THOSE WHO Advent Devotional DREAM

A Message from Pastor Stephanie

In the nostalgic poem, "Twas the Night Before Christmas", a familiar line reads:

The children were nestled all snug in their beds, While visions of sugar-plums danced in their heads.

It's easy to picture little ones lying in bed, imagining what gifts might await them under the tree on Christmas morning. But dreaming isn't just for children; God designed us to dream. Even in sleep, our minds can wander to new places, explore different realities, and imagine what might be. Throughout the Bible, God uses dreams to guide, warn, and reveal. Joseph, Daniel, and many others experienced God in this way. As adults, we often forget how to dream. This Advent, we'll see how God prepared the world for Jesus' coming through dreams, prophecies, visions, and revelations: all ways of helping people glimpse a future that is good, beautiful, and full of God's promises. This devotional is designed to walk you through the dreams that God offered to the world as it prepared to receive the birth of Jesus and to help you recapture your own ability to dream. This booklet is filled with poems, quotes, scripture and more. Each Sunday, there is space for you to breathe and rest. It might be tempting to skip those days, but remember, you can't really enter a dream state without being fully rested, so give yourself time and space to dream with God.

As you walk this Advent journey with us, from darkness to light, may God reveal to you the dreams he has for your life.

Many blessings,

Stephanie

Breath Prayer

A breath prayer is a short, simple prayer that is repeated by connecting it to your breathing. It is an ancient Christian practice in which you break the prayer into two parts: the first half on the inhale and the second on the exhale. This practice combines mindfulness with worship, allowing for continuous communion with God throughout the day.

Inhale: We are dreamers in the dark, Exhale: waiting for Your dawn to break.



Dream, Don't Sleep

Mark 13:24-37 & 2 Peter 3:8-15

They say you will come like a "thief in the night," The hour unclear, the day easily feared.

But I toss these words over the edge of my tongue, And they don't taste right.

> A thief is one that I lock out. A thief is the one that I fear.

So I ask myself-Did I downgrade you to no more than a thief, Great Builder?
Did you form me from the dust,
breathe life into my bones,
and paint the horizon into the sky, all for me?

And all of that was fine,
until you asked me to love my neighbor as myself?
Was all of that fine,
until you said, "Dream, don't sleep"?
Was all of that fine,
Until you asked me to wake up to the suffering in the streets?

Did I imprison you to the role of a thief to keep you from getting too close?

Forgive me, Great Builder,
tear down the door to my house.
Crawl through the window.
Slip through the attic fan.
Dance in the security light.
Scream through the letterbox until I hear you again.
For this house is your house.
You belong here.
I m begging you,

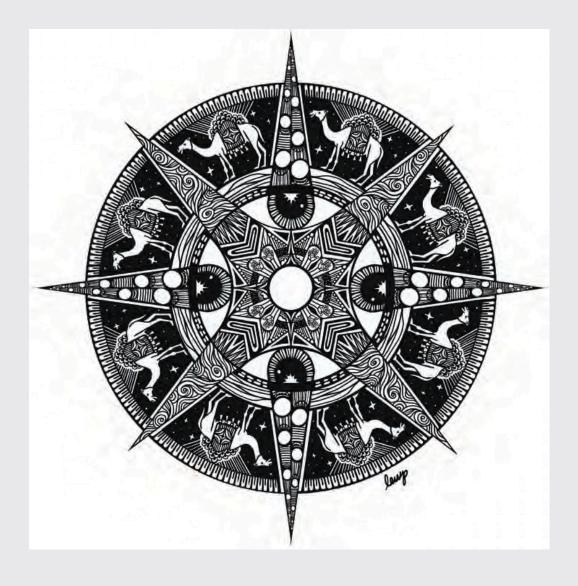
Poem by Sarah Are

break back in.



Arise, Shine, by Lauren Wright Pittman

Commentary on next page



from the artist, Lauren Wright Pittman

Isaiah 60:1-6

As exiles returned home to Israel from Babylon, the prophetic words of this text would have been a glittering, hopeful light-filled dream. This is precisely the kind of vision Israel would need to have a renewed sense of empowerment and a redefined goal for restoring Jerusalem.

This dream for Jerusalem is a complete overturning of what had become the norm in Israel's troubled history. Instead of emptying their resources out in offering to overbearing empires, all nations would come to Jerusalem, bearing gifts, elevating Israel to a position of influence never before reached. This is the kind of overturning that fuels dreamers throughout the scriptures, For the oppressed, downtrodden, and cast-aside, God says, "Arise, shine; for your light has come." These texts are filled to the brim with dreams to help us perservere on the path to realizing God's dream for Creation.

I've been told that I'm naive because my hopes for the world are desperate and wildly unrealistic. I've been told that once I come of age, I'll float back to earth and find footing in more grounded understandings of what is possible. To those people, I say: I will continue to set my vision on a horizon that feels impossible and will work toward jsutice, peace, and equity for all until my dying day. I pray that prophets continue to cast visions of glittering, hopeful, light-filled dreams which become our collective aim until heaven and earth meet.

Prayer

In quiet contemplation, color in the previous page, reflecting on how the imagery illuminates what you find in the scripture and artist's statement. Conclude with a silent or spoken prayer to God.



Keep Me in Touch With My Dreams

by Ted Loder

from his beautiful collection of prayers titled, Guerillas of Grace (Fortress Press, 2005):

Keep me in touch with my dreams O Lord in the turbulence and the loneliness of my living from day to day and night to night keep me in touch with my roots, so I will remember where I came from and with whom; keep me in touch with my feelings, so I will be more aware of who I really am and what it costs; keep me in touch with my mind so I will know who I am not and what that means; and keep me in touch with my dreams, so I will grow toward where I want to go and for whom.

O Lord,
deliver me
from the arrogance of assuming
I know enough to judge others,
deliver me
from the timidity of presuming
I don't know enough to help others,
deliver me
from the illusion
of claiming I have changed enough
when I have only risked a little,
that, so liberated,
I will make some of the days to come different.

O Lord, I ask not to be delivered From the tensions that wind me tight, but I do ask for a sense of direction in which to move once wound, a sense a humor about my disappointments, a sense of respect for the elegant puzzlement of being human, and a sense of gladness for your kingdom which comes in spite of my fretful pulling and tugging. O Lord, nurture in me the song of a lover, the vision of a poet, the questions of child, the boldness of a prophet, the courage of a disciple. O Lord, It is said that you created people because you love stories. Be with me as I live out my story.



Hope is a Risk

by Cole Arthur Riley from Black Liturgies

Hope is a risk; especially when you've known what it is to dream for better and only be met with the tyranny of degradation, greed, and violent appetites.

But despair is a concession.

Be careful of who you let regulate your dreaming. Always remember who benefits from our hopelessness.

Contemplation

by Cole Arthur Riley from Black Liturgies

What dreams have you silenced in yourself because of cynicism. In what ways does that cynicism serve you or comfort you?

How do you distinguish hope from toxic positivity? How can you sense when one is becoming the other?

Are you a person who is more inclined to look backward in time, paying more attention to memory and the past; or look to the future as a visionary and dreamer?

How are the two approaches connected?



Psalm 80:1-17, 17-19 (NIV)

with relfection from artist Lisle Gwynn Garrity

iHear us, Shepherd of Israel,

you who lead Joseph like a flock.

You who sit enthroned between the cherubim,

shine forth 2 before Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh.

Awaken your might;

come and save us.

3 Restore us, O God;

make your face shine on us,

that we may be saved.

4 How long, Lord God Almighty,

will your anger smolder

against the prayers of your people?

5 You have fed them with the bread of tears;

you have made them drink tears by the bowlful.

6 You have made us an object of derision[b] to our neighbors,

and our enemies mock us.

7 Restore us, God Almighty;

make your face shine on us,

that we may be saved.

77 Let your hand rest on the man at your right hand,

the son of man you have raised up for yourself.

18 Then we will not turn away from you;

revive us, and we will call on your name.

19 Restore us, Lord God Almighty;

make your face shine on us,

that we may be saved.

Psalms of lament, such as Psalm 80, give us permission to add our voice to the choruses of faithful outcries throughout the ages. They give us permission to be fully honest—with ourselves and with God. They give us permission to proclaim that God is powerful enough to take it—and to respond to our pleas.

God, wake us up to your power. Restore us. Let your face shine, so that we might be saved.



Journaling our Dreams

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If you can't remember your dreams, in the space below, write down a dream of hope: What's something you hope for yourself, your family, our world, or someone you love?



Breath Prayer

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Inhale: Breathe new vision into our weary souls, Exhale: that we may trust what You are birthing.

Take Sabbath, for dreams take time

There's a reason dream come to us in sleep--rest recharges us, connects us with our intuition, expands our imagination, and open us to receive God's messages. It takes action to bring our dreams to life; it takes rest and time to sustain them. To nourish and sustain yourself as a dreamer, commit to a Sabbath activity today, perhaps one of those listed below:

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- Watch a movie
- Take a nap
- Read a book



Prepare

Mark 1:1-8

My dad built me a changing table.

For nine months, my mom watched her ankles swell and her belly grow.

For nine months, my dad would come home from work, kiss her on the forehead-
Pressing her bangs to her skin--and tell her she was beautiful.

Then for nine months, she'd slip into the garage

to build sawdust sand castles and a dresser out of dreams.

I imagine she smiled, perched in that rocking chair. He was in the woodshop, preparing the way.

Eighteen years later I left for college.

As I packed my bags, my mom baked blueberry muffins for the road—
the smell of home.

She wrapped them in foil and placed them in a cardboard box, Willing similar layers of protection to be wrapped around me, her little girl.

She was preparing the way.

My aunts and uncles bought sweatshirts in my new school colors.

My dad taught me how to change a tire.

My mom gave me the earrings I'd been sneaking from her jewelry box for the last four years. I hid sticky-note love letters on the kitchen door for them to find when they returned home.

We were quiet in the car.

My brother cried.

We were preparing the way.

And through those moments, I have come to see, that preparation and love can be the same thing.

For there is something about love that makes us want to prepare.

There is something about love that compels us to throw open the doors, yell it from the rooftop, set the table, decorate the nursery, leave love notes in the back door, build the changing table, trim the tree, bake muffins for the road, and when it's time, if you must, let it go.

Preparation and love can be the same thing.

Poem by Sarah Are



A Heron's Wisdom, by Lauren Wright Pittman

Commentary on next page



from the artist, Lauren Wright Pittman

2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16

I was paddling in my kayak when I saw a heron standing tall at the next bend in the river. I was struggling to paddle upstream, but I desperately wanted to see this creature up close. I paddled as hard and as silently as I could, and as I got within twenty feet of the heron the moody hues of its feathers—navy, gray, steel blue, and periwinkle—the bright oranges of its beak, and the sunshine yellow of its eyes came into focus. Just as I got close enough to begin to discern the heron's details, it took flight, landing still in view at the next bend in the river. We continued this dance, bend after bend, with the heron as my guide until I came to the end of my journey. As the heron took off over the tree-laden horizon, I felt gratitude for this heron's presence. I felt the heron taught me about my relationship with God—this dance of pursuit, intimacy, guidance, and mystery.

So, David wants to build God a house. I love how God takes on this posture of playfulness when expressing how absurd this desire truly is. David wants to build a shelter for the architect of the cedar tree itself. The practice of drawing this cedar tree was a spiritual one. As I sketched the twists and turns in the branches, the flared patterning of the cedar leaves, and the swirling of the bark texture, I found awe for the tree's Designer. Though we may feel like we are paddling upstream all alone, God is with us. Despite our efforts to grasp God, or put God in a box, God is beyond comprehension, unbound, and everywhere.

Prayer

In quiet contemplation, color in the previous page, reflecting on how the imagery illuminates what you find in the scripture and artist's statement. Conclude with a silent or spoken prayer to God.



Help Me to Believe in Beginnings

by Ted Loder

from his beautiful collection of prayers titled, Guerillas of Grace (Fortress Press, 2005):

God of history and of my heart,

so much has happened to me during

these whirlwind days:

I've known death and birth;

I've been brave and scared;

I've hurt, I've helped;

I've been honest, I've lied;

I've destroyed, I've created;

I've been with people, I've been lonely;

I've been loyal, I've betrayed;

I've decided, I've waffled;

I've laughed and I've cried.

You know my frail heart

and my frayed history -

and now another day begins.

O God, help me to believe in beginnings

and in my beginning again,

no matter how often I've failed before.

Help me to make beginnings:

to begin going out of my weary mind

into fresh dreams,

daring to make my own bold tracks

in the land of now;

to begin forgiving

that I may experience mercy;

to begin questioning the unquestionable

that I may know truth;

to begin disciplining

that I may create beauty;

to begin sacrificing

that I may make peace;

to begin loving

that I may realize joy.

Help me to be a beginning to others:

o be a singer to the songless,

a storyteller to the aimless,

a befriender of the friendless;

to become a beginning of hope for the

despairing,

of assurance for the doubting,

of reconciliation for the divided;

to become a beginning of freedom for the

oppressed,

of comfort for the sorrowing,

of friendship for the forgotten;

to become a beginning of beauty for the

forlorn,

of sweetness for the soured,

of gentleness for the angry,

of wholeness for the broken,

of peace for the frightened and violent of

the earth.

Help me to believe in beginnings,

to make a beginning,

to be a beginning,

so that I may not just grow old,

but grow new

each day of this wild, amazing life

you call me to live

with the passion of Jesus Christ.



Keep Alive the Dream

by Howard Thurman

As long as a man has a dream in his heart, he cannot lose the significance of living. It is a part of the pretensions of modern life to traffic in what is generally called, "realism." There is much insistence upon being practical, down to earth. Such things as dreams are wont be regarded as romantic or as a badge of immaturity, or as escape hatches for the human spirit. When such a mood or attitude is carefully scrutinized, it is found to be made up largely of pretensions, in short, of bluff. Men cannot continue long to live if the dream in the heart has perished. It is then that they stop hoping, stop looking, and the last embers of their anticipations fade away.

The dream in the heart is the outlet. It is one with the living water welling up from the very springs of Being, nourishing and sustaining all of life. Where there is no dream, the life becomes a swamp, a dreary dead place and, deep within, a man's heart beings to rot. The dream needed not be some great and overwhelming plan; it need not be a dramatic picture of what might or must be someday; it need not be a concrete outpouring of a world-shaking possibility may be crucial for a particular moment of human history. But is is not these grand ways that the dream nourishes life. The dream is the quiet persistence in the heart that enables a man to ride out the storms of his churning experiences. It is the exciting whisper moving through the aisles of his spirit answering the monotony of limitless days of dull routine. It is the ever-recurring melody in the midst of the broken harmony and harsh discords of human conflict. It is the touch of significance which highlights the ordinary experience, the common event. The dream is no outward thing. It does not take its rise from the environment in which one moves or functions. It lives in the inward parts, it is deep within, where the issues of life and death are ultimately determined. Keep alive the dream; for as long as a man has a dream in his heart, he cannot lose the significance of living.



God's Timing

by Ted Loder

from his beautiful collection of prayers titled, Guerillas of Grace (Fortress Press, 2005):

O God of all seasons and senses, grant us the sense of your timing to submit gracefully and rejoice quietly in the turn of the seasons.

In this season of short days and long nights,
of grey and white and cold,
teach us the lessons of endings;
children growing, friends leaving, loved ones dying,
grieving over,
grudges over,
blaming over,
excuses over.



Journaling our Dreams

If you can remember any of your dreams from the past week, recall any details that come back to you--colors, people, images, fears, interactions, feelings. As you piece together your dreams are there any patterns or deeper meanings? How might your dreams be showing you something about your life right now?

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Inhale: Hold our fragile dreams gently, Exhale: as You make all things new in love.

Take Sabbath, for dreams take time

There's a reason dream come to us in sleep--rest recharges us, connects us with our intuition, expands our imagination, and open us to receive God's messages. It takes action to bring our dreams to life; it takes rest and time to sustain them. To nourish and sustain yourself as a dreamer, commit to a Sabbath activity today, perhaps one of those listed below:

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Mary

Luke 1:46-55

When I was young, my church hosted a Christmas pageant.
Families would show up on Christmas Eve
with diaper bags and children thrown over their shoulders.
No amount of Silent Night could quiet that room.
It was a holy and beautiful chaos.

What was special about that church Christmas pageant, was we, the children, got to pick our character in the story. So for one night, we could be Magi in Burger King crowns. We could be angels with wings made of clothes hangers. We could be shepherds in bathrobes, protecting the flock. We could be Mary, beautiful and brave.

And the preacher would stand on the steps and tell us the Christmas story, and as our character entered the scene, we would run down the center aisle and assume our places in the manger. (As an aside: Is there anything more holy than seeing a child run down the center aisle, as if getting closer to God is all they have in mind?)

And as the story progressed, the front steps would become crowded with dozens of Magi and a wide array of animals, but I would choose Mary.

I would always choose Mary-Mary the teen mom. Mary who said, "My soul magnifies the Lord." Mary who sang.
For even at that age, even as a child,
we could tell that Mary was afraid, and into that dark, Mary sang.

So I and most of the other little girls that night, would tighten the blue bed sheets draped around our shoulders, and run down the center aisle when our name was called.

For in that moment, we were on our way.
In that moment, we were those who dream.
In that moment, we were all Mary.
In that moment, we were brave.

Poem by Sarah Are



Commentary by Dr. Marcia Riggs

Luke 1:46-55

It is during a visit with her cousin Elizabeth—whose baby in her womb, John the Baptist, responds with joy to Mary's greeting—that Mary is moved to praise God in song. Mary's song wells up in her as joy because she feels deeply connected with Elizabeth—young woman to older woman experiencing redemption in and through their bodies. On one hand, in a culture where bearing children signified fulfilling one's womanhood, why shouldn't these women be overjoyed? On another hand, bearing a child in old age and becoming pregnant before marriage were reasons to diminish their joy. But they are faithful and believe that they have been chosen by God to bear children who will change the course of history.

Mary's song shows us that sowing joy emerges as we surrender to God's vision. Confirmed by Elizabeth's affirmation, Mary must praise God as she anticipates the fulfillment of God's promise to her ancestors and generations to come. God's realm may seem incomprehensible: those in power are brought down, those who are lowly are lifted, the hungry are filled with good things, and the rich are divested of their riches. This is a vision of a world turned upside down.

But, hasn't God already turned things inside out when he chooses Mary to be the mother of Jesus? Joy, anticipatory joy, is the only response of the faithful.

Gospel singer Shirley Caesar sings a song entitled, "This Joy I Have." The lyrics are:

This joy that I have the world didn't give to me
This joy that I have the world didn't give to me
This joy that I have the world didn't give to me
The world didn't give it to me and the world can't take it away.

Today's text is referred to as the Magnificat, Mary's joyous praise of God. From the moment Mary is chosen to bear Jesus, we are made aware of God's solidarity with the poor. The song sows joy that is the seed of a social revolution.



All in All

It takes strength to dream.

I imagine it's that same strength that leads people to say,

"I love you" first,

those three vulnerable words,

wrapped in heart strings,

whispered,

because what could be
is too good to keep quiet about.

It takes strength to choose joy.

It takes strength to push the covers off our weary bodies morning after morning to plant weary feet on solid ground and look for signs of beauty.

It takes strength to remember that we are not alone, but the story starts with bone of bone and flesh of flesh. That feels like so long ago.

Oh yes,
it takes strength to dream.
I imagine that's why many choose not to,
for it would be far easier to simply sleep.
But there are always those who dream,
those whoa re up at night picturing what could be,
because this world is too good not to.

So we say, "I love you."
We push the covers off.
We find solid ground.
We look for beauty.
And we dream.
We dare to dream.

Poem by Sarah Are



Sow in Tears, by Hannah Garrity

Commentary on next page



from the artist, Hannah Garrity

Psalm 126

Here, ripples of the waters of the Negeb frame the patterning of paper lace. These ripples represent the restoration celebrated in Psalm 126. The patterns within the ripples represent the tears and seeds at the sowing, the mature stalk at the reaping.

To sow joy is a powerful move. As young parents, in our striving we each try to figure out where the money for the next month's bills will come from. Simultaneously, we turn around and see our precious little ones looking to us for love, for strength, for righteousness, for how to do as Jesus would do. In those moments, even as the questions about how to keep our world on track swirl, we are compelled to sow joy, strength, and clarity in their hearts and minds.

As an educator, I have studied Culturally Responsive Teaching this year. In Zaretta Hammond's book, *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain*, the initial, powerful, charge with this mindset is to see each student as an asset to the class discussion and community. That may sound insignificant, but it is expansive. Imagine if we intentionally sought to see each person around us as an asset to our collective and interwoven lives in community. How might our thinking change? How might ripples of empowerment permeate our relationships and the relationships of those around us? Can we make this our intention? Can we sow joy?

Prayer

In quiet contemplation, color in the previous page, reflecting on how the imagery illuminates what you find in the scripture and artist's statement. Conclude with a silent or spoken prayer to God.



Sustain Me in the Coming Then

by Ted Loder from his beautiful collection of prayers titled, Guerillas of Grace (Fortress Press, 2005):

O God, empty me of angry judgements,
And aching disappointments,
And anxious trying,
And breathe into me
Something like quietness and confidence,
That the lion and the lamb in me
May lie down together
And be led by a trust
As straightforward as a little child.
Catch my pride and doubt off guard
That, at least for the moment,
I may sense your presence and your caring,
And be surprised by a sudden joy
Rising in me now
To sustain me in the coming then.

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Inhale: Let Your Spirit whisper in our night seasons, Exhale: and guide our steps toward compassion.

Take Sabbath, for dreams take time

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Joy Like Water

Luke 1:26-45

Mary went to
Elizabeth's house,
because that's what we do
when the world falls apart.
That's what we do when the
script is flipped,
when the rug is pulled,
when it rains inside.
We go home.
We find friends.
We find love.

So Mary went to
Elizabeth's house
harbouring good news that
must have felt like the water-something capable of
helping her float or pulling
her under.
And only then,
only there,
in the presence of a face
that looked like love,
does the word "joy" appear.

Mary said, "How can this be?"
the angel said,
"Do not be afraid."
Mary said, "May it be so."
But when Mary went to
Elizabeth's house
and Elizabeth opened the door,
joy--like a tipped cup of water
spilled out everywhere.

I imagine that
Elizabeth laughed.
I imagine that Mary framed
her growing belly.
I imagine that both women
pressed palms to stomach
when that baby began to kick,
a holy ritual as old as time.
I imagine that God smiked.
And I imagine that, for the first time,
Mary could float.

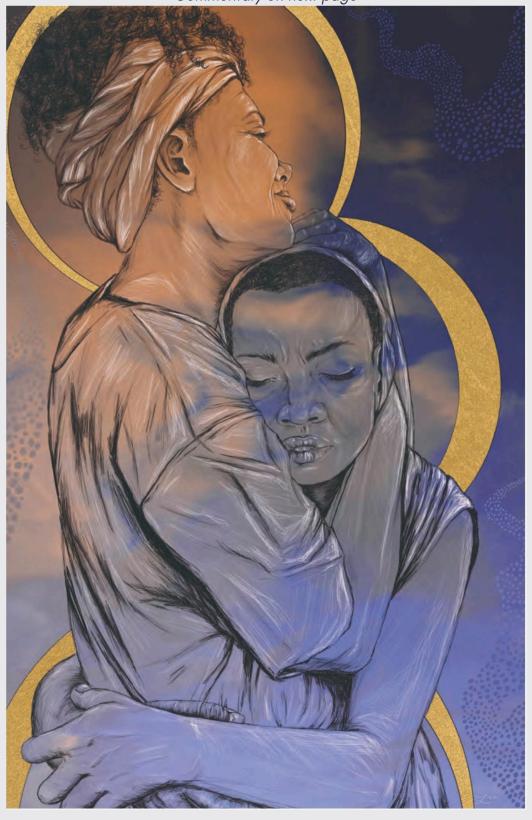
Isn't it always that way?
I could harbor joy for myself.
I could tuck joyful moments
deep into pockets,
saving memories of better
days for long nights.
But when I share my joy
with you,
when you open the door,
joy spills out everywhere,
and it is the love that
helps me float.

Poem by Sarah Are



A Dream Confirmed, by Lisle Gwynn Garrity

Commentary on next page



from the artist, Lisle Gwynn Garrity

Luke 1:26-45

Did it feel like a dream when the angel approached? "Greetings, favored one!"

Did her mind spin as she pondered the impossibility of it all? "You will bear a son... and he will be great."

Did she lose her balance when she realized the gravity of her call? "The child will be holy... the Son of God."

Did her legs get weak after the words left her lips? "Here I am... let it be."

In the quiet that followed, did she question everything? Did she realize what this would mean—for her family, for Joseph, for her future? Did she realize she would be perceived as impure, as a threat to patriarchy, power, and proprietary? Did fear cloak her, like a garment pulled too tight?

And so, in a haze, she runs away--seeking refuge in the hill country, retreating to a family who would keep her sage and help her make sense of her world turned upside down.

As soon as she falls into Elizabeth's arms, Elizabeth knows and feels it to be true. Yes, I feel it too. We are pregnant with promise. We carry this together. This is not a dream deferred. It is a dream confirmed, a dream shared. A dream that will birth joy.

In this image, Mary and Elizabeth's bodies are tenderly intertwined. Halos, like crescent moons, encircle each of them and their wombs, signaling the cosmic change they bring forth.

Prayer

In quiet contemplation, color in the previous page, reflecting on how the imagery illuminates what you find in the scripture and artist's statement. Conclude with a silent or spoken prayer to God.



Wed Dec 24 this night, we are THOSE WHO DREAM.

To Carry A Dream

Luke 2:1-20

To carry a dream
is to walk at night,
or to walk by light,
but with a pebble in your shoe.

To carry a dream is to
wake at night
to wake and blink twice
in case you see something new.

To carry a dream is to plant trees in old age to be a part of a church that is human and frayed.

To carry a dream is foolish and wild.

It's the faith of a child

wishing on stars.

But to carry a dream is also hopeful and wise, the faith of our elders saying God will provide.

So may we walk
until we see the light.
May the pebble in our shoe
remind us why we fight.
May they say
we are foolish and unwise,
and may we continue to dream;
may hope keep us alive.

Poem by Sarah Are



A Message from Pastor Stephanie

I'm not a fan of snow, but there is something really special about a white Christmas. Whether we step out of worship to find flakes falling gently from the sky, or wake up to a quiet world wrapped in white, freshly fallen snow somehow offers a message of hope. It is pure and untouched and peaceful. It reminds us that God loves to make all things new.

We've spent this season with dreamers. We have walked with Mary, Joseph, the shepherds and the magi, people who trusted that God was up to something even when they couldn't see the whole picture. And on Christmas, that dream becomes a reality. Jesus is born. Hope shows up. Grace comes down. The world is changed. Because of what God has done, every day is like waking up to a fresh snow -- a clean slate, a new moment, a chance to try again.

So maybe this year, when you hear "I'm dreaming of a white Christmas," let it be more than nostalgia. Maybe let it be a prayer. A dream of peace falling fresh. A dream of mercy blanketing our communities. A dream of God covering the broken places in our world, and in us, with redeeming love.

Merry Christmas, dear friends. Keep dreaming. Christ the Savior is born!



