens above
And peace to the earth,
on the people who he is pleased with

*Esther Weeks*

The Shepherds and The Angels

Crayon on Paper

Arely Fagan

Glory to the Lord in the Highest

Original song based on Luke 2:14

Artist Statement – Arely Fagan:

I was inspired to write a children's choir song, *Glory to the Lord in the Highest*, based on the song of the angels, who celebrate the glorious birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ. I was inspired during a quiet moment of reflection on Luke 2. I couldn't help but imagine the angelic chorus that proclaimed the birth of Jesus, singing with resounding clarity: "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." This proclamation of God's glory and the promise of peace filled my heart with awe and wonder. This Christmas holds a special place in my heart, and I just need to feel immense gratitude towards God for everything He has done for me.

Glory to the Lord in the Highest expresses the joy and gratitude that overflows from my heart for the gift of Jesus Christ. It represents a celebration of the Savior's birth, that forever changed the world. The song serves as a reminder of the incredible love and grace that God has bestowed upon us through His Son.

It is my hope that when you hear this song, you too will be inspired to join in the chorus of praise and adoration for our Lord, being reminded of the hope, love, and peace that is ours this season. Let us lift our voices high, just as the angels did on that blessed night, and proclaim, "Glory to the Lord in the Highest!"

Lyrics:

Glory to the Lord, in the highest
Glory to the Lord, in the highest
Glory to the Lord, in the highest
In the highest, Glory to the Lord.

Listen!



Listen to our children's choir sing
this song on Sunday December 3rd
in our services!

The angels rejoice
The Lord was born
The angels sing
Glory to the Lord.

Peace on earth
The Savior was born
Peace on earth
Glory to the Lord

Arely Fagan

Glory to the Lord!

Meditation on Luke 2:14

Encountering angels, my heart brims with joy and excitement. Their song shines a bright spotlight on the birth of our Savior, Jesus. Envision that magical night in Bethlehem when the heavens themselves came alive with the harmonious voices of the angels, singing, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." Through this celestial melody, our Savior's arrival was exalted in a glorious and resplendent manner.

Take a moment to imagine the scene. Share in the breathtaking proclamation of their song. Notice the shepherds. They are a beautiful reminder that God reveals His most extraordinary moments to those with humble hearts, inviting them to partake in His divine plan and the sheer joy of that night. Ordinary shepherds were blessed to witness this marvelous scene. Imagine the night sky coming alive with a heavenly choir singing their hearts out. The shepherds must have felt like they were in a dream, surrounded by a melody of pure joy and wonder. What a privilege it would have been to be a shepherd on that unforgettable night!

The most glorious proclamation of Jesus' birth is made over the humblest of settings. Our Lord chose to enter the world in simplicity, reaching out to all with His boundless love. Consider the astonishment of those angels, witnessing the historic and heavenly moment that their song proclaimed.

We can join in the song itself, singing *Glory to the Lord in the Highest*, a melody that resounds with the joy and hope of that sacred night. With every note and every word, let's carry the same sense of awe and wonder that filled the hearts of the shepherds. May this reflection fill your hearts with boundless joy, peace, and splendor, just as it did for the shepherds on that unforgettable night. And may our Lord Jesus Christ be born anew in each of our hearts, bringing us everlasting hope and love.





Salvation Sings

2023 Advent Devotional

*Art and Devotionals by our NSCBC family
Produced by Sarah Bartley and Adam Kurihara
Editing help from Betsy Crowe*

*...to shine on those living in darkness
and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the path of peace.*

Luke 1:79

Join us for Christmas Eve Services • Sunday December 24th at 3pm and 5pm.