



How does a weary world rejoice?

An Advent series in
Luke's Gospel

How we developed this theme

For this 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, "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/CX3pqGBO0vO/](https://www.instagram.com/p/CX3pqGBO0vO/)



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.

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