



How does a weary world rejoice?

An Advent series in Luke's Gospel

RESOURCES INCLUDED IN THE BUNDLE

- 1. DEVOTIONAL BOOKLET** (A printable devotional booklet with: scripture, commentary, poetry, visual art, hymns, and reflection prompts).
- 2. SERMON PLANNING GUIDE** (A guide offering biblical commentary as well as theme connections and links to further reading for each Sunday in our series)
- 3. WORDS FOR WORSHIP** (Written liturgy inspired by the theme and our focal scriptures for each Sunday in our series).
- 4. BANNER DESIGNS** (For bringing to life as large, paper lace, painted, or commercially-printed banners in your worship space).
- 5. 11 NEW VISUALS WITH ARTIST STATEMENTS** (Illuminating the focal scriptures in our series).
- 6. BRANDING BUNDLE** (Logo files and graphics to help you share the theme in your print and online communications).
- 7. POETRY PRAYERS** (7 poems inspired by our theme and weekly sub-themes).
- 8. LITURGY FOR THE WEARY** (Liturgy to offer sacred space and respite for the weary and hurting).
- 9. CHILDREN'S CURRICULUM** (A skit-based curriculum with musical components that can be used weekly, or as a pageant).
- 10. CHILDREN'S BULLETINS** (Interactive worship bulletins for each Sunday in our series).
- 11. ADVENT CALENDARS FOR CHILDREN & ADULTS** (Two Advent calendars, one with daily coloring and prompts for children, and one that is for adults to practice daily acts of joy).
- 12. BONUS RESOURCE: THEME SONG** (A theme song written by our guest musicians. This will be released after our initial launch of the Advent resources, so stay tuned).

How we developed this theme

For this coming Advent, we felt called to depart from the lectionary and create another narrative-driven series. This year, we are paying close attention to how the Gospel of Luke begins the story of Jesus: by interweaving Christ's birth with the parallel story of Elizabeth, Zechariah, and John the Baptist. As we looked closely at both of these birth narratives told side by side, we saw the full scope of human emotions: isolation, fear, disbelief, as well as connection, trust, and joy. We acknowledged that the Christmas season is often an emotionally-charged time when we feel many things deeply—sometimes all at once. Many experience emotional dissonance in the midst of joy-filled carols and festivities.

As we studied the scriptures, we asked out loud, "What is the message we will need to hear this season?" Sarah Speed, one of our founding creative partners, referenced a poem she had written a few years ago titled, "How does a weary world rejoice?"¹ In it, she lists many seemingly mundane actions that fill our days: stretching your body awake, looking at the night sky, making room on the subway, helping a neighbor on the street, and so on. In the last stanza, she concludes:

*How does a weary world rejoice?
I would guess
soul by soul
and day by day.
But if you ask me,
I bet most of it counts.*

After Sarah read her poem aloud, we heard the answer to our question: we need to hear that it all counts. We need to acknowledge the weariness of our world while also seeking real and daily moments of joy. We need to remember that all of life can be a prayer.

And so, we found ourselves compelled by the question Sarah's poem poses: *How does a weary world rejoice?* In each week of our series, we respond to this question with a statement inspired by our scriptures. These texts bring us into a space of possibility; in them, we find rhythms for rejoicing, even in the midst of difficult circumstances. Each weekly sub-theme is a "we" statement because joy is deeply relational and rooted in the fact that we belong to God. As we move through our series, we hope to create space for acknowledging the weariness of our world while celebrating God's closeness with great joy.

¹ "How Does a Weary World Rejoice?" by Sarah A. Speed. Published on @writingthegood Instagram page, December 24, 2021. [instagram.com/p/CX3pqGBO0v0/](https://www.instagram.com/p/CX3pqGBO0v0/)



ABOUT THE THEME

How does a weary world rejoice?

Joy is often a companion to many other emotions. We can feel joy in addition to feeling many other things at once: grief, anticipation, anxiety, excitement, disappointment, exhaustion. Perhaps many of us live with the myth that joy is not something we deserve—or that it is wholly out of reach. But our joy is rooted in the truth that we belong to God. Can you tether yourself to that deep truth? You deserve to feel joy—fully. The world needs your joy, even if you are weary. Our joy is better when it is shared.

This theme of course alludes to a line in the familiar Christmas hymn, “O Holy Night,”² which has an interesting history. The song was originally written by a French poet who was atheist, and the music was supplied by a Jewish composer. The hymn was later translated into English by an American Unitarian minister. In the 1800s, it became a popular hymn for Christian abolitionists due to its justice-focused language in verse 3.³ Like Mary’s song, the hymn reminds us that justice and joy belong together. Sometimes our joy is an act of resistance.

And so, this Advent, we will hold space for our weariness and our joy. We will seek a “thrill of hope” in our hurting world. We will welcome joy—even and especially if, like the prophet Isaiah, we cry out for comfort (Isaiah 40:1). In this weary world, may we find many ways to rejoice.

MATERIALS WE’LL RELEASE FOR FREE TO SUPPLEMENT BUNDLE

- 1. HYMN & MUSIC IDEAS**—featuring a long list of music ideas inspired by our theme and weekly themes—for worship, fellowship, and listening.
- 2. CONTENT CALENDAR FOR SOCIAL MEDIA**—Carefully-selected images, graphics, and excerpts from the resources for you to post on your social media platforms. This will be a free bonus for bundle patrons.

² “O Holy Night.” Author: Placide Cappeau (1847). Translator: John S. Dwight. Tune: CANTIQUÉ DE NOËL. Public Domain.

³ “Reminder: ‘O Holy Night’ Started Out as an Abolitionist Anthem.” Published by *Relevant*. December 9, 2020. relevantmagazine.com/culture/music/reminder-o-holy-night-started-out-as-an-abolitionist-anthem/

About the logo & branding



“Two people—one radiating joy & the other wading into weariness—hold the world together.”

“How does a weary world rejoice? This is a difficult question to image, much less to answer. The world was the first tangible image that emerged from our brainstorming. This theme feels all-encompassing; it feels important to highlight its expansiveness with a visual reference to the globe. The other design problem to solve was how to reference both weariness and joy. How do you visually hold these contrasting emotions together? What feels connective about these emotions is that they are very human. We decided on the image of a comforting embrace, and perhaps in the space between the people, continents and bodies of water come into view. These two people could represent characters we follow this Advent season: Elizabeth & Zechariah, Mary & Elizabeth, Mary & Joseph. Or maybe the figures are more broadly representative of God & humanity or of the personification of joy & weariness. Two people—one radiating joy and the other wading into weariness—hold the world together.”

—Rev. Lauren Wright Pittman,
graphic designer

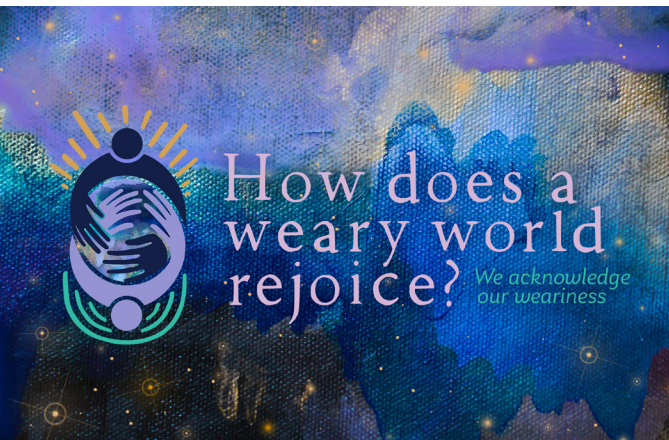
“As Lauren and I discussed the visual branding for our Advent theme, we talked about visuals, textures, and color palettes that might communicate the idea of a weary world rejoicing. As we talked about images of the world, the scope of our brainstorming widened into the cosmic realm. We soon found ourselves peering into galaxies by sifting through the new images captured by NASA and the Hubble telescope. We were reminded of how captivating and breathtaking these images are; viewing them invites you into worlds unknown. As we looked through the renderings of nebula and star clusters, we were mesmerized by the colors and luminescent textures. These images have the power to lift every weary bone in your body. When you gaze upon the beauty of the cosmos, how can you keep from rejoicing? And so, for our theme branding, I decided to create acrylic paintings inspired by the Hubble telescope images. I painted washes of vibrant colors and metallic gold amidst a backdrop of beautiful blackness. In these paintings, I hope you see the vastness of God.”

—Rev. Lisle Gwynn Garrity, painter/photographer
of the theme backgrounds

FOCAL SCRIPTURES

Notes about our focal scriptures:

While this series primarily focuses on the stories told in Luke 1-3, we've also included a few Hebrew scriptures from the RCL (Year B). In order to stay in Luke's narrative, we have omitted the story of the Magi and traditional celebrations of Epiphany in this series. Instead, we conclude the series with Baptism of the Lord Sunday. In this way, the series follows the birth stories of Jesus and John the Baptist, and culminates with John baptizing Jesus in the Jordan river. We hope this allows worshipers to understand more clearly the beginnings of Jesus' life and ministry. The series begins with weariness and moves through themes of connection, amazement, hope, hospitality, and ritual; we conclude by focusing on belovedness.



The First Sunday of Advent | How does a weary world rejoice?

We acknowledge our weariness

Luke 1:1-23 (*Zechariah & Elizabeth are promised a child*)
Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

As Advent begins, we start by acknowledging the weariness, grief, rage, and hopelessness we carry—and we also affirm that we are made for joy. We start the season with Zechariah and Elizabeth; they have battled infertility and have lived many years. Perhaps they feel the weight of hopes and dreams unattained. The angel comes to Zechariah with a promise of good news, but Zechariah can't fully receive it. Sometimes weariness can harden us and prevent us from living fully. Let us acknowledge the ways we, too, are hardened by disbelief. Like the psalmist, let us ask, "how long?" and plead for restoration.



The Second Sunday of Advent | How does a weary world rejoice?

We find joy in connection

Luke 1:24-45 (*Gabriel visits Mary; Mary goes to Elizabeth*) | Isaiah 40:1-11

In community, our joy expands. When we can't rejoice, we can carry each other's joy. That is what Elizabeth and Mary do for each other. The good news begins to take shape in Elizabeth's womb, but scripture tells us that she stays secluded, hiding her pregnancy from others—that is, until Mary arrives at her door, also pregnant. Perhaps Mary's arrival is the inbreaking that changes everything for Elizabeth, for in that moment, her child leaps in her womb and she is filled with the Spirit. She can't help but to rejoice. Her joy is contagious and wraps around Mary like a hug. Through the prophet Isaiah, we hear God speak tender words of comfort; this is the comfort we can give to and receive from each other during this season.



The Third Sunday of Advent | How does a weary world rejoice?

We allow ourselves to be amazed

Luke 1:57-66 (*The birth of John*) | Psalm 126

After Elizabeth gives birth, her neighbors and family celebrate with her. When it comes time to name the child, Zechariah affirms the name given by the angel and by Elizabeth. In that moment of affirming the promise, Zechariah's speech is restored. Everyone is filled with awe. How often do you allow yourself to be amazed? Wonder is all around us—can we recognize it? As we learn how to rejoice in a weary world, can we live in a way that allows amazement and wonder to surprise us often? In Psalm 126, those who expect to reap tears are granted a surprise: shouts of joy. Amazement is a balm for the weary.

FOCAL SCRIPTURES (cont.)



The Fourth Sunday of Advent | How does a weary world rejoice?

We sing stories of hope

Luke 1:46-55 (*Magnificat*) | Luke 1:67-80 (*Zechariah's song*)

As soon as Zechariah's voice returns, his first words are gratitude and blessing. He sings a story of praise for God's protection and promise, and then he showers a blessing on his newborn son. He sings a story of hope. After Elizabeth exclaims blessings upon Mary, Mary sings: "My soul *magnifies* God; my spirit *rejoices* in God." Mary sings about a God of liberation who pulls the powerful from their thrones and lifts up the lowly. Mary sings a story of hope, one in which justice and joy are interwoven. As we prepare to celebrate Christ's birth, may we also sing stories of hope, justice, and joy.

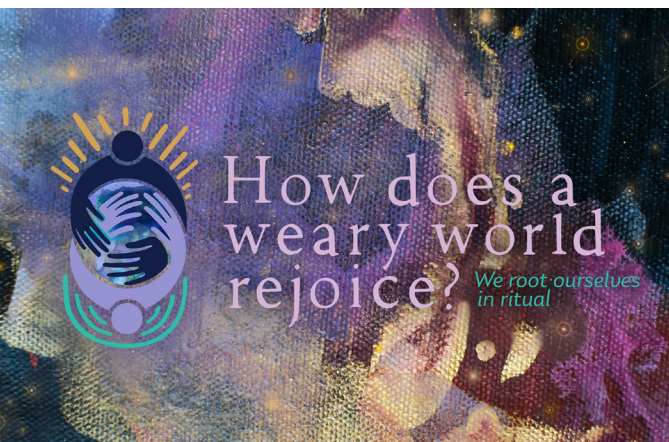


Christmas Eve | How does a weary world rejoice?

We make room

Luke 2:1-20 (*Nativity story*)

Luke's Gospel tells us that when Mary gives birth to Jesus, she lays him in a manger, for there was no place for them in the guest room. Scholars argue about where, exactly, the birth occurs—and why. Was it in an inn or the living room of a simple peasant home? Was Bethlehem teeming with visitors who were also there to be counted in the census? Was Joseph's family inhospitable because they disapproved of his marital situation? Regardless of where the birth occurs, we know that Christ is born in a crowded, unlikely place. And yet, God makes a place here anyway. God draws the circle wider as shepherds and unexpected guests arrive. This Christmas, let us also make room—for strangers and neighbors alike. For this is good news of great joy for all people.



1st Sunday after Christmas | How does a weary world rejoice?

We root ourselves in ritual

Luke 2:21-38 (*Jesus is circumcised & presented in the temple*)

After eight days have passed, Mary and Joseph circumcise their child and give him the name Jesus. They return to the temple in Jerusalem to enact the sacred birth rituals of their culture and tradition. While they are doing what is customary, the unexpected occurs. A man named Simeon is led by the Spirit into the temple to proclaim Jesus as the "light of revelation." Then, a prophet named Anna suddenly approaches them; she praises God and speaks about Jesus to everyone longing for redemption. Rituals mark sacred turning points in our lives. They can help us make meaning of celebrations, losses, and transitions. As new parents to Jesus, Mary and Joseph could feel weary for what lies ahead, but perhaps these sacred rituals—and those who bear witness to them—bolster them and give them courage for the journey. How do our sacred rituals root us and help us live into new chapters with courage?



Baptism of the Lord | How does a weary world rejoice?

We trust our belovedness

Luke 3:21-22 (*Jesus is baptized and beloved*)

We began our series by acknowledging our weariness and we conclude with trusting our belovedness; ultimately, our joy is rooted in the fact that we belong to God. In the story of Jesus' baptism, the heavens part open and the voice of God wraps Jesus in joy and loving care. Some translations of Luke 3:22 read, "in you, I find happiness and delight." Therefore, we are also the source of God's joy. When we trust our belovedness, we live and give fully—we are compelled to treat all of creation with tenderness and care. When we trust our belovedness, we have endless reasons to rejoice.

ABOUT OUR GUEST CONTRIBUTORS



Guest Writer

Rev. Cecelia D. Armstrong

is writing commentary that will be featured in our devotional and sermon planning guide.

The Rev. Cecelia D. Armstrong (*she/her*) is an energetic national leader within the Presbyterian Church (USA) who preaches often for conferences and groups. She is called “CeCe” by friends and family members. She has never met a stranger and continues to collect friends and family members throughout her Christian journey through life and real-world experiences. Born and raised in Detroit, Michigan, she was baptized at Calvary Presbyterian Church (USA) and remained a very active member there until her decision to make Georgia her home. Pastor CeCe is a graduate of the Interdenominational Theological Center, where she attended Johnson C. Smith Theological Seminary and earned her Masters of Divinity. After seminary, she served Grady Memorial Hospital as a chaplain and Beth Salem Presbyterian Church (USA) as supply pastor. As an ordained Teaching Elder in the Presbyterian Church (USA), Rev. Armstrong served her first call as Solo Pastor of Grace Presbyterian Church (USA) in Lantana, Florida. Now, Pastor CeCe is the very proud Associate Pastor of St. James Presbyterian Church (USA) on James Island in Charleston, SC. stjamesji.org/pastors-staff



Guest Artist

Rev. Nicolette (Faison) Peñaranda

is creating visual art that will be featured in our devotional and visual art collection.

Rev. Nicolette “Nic” (*she/her*) is a pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America serving as the Program Director for African Descent Ministries. Nic is the creator of MONadvocacy, a racial justice resource grounded in play, as well as the “Talks at the Desk” series which celebrates the voices of leaders in the ELCA African descent community: livinglutheran.org/2022/02/a-love-letter-to-african-descent-communities.

She is passionate about queer Black liberation, cultivating diverse leadership in faith spaces, and the art of creation. She is also the illustrator of *God's Holy Darkness*, written by Sharei Green and Beckah Selnick (Beaming Books, 2022). The book deconstructs anti-Blackness in Christian theology by celebrating instances in the story of God's people when darkness, blackness, and night are beautiful, good, and holy. She resides in the Chicagoland area with her spouse, two daughters, and two cats, Penne Pablo and Rigatoni Braxton.

ABOUT OUR GUEST CONTRIBUTORS



Guest Musicians

Can Olgun

*& the Chapel Church Band at
Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church*

This Advent, our theme song will be crafted by a collective of talented creatives. The lyrics will be written by Rev. Sarah Speed (one of our Founding Creative Partners and our lead liturgy writer). Sarah is collaborating with the Chapel Church Band at Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church (New York), where she serves as Associate Pastor for Young Adults and Membership. Music director, Can Olgun, is the leader of the band, which features a rotating slate of professional vocalists singing to the rhythms of guitar, piano, and drums. Their repertoire covers a broad range of traditional and contemporary music, with a growing list of original compositions. fapc.org/chapel-church



Can Olgun (*he/him*) is an internationally performing pianist, composer, educator, and researcher. Originally from Berlin, Germany, Olgun moved to New York in 2008 to pursue a Master's degree at the Manhattan School of Music after being awarded a scholarship by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). He has appeared at landmark venues such as the Berliner Philharmonie, Carnegie Hall, Blue Note, A-Trane Berlin, Jazz Club Unterfahrt Munich, Winter Jazz Fest, and Jazz at Lincoln Center. While maintaining a busy schedule as a sideman, he also tours frequently throughout Europe and the U.S. Olgun can be heard on numerous albums alongside artists such as Mark Turner, Michael Mayo, Thomas Morgan, Nate Smith, and Ben Wendel. His most recent project, 'Bear and Grin,' expected to be released in 2023, showcases eight of Olgun's original compositions and features Grammy-nominated singer Becca Stevens. Olgun serves as the Director of Chapel Church Music at Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York and was the musical director for the late actress/singer Suzanne Douglas. He was a semi-finalist in the 2010 Martial Solal Piano Competition in Paris and the 2011 Thelonious Monk International Jazz Piano Competition in Washington, D.C. In 2019, Olgun joined the faculty at CUNY BMCC, where he teaches classes in performance, piano, and theory, as well as focusing on the development of a new degree specialization in jazz and popular music. He is a Ph.D. candidate at the Victoria University of Wellington/New Zealand School of Music, where he conducts research at the intersections of contemporary gospel keyboard playing, artistic research, and jazz piano improvisation. His research findings will entail a portfolio of creative work expected to be released in 2023 and 2024. canolgun.com

REFLECTIONS ON THE THEME

"I lost my grandfather (Poppa) about 10 months ago. He and I called each other soulmates. He died 17 days after my son was born. As I fell onto the floor in grief, all I could think about was the joy I would've experienced seeing them meet. Joy and grief are dancing partners. Darkness and light cannot exist without the contrast between them.

My son and I often sit on our porch swing, and one of his favorite things is to watch the wind chimes my grandfather made twirl in the wind and sing improvised songs. The work of my Poppa's hands delights my son, and in that I find an inexplicable joy.

Each Advent we practice rejoicing in a hope that is promised but not yet realized in a world that feels like it is breaking apart in every way. How does a weary world rejoice? I don't know. But, I think I'll start with acknowledging my weariness, finding joy in connection, allowing myself to be amazed, singing stories of hope, making room, rooting myself in ritual, and trusting in my belovedness."

—Rev. Lauren Wright Pittman, Director of Branding, Founding Creative Partner

"I am concerned, weighed down, unable to solve it all—or really any of it. Mental health crisis, opioid crisis, gun violence, war, illness—we grieve. In grief, we are on edge, more aware of the pain, struggling to be sure that we are thinking clearly. Yet in grief, we also respond viscerally in a loving, more open way. We are attuned to our neighbors' needs, for they seem to be more at-hand, louder in our psyche. We are more able to follow our gut and intuition through challenges that are inexplicable. Perhaps we should have been following it all along. In grief, I find that I am unearthing the positives—not in the realization of life-long dreams and goals. No. The positives are embedded in the minutiae of life—freely and beautifully given. When I cannot see a positive, I take another breath, a slower step, and I look again, more closely. For Her grace—the grace of our Holy Mother God—is found in the details of a moment."

—Hannah Garrity, Founding Creative Partner

"On December 24th, 2021, Omicron was wreaking havoc on New York City. The lines for COVID tests were wrapping around city blocks. Officials were urging people to double-mask. Hospitals were overflowing, and every hour, I received text messages from people saying, 'I tested positive. I needed someone to know.' As a pastor in the heart of Midtown, I was washed with fear, anxiety, and grief when I realized that my church would be one of the few Presbyterian churches offering in-person worship that Christmas Eve. Would I be safe? Would people come? Would it feel like Christmas? Once again, COVID was stealing our rituals. Once again, the city was sick. Once again, joy felt out of reach. So I sat down at my computer and wrote a poem titled, 'How does a weary world rejoice?' It was an effort to sift through the pain of that day, to still my scattered mind, and to put some words on paper that might serve as breadcrumbs on the way to joy. Two years later, and I'm still asking myself that same question. Fortunately, I have found that our sacred texts provide some answers. How does a weary world rejoice? Day by day, and with God's help."

—Rev. Sarah Speed, Founding Creative Partner

"I distinctly remember the first time I laughed after my grandmother died. I was standing in my kitchen when joy interrupted my mourning like a loud dinner guest. Almost immediately, I felt ashamed. *This is no time for joy*, I thought. As I processed my emotional dissonance, I wondered why I felt so uncomfortable by joy's intrusion. When did I decide that joy didn't belong with my grief? Who told me that joy is selfish? Wouldn't my grandmother love to hear the sound of my laughter? I've decided that joy is a companion emotion. Almost always, it comes alongside other feelings: excitement, sadness, exhaustion, relief, apprehension. It's also a transformative emotion; joy changes you. It can shift your perspective. It can bring warmth to those around you. It will certainly lighten your load. And so, this Advent season, if you ever find yourself thinking, 'this is no time for joy,' then I hope you'll reconsider. I hope you'll allow joy to be your surprise guest."

—Rev. Lisle Gwynn Garrity, Founder, Creative Director

"My first pregnancy was due just days before Christmas. I imagined giving birth amidst the singing of 'Joy to the World,' but nine weeks into the pregnancy—the Wednesday after Mother's Day—I miscarried. I spent the long Texas summer mourning the loss. By the time December finally came, I was four months pregnant with a daughter who would be born on Easter. As I prepared the nursery that winter, my joy was interrupted by a wave of grief for the child I never met, the child who would have been arriving in days, not months. In the midst of what everyone saw as a joyous season, for me there was this hidden pain I felt I needed to tuck away. My grief felt so unearned, but so did my joy. So if you are weary this season, if you feel like joy is out of reach, undeserved, or fleeting, if your pain is tucked away in the closet with the Christmas presents, I hope you'll find comfort sitting with Mary, Zechariah, and the shepherds as angels bring their greetings of 'Do not fear.'"

—Rev. Anna Strickland, Operations Support & Content Creator

