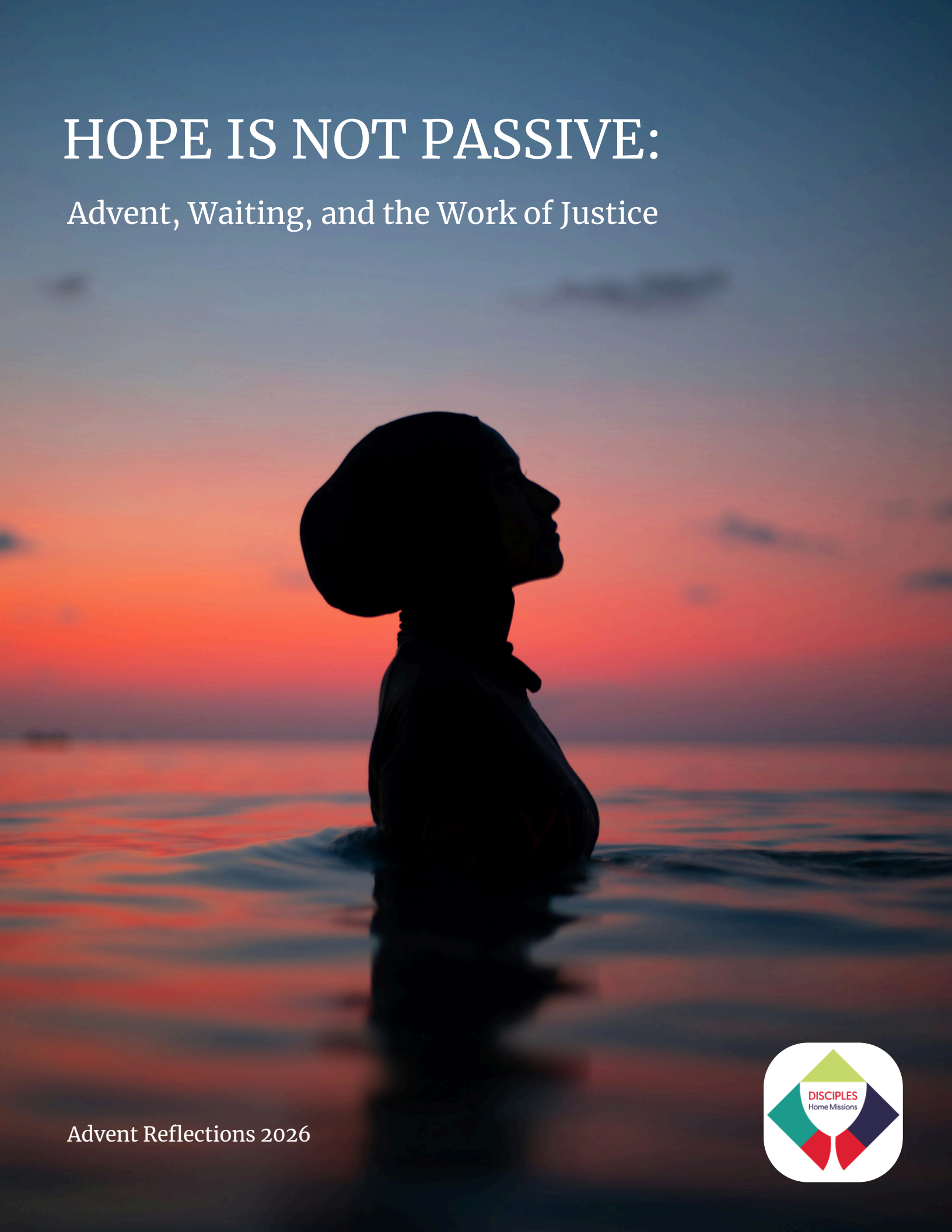


HOPE IS NOT PASSIVE:

Advent, Waiting, and the Work of Justice

Advent Reflections 2026

DISCIPLES
Home Missions

WELCOME

LUKE 1:46–55 NRSVue

And Mary said,
"My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked with favor on the lowly state of his servant.
Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed,
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name;
indeed, his mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones
and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things
and sent the rich away empty.
He has come to the aid of his child Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

Mary's song is not a lullaby. Before Jesus is born, a young woman from an occupied village sings of a God who scatters the proud, brings down the powerful, lifts up the lowly, and fills the hungry with good things. She sings in the past tense about things that have not yet happened, because she trusts that God's promise is as good as done. Her waiting is not idle. It is the kind of hope that gets up and gets to work.

This Advent resource from Disciples Home Missions brings together five writers who take up the Magnificat from very different places, each asking what it means to wait for Christ in a world that still needs bringing down **and** lifting up. Their reflections, questions, and prayers are offered for personal devotion, small groups, and congregational use throughout the season.

Join with the 2026 Advent writers in exploring this part of the journey with Jesus.

Be well,

Rev. Dr. N. Alexander Ruth
Director, Disciples Men
Disciples Home Missions

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CALL TO WORSHIP

Leader: **The season of Advent is here. We wait, but we do not wait in silence.**

Congregants: With Mary, our souls magnify the Lord, and our spirits rejoice in God our Savior.

Leader: **We wait for a God who looks with favor on the lowly and remembers those the world forgets.**

Congregants: Our hope is not passive. It rises to meet the work God is already doing.

Leader: **God brings down the powerful from their thrones and lifts up the lowly.**

Congregants: Make us ready to stand where you stand and to build what you are building.

Leader: **God fills the hungry with good things.**

Congregants: Open our hands, our tables, and our doors.

All: **Advent has come. We will wait with open eyes and working hands. Come, Lord Jesus; your justice is welcome here!**

N. Alexander Ruth

DAILY MEDITATIONS



HOLY ONE,
MY HOPE IS
NOT PASSIVE.

HOLY ONE,
MY HOPE MAKES ROOM
FOR YOUR JUSTICE.

YOUNGJAE LEE

The Song of Mary

Time goes by so quickly. It is already the winter of 2026. Can you believe we will soon be celebrating 2027? As the years pass, some things remain the same, while others change so quickly that it can feel as though there is no place for us in this world anymore. We often hear that everything has advanced further than ever before. But has all this progress made us happy? Is this world enough for us?

In this season of Advent, a season of uncertainty, wondering, and waiting, as we wait for the coming of our Lord, who came as such a vulnerable little child into this cold world, I would like to turn our attention to a woman who lived in a very different time, yet who courageously and boldly said yes to God and brought God's promise into this world.

Mary.

Mary was a young woman from Nazareth, a small town in Galilee, engaged to Joseph, a craftsman in an ordinary town. She was headed for a very ordinary life. Then one day God sent an angel with a message: "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you" (Luke 1:28). Through her yes, a courageous yes that overcame the fear of breaking social norms, God's reconciliation of heaven and earth, body and spirit, and God's promise of salvation began.

Mary's response, the Song of Mary, often called the Magnificat, appears in Luke 1. Shall we read part of it together? I hope you will read it slowly, with a deep breath.

"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowly state of his servant. … He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty." (Luke 1:46–48, 51–53)

How do you feel after this reading? Is any part of it speaking to you? This is what Mary confessed about God, what Mary felt, and what Mary witnessed. God chose a young woman in Galilee as a partner in salvation and began that work with her answer. Mary may not have seen the whole story at the beginning. She might not yet have known everything she and her son would face, or the suffering and death that would come before the resurrection.

YOUNGJAE LEE

But Mary sensed that God would bring peace to a world full of hunger, poverty, uncertainty, war, and despair. Mary believed that God brings down the powerful from their thrones and lifts up the lowly. God came into Mary's very personal life, and this journey began with her yes.

This is the God who did not remain silent at the cries of children, who heard the thirst and fear of Moses' people in the wilderness; the God proclaimed by the prophets, who has worked and is still working through history, taking the side of the poor and hungry. This God invited Mary to be the very first partner in Jesus' whole story. Mary felt it, and Mary sang her vision of God. That song is the Magnificat.

The story of Jesus began with Mary's willingness to receive the life of God and bear witness to it, even when doing so brought risk, even the risk of death. The story starts with Mary's yes; Jesus Christ is born; and we continue to wait for the day when God's kingdom comes in its fullness and the reconciliation of this land and all nations is finally complete.

Mary's song does not allow us to remain indifferent to the world around us. Instead, it invites us to trust that God is still at work, even when we cannot see the whole picture. It also asks us to make room for God's work through our own lives: through our courage, our care for one another, and our willingness to say yes.

Reflection Questions

- *What kind of world are we waiting for?*
- *What kind of response is God asking of us while we wait?*
- *What are we praying for, and where is our heart headed?*

Let Us Pray...

Holy God, may we, like Mary, find the courage to receive your life, even in a world that changes faster than we can follow. May we continue to wait in hope for the coming of our Lord, who will lead us toward the fullness of your kingdom. Help us to work for that kingdom, where every person and every nation is welcomed, and where those who have been forgotten and marginalized are seen, heard, and loved. Amen.



YoungJae Lee (they/she) is a third-year M.Div. student at Montreal Diocesan Theological College and served as a Peace Intern in summer 2026. After serving with St. Martha's Chapel in Montréal and the Student Christian Movement, they have moved to Edmonton to explore a new chapter in life, faith, and ministry. They are passionate about creating welcoming, inclusive spaces where everyone can feel at home. In their free time, you can find them enjoying a cup of tea, wandering in nature to notice plants and birds, or watching church videos.

ELI ROLÓN JEONG

Between Promise and Reality

Sparks of meaning and purpose are quickly extinguished in a world that is cold, silent, and indifferent. The possibility of a flourishing life foregrounded against a backdrop of decay is merely… absurd. Hope for what is to come, for new possibilities, is not necessarily diminished. Yet when life recounts a story of repeated adversity, the opportunity for disruption might lead one to ask only, "How can this be?"

Mary's praise echoes her progression from acceptance to confident affirmation. Yet her praise remains nested within the tension between promise and reality—a tension that still feels absurd. That time and space oscillating from promise to reality remains not fully known. Doubt and assurance may sway in any direction. Reorientation is inevitable.

Stripped of its context, Mary's Magnificat may be encountered as a generous and worshipful way to praise God for all that God has done. Mary asserts her role in God's plans even if her words here do not directly point to the birth of a messiah. As we read these passages in the context of the gospel, we encounter a story of hope—with a progression that many of us have already known in some capacity. This story of hope is set against a rather dismal background that is impossible to ignore. Roman occupation and rule challenged Jewish culture and identity, while mounting economic disparity and marginalization created a volatile landscape. We encounter a hopeful promise foregrounded against a deteriorating background.

Mary's song is also nested within the immediate story of her and Elizabeth's pregnancies. Mary, an unmarried young woman, and Elizabeth, a woman of advanced age, are in a rather absurd situation where their expected children are anything but expected. Mary knows and accepts what God has in store for her and for her people. But knowing a promise does not mean that its fulfillment is yet known. And in this middle ground, Mary raises her voice to praise her God who dismantles and reorients all expectations, leading from what is to what is to come. Her encounter with the absurd does not extinguish her spark but gives it fuel, because she knows and embraces the promises that God has made. Mary's dive into the tension between promise and reality is not a moment of despair but an act of radical faith—of trusting. Mary knows that God works through the impossible to unravel a new reality.

The ground bounded by promise on one end does not merely lead past another newly labeled boundary as reality. It is, however, a fertile ground in which hope can—and must—be cultivated. Nurturing this ground is nonsensical. It is absurd. It demands reorientation. Hope is an act of defying what is known to make sense, especially when what makes sense serves only to perpetuate a reality that must be abandoned. Hope is a reorientation from impossibility into new reality.

ELI ROLÓN JEONG

A reoriented reality where those who have not filled their stomachs are satiated and those who have been filled beyond their complacency are now realizing that hoarding is insatiable.

A reoriented reality where those in high places must look up to see those now seated above their once-unreachable thrones.

A reoriented reality where the young and the old are not at the margins but rather centered in God's plans.

Mary knew. But does everyone else know?

Reflection Questions

- *Where in your life do you currently find yourself stuck between a promise you believe and a reality that feels silent or contradictory? How are you navigating that space?*
- *Mary's hope was not passive optimism, but an act of radical trust that defied her surrounding circumstances. What would it look like for you to practice hope as an active, defiant choice this week?*
- *The Magnificat envisions a world where the margins are centered and power is upended. Whose voices or struggles in your immediate community need to be brought from the margins into the center?*

Let Us Pray...

God of promises and new realities, loosen despair's grip as we step into unknown fields. May we find hope when nothing makes sense. We praise you for the reoriented world in which all flourish as you intend. Amen.



Eli Rolón Jeong (he/him/his) serves as Associate Regional Minister for the future Living Waters Region. Throughout his career, he has embraced the roles of teacher, researcher, mentor, facilitator, preacher, and more. Eli can often be found enjoying continental philosophy and rich theological conversation, finding joy in analog rituals like handwriting with fountain pens and listening to music on vinyl, and catching up on the latest Ninja Turtles comics.

VISUAL MEDITATION





What comes to mind when gazing at these images?
Where do you see hope at work in them?

CHRIS SNOW

Room for the Unexpected

Whether we like to admit it or not, even in this season of waiting, we strive to put on an air of perfection. With all of the decorations we put in our homes and churches, we take a step back to make sure it all looks perfect. Even when we enjoy a snowy landscape in some of our locales, we prefer the snow undisturbed rather than marred by the debris of snowplows. More than that, in all that we do we lean closer into an idealized perfection and claim this is what God wants from us.

As I hear Mary's words declaring God's favor for the lowly, the least of these, the marginalized, the oppressed, I can't help but be mindful of all the ways we seek to hide our weaknesses as individuals and as communities of faith—where we hide that which is imperfect and "distracting." As we gather for Christmas parties, we hide away the imperfections of our homes, those things that are authentically us but don't fit the vibe we are going for. When we gather for worship, we, knowingly or not, place pressure upon our pastors to ensure perfection in our worship services. We expect smooth transitions, with everything in its place and nothing disrupted. Even when we engage in mission work, we grumble when things don't go as planned. Yet we are a people invited to hear Mary's song of praise, which declares that the Holy lifts up the imperfect, that God brings down the powerful from their thrones. This is the image of a God who humbles those who become too full of themselves, and instead lifts up the meek and selfless.

As someone who lives with my own disabilities and cares for my daughter, who has a complex medical history, I read Mary's words as a reminder not to be overly focused on perfection and what is considered "normal"; not to be focused on removing every single "distraction" or unexpected happening, but instead to allow the Spirit to move and bring forth hope for what this world can be, with everyone being their authentic selves.

I find a great deal of hope when I see the full expression of God's love for all of God's children. This hope is realized when the barriers of perfection are stripped away to declare instead that your child, who cannot sit still, is welcome to be themselves in this space. This hope is realized when communities of faith begin changing the world around them to declare that if everyone is welcome, then that includes all those unexpected happenings that reflect the full nature of the Holy Spirit.

CHRIS SNOW

Each year we find time to declare the hope that comes from the birth of our Savior: a hope that lifts up the lowly, the downtrodden, the marginalized, and the silenced. But we cannot experience the full realization of our hopes without our own participation. Jesus has shown us how we are to live in community: a community that seeks out the lost and forgotten, a community that makes space for those who have been pushed away for too long. If we hope for the world that the scriptures describe, we cannot be passive. We must actively pursue God's justice, even when that means discarding the pursuit of perfection to declare instead that all are welcome to be their authentic selves.

Reflection Questions

- *What authentic parts of yourself do you hide away because they are not perfect?*
- *Have there been times when the quest for perfection got in the way of declaring God's love?*
- *What actions can you take, individually or as a community, to pursue the world we hope for in this season?*

Let Us Pray...

God our creator, the one who looks upon their creation and calls it good; may we find time in this season of waiting to celebrate the imperfections in our lives. Those things the world deems not good enough, yet you, Holy One, routinely lift them up above the proud and the haughty. May we not be swayed by social media influencers, but rather by Mary's song of praise, which celebrates the ways you do amazing things in the most unexpected ways. As we prepare once again for your son's birth in this season, may you call us into attitudes of authenticity over and above perfection. May you continue to call and lead us into works of justice that reveal your love and promise to all the world, even if that means calling out those committing injustice in your name and lifting up the marginalized and systematically ostracized in our communities. As we prepare to sing "Joy to the World!" may we do so honoring all people for whom Christ's birth declares a future filled with joy. In your Holy name we pray. Amen.



Rev. Chris Snow is pastor of North Hill Christian Church in Spokane, Washington. He received his BA from Culver-Stockton College and his MDiv from Eden Theological Seminary. Chris has served in congregational ministry for 16 years and is actively seeking and sharing a theological framework around disability and accessibility in the church.

LAURIE POUND FEILLE

Singing Resistance

Mary, sweet Mary, sings a song praising God. Mary who is obedient and docile. At least, that is the image many have of Mary. As a woman who could be stoned to death or dismissed for being pregnant, because there is a chance it isn't Joseph's baby, is she really singing sweetly? Rev. Grace Imathiu reads this story and asks who decided and taught us that Mary should be dismissed or stoned to death or disowned by her family. Who taught us, and why, that people like Mary should not be heard? Only seen quietly wearing a blue scarf over her head or whatever it is, smiling sweetly. Mary was not smiling. (And I'll add, the Scriptures say nothing about Mary smiling sweetly.) So we have tamed Mary… and then we dismiss Mary as a prophet… but have you really listened to what she is singing?[1]

Have we really listened? Once Mary is through singing of her thankfulness to God, Mary turns to what is going to happen once her child is born: God will deal with the proud. God will bring down those who abuse power and lift up those who are oppressed. The hungry are now full and those who hoarded the food have been sent away. God has not forgotten God's people, according to the promises made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever. This is a woman who is singing resistance to the way the world is and proclaiming justice for the most vulnerable and herself.

To think that Mary being pregnant is the only scandalous part of the story overlooks how scandalous the words are that she is singing. Resistance to the powers that be is no small matter. During Metro Surge in Minneapolis at the beginning of this year, many of our neighbors were abducted from their homes, work, schools, and off the streets. At one point we had 3,000 ICE agents on the streets of Minneapolis. Neighbors began to stand up for and protect each other. Religious and community organizations, along with unions, began to work together to protect against the brutality that was happening.

In the midst of the chaos, horror, and disbelief of what was happening, we began to hear singing in neighborhoods, gatherings, protests, and rallies. The emergence of the Singing Resistance choir in one of the most horrifying situations reminded me of Mary singing resistance in a world also filled with chaos. The Singing Resistance singers brought hope and reminded us that hope is not passive. They proclaimed a better world through their music, and they continue to sing today. Singing Resistance choirs are now in cities across the country. They are grounded in love, nonviolence, and solidarity. Like Mary, the Singing Resistance choirs sing of love, hope, peace, and joy:

[1] Grace Imathiu and Marcia McFee, "Love: A Room with a View," in The Inn: Housing the Holy (Worship Design Studio).

LAURIE POUND FEILLE

“Stronger Than Fear” by Sarina Partridge

Our love (hope/peace/joy) is stronger than the fear
We see the path before us
And we are not afraid
We are a mighty chorus
And we are not afraid

Singing is a form of powerful resistance to the powers that be and to the myriad injustices in our world, our country, and our communities today. As followers of Jesus, we are called to join in working for justice, and along with Mary, we are called to lift our voices and sing our resistance.

Reflection Questions

- *Where in our communities do we see a place to stand and sing resistance?*
- *What consequences do we see in singing resistance?*
- *What will it take for us to join Mary and today’s Singing Resistance choirs in singing our resistance to injustice?*

Let Us Pray...

God of Us All,
Like Mary, we proclaim your love and the great deeds you have done. We join Mary in singing of what a just world looks like. During this Advent season, we are anticipating that your love, hope, joy, and peace will once again come through the birth of the Christ child. This year, though, we know that we are not passive participants when it comes to your justice filling this world. Give us the courage, your courage, to stand, sing, and work for justice for all. Amen.



Rev. Dr. Laurie Pound Feille served churches in Texas and retired from parish ministry in May 2025 after more than 12 years at First Christian Church, Minneapolis. She is the founder and co-facilitator of Disciples Public Presence and co-facilitator of Disciples Justice Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). She also serves on the Disciples Center for Indigenous Ministries Advisory Board and the Anti-Racism/Pro-Reconciling (AR/PR) team of the Upper Midwest Region.

JIA STARR BROWN

Mary Didn't Just Believe. She Moved.

I wonder what would happen if we stopped treating Mary's Magnificat like a beautiful Christmas song and started hearing it for what it really is. A declaration of holy disruption.

Because Mary isn't singing about a world where everybody gets along, the powerful remain comfortable, and the oppressed learn to be patient. Nope. Mary announces a world turned upside down. God scatters the proud. Brings down the powerful. Lifts up the lowly. Fills the hungry. Sends the rich away empty. Whew. Not exactly the message we put on our Christmas cards, is it?

Before Mary ever held Jesus in her arms, she was proclaiming the kind of world he would call us to help build. And Mary wasn't speaking from privilege. She was a young Jewish woman living under Roman occupation, navigating a society that afforded her little power. No wealth. No political influence. No institutional authority. But she had a voice. And she used it.

Mary believed God's promises were bigger than her circumstances. And that belief moved her. Earlier in Luke's account, after receiving the angel's announcement, Mary goes in haste to Elizabeth. In haste. I love those words. Mary doesn't have all the answers or guarantees. But she moves.

And Elizabeth recognizes something extraordinary: "Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord" (Luke 1:45). Blessed is she who believed. Not because she had nothing to fear, but because her belief was alive enough to move her.

And I wonder whether that's where the church needs to spend more time this Advent. Because we've become exceptionally good at proclaiming hope while remaining remarkably comfortable with the conditions that make hope necessary.

We pray for hungry people while debating whether they deserve assistance. We preach welcome while immigrant families fear separation. We proclaim that every person is wonderfully made while transgender young people navigate laws restricting their care. We call everyone God's beloved children, then participate in systems that treat some as disposable. And somewhere in all that contradiction, we light another Advent candle.

Don't misunderstand me. I believe in prayer, worship, and sacred waiting. But we've confused waiting on God with waiting for someone else to do the work God has already placed before us. Biblical hope isn't simply believing things will improve. It's participating in God's vision of justice before we see the outcome. And that kind of hope costs something. Especially for those of us with access, influence, resources, and seats at decision-making tables.

Notice what Mary doesn't say. She doesn't say God will teach the hungry patience, or make the powerful more compassionate while protecting their thrones. Mary proclaims a God who disrupts arrangements that elevate some at the expense of others. That's harder for the church to embrace. Because sometimes we're the ones comfortably sitting on those thrones.

We want justice without disruption. Reconciliation without accountability. Transformation without surrender. We want God—and church—without the risk. And Mary announces that God's justice isn't waiting for our permission.

JIA STARR BROWN

I think about the names our world assigns people. Illegal. Unworthy. Dangerous. Undeserving. Broken. Other. Sometimes the church joins in, calling people by their circumstances and handcuffing them to their yesterdays. But Mary reminds us that God sees differently. The hungry aren't forgotten. The lowly aren't disposable. The powerful aren't beyond accountability. God's vision challenges not only how we see ourselves, but how we treat others and share power.

Perhaps Advent's question isn't simply whether we believe God's promises. It's whether anybody can tell that we do. Can they tell by how we vote, spend, lead, challenge injustice, and whose dignity we're willing to defend?

Mary proclaimed justice while empire still ruled, the hungry remained hungry, and the lowly remained lowly. She didn't wait for the world to change. She became part of God's work to change it.

That's Advent hope. Not passive optimism. Not spiritualized patience. Not pretending everything is okay while refusing to confront what isn't. Hope is believing another world is possible—and living as though we're responsible for helping bring it into being.

Mary believed.
Mary moved.
And now, church, it's our turn.

Reflection Questions

- *Where have I confused waiting on God with avoiding what God is calling me to do?*
- *Whose lives would change if Mary's Magnificat became reality in my community—and what power or privilege might I need to surrender?*
- *What would someone experiencing injustice learn about my hope by watching how I live?*

Let Us Pray...

God of Mary, God of the lowly, God of holy disruption, forgive us for choosing comfort over justice and calling our hesitation patience. Give us Mary's courage to believe, her boldness to speak, and her willingness to move. May our hope become action, our worship become justice, and our love become something the world can actually feel. Keep us moving until every soul knows their God-given worth. Amen.



Rev. Dr. Jia Starr Brown is the Founding Pastor of The Stable, an online anti-racism study church. An educator, author, and justice advocate with more than three decades of experience, she co-founded Reaching Up Ministries to create hope, help, and opportunities for youth and families in the Twin Cities. She is a mother of five and "GoGo" to two grandchildren.

LISTENING MEDITATION



CANTICLE OF THE TURNING

Rory Cooney

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F9QeTmRCpW4

CLOSING MANTRA AND UNENDING PRAYER

Holy One, I will wait with open eyes.
Holy One, I will hope with working hands.
Holy One, your justice is welcome here.

THANK YOU

For questions or requests about Disciples Home Missions resources, please contact:

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With gratitude to Rev. Dr. Monique Crain Spells, whose faithful leadership shapes this annual Advent series, and with prayers for rest and renewal during her sabbatical.

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