



## ***Advent Small Group Session 1 From Generation to Generation: God Meets Us in Our Fear***

### **Welcome/ Introductions**

***Please share your name and tell “What activity or concern have you set aside tonight for this one hour, so that you may be fully present to God and one another?”***

### **Deb: Introduction to *From Generation to Generation* from Sanctified Art:**

The stories, scriptures, and traditions of the Christmas season have been passed down to us throughout the generations. Many of us enter this season with a swell of memories and emotions as vast as the cultural and religious rituals this holiday holds.

Like a tapestry woven throughout time, the Christmas story weaves us in—to remember how God has shown up in the past, to continue the work of collective liberation, to behold the presence of God in flesh and bone.

We encourage you to pay attention to each of the characters in these familiar narratives and ask: *What did each person pass on or contribute? How did they either participate in God’s liberation and love—or try to thwart God’s justice? What can we learn from them and what is our role now? What will we pass on to the next generation?*

This Advent, may you remember that you belong—to a story etched into the wrinkles of time, to generations that have come before and will come after, to a love that won’t let you go.

## **Opening Poem - Love Comes Running**

I remember  
the first time I was afraid. I was a child.  
It was a nightmare.  
*(You remember those pesky monsters under the bed.)*  
I remember  
minutes felt like hours.  
I begged  
the sun to rise. *(Fear always begs the sun to rise.)*

Eventually,  
after minutes that felt like hours,  
I cried out.  
My dad came running.  
He sat at the edge of my bed.  
He said there is no reason to be afraid.

He checked the closet and the floorboards.  
He rearranged my pillows. He said, *"I can stay."*

And that's when I learned  
that when you are afraid,  
love always comes running.  
Love says, *"I can stay."*

That's what God does for us.  
God sits at the edge of the bed.  
God checks the closet and the floorboards.  
God says, *"Be not afraid."*  
God stays until sunrise.  
Love always comes running.

*Poem by  
Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed*

***Question: What do you think of the metaphor for God as a loving parent who comes running when you are afraid?***

***Do you have a different image of God?***

***What feelings does this poem bring out in you?***

## Sharing the Scripture:

Narrator

Gabriel

Mary

### Luke 1: 26-38 The Birth of Jesus Foretold

New Revised Standard Version

<sup>26</sup> In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, <sup>27</sup> to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. <sup>28</sup> And he came to her and said, "**Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.**"<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>29</sup> But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. <sup>30</sup> The angel said to her, "**Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.** <sup>31</sup> **And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus.** <sup>32</sup> **He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David.** <sup>33</sup> **He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.**" <sup>34</sup> Mary said to the angel, "**How can this be, since I am a virgin?**"<sup>[b]</sup> <sup>35</sup> The angel said to her, "**The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born<sup>[c]</sup> will be holy; he will be called Son of God.** <sup>36</sup> **And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren.** <sup>37</sup> **For nothing will be impossible with God.**" <sup>38</sup> Then Mary said, "**Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.**" Then the angel departed from her.

#### Questions:

In what way do you identify (or not) with each character?

Are there any other characters in the passage that do not have speaking parts?

What questions or observations do you have about this encounter?

What did you hear in this familiar story that was new to you?

How does each character participate in God's love and justice?

#### 4 Readers – 1 paragraph each

**Commentary** | *Dr. Christine J. Hong, Asst. Professor of Educational Ministry at Columbia Theological Seminary, Decatur GA*

The story of the annunciation has always held **dissonance** for me. After all, the angel's exclamation that Mary should not be afraid is terribly **unrealistic**. How could Mary not have felt fear when confronted with a celestial being? How could she avoid feeling afraid after hearing the angel's message about her pregnancy? Later, Mary's son, Jesus, also felt fear at Gethsemane when faced with betrayal and capital punishment. As she watched him suffer and die, the fear and anguish she must have felt!

As a young child, I remember whenever my brother or I were very ill I would hear my mother praying in Korean, "*Jeh-gah dae-shin*" ("**Take me instead**"). My mother bargained with God to ease her children's pain. In my time as a chaplain and pastor to parents with sick children, sometimes with life-threatening illnesses, I have heard many parents whisper the same prayer, "Take me instead."

What if the **dissonance is what we are meant to sit with**? Every day, people are faced with untold grief and pain, and the gospel, or the good news, is not enough to take that pain and fear away. Hope sounds hollow to those who are enduring the wretched parts of life. Rather than gloss over the dissonance, can **we sit with Mary**? Yes, the Magnificat, her song of courage, is a mark of her bravery. Still, we know—because we too are human—that **courage rises despite our fear, not in its absence. Those who have suffered loss know this.**

Perhaps this story and the dissonance of the angel's command are an invitation to **sit with those who are experiencing the dissonance** of a world moving on despite their personal struggle—a world that says, "Cheer up! Move on!" while they are still grieving. Perhaps the dissonance invites us to accompany people moving through their pain, as Mary and Jesus accompanied one another through life events only the two of them understood. Despite the dissonance, they moved through the liminal and tender space of their lives together. In other words, **God moved through the liminal and tender spaces of God's human life with Mary, even as they were both afraid.**

## **DISCUSSION**

**Liminal Space - sitting with dissonance**

**Liminal means - a transitional stage in the beginning of a process; “threshold”, To be on the precipice of something new, but not quite there yet...an uncomfortable, disorienting b place to be.**

**In what way was Mary experiencing a liminal moment?**

**In what way are you experiencing a liminal moment, space, time?**

**UP Church?**

**Our nation, our world?**

**What fears would there be? What dissonance is there?**

**How might God be involved in this?**

## Visio Divina / Journaling

Lectio Divina (Latin for "Divine Reading") is a traditional monastic practice of scriptural reading, meditation, and prayer. Visio Divina ("Divine Seeing") is a similar contemplative process which traditionally was used with art or icons.

In these three cycles of meditation on the art image on the next page, you are invited to be mindful of your breathing and listen for the ways God may be speaking to you through your senses and imagination. The visual prompts for each cycle are offered to assist in going deeper. If this doesn't work for you, just focus on the breath to bring you back to deeper awareness of what you are seeing.

LOOK AT PICTURE FOR 1-2 MINUTES -

Breathe deeply in and out as you take a first look at the image. Simply notice the visual qualities of what you see as a portrayal of the visitation of Mary by an angel messenger: color, line, form, space and texture. How do you feel looking at this image? *[write a few notes if you choose before reading #2]*

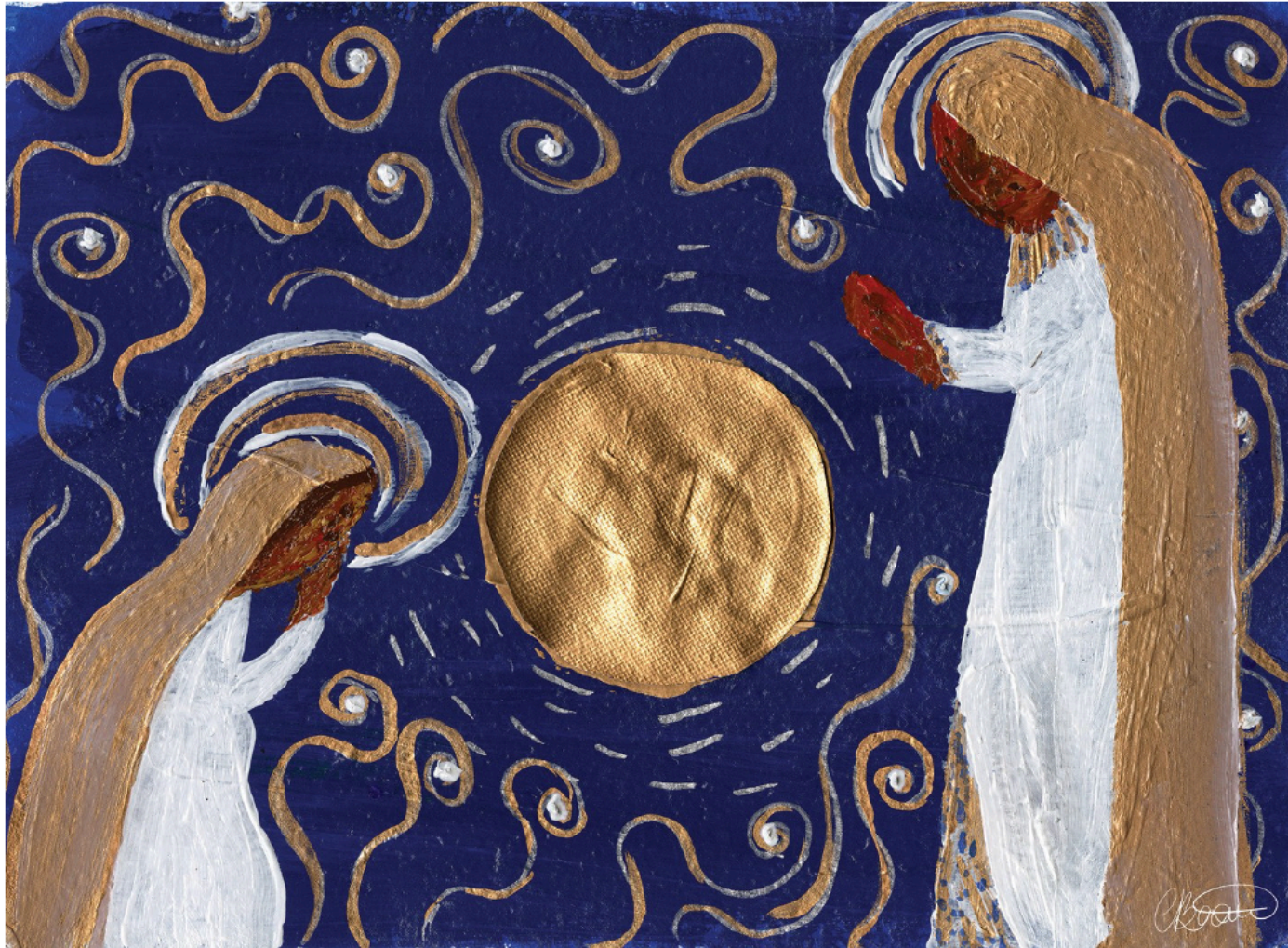
LOOK AT PICTURE AGAIN FOR 1-2 MINUTES

Breathe deeply in and out as you reconnect with the artist's portrayal of the characters in this mysterious yet familiar story? What part of the images are your eyes most drawn to? What did you miss in the first look? *[write a few notes if you choose]*

LOOK AT THE PICTURE AGAIN FOR 1-2 MINUTES

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.



Mary's Golden Annunciation | Carmelle Beaugelin  
*Acrylic, gilding paint, canvas collage on handmade reclaimed paper*

from the artist | **Carmelle Beaugelin**

*Mary's Golden Annunciation* explores the moment of encounter between Mary and the angelic messenger. This unusual encounter may have been startling to young Mary—a soon-to-be teen bride turned, possibly, unwed mother. Yet, with holy bravery in the face of communal isolation, she accepts the call to be a surrogate mother to a son who is to be the savior of her people and the son of God.

There is not much commentary regarding Mary's consent to motherhood. She is often portrayed as a humble, yet passive, "accepter" of a fate predestined for her. But I wonder, what if the angel had appeared to Mary and she had declined? Would her name be erased from historic and religious memory in favor of another willing young virgin?

*Mary's Golden Annunciation* depicts not only a remarkable encounter, but also the moment that divinity in human form was conceived. It is my speculation that the divinity of God entered Mary's body no sooner than Mary's "yes" went out from her mouth. In a time when women had few options other than marriage, Mary's consent to a potentially unwed motherhood is a brave act of subversive agency. In Mary's "yes," uttered in her Magnificat, we see the transformation of a young teenage girl from fearful to determined, from simply accepting to deciding, from passivity to agency, from betrothed to surrogate mother of God—an honor rarer than gold. Perhaps the most remarkable annunciation in this passage is not the messenger's revelation to Mary, but Mary's "yes" to the call.



## **Journaling Prompt**

*When the angel Gabriel comes to Mary, she is perplexed and confused—and no doubt, afraid.*

*And yet, the angel's news is: "Do not be afraid."*

*In the space below, reflect on a time when you were afraid, but said yes to an invitation anyway.*

## **Closing Prayer**

Go around the circle and invite shared prayers for the week ahead.