
A **Sanctified Art LLC** is a collective of artists in ministry who create resources for worshiping communities. The Sanctified Art team works collaboratively to bring scripture and theological themes to life through film, visual art, curriculum, coloring pages, liturgy, graphic designs, and more. Their mission is to empower churches with resources to inspire creativity in worship and beyond. Driven by the connective and prophetic power of art, they believe that art helps us connect our hearts with our hands, our faith with our lives, and our mess with our God.

Learn more about their work at sanctifiedart.org.

THOSE WHO *Advent Devotional* DREAM

Art, reflections, &
prompts for a
season of dreaming

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about the CREATORS

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Founder | Creative Director of SA

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

Rev. Lauren Wright Pittman

Director of Branding | Founding Creative Partner of SA

Lauren (she/her) is an artist, graphic designer, and theologian. She uses paint, metallic inks, and Apple pencil to image the layered complexity she experiences in scripture texts. She also helps faith communities share their vibrant stories through branding & design services.

Hannah Garrity Founding Creative Partner of SA

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

Rev. Sarah Are Founding Creative Partner of SA

Sarah Are (she/her) is the Associate Pastor for Youth and Young Adults at Preston Hollow Presbyterian Church, Dallas, Texas. She believes that the Church has a responsibility to open every door to God, so that those of us who are visual, kinesthetic, or relational learners all have equal opportunity to engage God to the fullest of our abilities.

Dr. Marcia Riggs J. Erskine Love Professor of Christian Ethics at Columbia Theological Seminary, Decatur, GA

Dr. Riggs has an undergraduate degree in Religion from Randolph-Macon Woman's College, a Master of Divinity degree from Yale University Divinity School and a PhD in religion/ethics from Vanderbilt University. In April of 2006, Dr. Riggs was inaugurated as the first professor to hold the J. Erskine Love Chair in Christian Ethics at Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia. She teaches in the Master of Divinity, Doctor of Ministry, and the Master of Theology Programs at the seminary. Dr. Riggs is interested in the relationship between social oppression and socio-religious ethical praxis, ethical discourse that bridges the gap between womanist religious scholarship and the Church's practice of ministry, the moral foundations for public policy, and the Church's role in social justice ministry.

Psalm 126 opens with the line: "When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream." What does it look like to live as those who dream? How can we embody and bring forth God's dreams? How do we dream of a better world when our current one feels harrowing and disorienting?

The prophets, the psalmists, John the Baptist, Mary, Elizabeth, Joseph, Simeon, Anna, the shepherds and the Magi—they were all dreamers. They received, discovered, and responded to God's dreams for the world. In Advent, we step into the mystery and awe of God's dreams and pray they shape our reality.

This devotional is for the dreamers in all of us—those who dream of a deeper connection with God and those who dream of a better world. It's for those who dream of comfort and for those who have given up on their dreams. It's for those whose dreams have been crushed and for those who show us that dreams take time. And so, as you walk through these prompts and readings day by day, may you dream alongside prophets and angels, Mary and the Magi. Together, may we seek and sow God's dreams for our world.

Artfully yours,

The Sanctified Art Creative Team

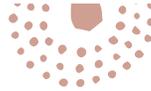
Lisle Gwynn Garrity

Sarah Are

Hannah Garrity

Lauren Wright Pittman

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this night, we are THOSE WHO DREAM

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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 was all of that 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 the 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 built it.
You belong here.
I am begging you,
Break back in.

Poem by Sarah Are

read Mark 13:24-37

commentary / Dr. Marcia Riggs

This Advent season begins amid pandemic and protest. We were not prepared for the dramatic shifts in our ways of living as COVID-19 began its trek across the globe. Many physical bodies have been ravaged and lives taken by this fierce virus. Families, churches, schools, and employees have been scattered from their gathering spaces into physical isolation. Likewise, Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests erupted in cities (nationally and globally) as Black women and men died again at the hands of police violence.

To begin Advent amid pandemic and protest is a befitting point of departure for 21st century people of God. We are being reminded that to be the people of God requires an ethical posture of attentiveness, to "keep awake." (v. 37) The text charges us to "keep awake" because we do not know the day or the hour when the fullness of "God with us" will be realized. To keep awake means we are being charged, in the vernacular of BLM, to be "woke." Being woke means being aware of, enraged by, and willing to protest in solidarity with people who are pushed to the margins of society because of systemic oppression manifest as racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia—any and all forms of objectification and dehumanization we enact upon one another.

As we light the Advent candle of hope, we keep awake by dreaming, by envisioning how we will live out God's promise to be with us. We expect God to be with us and meet us on the other side of this pandemic and protest. For the other side of pandemic and protest is not a return to "normal"; it is living the hope of God's continuing revelation of justice. We do not know the day or the hour, but we do know as the African American poet Langston Hughes says:

*Hold fast to dreams
For if dreams die
Life is a broken-winged bird
That cannot fly.¹*

¹ Langston Hughes. "Dreams." The Collected Works of Langston Hughes. Copyright © 2002 by Langston Hughes. Reprinted by permission of Harold Ober Associates, Inc. poetryfoundation.org/poems/150995/dreams-5d767850da976

read Mark 13:24-37

from the artist / Hannah Garrity

This paper lace explores the poetic patterns in this Mark text. Stars fall to the lower part of the frame as a fig tree leafs out in the central circle. The fig tree creates a circular motif reminding us of the tree of life while also representing the sun and the moon in this text. With a celestial flow, lines circulate around the edges of the piece, replicating the pupil of an eye.

"And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake."

In the time of COVID and in this season of Advent, we can see, now. We can see that systemic change is not just possible, but immediate. God has tried this before—we have glimmers in history. Can the human collective bring about God's dream for the new heaven and the new earth? I can reach out and touch it. It is possible, immediately. We must choose it.

In one of Oprah Winfrey's masterclasses, the late John Lewis shared how he was shaped by his mentor:² "Jim Lawson taught us the whole concept of the Beloved Community, this idea that in the bosom of every human being there is the spark of divinity and it is the spark of something that is sacred, and holy, and special, and that we don't have a right to destroy."³ The stars in this image depict that divine spark we are born with—that hope, those stars that have fallen from heaven and lodged themselves within each of us. Let us not be found asleep in this moment, this movement. Let us live into our spark. Let us seek it in each person we meet.

prayer

Breathe deeply as you gaze upon the image on the left. Imagine placing yourself in this scene. What do you see? How do you feel? Get quiet and still, offering a silent or spoken prayer to God.

² Jim Lawson, b. 1928, is an activist and university professor. He was a leader and theoretician of nonviolence within the American Civil Rights Movement during the 1960's.

³ Winfrey, Oprah. "Oprah's Master Class, Remembering John Lewis." *Oprah Winfrey Network*. July 19, 2020. [youtube.com/watch?v=tKmanDEy2ZE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tKmanDEy2ZE).



Spark of Divinity | Hannah Garrity

read Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

from the artist / Lisle Gwynn Garrity

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.

Lamenting, therefore, is an act of robust faith. When we cry out to God, we name the disruption, disorientation, and disorder of our lives. We dismantle the myth that we have everything under control. We awaken to our own pain and the suffering of others. We ask God to wake up God's power.

In this image, I drew a visual prayer of lament, grieving some of the many hardships we've collectively faced in 2020. A healthcare worker masks her son as he prepares to go into a precarious learning environment. A church building announces its closure. A crashing stock market creates a chasm through the composition. An eviction notice and a Zoom meeting loom in the background. An obituary hangs near hands testing a COVID-19 vaccine. Tears fall like rain.

While drawing this, I kept adding more and more laments. The page filled, and yet I couldn't fit it all in. As you add color to this scene, I invite you to consider your own grief. Contemplate what images you would include to compose your own visual prayer of lament.

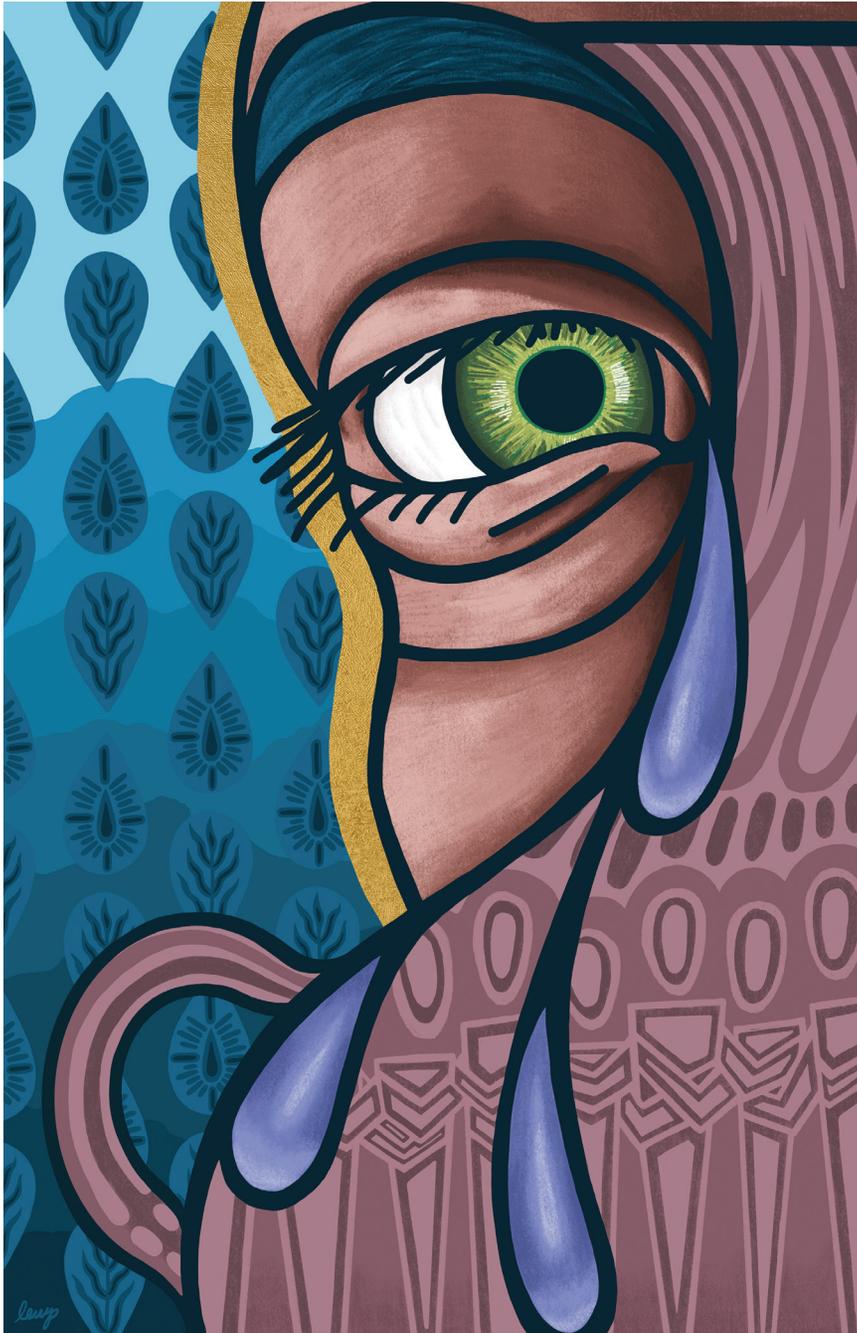
God, wake up your power. Restore us. Let your face shine, so that we might be saved.

prayer

In quiet contemplation, color in the page on the left, 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.



Restore Us | Lisle Gwynn Garrity



Tear Open the Heavens | Lauren Wright Pittman

read Isaiah 64:1-9

from the artist / Lauren Wright Pittman

Nothing feels more appropriate to me this year than lament. I began to study this text as I saw police and military presence forcibly end peaceful demonstrations in D.C. With tear gas and rubber bullets raining down, the crowd scattered to make way for a photo op co-opting the Word and house of God.⁴

"O that you would tear open the heavens and come down."

Seeing this public display of power felt like I was drifting off into a nightmare. Instead of succumbing to numbness, abdicating responsibility, and pointing a finger at God, we must keep awake. Particularly, we white people have a tremendous amount of work to do. We could curl up in our cushioned privilege and ignore this national reckoning, or we could blaze a new way. We need to stop stammering in self-justification and defense. We need to stop performative acts of allyship and resist centering ourselves.

"We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities take us away."

We hope that God will not remember our iniquity forever. We plead with God, and hope God's anger may subside. God is raging against our systems alongside those prophetic protesters entreating us to "Step down off the scaffolding of whiteness and join the community of Creation."⁵

In this image, the tears of humanity rise to meet God, as God's tears rain down. God weeps for Creation to be restored, for humanity to be the vessels we were designed to be—vessels of baptismal waters, of peace, of justice, of love. I pray that we allow God's tears to soften and prepare us to be molded into God's dream for Creation.

prayer

Breathe deeply as you gaze upon the image on the left. Imagine placing yourself in this scene. What do you see? How do you feel? Get quiet and still, offering a silent or spoken prayer to God.

⁴ The artist refers to an incident that occurred in June of 2020, when President Trump posed with a bible in front of St. John's Church in D.C., using military force to clear protesters from the street.

⁵ Sharon Harper, Lisa. "White Women's Toxic Tears with Lisa Sharon Harper." For the Love podcast with Jen Hatmaker. Special Edition Series | Episode 05." jenhatmaker.com/podcast/special-edition-series/white-womens-toxic-tears-with-lisa-sharon-harper/

journaling our
DREAMS

If you can remember any of your dreams from this 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?

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

TAKE SABBATH,
for dreams take time

There's a reason dreams come to us in our sleep—rest recharges us, connects us with our intuition, expands our imagination, and opens 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:

- Go for a walk outside.
- Sit quietly and meditate.
- Plant something indoors or outside.
- Spend time with a friend or loved one.
- Explore a new area of your town or city.
- Cook or bake something using a favorite or new recipe.
- Do yoga or exercise in a way that feels good for your body.
- Write and mail a letter to someone you haven't talked to in a while.
- Organize or redesign an area in your home.
- Draw or create something.
- Dance or play music.
- Write a poem or a song.
- 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 her forehead—
Pressing bangs to skin—and tell her she was beautiful.
Then for nine months, he'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 his 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 all preparing the way.

And through these 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 on the back door,
Build the changing table,
Trim the tree,
Bake muffins for the road,
And when it's time,
If you must,
Let go.

Preparation and love can be the same thing.

Poem by Sarah Are

read Mark 1:1-8

commentary / Dr. Marcia Riggs

There is a messenger app on our phones. We can communicate immediately and directly with folks on our contact list using this app if they are online at the time. We have become accustomed to receiving news about upcoming events through email and text messages. For some of us, it may be difficult to imagine being John the Baptist standing in the wilderness. He is face to face with others. He is vulnerable, “clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist” (v. 6a). He proclaims that there is one more powerful coming (v. 7a). Yet, we do know messengers like John the Baptist. They are the peaceful protesters in the streets; they proclaim that “Black Lives Matter”—a message that contradicts their treatment at the hands of society’s “protectors of the peace.”

There are at least two reasons why John’s and the protesters’ messages challenge the status quo. First, John’s message is not self-aggrandizing; it is not about his brand. His message preempts those who think they know who is—and how to be—powerful. Second, the message of peaceful protesters marks them as dreamers; why put ourselves in harm’s way when social justice seems elusive? Dreamers acknowledge that the world is violent, but they have a vision of a society of just peace. They proclaim: “No justice, no peace.”

As we light today’s candle, remember that Jesus came into the world so that we are now messengers by the baptism of the Holy Spirit (v. 8). To prepare the way for just peace is a choice that we must make daily. Messengers know that what we see is not all there can, will, or should be. Messengers face the troubles of the world receptively, perceptively, and attentively as they proclaim, “We shall overcome.”

read Mark 1:1-8

from the artist / Lisle Gwynn Garrity

Recently, my husband and I volunteered to serve on the safety team for a Black Lives Matter march and vigil in our local city. While we've frequently participated in peaceful protests, this role was new to us. We joined hundreds of white allies and community organizers, showing up hours before the march began to prepare supplies and receive training. Our role was straightforward: we were to use our bodies to create critical mass along the edges of the crowd in order to protect the leaders of the march from harm. We were to stay alert and look for agitators—white supremacists or others instigating violence—and either place our bodies as a barrier or, when possible, try to nonviolently de-escalate the situation. Our trainers directed us: "Today's march is not about you. You won't be able to participate in the chants and you might not be able to hear the speakers. Instead, you are here to use your privilege to protect our Black leaders so they can make their voices heard, so they can express their grief and cry out for change without fearing that harm will be done to them in return." And so, all day we walked alongside the shouts crying out in the wilderness of downtown city streets. As a call for repentance for the sins of racism, police brutality, and systemic injustice were proclaimed, we did our best to keep the peace and prepare the way.

As I've returned to this scripture, I've been struck by the fact that the story of the good news according to Mark begins with protest—with crowds swelling and shouting, with a movement of people hungry for change and willing to risk their lives for it. And so, I'm committing to preparing the way—for God's message of liberation and love to truly be heard and made known.

prayer

Breathe deeply as you gaze upon the image on the left. Imagine placing yourself in this scene. What do you see? How do you feel? Get quiet and still, offering a silent or spoken prayer to God.



The Beginning of the Good News | Lisle Gwynn Garrity



Prepare a World | Lauren Wright Pittman

read Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13

from the artist / Lauren Wright Pittman

The words of this psalm both soothe my soul and ignite longing in my bones. I felt this same feeling as I watched the funeral of the Honorable Congressman, John Robert Lewis. I couldn't help but weep listening to stories of his astounding life—about his passion and undying belief in humanity despite being repeatedly ridiculed, beaten, and jailed. It's the same dissonance I feel when I hold this psalm in sharp contrast to the reality of this broken world.

During the funeral, professor and civil rights activist, Rev. James Lawson shared the poem, "I Dream A World" by Langston Hughes⁶ to close his remarks about Lewis: "I dream a world where man / No other man will scorn, / Where love will bless the earth / And peace its paths adorn / I dream a world where all / Will know sweet freedom's way, / Where greed no longer saps the soul / Nor avarice blights our day. / A world I dream where black or white, / Whatever race you be, / Will share the bounties of the earth / And every [one] is free, / Where wretchedness will hang its head / And joy, like a pearl, / Attends the needs of all [humankind]— / Of such I dream, my world!"

Lewis aligned his dreams with the dreams of God, and he worked his whole life, creating a path for God's forward motion. I believe this discord in my bones is actually a charge and calling—one that John Lewis named "the deepest calling of your hearts." We were created to prepare the way for *Shalom*—complete wholeness and peace—to take shape on this earth, to ensure all of humanity can enjoy the fullness of Creation. May we honor the life and work of Lewis by getting into good trouble, preparing the way for God's glory to dwell among us.

prayer

In quiet contemplation, color in the page on the left, 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.

⁶ Hughes, Langston. "I Dream A World." 1902-1967. *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*. New York: Random House, 1994.

read Isaiah 40:1-11

from the artist / Hannah Garrity

*"The grass withers, the flower fades;
but the word of our God will stand forever."*

In this image a single iris stalk rises up with three flowers. Representing the inconstancy of the people, the flower is just beginning to fade and the grasses begin to bend. The breath of the Lord swirls through the frame.

*"In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord,
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain."*

In the background, straight vertical lines represent the paths made straight, the leveling of the ground, the smoothing of the rough places.

Yet, in our inconstancy, God is there for us. There is hope, as Isaiah cries out, for God continues to speak peace into being within us. God continues to whisper Their meaning and purpose into us, teaching us to rely on Them and to bend our trajectory toward righteousness. In this moment, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, our physical ways of reaching out and encircling each other in love are stripped away. We must speak. We must speak the peace that we normally act out; we must speak it into being. Can we find the words? Can we reach out to those with whom we can connect? Can we, together, make space for God to speak peace through us?

prayer

Breathe deeply as you gaze upon the image on the left. Imagine placing yourself in this scene. What do you see? How do you feel? Get quiet and still, offering a silent or spoken prayer to God.



The Flower Fades | Hannah Garrity

journaling our
DREAMS

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If you can't remember your dreams, in the space below, write a dream of peace: Who is in need of peace and what does it look like for them to receive it?

TAKE SABBATH,
for dreams take time

There's a reason dreams come to us in our sleep—rest recharges us, connects us with our intuition, expands our imagination, and opens 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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- Sit quietly and meditate.
- Plant something indoors or outside.
- Spend time with a friend or loved one.
- Explore a new area of your town or city.
- Cook or bake something using a favorite or new recipe.
- Do yoga or exercise in a way that feels good for your body.
- Write and mail a letter to someone you haven't talked to in a while.
- Organize or redesign an area in your home.
- Draw or create something.
- Dance or play music.
- Write a poem or a song.
- Watch a movie.
- Take a nap.
- Read a book.

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 place at the manger.
(As an aside: Is there anything more holy than seeing a child
Run down that 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 always 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 in the church 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

read Luke 1:46-55

commentary / Dr. Marcia Riggs

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 away⁷*

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.

⁷ Shirley Caesar, featuring Eric Reed. "This Joy I have." Higher Ground Hurricane Relief Benefit Concert. 2005.

read Luke 1:46-55

from the artist / Lauren Wright Pittman

As I read Mary's song this year, I felt a sting of grief, one that I hadn't felt in response to this text before. In the wake of George Floyd's murder, artist Titus Kaphar created an image for Time magazine devoted to Black mothers. In his image, "Analogous Colors," he depicts a Black mother fiercely and lovingly holding her child. However, her child is cut out of the image, leaving a harsh, blank hole with shadows where the child should be. Reflecting on his piece, Kaphar wrote: "In her expression, I see the Black mothers who are unseen, and rendered helpless in this fury against their babies. As I listlessly wade through another cycle of violence against Black people, I paint a Black mother... eyes closed, furrowed brow, holding the contour of her loss."⁸

When I read the Magnificat, Kaphar's image came into sharp relief. How could I image Mary holding the contours of her dreams for the world, while also holding the contour of her loss? Mary's son would be publicly murdered at the hands of the State. Mary's song reverberates for all mothers who have had dreams for their children shattered by senseless violence.

I have this instinct to read the Magnificat alongside the first Creation narrative in Genesis. I imagine Christ taking form in Mary's womb much like I imagine all of Creation emerging at the Creator's voice. I collaged macro photography of patterns, textures, and colors from Creation—such as sunsets, bird's feathers, fish scales, galaxies, leaves, planets, fur, water, etc.—and wove them into her hair. Jesus, the thread of Creation, is being knit together in her womb. God's dream for all Creation is materializing as cells divide in her body; all the while she sings of a dream, still unrealized.

prayer

Breathe deeply as you gaze upon the image on the left. Imagine placing yourself in this scene. What do you see? How do you feel? Get quiet and still, offering a silent or spoken prayer to God.



Contours of Mary's Dream | Lauren Wright Pittman

⁸ Kaphar, Titus. "I Cannot Sell You This Painting." Artist Titus Kaphar on his George Floyd TIME Cover." *Time*. June 4, 2020. time.com/5847487/george-floyd-time-cover-titus-kaphar/

read Psalm 126

from the artist / Hannah Garrity

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*,⁹ 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 the ripples of empowerment permeate our relationships and the relationships of those around us? Can we make this our intention? Can we sow joy?

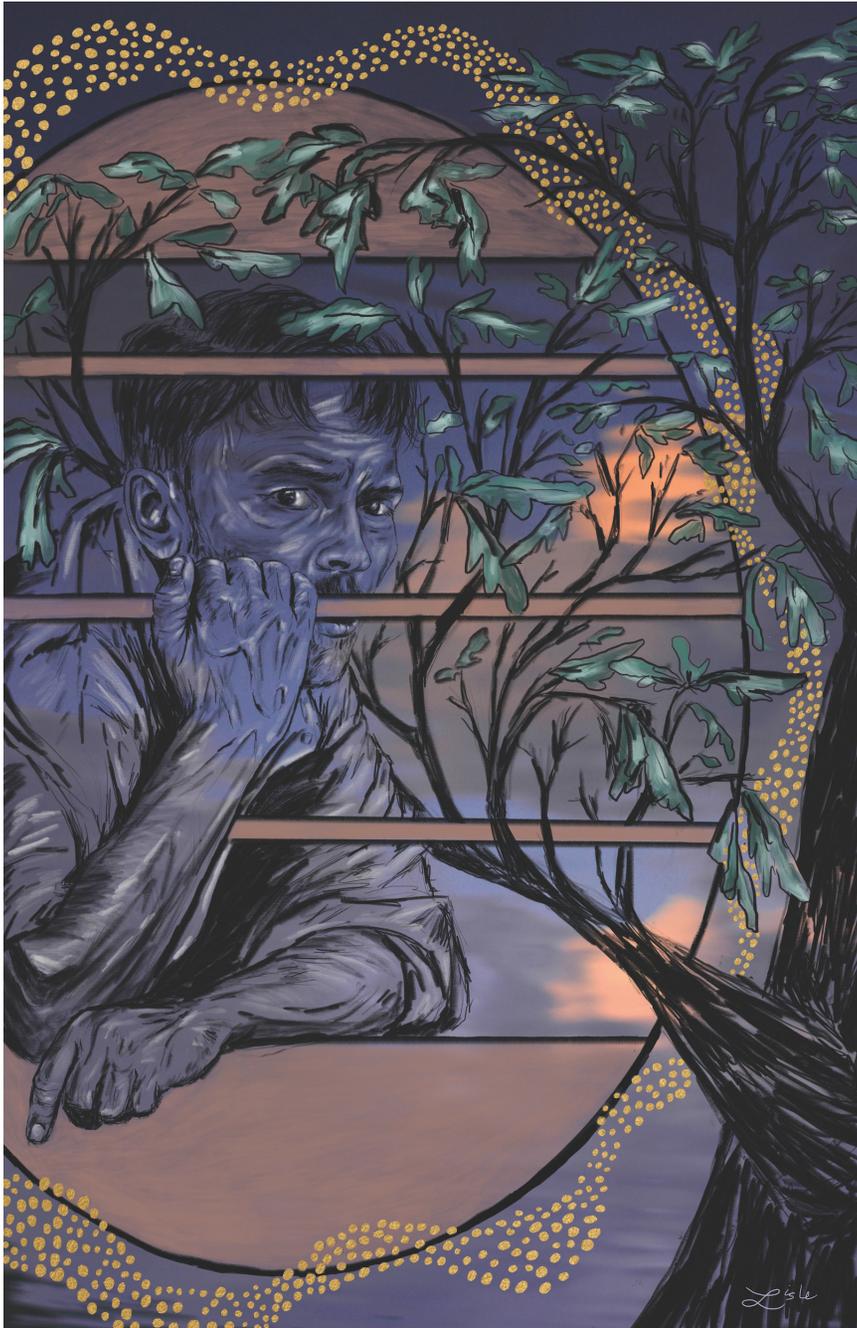
prayer

In quiet contemplation, color in the page on the left, 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.



Sow in Tears | Hannah Garrity

⁹ Hammond, Zaretta, and Yvette Jackson. *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain: Promoting Authentic Engagement and Rigor Among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students*. California: Corwin, 2015.



God of Justice | Lisle Gwynn Garrity

Thursday THOSE WHO DREAM... *sow joy*

read Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11

from the artist / Lisle Gwynn Garrity

I like to think of this passage from Isaiah as “The Great Exchange,” as God’s dreams painting the world with promise: The oppressed receive good news, the brokenhearted are bound up, captives and prisoners are released and liberated. Mourners are not only comforted, but crowned with gladness. The faint-hearted are bolstered with praise. In the aftermath of exile, the prophet provides them with a rich vision of hope—of joy, even. After everything in their world has fallen apart, they are named the anointed ones, the restorers of the ruins.

This year, many of us are the brokenhearted and the mourners. Many of us find ourselves in the ruins of lives disrupted by COVID-19, economic turmoil, political strife, and deeply-embedded racial inequities. As the Church, we have experienced a strange form of exile—displaced from our sacred spaces, rituals, and from one another. And yet, no matter how much we identify with the prophet’s original audience, we must remember we are not the only ones who mourn. We can’t center ourselves in this text without recognizing that it is also for those who are truly—and literally—held captive, for those who are systematically oppressed and beaten down. This poetry of promise reminds us to witness—and truly see—the suffering of those we have intentionally or unintentionally exiled. In this image, I invite you to look into the eyes of the one held captive. What do you see? What do you imagine is his story? Now imagine how God sees him.

He grips tightly to the bars that hold him in place. Yet, the oaks of righteousness, sown by the God of justice, break through, proclaiming a different fate. God’s dreams, represented by the gold stippling, become a garland crowning him with glory instead of mourning. This is his Great Exchange. May it be so for us as well.

prayer

Breathe deeply as you gaze upon the image on the left. Imagine placing yourself in this scene. What do you see? How do you feel? Get quiet and still, offering a silent or spoken prayer to God.

journaling our
DREAMS

If you can remember any of your dreams from this 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?

If you can't remember your dreams, in the space below, write a dream of joy: Where and how can you sow joy into your life?

TAKE SABBATH,
for dreams take time

There's a reason dreams come to us in our sleep—rest recharges us, connects us with our intuition, expands our imagination, and opens 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:

- Go for a walk outside.
- Sit quietly and meditate.
- Plant something indoors or outside.
- Spend time with a friend or loved one.
- Explore a new area of your town or city.
- Cook or bake something using a favorite or new recipe.
- Do yoga or exercise in a way that feels good for your body.
- Write and mail a letter to someone you haven't talked to in a while.
- Organize or redesign an area in your home.
- Draw or create something.
- Dance or play music.
- Write a poem or a song.
- Watch a movie.
- Take a nap.
- Read a book.

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,
Harboring good news that
must have felt like 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 smiled.
And I imagine, that for
the first time,
Mary could float.

Isn't it always that way?
I could harbor joy to 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 love that
helps me float.

Poem by Sarah Are

read Luke 1:26-45

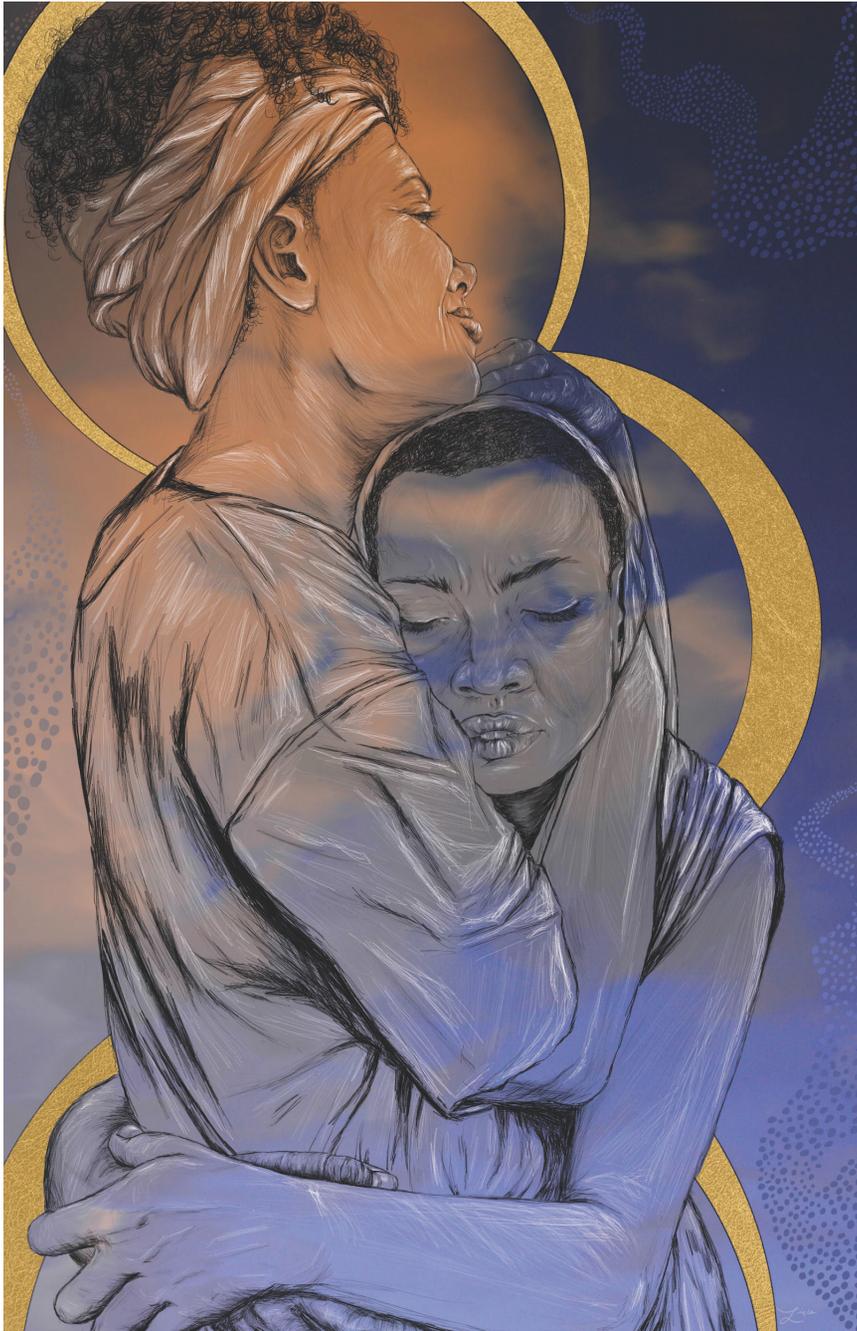
commentary / Dr. Marcia Riggs

"The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God'" (v.30). There are three possible responses to fear: fight, flight, or freeze. Mary is, perhaps, frozen by the appearance of the angel Gabriel, whose greeting and message leave her perplexed and pondering. But she is not paralyzed by fear; instead, she is suspended in time as the angel foretells her destiny: to bear the Son of God. Mary is also told that she is not alone because her cousin Elizabeth is miraculously pregnant after years of being barren. Fully awakened by the angel's declaration, "For nothing will be impossible with God" (v.37), Mary accepts her destiny saying, "Here am I, the servant of the LORD; let it be with me according to your word" (v.38a).

Why does Mary accept her destiny? Mary and Elizabeth are mutually confirming witnesses that God stands with those who are marginalized. They know that they are not alone; they have each other, and know that God deems them worthy. Today we often talk about the need for solidarity. In 2017 the Women's March on Washington and simultaneous marches around the globe demonstrated publicly women's solidarity is necessary in the quest to fulfill the dream of equality for everyone.

What Mary and Elizabeth's witness teaches us is that solidarity emerges when we share a dream that perplexes us into pondering what God intends for and requires of us. In his posthumous letter, the late Congressman John Lewis speaks about solidarity thus: "Millions of people motivated simply by human compassion laid down the burdens of division. Around the country and the world, you set aside race, class, age, language, and nationality to demand respect for human dignity."¹⁰ People motivated simply by human compassion become the love that does justice.

¹⁰ Lewis, John. "Together, You Can Redeem the Soul of Our Nation." The New York Times. July 30, 2020. www.nytimes.com/2020/07/30/opinion/john-lewis-civil-rights-america.html



A Dream Confirmed | Lisle Gwynn Garrity

read Luke 1:26-45

from the artist / Lisle Gwynn Garrity

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 family who would keep her safe 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.¹¹ 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

Breathe deeply as you gaze upon the image on the left. Imagine placing yourself in this scene. What do you see? How do you feel? Get quiet and still, offering a silent or spoken prayer to God.

¹¹ This is an allusion to the Langston Hughes poem, "Harlem," which begins, "What happens to a dream deferred?" from *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes*. 2002. Reprinted by permission of Harold Ober Associates, Inc. poetryfoundation.org/poems/46548/harlem.



A Heron's Wisdom | Lauren Wright Pittman

read 2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16

from the artist / Lauren Wright Pittman

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 page on the left, 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.

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

read Luke 2:1-20

commentary / Dr. Marcia Riggs

We often get upset about the commercialization of Christmas, the emphasis on buying gifts rather than celebration of the birth of Jesus as the gift from a God who loved the world so much (Jn. 3:16). We live in a consumer culture and we accumulate things in a quest for status. But, this night, Jesus is born in a manger and our notions of status must be revised.

This Christmas during the COVID-19 pandemic can be a time to pause, question, and dream our way back to the manger where divine power comes into the world. The political reality at the time of Jesus' birth has points of contact with ours. Jesus is born at the time of a census. We are currently conducting the U.S. census. Jesus is born homeless. Evictions are on the rise as the political powers fail to pass necessary legislation to continue a moratorium on evictions and extend unemployment benefits.¹² Jesus is a child perceived as a threat to political stability. Immigrant children are being expelled from shelters and the country.¹⁵

It is imperative that on this night we join the shepherds on the social margins and hear anew the angel say: "Do not be afraid; for see— I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the LORD" (v.10-11). Without fear, we must dream and act in ways that challenge current economic expediency and political apathy. Tonight we dream our way back to the manger and forward into the words of Guyana poet, Claire Smith:

| | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| <i>I dream</i> | <i>I dream</i> |
| <i>Of a loving world</i> | <i>Of a hopeful world</i> |
| <i>Where we see each other</i> | <i>Where we recognize the power</i> |
| <i>With God's eyes:</i> | <i>of God's grace</i> |
| <i>I dream of a resourceful world</i> | <i>To transform and make new;</i> |
| <i>Where we cherish the unique gift</i> | <i>I dream of peace.¹⁴</i> |
| <i>Of each other;</i> | |

12 Bynum, Russ. "Rent's due, again: Monthly anxieties deepen as aid falls off." Yahoo News. July 31, 2020. news.yahoo.com/rents-due-again-monthly-anxieties-140346782.html.

13 Pitzl, Mary Jo. "US government sued after report of detained migrant children at Hampton Inn hotels." Yahoo News. July 27, 2020. news.yahoo.com/us-government-sued-report-detained-142513661.html.

14 Smith, Claire. "A Peace Dream." *Timeless Prayers for Peace: Voices Together from Around the World*. Compiled by Geoffrey Duncan. 2003.

read Luke 2:1-20

from the artist / Hannah Garrity

I am brought to tears just working on this image.

The divine baby, God incarnate, cuddled into his blanket and hat. The stripes of his blanket represent the shepherds and angels with stars and doves, respectively. Behind his head, an iconographic halo harkens back to historical images of Jesus. This beautiful Black baby Jesus, inspired by a photo of my newest family member, sleeps on the night of his birth.

As a new year dawns, I imagine, what if this year were the first year? What if this baby was the baby Jesus? What are my hopes for the life of God incarnate, in his Black body, in this moment?

That he will not be judged by
the content of his character or the color of his skin
but invested in because he was born,
and that makes him worthy of investment.
That he will live freely a life of happiness and joy.
That he will enjoy his moments,
find purpose,
live into deep love,
share great kindness,
wander in the expanse of his great mind.
That those who meet him
will see the love he holds,
will see the joy he lives,
will see the kindness he is shown.
That those who meet him
will treat him as the genius that he is,
will treat him with the dignity he owns,
will treat him with the respect he embodies,
will treat him with the grace and humility in which he thrives.
That those who meet him
will assume that he is a precious being,
will revel in the power he exudes,
will soak in the joy he emanates,
will reflect the love he radiates.

Can we live out my dream?

prayer

Breathe deeply as you gaze upon the image on the left. Imagine placing yourself in this scene. What do you see? How do you feel? Get quiet and still, offering a silent or spoken prayer to God.



Love Incarnate | Hannah Garrity

Swell / Luke 2:22-40

You know that feeling when you fall in love?
Time-stands-still *and* moves too fast.
You'd give up sleep just to talk all night,
Because there's so much to say and not enough time.

It's that full to the brim,
Over the stars,
Living is dreaming,
Too-good-to-be-true
Kind of feeling?

I imagine that's how Simeon and Anna felt
When they saw Jesus that day.
I imagine it was that full to the brim,
Over the stars,
Living is dreaming,
Too-good-to-be-true
Good news kind of feeling.

I imagine it was love.
And I imagine that that good, good news
Swelled to the tip of their tongues
Until they could not keep silent.

So may we know what Simeon and Anna knew,
Which is that some dreams we hold close to our chest,
For ourselves to cherish and never forget.
But other dreams must be spoken out loud—
Dreams of justice and love and hope, here and now.

So today my prayer is to know that swell,
For there is good, good news
That we must tell.

Poem by Sarah Are

read Luke 2:22-40

commentary / Dr. Marcia Riggs

Jesus is brought to the temple as is required by Mosaic law to be presented to the Lord. Simeon, a "righteous and devout man" filled with the Holy Spirit, takes the child in his hands and praises God. He exclaims, "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel" (v.29-32). Likewise, Anna, a prophet and elder of her tribe who resided in the temple worshiping, fasting, and praying, proclaims Jesus as the redemption of Jerusalem.

Both Simeon and Anna have been waiting a long time to proclaim this salvific news to others. They have been steadfast in their belief in God's promise. Steadfastness, or as some might say in the Black church tradition, tarrying (abiding) in the Spirit is like being in the REM stage of the sleep cycle. REM is traditionally described as the dream stage. In the dream stage, irrelevant information is removed, and our capacity to retain what is important is heightened. When we are steadfast in our beliefs, we deepen our faith. Deep faith is not learned as doctrine but through spiritual discipline and practices, such as prayer and fasting. Like Simeon and Anna, as our faith deepens, the need to tell others about it will well up in us. Then we too will not keep silent.

read Luke 2:22-40

from the artist / Lauren Wright Pittman

This passage highlights postures of faithfulness. After intense interactions with angels and seemingly impossible directives from God, Mary and Joseph remain faithful to the Mosaic law. Despite a long life of anticipation, Simeon remains faithfully diligent, awaiting the coming Messiah. After losing her husband and living a long, solitary life, Anna faithfully worships, fasts, and prays at the temple. Their faithful journeys converge at the temple where Jesus is to be designated holy before the Lord.

I wanted the composition of this image to emphasize the focus of the actions and words of Simeon and Anna. Instead of centering themselves, they center Christ. In the patterning of their clothes, I created icons to visually express the particularity of each person.

Jesus is held high while swaddled in cloth patterned in imagery of radiant starlight and olive branches of peace. Simeon's sleeves are covered with imagery of doves, referencing the Holy Spirit who rested upon him, and eyes representing his witnessing of "a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." The prophet Anna needed no explanation of who the child was; she immediately praised God and shared the Good News with everyone who would listen. Her clothing is patterned with sound waves echoing the light of Christ.

Silence was not an option for either Simeon or Anna, and in the midst of such desperate need for peace and justice in this world, silence is not an option for us either. Faithfulness moves us to action, calls on us to speak of God's dream for this weary world. May we not be silent, and may our faithful journeys lead us to miraculous encounters with God.

prayer

Breathe deeply as you gaze upon the image on the left. Imagine placing yourself in this scene. What do you see? How do you feel? Get quiet and still, offering a silent or spoken prayer to God.



Center Christ | Lauren Wright Pittman

read Isaiah 9:2-7

from the artist / Hannah Garrity

Oppression must be overcome. This is a truth universally acknowledged and reiterated by the words of Isaiah 9. I will not re-litigate. The fist of anti-oppression stands in the middle of this paper lace. Can we deliver?

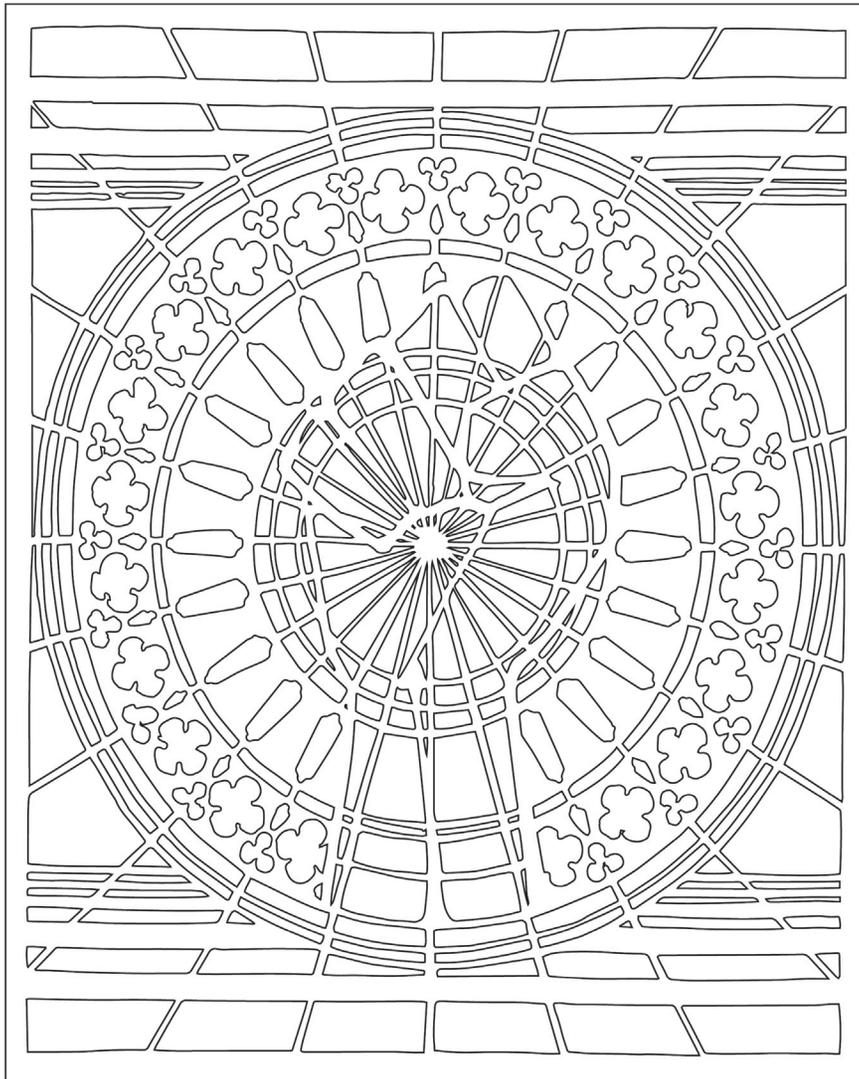
Artistically, this is a powerful time. The monuments to the American Confederacy are being legislatively removed or simply toppled. In Richmond, Virginia, a new monument was erected last year: "Rumors of War" by Kehinde Wiley. The powerful face, according to Wiley's speech at the unveiling ceremony, is a combination of numerous young Black men, creating a monument celebrating, not a single man, but honoring the lives of all Black men and women, boys and girls, as monumental.¹⁵

Here, in this paper lace, I explore physical structures that house and enable American society. The shape of the monument pedestals inspires the first ring of pattern surrounding the fist. The next ring portrays patterning that is seen regularly in church architecture. The Quatrefoil represents the cross and the Trefoil represents the Trinity. These rings symbolize the intricate way that white supremacy must be unwoven from daily operations.

It is time! It is time to let Isaiah's prophecy come to fruition. People of God, we must gather our words. May we meet whataboutism, anger, and backlash with Jesus' clarity on love being the only way. May we prepare and seek out discussion with all we are connected to who are lost in hate and fear. It is time for the love of God to permeate our structures, systems, and daily moments.

prayer

In quiet contemplation, color in the page on the left, 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.



Hannah Garrity

Systemic | Hannah Garrity

¹⁵ Wiley, Kehinde. "VMFA Virginia Museum of Fine Arts on Facebook Watch." Facebook Watch. VMFA, 2019. [facebook.com/myVMFA/videos/live-footage-from-the-unveiling-of-rumors-of-war-by-kehinde-wiley-at-vmfa-rumors/995984914099914/](https://www.facebook.com/myVMFA/videos/live-footage-from-the-unveiling-of-rumors-of-war-by-kehinde-wiley-at-vmfa-rumors/995984914099914/).



Can't Keep Silent | Lisle Gwynn Garrity

 **Thursday** *THOSE WHO DREAM... will not keep silent*

read Isaiah 61:10-62:3

from the artist / Lisle Gwynn Garrity

When I read through Isaiah's words, I immediately visualized Mary, wrapped in a robe of righteousness, proclaiming what she knew to be true: "God has lifted up the lowly and filled the hungry with good things." Mary could not keep silent.

Then I thought of the prophet Isaiah, whose fierce visions for a weary world welled up from within him: "For Jerusalem's sake, I won't sit still." He could not keep silent.

Then I thought of thousands of women shamed and scrutinized, who have risked everything to name their abusers. They could not keep silent.

Then I thought of the names we speak to honor the memory of lives abruptly and unjustly cut short—Breonna Taylor, Tamir Rice, George Floyd, Sandra Bland, Michael Brown. . . the list goes on. We cannot keep silent.

And then I thought of myself—of the times I have held back, buried my pain, avoided a hard conversation, worried about others' perceptions, or become numb to the wrongs of the world. I cannot keep silent.

And yet, what I find most compelling about this passage is its particular emphasis and global reach. The prophet speaks for the sake of Zion, a city desperate to be revived. But as the prophet pursues God's dreams for his battered home and for the people he loves, the Divine Dreamer has more to grow: righteousness and praise in every nation. For the difference between a pipe dream and God's dreams is that God's dreams hold timeless and expansive power. We can't be silent because there's too much at stake. There are too many seeds in the ground, ready to spring up from the soil.

prayer

Breathe deeply as you gaze upon the image on the left. Imagine placing yourself in this scene. What do you see? How do you feel? Get quiet and still, offering a silent or spoken prayer to God.

journaling our
DREAMS

If you can remember any of your dreams from this 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?

If you can't remember your dreams, in the space below, write a dream of love: What's one way love could reshape or recolor your life?

TAKE SABBATH,
for dreams take time

There's a reason dreams come to us in our sleep—rest recharges us, connects us with our intuition, expands our imagination, and opens 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:

- Go for a walk outside.
- Sit quietly and meditate.
- Plant something indoors or outside.
- Spend time with a friend or loved one.
- Explore a new area of your town or city.
- Cook or bake something using a favorite or new recipe.
- Do yoga or exercise in a way that feels good for your body.
- Write and mail a letter to someone you haven't talked to in a while.
- Organize or redesign an area in your home.
- Draw or create something.
- Dance or play music.
- Write a poem or a song.
- Watch a movie.
- Take a nap.
- Read a book.

I Imagine / Matthew 2:1-12

I imagine they packed bags—
Water and food, blankets and clothes.

I imagine they packed tools—
Maps and telescopes that could bring the stars closer,
As if the sky was a comforter they could pull near.

I imagine they hugged loved ones and said,
“We’ll be back soon.”

And when loved ones said,

“Don’t leave,”

“It’s risky,”

“You don’t even know what you’re chasing,”

I imagine they put lips to foreheads and said,

“There is a light in the darkness. I must chase that.”

And then I imagine they walked.

I imagine they walked until legs were tired and knees gave out.

Maybe they told stories on the road and laughed into open sky,

Or maybe they sat in silence and prayed for more light.

However the road unfolded, I imagine it was not easy.

I imagine all of this, not because I’ve chased stars,

But because I have dreamed.

And these dreams for justice make the Magi’s story my own.

For every time we fight for justice,

We start in the dark.

We hug loved ones and say,

“There’s a light in the darkness, I must chase that.”

We walk until we’re tired,

And then we keep walking.

We laugh at the open sky as a form of resistance.

We pray in the night for signs of more light.

And no matter how important the journey is,

And no matter how much progress we make,

The journey to justice is never easy.

And so I pray,

That maybe one day,

We will be like the Magi,

And will walk ourselves into the light.

Until then, don’t forget—

There’s a light in the darkness. We must chase that.

Poem by Sarah Are

read Matthew 2:1-12

commentary / Dr. Marcia Riggs

Alerted by a rising star that the “King of the Jews” has been born, three Wise Men wish to pay homage (v.1-2). According to the text, when King Herod hears about the birth, he and “all Jerusalem” with him are frightened (v.3). Herod seeks information about the birthplace of the child from the religious leaders, and then he reaches out to the Wise Men to inform him when they locate the child so that he too can pay homage (v.8). Two typical responses: Jesus will be recognized by some as God entering the world on behalf of all humankind; or Jesus will be feared as a threat to the rulers (political or religious) who exercise power over other humans.

The journey of the Wise Men discloses the power of a dream: “And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road” (v.12). This is a dream of divine intervention. Although the Wise Men do not perceive Herod’s deception, it is known to God. Most importantly, though, they heed the message sent by God through a dream.

Womanist ethicist Barbara Holmes describes Creation in Genesis as “God busily untangling the chaos in the cosmos.” She describes God’s rest from creating thus: “The Holy One rests and perhaps dreams, then beckons us toward an unimagined future and the possibility of moral flourishing From now on, our lives will be nuanced and dependent on covenants and on our initiatives and commitments to God and others.”¹⁶

The imperative of Epiphany today is to receive all of God’s dreams: warnings, assurances, projections about how to persevere during this pandemic. The initiatives and commitments to God and others about how to flourish will surely come to us in our dreams.

16 Holmes, Barbara A. *Dreaming (Christian Exploration of Everyday Living)*. (Fortress Press, 2012). Kindle Edition, Loc. 603; 616.

read Matthew 2:1-12

from the artist / Hannah Garrity

This image is a meditation on the gift boxes spiraling out from the center of the Star of Bethlehem. The top of the central square opens as Mary receives the gifts of the three Wise Men. Multiple paths surround the star, portraying the wise decision of the Magi to return home a different way to resist the fear-ridden power of King Herod.

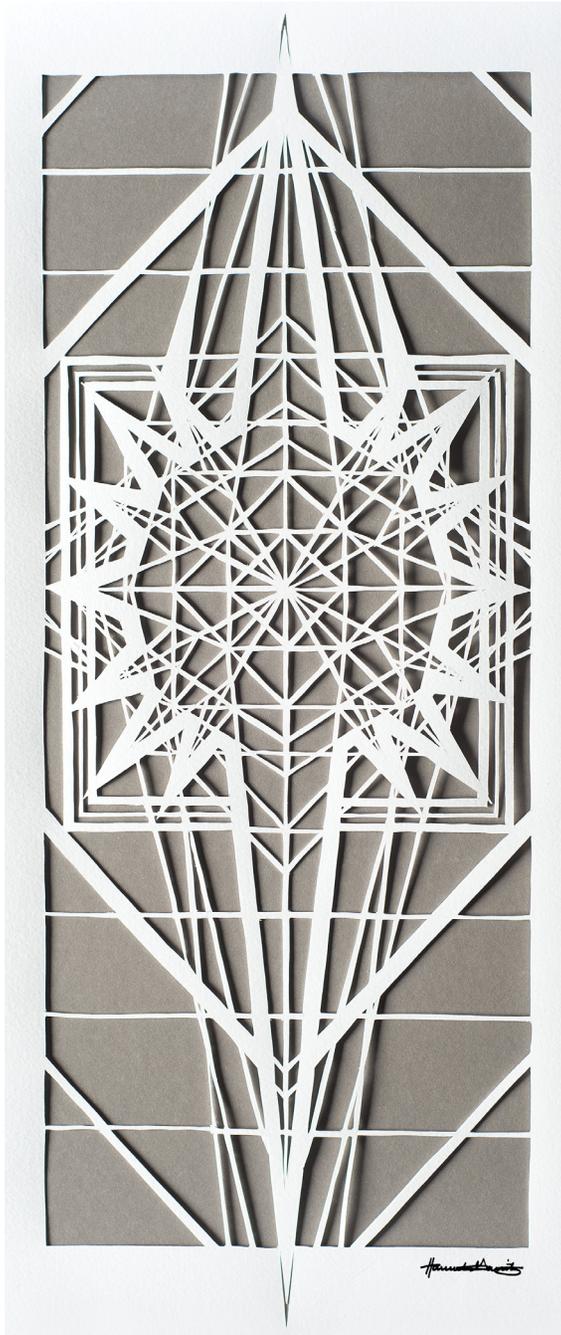
"When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him." The power of fear is palpable; it is easy for a leader to share and to use to his advantage. In this story we are reminded of the wisdom that has been gifted to us by God through Jesus' ministry—the wisdom to avoid imbibing and stoking fear. Knowing this wisdom to be true, and knowing Herod to be a leader who leads fearfully and by fearmongering, I wonder how often we humans can fall into this pattern.

We know the story well. The Magi's decision buys time for Mary and Joseph to make a move that will eventually save the life of God incarnate. They choose to leave the country as refugees, to escape the oppression that Herod's fear imposes on their child.

Can we combat the fear within ourselves—to see beyond it to the love and hope that are also held in every moment? With each decision, we first choose our lens. Can we make it our intention to see the world through love, not through fear?

prayer

Breathe deeply as you gaze upon the image on the left. Imagine placing yourself in this scene. What do you see? How do you feel? Get quiet and still, offering a silent or spoken prayer to God.



Another Road | Hannah Garrity

read Isaiah 60:1-6

from the artist / Lauren Wright Pittman

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.

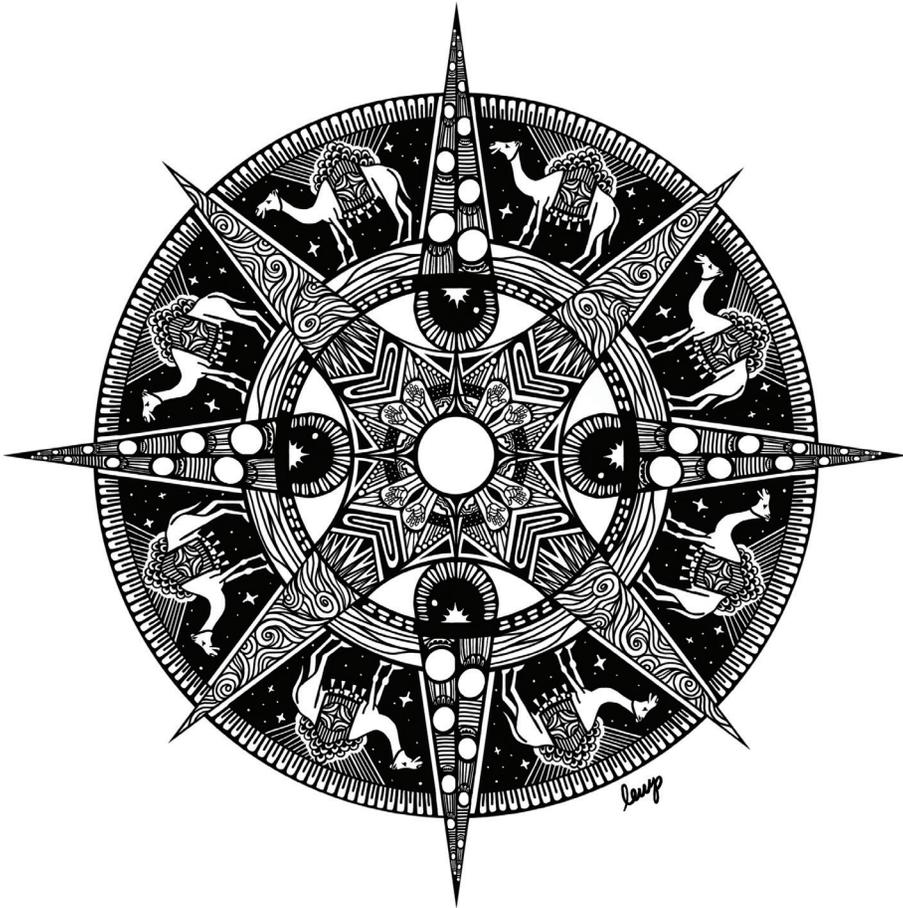
This dream for Jerusalem is a complete overturning of what had become the norm in Israel's troubled history. Instead of emptying their resources out in offering to overbearing empires, all nations would come to Jerusalem, bearing gifts, elevating Israel to a position of influence never before reached.¹⁷ 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 persevere 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 justice, 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 page on the left, 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.

¹⁷ Brueggemann, Walter. *Westminster Bible Companion; Isaiah 40-66*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 205.



Arise, Shine | Lauren Wright Pittman

journaling our
DREAMS

Take time to reflect on this past year, honoring its hardships and giving thanks for its gifts. In the space below, record all your dreams—big and small—for the year ahead.

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 who are 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