

Advent

# musings

of Millbrook Baptist Church

DEC 2024



ISSUE No. 03

**PREPARING FOR  
THE STORY**

**SHARING  
THE STORY**

**EXPERIENCING  
THE STORY**

## musings

noun [plural]

UK /ˈmjuː.zɪŋz/ US /ˈmjuː.zɪŋz/

your thoughts or comments on something you have been thinking about carefully and for a long time:

The Season of Advent is here! For many of us, it's also one of the most hectic times of the year. We may need more time, more space, more freedom to pursue God's presence, to sense Emmanuel - God with us!

We hope that *Musings* will meet you in those in-between spaces, perhaps the ones that are ordinary and even unexpected. At morning coffee. In your lounging chair. In pants with an elastic waistband. In the spaces where you are you. And we hope that *Musings* will be an invitation into the rich tapestry of Millbrook. And we hope that *Musings* will reveal a little something of the goodness of God in the land of the living.

Hope, peace, joy, and love are coming into the world. May our minds be opened and our lives be freed to experience their arrival.

Expectantly!



RESIDENT MUSES

# Table of Contents

04	<b>INTRODUCTION TO ADVENT</b> Bob Stillerman
06	<b>ADVENT WORSHIP</b> Dates and Events
08	<b>HOPE: CALENDAR &amp; REFLECTION</b> Jessica McDougald
12	<b>PEACE: CALENDAR &amp; REFLECTION</b> Jessica McDougald
16	<b>JOY: CALENDAR &amp; REFLECTION</b> Jessica McDougald
20	<b>LOVE: CALENDAR &amp; REFLECTION</b> Jessica McDougald
24	<b>ADVENT THOUGHTS</b> Hunter Reese



# INTRODUCTION TO ADVENT AT MILLBROOK, 2024

*Bob Stillerman*

As November arrived, our children gathered on the labyrinth for Sunday School on All Saints morning. The warm sun betrayed the insistence of autumn, and on this day, leaves shone a golden-orangish hue. Determined little sets of hands wrote on colorful strips of fabric the names of the very saints that they'd been named for. And on tippy-toes, they reached high, clothes-pinning them to a line strung between the maples. A gentle breeze animated the flapping rectangles, a reminder of a spirit that transcends time. But also, a scene of hope and possibility: how might our little ones live into their own names, and how might God's spirit be revealed in their goodness?

As December arrives, the leaves have fallen, and the fabric has faded. But our hope is just beginning. Just as we faith in the promise and possibilities of our children, we faith, too, in the promise and possibilities of God's presence in the year ahead. God is doing new things, big things, loving things, all the God stuff!!! Spring is coming!!! But we musn't wait passively. We will not wait passively. We will wait with expectancy. We will prepare our hearts and minds to receive the Chirstchild. And upon realizing what we've waited for, we'll set about to parent, nurture, and support a fragile-but-determined hope.



In this volatile season, you might be asking, just like me, "What do we do with all this expectancy and anticipation? How might we channel it in a constructive manner?"

I can't stop thinking about All Saints morning. My Lucy Marguerite, named for her grandmother and great grandmother, and my Mary Allen, named for her grandmother, grandfather, and great grandmother, wrote down and spoke aloud pieces of their own names when they honored the names of their saints. And for the first time they processed that their names are attached to the legacies of those who've gone before them. In a way I cannot explain, they somehow understood that they are part of something much, much bigger than themselves.

Mary named her son Jesus, a derivative of Joshua. And honestly, I think that's about as Adventy a choice as one could make! Because Joshua represents the next generation. He leads a people transitioning from a wilderness adolescence into a new land with new possibilities. His experience, his leadership, his faith is no less clunky, no less clumsy, no less beautiful, no less perfectly-imperfect than those who precede and follow him. But his life, his choices, his very existence, express, and profoundly, the acceptance and movement of God in the world. Joshua's life is a resounding **YES** to God's possibilities.

Joshua moves his people into a kind of political freedom, but also, into a new identity, a more formal expression of Israel, a more formal expression of covenant. Jesus will free us from a different kind of captivity. Jesus will open our hearts and minds to express a God beyond systems, beyond limited imagination, a God present in the messiness of life, right alongside us, weeping and laughing and faithing through it all.

It occurs to me that we ought not just speak the name Emmanuel - God with us - in the coming season. But we ought to speak our own names as well. O come, O come Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel. Let us experience the possibilities of God, right here and right now. And let us also know the realized joy of all those saints, living and old, acting into the very purpose Christ came to see us manifest in our own living.

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel, and us Millbrookers, too!



***And guess what?!? There's good news. We can start this process in our Advent worship. You will notice five distinct movements as we make our way from Advent to Christmas.***

# ADVENT WORSHIP

## FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT: HOPE SUNDAY

Sunday, 12/1

### **Theme:**

We will **PREPARE** to tell the Story. That means greening the sanctuary. That means reminding ourselves of the prophecies. That means claiming the ancient traditions in modern ways. As we prepare, we'll remind ourselves of why we prepare.

### ***Hanging of the Greens Worship Service, Sunday 12/1 @ 11:00 am***

Join us as we green the sanctuary, and recall the legends of the candle, the evergreens, the poinsettia, the Chrismon tree, and even the candy cane!

## SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT: PEACE SUNDAY

Sunday, 12/8

### **Theme:**

We will **PROCLAIM** the Story. We'll never learn the story if we fail to tell it. Again and again. And what better way to tell the story than to share it in song! Join us for our Christmas Cantata, as the Chancel Choir performs *This is Christmas* by Mary McDonald.

### ***Christmas Cantata, 11:00 am***

Be wowed, as the Millbrook Chancel Choir shares the Christmas story in song.

**Community Potluck**, Immediately following Worship in the Fellowship Hall

Bring your favorite main dish, side dish, or dessert, and enjoy the fullness of fellowship.

## THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT: JOY SUNDAY

Sunday, 12/15

### **Theme:**

We will **HOST** the Story. Stories can't take root without space to grow, to thrive, and to find community. It's fitting then, that the third Sunday of Advent includes the Institution of Communion. Let's listen for the story, and find God and one another at a table.

***Morning Worship, Including Communion, 11:00 am***

All are welcome at Christ's Table

***Evensong on the Millbrook Labyrinth, 5:00 pm***

Finish your Sunday at sunset as we sing, pray, and find joy on the Millbrook Labyrinth

**FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT: LOVE SUNDAY**

**Sunday, 12/22**

***Theme:***

We will **SHARE** the story. Stories are only transcendent if people can see themselves in the narrative, identify with the characters. Join us for a participatory pageant as children of all ages help us tell the story. And afterwards, we'll sing all our favorite Christmas carols.

***The Second Craziest Christmas Pageant Ever, 10:00 am***

***(Note: NO SUNDAY SCHOOL)***

We're doing it again! Children of all ages will lead us in the telling of Luke's and Matthew's Christmas stories. Whistling Josephs, laughing donkeys, skipping shepherds, and much, much more. Wear your most festive attire. Ugly Christmas sweaters are entirely appropriate. At the conclusion of the pageant, we'll sing our favorite Christmas Carols.

***Christmas Cozies, Fellowship Hall, Immediately following worship***

Come across the hallway and have a cup of cocoa, coffee, or cheer. Greet friends new and old. Have all the Christmas feels!

**CHRISTMAS EVE**

**Tuesday 12/24**

***Theme:***

We will **EXPERIENCE** the story. Anticipation and expectancy transform into realization. Join us by candlelight on Christmas Eve, and let the star lead you to your own Bethlehem in a village full of Millbrookers.

***Christmas Eve Reception, Fellowship Hall, 4:00 pm***

Come a little early, enjoy light refreshments and fellowship, snap a family picture in front of the tree. Ease into the Christmas Spirit.

***Candlelight Christmas Eve Service, 5:00 pm***

Hear the ancient stories. Sing the familiar songs. Welcome the Christchild. This will be a family-friendly service that we expect to last less than 45 minutes.

# *hope*

*verb*

*to want something to happen or to be true, and usually have a good reason to think that it might:*





1

*The soul should always stand ajar, ready to welcome the ecstatic experience.*

**Emily Dickinson**

2

*Try to keep your soul always in peace and quiet, always ready for whatever our Lord may wish to work in you. It is certainly a higher virtue of the soul, and a greater grace, to be able to enjoy the Lord in different times and different places than in only one.*

**Saint Ignatius**

3

*Read my letter to the old folks, and give my love to them, and tell my brothers to be always watching unto prayer, and when the good old ship of Zion comes along, to be ready to step aboard.*

**Harriet Tubman**

4

*We have to continue to learn. We have to be open. And we have to be ready to release our knowledge in order to come to a higher understanding of reality.*

**Thich Nhat Hanh**

5

*Love fills and empties simultaneously. It makes us reach out to God, ready to be pruned, recklessly desiring whatever the cost. It soothes the aching heart and then makes it thirst for more.*

**Mother Angelica**

6

*When you wash your hands, when you make a cup of coffee, when you're waiting for the elevator - instead of indulging in thinking, these are all opportunities for being there as a still, alert presence.*

**Eckhart Tolle**

7

*We must learn to reawaken and keep ourselves awake, not by mechanical aid, but by an infinite expectation of the dawn.*

**Henry David Thoreau**

# HOPE

*Jessica McDougald*

It is the first Sunday of Advent, a day many traditions light their candle of Hope.

First, some context. You know I love context. There is so little we can understand without it.

Imagine you are an ancient Israelite. You are a part of a holy community – you are God’s chosen ones, a people set apart. Yet, for centuries you have been conquered, exiled, and scattered. Though your people have now returned home, things are far from what they were during the highest points of your history. There’s an oppressive ruler, extreme poverty, unfair taxation and corrupt politicians. You are strangers in your own land.

Yet, you hold on to the promise, given by the God of your fathers – the good news that, someday, there’s going to be a King, from the lineage of the great King David, who will come and set things right – once and for all. Long before this, from the prophet Isaiah, came:

***For a child has been born for us,  
a son given to us;  
authority rests upon his shoulders;  
and he is named  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.  
His authority shall grow continually,  
and there shall be endless peace  
for the throne of David and his kingdom.  
He will establish and uphold it  
with justice and with righteousness  
from this time onward and forevermore.***

Advent begins with hope. There's something coming. God is about to do something incomprehensible and brand new, once and for all. The weary world rejoices, for yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.

The spirit of Advent is one of expectation and longing. We use these four weeks before Christmas to prepare our homes and our hearts for the coming of Christ. We are a weary world, and we are absolutely yearning for the fulfillment of God's promise.

I had the privilege of growing up with a minister who once told us, before a weekend retreat, to set our expectations before God and watch them be exceeded.

To the Israelites, this promise from God wasn't just something they fell back on when times were tough and kinda just hoped God hadn't forgotten – no, to them, it was an expectation. They expected God to be faithful.

What they expected, however, was a mighty earthly King who would take the throne for the Israelites once more, restoring the Israelite Kingdom to what it had once been. To them, that's what the Messiah would be.

Talk about God exceeding human expectation.

So, on this the first day of Advent, let us set our expectations on the altar before our Father, whose grand plan to reconcile this whole weary world to Him began with a young Mom and her newborn baby, and watch those expectations be exceeded.

***The people who walked in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—  
on them light has shined...***

# *peace*

*noun*

*freedom from war and violence, especially when people live and work together happily without disagreements:*



8

*If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other.*

**Mother Teresa**

9

*I do not want the peace which passeth understanding, I want the understanding which bringeth peace.*

**Helen Keller**

10

*I refuse to accept the view that mankind is so tragically bound to the starless midnight of racism and war that the bright daybreak of peace and brotherhood can never become a reality... I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word.*

**Martin Luther King, Jr.**

11

*We are not at peace with others because we are not at peace with ourselves, and we are not at peace with ourselves because we are not at peace with God.*

**Thomas Merton**

12

*Dear God, please send to me the spirit of Your peace. Then send, dear Lord, the spirit of peace from me to all the world. Amen.*

**Marianne Williamson**

13

*I come into the peace of wild things who do not tax their lives with forethought of grief... For a time I rest in the grace of the world, and I am free.*

**Wendell Berry**

14

*Compassion is sometimes the fatal capacity for feeling what it is like to live inside somebody else's skin. It is the knowledge that there can never really be any peace and joy for me until there is peace and joy finally for you too.*

**Frederick Buechner**

# PEACE

*Jessica McDougald*

When it comes to Advent's promises of Hope, Peace, Joy and Love, Peace is the week that always befuddles me. Perhaps because it is the one out of the four that seems most elusive both in my own life and in the world around me.

My house has not been quiet or peaceful since the year 2015 and I have the sneaking suspicion that it will never be able to rightfully be described as such. Stores are not peaceful – they are crowded with grumpy people (with whom I generally fit right in). Vacations are not peaceful, afternoons at the park are not peaceful, family outings in general are not peaceful when you're a Mom – you're busy remembering to pack an extra water bottle and trying to diffuse meltdowns before they become fully atomic. At home there's always a chore to be done, homework to finish, an email to send. And let's not even begin to beat the dead horse that is the fact that this year has not been a peaceful year for our country, or for the world.

What can be said of the fear and loss, disease and division we've known this year that hasn't already been said a billion times at this point? The concept of peace on earth is foreign to us – there's just no pretending otherwise.

At the start of this year, I bought a smart watch because I am a New Year's person with big New Year's hopes and dreams, and I thought that owning a smart watch would help me be a healthier person in this new year. Spoiler alert: it didn't. But the watch does have a feature that I have found really useful – it has a button I can press that starts a breathing exercise. When I am overwhelmed, or feeling particularly not-peaceful, I close myself up in a room by myself for a moment and start the breathing exercise. My watch vibrates to tell me when it's time for a big inhale, and when it's time for a big exhale. Just for a moment I tune out the noise and busyness around me, and only pay attention to my breath.

Did you know that in Hebrew, the word for "breath," ruach, is the same as the word for "spirit?" When the Psalmist writes "where can I go from your spirit?" he's asking where he can go that the very breath of God does not already permeate. The Psalmist knew he was surrounded by this breath, this Spirit of God; knew that he could not take a breath of his own without inhaling the Divine presence.

Sometimes, when I'm locked in a closet breathing in time with my watch, I tune into being surrounded by the breath of God and I feel as though that's the closest to peace I'll ever be in this world.

You know that Christmas hymn Silent Night? The writer of that hymn must not have ever known a baby, nor seen a stable, nor heard any stories about the act of childbirth in his or her life. I can promise you all that there was nothing calm or silent about the night that Jesus was born. There is no need to try to clean up our understanding of what happened at the manger that night – no need to make it less messy or less human than it was.

But despite the lack of stillness and quiet that night, I am sure Mary was aware of the Spirit of God surrounding her, filling her lungs as she delivered Jesus, giving her the strength she needed to birth the Savior of the whole world. I am sure afterwards, Mary watched the Spirit of God as it rose and fell, rose and fell, within the tiny chest of her new baby.

I am sure Mary understood that we serve a God who is just as present and active in moments of noise and clamor as in moments of quiet and calm, and that peace exists as a gift – no stillness required.

Thanks be to God.



*joy*  
*noun*  
*great happiness:*





**15** *Joy is prayer; joy is strength: joy is love; joy is a net of love by which you can catch souls.*

**Mother Teresa**

**16** *The sun does not shine for a few trees and flowers, but for the wide world's joy.*

**Henry Ward Beecher**

**17** *With an eye made quiet by the power of harmony, and the deep power of joy, we see into the life of things.*

**William Wordsworth**

**18** *My heart is singing for joy this morning! A miracle has happened! The light of understanding has shone upon my little pupil's mind, and behold, all things are changed!*

**Anne Sullivan**

**19** *Wait the end with joy. It is the end which characterizes everything and which tests a man's expectations.*

**Thomas Becket**

**20** *I certainly wasn't happy. Happiness has to do with reason, and only reason earns it. What I was given was the thing you can't earn, and can't keep, and often don't even recognize at the time; I mean joy.*

**Ursula K. Le Guin**

**21** *It was morning; through the high window I saw the pure, bright blue of the sky as it hovered cheerfully over the long roofs of the neighboring houses. It too seemed full of joy, as if it had special plans, and had put on its finest clothes for the occasion.*

**Hermann Hesse**

# JOY

## *Jessica McDougald*

Today is the third Sunday of Advent – the Sunday we light our pink candle: the candle of joy!

There are so many verses and passages we could look at as we sit with our candle of joy, but I want to talk about one of my favorite parts of the Christmas story that we usually skip right on over.

In Luke 1, we read that an angel has appeared to Mary and told her that she was going to have a baby who would be the King and that there would be no end to his reign. The angel told her she was favored by God, and that nothing was impossible. The angel also let her know her cousin (who was well-past childbearing age) was also pregnant.

We've heard this before. But really think about it. When I found out I was pregnant with Camille, I was afraid that everyone would be mad – I cried when I told my mom because I was afraid of what her reaction would be! My Mom! The coolest, best person in the whole world!

I was not so much joyful as I was absolutely paralyzed with terror.

Think about the context here. Mary was unmarried. Scholars think Jesus was born between 4 and 6 BC. Times were vastly different then than they are now. A woman's whole future relied largely on whether or not she was married, and in ancient times it was hard, if not impossible, to find a husband if you were an unwed mother. Nevermind about Joseph, her betrothed. We're told the angel handled this one for Mary, thankfully. Would you have liked to have sat down with your future husband and explain suddenly being pregnant by no one? Me either. I imagine that, once the shock of the angel's appearance wore off, Mary probably freaked out just a little bit.

I am sure I would have, at least. Joy would not be my go-to emotion here.

In fact, Luke 1:29 says that, when the angel first came to Mary she was "greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be." What a perfectly human response! Isn't this how we all respond when faced with divine interruption?

Anyway. Verse 39 tells us that Mary “went out with haste” on her way to her cousin Elizabeth’s house. The New Revised Jessica translation says Mary was in such a hurry she forgot to pack her toothbrush. Scripture says that as soon as Mary said hello to Elizabeth, Elizabeth began to gush over her.

“Blessed are you among women,” she said “and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.”

I don’t think we give enough time to reflect on the absolutely incredible women in the Gospels.

Here is a woman who is well aware of the situation Mary has found herself in. She knows that this is an incredible thing, but she also must have known the stigma that would follow Mary. She must have known that there would be skeptics even then. She would have known that Mary was probably scared – motherhood is scary no matter what – even when you’re not raising the Son of God.

Elizabeth knew the reality of the situation, but she rolled up her sleeves, took Mary in, and started on the baby blanket right away. She was excited.

She was supportive. She ministered to Mary in this simple way. Elizabeth was joyful for Mary.

Like I said, when I told my Mom I was pregnant, I cried. Matt and I were newlyweds, living out of my old bedroom at her house. We didn’t have health insurance. We didn’t even own a couch. We had none of our adult-stuff together. I was so worried she’d be disappointed in our timing. I was afraid that she wouldn’t be excited. I needed her to be on my team.

She was, of course. Looking back, it seems silly to even think otherwise. Moms know what their kids need. Yes, I’m sure she was aware of the reality of the situation. I am sure she thought “Lord, she has no idea how hard this will be.” But what did she do? She got excited! She gave me a giant hug! She let me feel, for the first time, as if everything was going to be perfectly fine – better than fine, even! She granted me permission to be joyful about this new, awesome, thing.

May we be Elizabeths. May we have the faith and the perspective to drench our friends and families in joy, regardless of the potentially frightening future. Let’s be the first ones in line to celebrate the incredible ways in which God is moving, even in the face of uncertainty because we know that, however daunting the next day may seem, we are being held in the hands of the one who created day itself.

# *love*

*noun*

*a strong affection for another arising out of kinship or personal ties:*



# 22

*Someday, after mastering the winds, the waves, the tides and gravity, we shall harness for God the energies of love, and then, for a second time in the history of the world, man will have discovered fire.*

**Pierre Teilhard de Chardin**

# 23

*Your ordinary acts of love and hope point to the extraordinary promise that every human life is of inestimable value.*

**Desmond Tutu**

# 24

*What does love look like? It has the hands to help others. It has the feet to hasten to the poor and needy. It has eyes to see misery and want. It has the ears to hear the sighs and sorrows of men. That is what love looks like.*

**Saint Augustine**



# LOVE

*Jessica McDougald*

On the fourth Sunday of Advent I light my last purple candle and sit there, staring at it, while I puzzle over the concept of Divine love. It's an unintended tradition, at this point. Perhaps it's because I have heard the verse "for God so loved the world..." so many thousands of times in my life that I can't quite figure out what exactly that actually means – kind of like when you repeat an ordinary word over and over until it starts to sound completely bizarre. It seems to me that simply saying "God loves you" does the whole thing no justice – it only begs follow-up questions: okay, sure, but...why? And...how?

Because I am a human and can only comprehend human-level stuff, the best way I know how to think about Divine love is by comparing it to something human-level. When I think of Divine love I cannot help but think of it as maternal love – with the way my Mom loved me twisting up with the way I love my girls to paint a very personal and tender picture. Now, this is of course a very flawed comparison – one, I am positive that God is better at love than I am, and better than my Mom (though surely only marginally), and two, not everyone had the same parental experience as I, and comparing Divine love to Maternal love may cause many to flinch. It's not perfect – but it's the best I can do.

Love, to me, became an involuntary thing when my babies were born. When they cried at night, it was love that compelled me to go to them. It was love that packed up the car for check-ups and school drop-offs. It was love that tightened around my throat when I watched them fall and scrape their knees. It was love that made me absolutely stupid over the smell of their fuzzy baby-heads. It is love – not obligation – that wipes their bottoms, love that stays up with them when they are sick, love that has turned me into a human thermometer – able to tell when one of them is running a fever just by the feel of her skin. I may not always be having a great time parenting – it's not easy ever and it's only fun three-quarters of the time – but there's no denying that I am 1,000% in love with my children in some otherworldly way that I cannot comprehend.

And my Mom? Don't even get me started. She's loved me so well over the years that I simply cannot comprehend what better love looks like. That God's love for me isn't exactly like my Mom's love for me is something that I just have to take on faith – because the idea is as incomprehensible and unexplainable to me as the virgin birth itself.

I've been reading this Advent devotional called *Honest Advent*, by Scott Erickson. In one chapter he writes: "What does it say about a God who's willing to be vulnerable with us? Who's willing to come into this world through the statistical risk of childbearing? Who's willing to be attached by a placenta for nourishment and life to Its own creation? Who's willing to wait and grow in the human womb?"

Man, if that didn't stop me in my tracks.

This morning, well before the sun had risen, Margot called to me from her bedroom. I found her standing in the darkness, blankie in hand, looking out her window at the house across the street from ours in wonder. "Look, Mommy," she said, pointing, paci still in her mouth, sleep still in her voice. I stood beside her and saw that our neighbors had installed one of those Christmas light projectors which casts the green and red lights on the exterior of the house. The lights were blinking and dancing and Margot was transfixed. "It's amazing," she whispered in wonder.

It's amazing, isn't it? The way God chose to work? It doesn't make a single bit of sense. No wonder the angels sang. No wonder the stars responded. No wonder Kings shook in fear. No wonder we can't stop telling this story, forever pondering this Divine, mysterious, wondrous love.



# ADVENT THOUGHTS

*Hunter Reese*

Happy new year! No, it's not quite the secular new year, but the liturgical new year starts with Advent. Like the secular new year, Advent starts out with hope and excitement for what's to come (and, given the stresses of holidays, a touch of anxiety hiding in the background).

This past liturgical year has felt more like a complete, packaged unit of time for me than it ever has before. From last year's Advent till now, the question I kept coming back to was, "Where did this information/scripture/detail come from?"

I delved into apocrypha, read about how "left-brain thinking" has impacted the study (and, perhaps, misuse) of scripture, and contemplated the formation of canon. For a brief moment, I wondered why canon was closed and why there would be no more scripture. As soon as I'd asked that question, however, someone started selling Bibles with the Declaration of Independence and other American government documents in them, and I felt like that was a good enough answer.

Though I can't say thank you enough to Bob and Jessica for their conversations on these topics, and while I can't recommend enough *The Lost Art of Scripture* by Karen Armstrong, there's one person out there who impacted my study and growth more than I think she realized. My husband's grandmother was in her waning days through much of this liturgical year, and the response to her late May passing continues to impact me up until now.

Last year, Phil's (my husband Phil, not music director Phil) grandmother unabashedly handed me one of her many, many religious pamphlets. This one was about a special type of rosary that she wanted and was hinting to me and Phil to purchase for Christmas or Mother's Day or something of the sort. This rosary, however, was called the Seven Swords rosary, and led the holder through a contemplation of the gospel through Mary's perspective. This little pamphlet caused me to believe that I could lead a study on Mary. When Grandma gave me this pamphlet, we didn't know she was about to enter hospice or that her time remaining here was so short.

For those of you in Kairos who participated in the study, you all may remember me talking about Grandma watching some of the slides with me. We didn't finish them all because they worked her failing heart into too much excitement, and we couldn't get too far in a sitting. While Grandma was at least somewhat interested in knowledge for its own sake, I believe she innately understood that "art of scripture" which Karen Armstrong described.



Grandma could sense the waves of redemption present throughout the old and new testaments, and she was able to distance herself enough from legalistic interpretations to be surprisingly forgiving for a 94-year-old Catholic lady. I always knew she loved me, and I loved her.

Being there with her towards the end was scary because I'd never known what hard work dying was, but it was also illuminating and rewarding in its own right. When Phil and I gave her the Seven Swords rosary for an early Mother's Day present in April, she opened it immediately and said she'd get the priest to bless it so she could use it (that was our bad for not realizing we should have gotten the blessing performed prior to giving it as a gift). She then demanded to pray a normal rosary on the spot, and I said, "I've never done it," thinking that would get me out of it.

Well, Grandma had several drawers of emergency (and blessed) rosaries sitting all over the house, and she just reached over and pulled one out for me. "Oh, that's no problem. Here's how you do it."

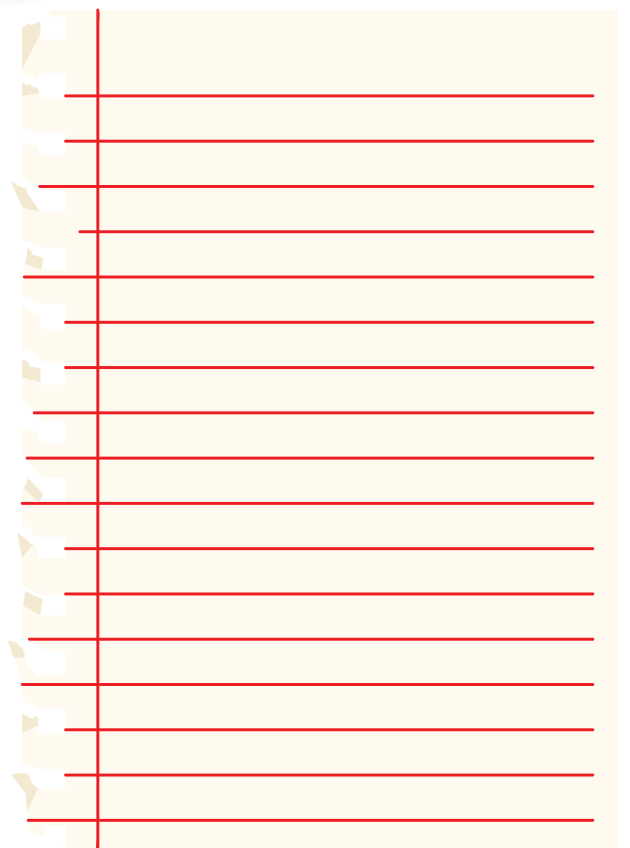
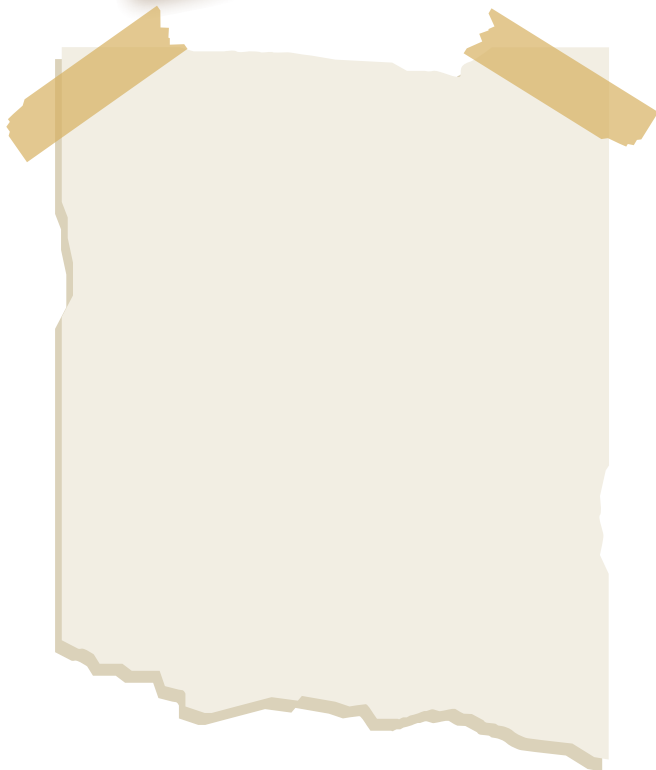
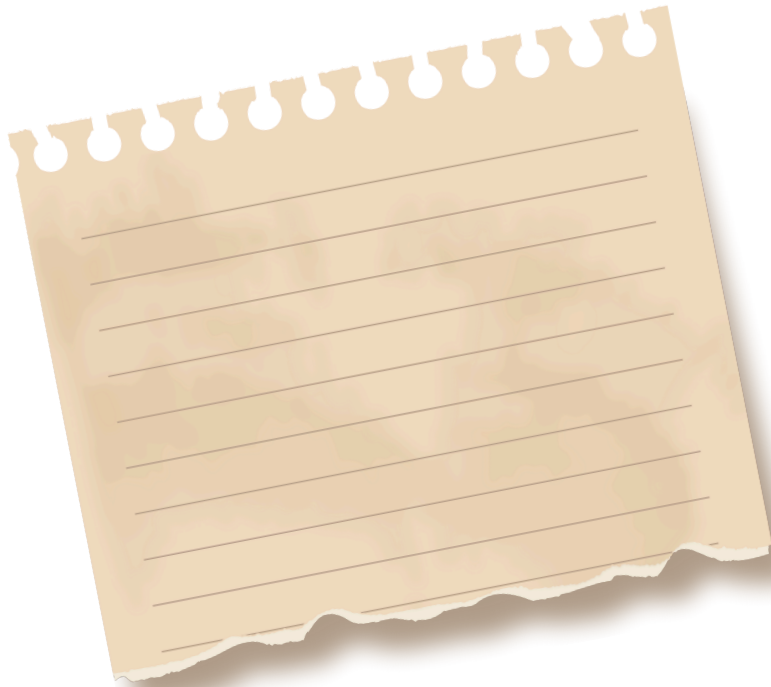
I'd never intended to do anything so dramatically papal, but it's kind of hard to say no to anyone in the moment, much less to Grandma during her last couple of months. I started after her, thankful that Phil and his family were more familiar with the words and strategies so I could flail about in the background and stay silent when I felt like it. Grandma's voice waned after we got through the first decade, the fluid in her lungs being built up such that she couldn't catch a breath easily. At points, however, I looked at her face and knew she could dive into the ritual so well and so easily. I was amazed as I sat there, watching Grandma contemplate the mysteries of the gospel during this 20-minute prayer.

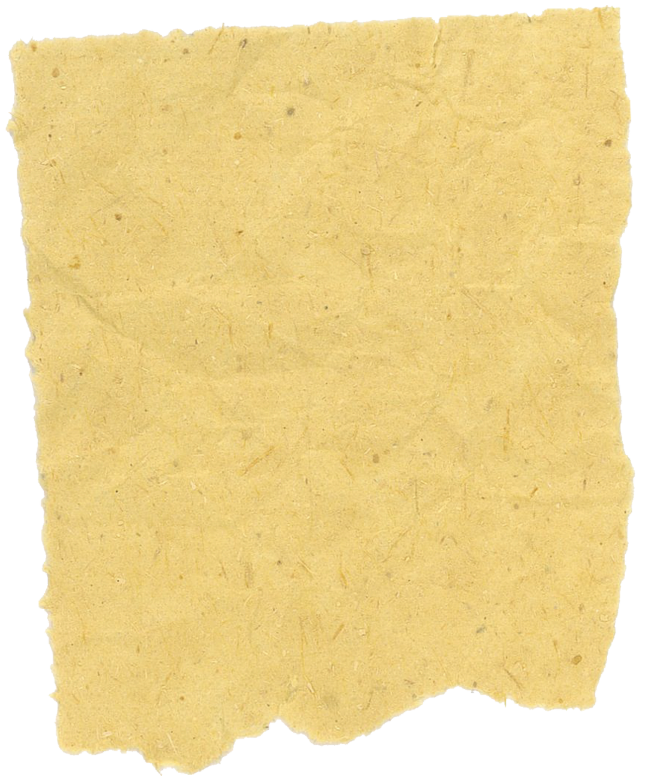
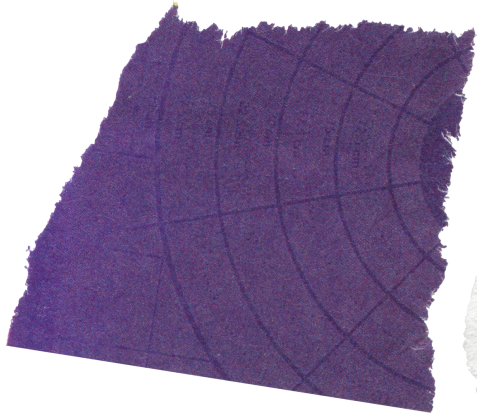
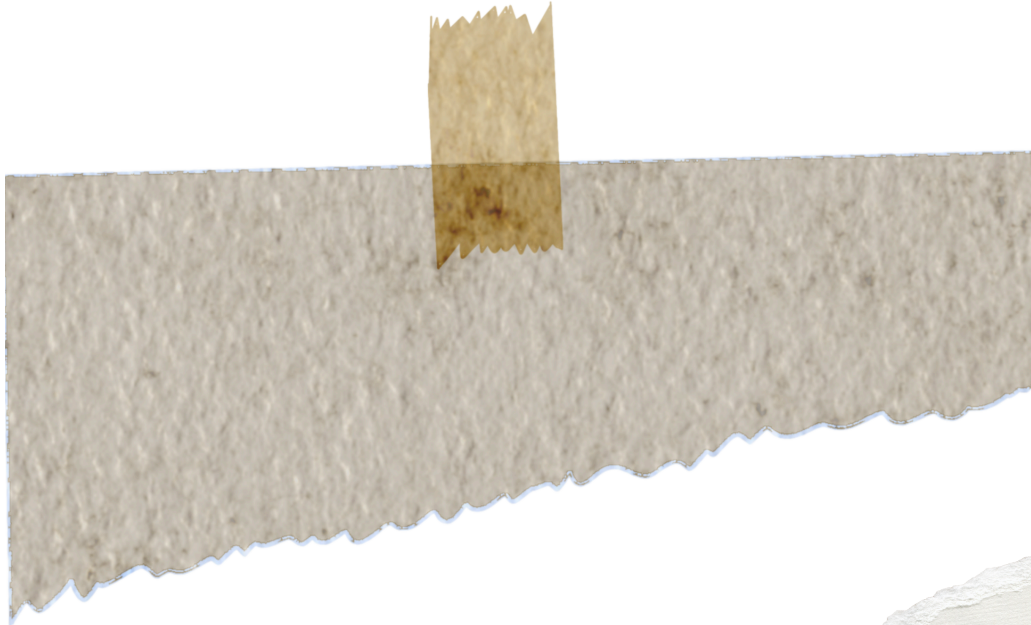
Throughout the remaining time Grandma had with us, Phil and I participated more in her care. By the end we were helping out during night and weekend shifts so we could go to work in the day, and these longer stays with Grandma contained participation in the hours of prayer with her. Something about praying with Grandma, even if it wasn't in the format I'm used to, brought me closer to a holistic view of the gospel, of scripture, and faith formation. Perhaps it was about her being in that special time of life, where the precious moments we had together were inevitably enmeshed with God's presence.

Though I'm probably too deeply invested in the practice of "left-brain thinking" to be great at the art of scripture, being able to see Grandma's art so soon after reading Armstrong's book, so soon after contemplating canon and apocrypha, brought everything I'd learned to a more relevant light. This next liturgical year will be different, and as of now I don't know what new things it will hold.

# PERSONAL MUSINGS

*Use this space for your own Advent reflections, scribbles, and musings*





*Thank you for reading and connecting with us!*



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