



GATHERING TO WRITE

# Advent





Writing is a way of paying close attention to our lives. Finding just the right words to describe our thoughts, emotions and experiences can be an act of holy gratitude and a way of opening ourselves to God's ongoing work within us. When we write alongside others and share some of the words we've found, we build trust and community among ourselves.

Writing as a spiritual practice is different than writing for school or work. Your purpose is *not* to figure out what the text means or to produce polished prose. Writing here is a way to connect with each other and God, and that can be done without ever finding an answer or ever using punctuation correctly.

*Scribble together with the Spirit, and see what God might do among you.*

## A Rhythm for Your Gathering

1. **Opening Ritual** (e.g. prayer, light a candle, quiet centering)
2. Have someone **read the Gospel text** out loud
3. **First Writing** session (about 5-10 minutes)
4. **Share** with each other.
5. **Second Writing** session (about 10-12 minutes)
6. **Share** with each other again.
7. **Closing Ritual** (e.g. prayer, blow out the candle, quiet centering, sing together)

# Reminders

Each week there are prompts for **EVERYBODY**, some for **YOUNG** folks, and some for **GROWN** folks. But truly, anybody can work with any of the prompts, no matter their age.

Don't require or expect everyone to share. Make time and space for those who choose to and allow for plenty of silence. Remind everyone that you don't have to read exactly what you wrote; you can talk *about* it if that feels safer.

The lectionary texts are provided only as a starting place. If your group never references them in your discussions, you're still doing great. Spending time with the texts in this forum will enrich your experience of them this season, but do not feel bound to them.

## Opening & Closing Prayers

*God, since you spoke over the waters of creation, you have always been interested in words. Help us find some words tonight. Tune our ears that we might hear you whispering in our pen scratches. Train our eyes that we might see your love lingering on our pages. Open our hearts that your Spirit might dwell among us in this time.*

*Amen*

*God, we give you thanks for your presence in our writing and in our conversation during this time. What we don't yet understand, we entrust to your wisdom. What we are struggling with, we enfold in your love. What we delight in, we receive as your grace. Bless each of us gathered here. May we be blessings in this, your world, today and in the days to come.*

*Amen.*

# Advent Week One

## Luke 21:25-36

“There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in a cloud’ with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

Then he told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. “Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

### *Idea to Consider:*

**In order to explain complicated mysteries Jesus turns to the natural world. He assumes that his audience is paying attention to it and that what they see in the world can help them understand what he’s trying to say.**

# First Writing (EVERYBODY)

**Make a list:** What are the SIGHTS, SOUNDS, SMELLS, and TASTES that tell you it's Advent? Think about Advents past. Think about what you're already sensing these days. What's the natural world up to in this season?

SIGHTS

SMELLS

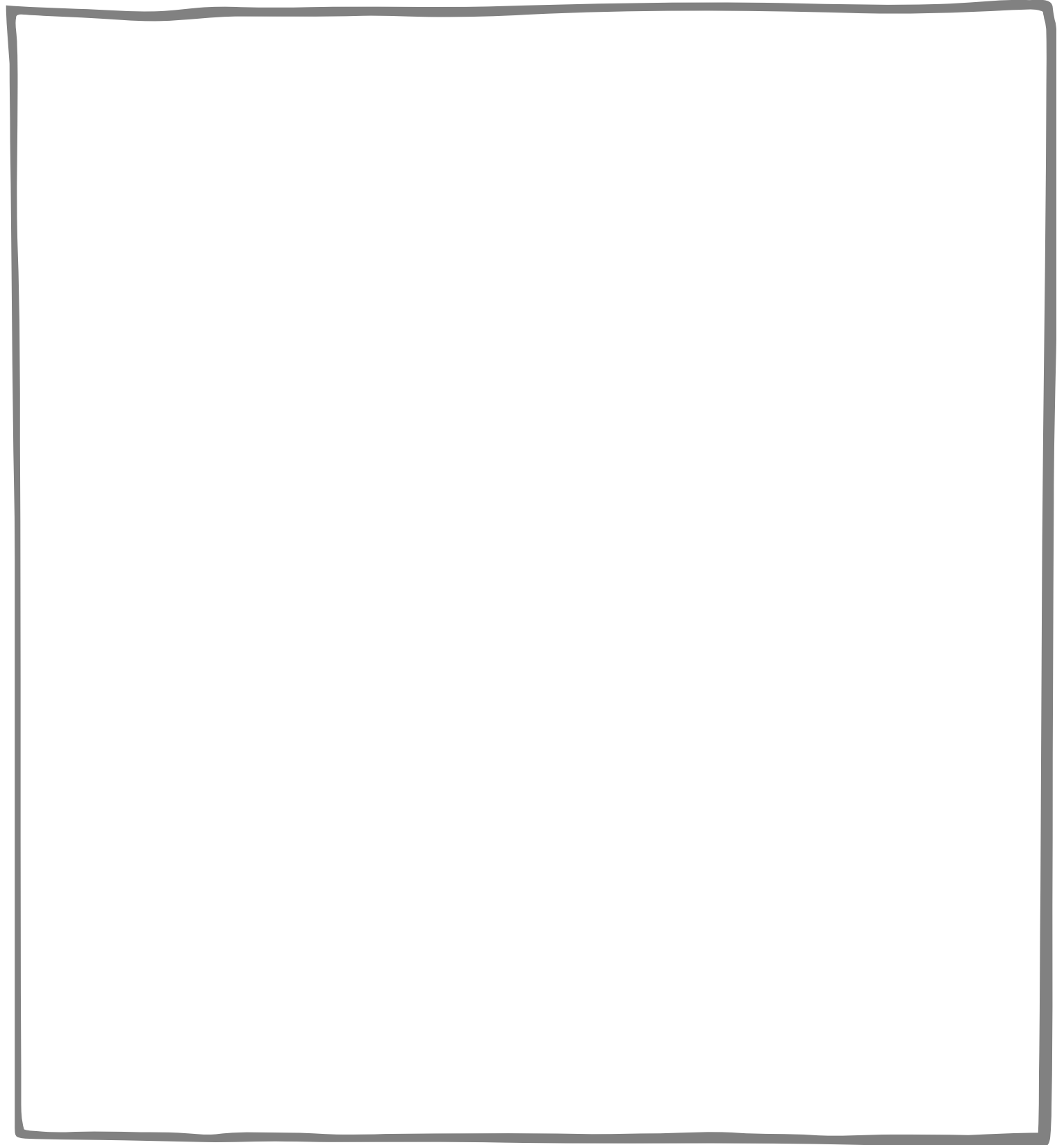
SOUNDS

TASTES

## Second Writing (YOUNG)

**Draw a picture** that has **ALL** the stuff in your list to show what Advent looks/sounds/feels/tastes like. Can you get it ALL in? Put yourself in there and show how you're feeling about this Advent. **OR,**

**Write it out:** If you were explaining this season to a visitor from another planet, how would you explain Advent? How are *you* feeling about Advent this year?



## (GROWN)

**Make another list:** What are the losses, confusions, disappointments, griefs, mysteries that are also a part of your Advent this year?

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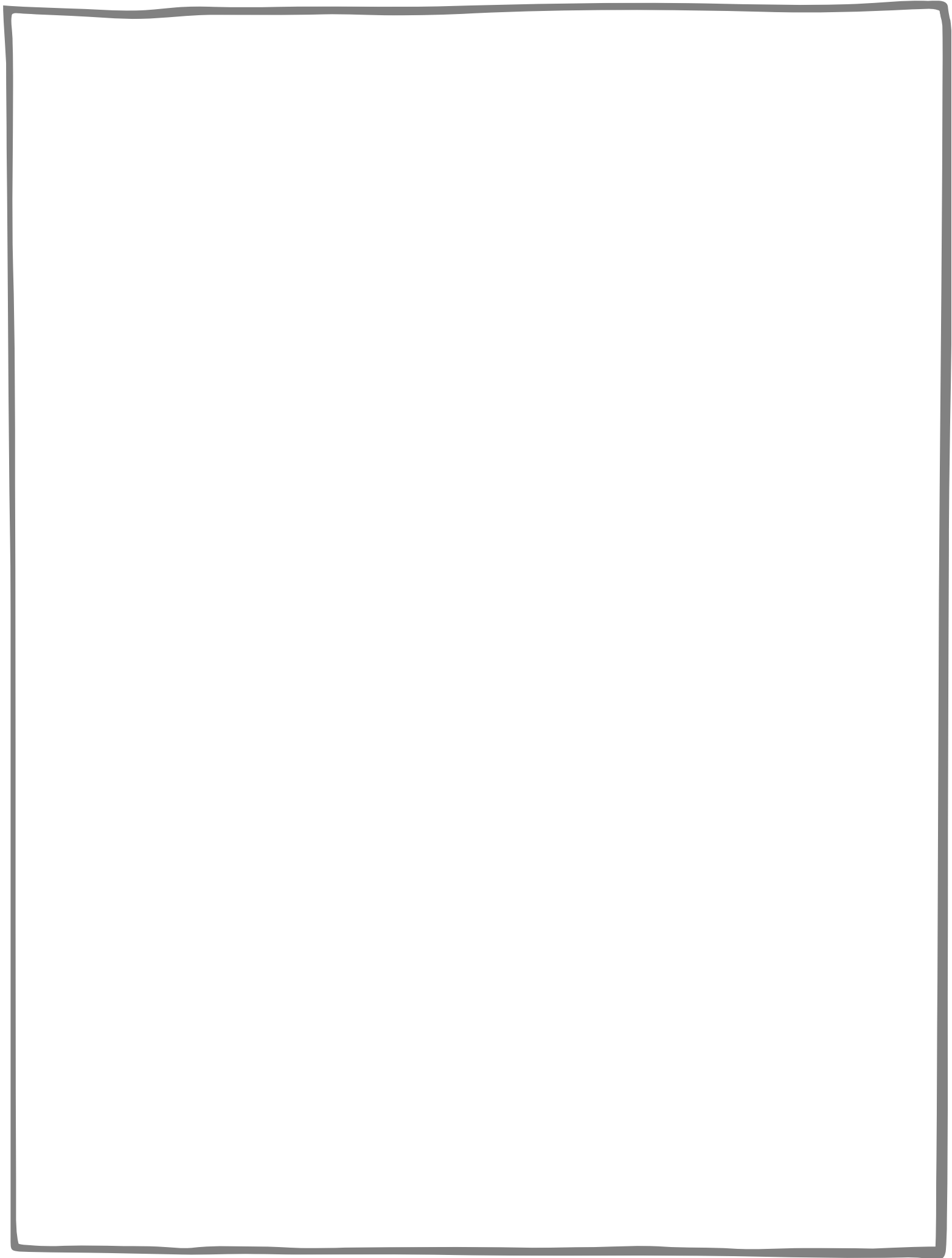
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**Write it out:** How might the stuff of your first list bring comfort or peace when you look at your second list? *(For example: Is there a smell that brings back memories of a loved one or of an easier time?)*

How can you use something from the first list to explain how you're feeling about the second list? *(For example: Entering this season without a loved one might feel like the one dark house on the street that isn't decorated.)*





# Advent Week Two

## Luke 3:1-6

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness. He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah, "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'"

### Idea to Consider:

The Gospel writer is recalling an older text, Isaiah's images of a journey, to describe John's message. Life *as a journey* is an ancient but also familiar and contemporary way of making sense of what is happening in our lives. It is also an image that can clarify how we wish and pray our lives might go.

# First Writing (EVERYBODY)

**Create** a diagram to show the shape of your journey over the last year, all the ups and downs, those rough and smooth ways, straight and crooked paths. Would it look something like one of these?



On the next page draw your diagram below AND label its parts:

- *What were the uphill or rough patches you've faced? What's been hard?*
- *What were the valleys or the smooth periods where you caught your breath? What's been joyful or fun?*
- *What have been the unexpected turns? When did it feel like you weren't getting anywhere at all?*

## HINTS

- Don't worry about sentences. Words and phrases are fine.
- It doesn't have to be chronological.
- If the shape is stressing you out, just make a list!
- You cannot do this incorrectly.

*January*  
Started here.

*December*  
Now I'm here.

# Second Writing

## (YOUNG)

**Write it out:** If you could time travel back to January and tell yourself about how this year will go, what pieces of advice would you give yourself?

1



2

3

4

## (GROWN)

**Write it out:** What's the How-To for surviving your last year? Who/what do you wish you'd have had more of? Who/what did you have? Where does God fit into that diagram? Where do you wish God had been?

A large, empty rectangular box with a thick, hand-drawn gray border, intended for writing. The box occupies the majority of the page below the introductory text.



# Advent Week Three

## Luke 3:7-18

John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." And the crowds asked him, "What then should we do?" In reply he said to them, "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise." Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, "Teacher, what should we do?" He said to them, "Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you." Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what should we do?" He said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages."

As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying, "I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." So, with many other exhortations, he proclaimed the good news to the people.

## Idea to Consider:

Time is funny. In this season in which we anticipate Jesus' birth, we're still participating in the Eucharist in remembrance of his death, AND in the text today we're hearing about a time before Jesus' public ministry. Our lives are also folded up in time. We bring memories of the past and hopes for the future into each present moment. The beautiful potential there is that right now, you have ALL of time's gifts and graces accessible to you. Can you hear and borrow a little of John's passion for Jesus at this moment, even if you don't particularly feel it right now?

## First Writing (EVERYBODY)

**Make a list:** Name FOUR things you like about Jesus. Best stories, qualities, personal experiences, favorite quotes?

Yes, you can have more than four!

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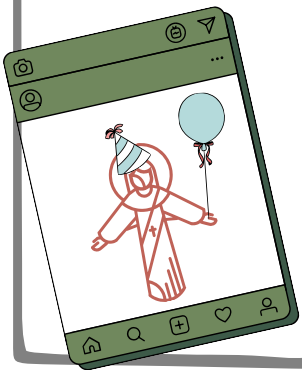
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## Second Writing (YOUNG)

**Make Jesus a birthday card!** It'll be his birthday so soon. Grab some paper, draw him a picture, and don't forget to tell him what you love about him on the inside. **OR, Write it out** below: What's the caption on your social media post for Jesus' birthday? Tell your friends what you appreciate about him. Embarrass him with all the love.





**(GROWN)**

**Write a letter** to Jesus, a really honest one. Tell him how life feels at this time and what you need from him now. Remind him how he's been what you needed in the past. Ask him to be that for you again.



# Advent Week Four

## Luke 1:39-55

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, 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." [And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness 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. 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 thoughts 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 helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."]

## Idea to Consider:

Given an incredible turn of events in her life, Mary bursts into song! It's one that echoes what would have been an old and familiar tune for her from 1 Samuel, Hannah's song, which was also sung at the unexpected birth of a son. Both women's songs tell of the world made better with God's help. Perhaps they sang them as prayers that a kinder and more just world would greet their children.

## First Writing (EVERYBODY)

**Make a list:** What are the BEST Christmas and Advent carols, hymns, and songs? Which one is the most beautiful? The most hopeful? The most calming?

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# Second Writing

(YOUNG)

**Rewrite Mary's song!** What words would you sing if you were singing about how God can make the world better?

What would make your life better?



## (GROWN)

**Write a song!** Mary sort of borrowed from Hannah's song. You can too! Look up and copy your favorite lyrics from one or several of the songs in your list. Now add to those lines to describe your life and our world made right with God's help. No, it doesn't have to rhyme and, no, you won't have to sing it. If writing something lovely is intimidating, then just get down some phrases OR rearrange lines from several songs into something new that feels honest and hopeful.





**You have written your way through the Advent season!**

**Be sure to pause and give thanks to each other and to God  
for your time together.**

In the box, note how you can hold each other in prayer into the new year.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thick, dark gray border, intended for writing a response to the prompt above.



## *A Final Reminder*

Nothing is too ridiculous or trivial for God's creative work in this world, and your notes in these pages and the words you've shared in your gatherings are no exception. All the joys, sorrows, and mundane moments you've brought through Advent into Christmas will be held in God's grace, wisdom, and love.

May the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ remind you that God is well practiced at taking regular old lives and transforming them into something miraculous.

May YOUR words and lives be so transformed!

Lectionary Texts come from RCL Cycle C

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Written for the Diocese of NC by  
Lauren Graeber, MaEd, MDiv  
lcgraeber@gmail.com  
www.laurengraeber.com