

Sunday

FROM GENERATION  
TO GENERATION...

We see God in each other



## WHERE I SAW GOD LAST

The dimple in your right cheek, the child playing peek a-boo from his stroller, the abuelita who spends her afternoons in the park by 86th; the teenagers on the subway who cannot control their laughter; Neil, my neighbor, who always asks about you, the mother who whispers a dozen times a day, “*thank you, Jesus, thank you, Jesus, thank you, Jesus*”; the saxophone player at 42nd street, the poets, the artists, the garden volunteers; the metro car driver who sticks his head out the window to make sure we’re all aboard; the man who gave up his seat on the subway, the kid in the dinosaur pajamas who cannot be convinced they’re not school attire; the teachers, the nurses, the taxi cab drivers; the woman at the end of the block with her yappy dogs and her books in the window, the lovers that lay sprawled out on park blankets, the runners, the daydreamers, the sidewalk chalk artists; John from upstairs whose favorite flowers are yellow tulips, the Persian man at the grocery who tells me to be safe when I leave, my grandmother in Georgia; my neighbor, the stranger; *thank you, Jesus, thank you, Jesus, thank you, Jesus.*

Poem by  
Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed

*We see God in each other*

READ Luke 1:39-58

COMMENTARY | Dr. Christine J. Hong

My parents are Korean immigrants. My mother used to say that back in the days of their immigration, whoever met you at the airport decided your destiny. In other words, whoever greets you at the threshold as you become a new immigrant determines the direction your life moves. I remember her words and reflect on them whenever I reach significant impasses in my life—a new job, a move, when I became a parent for the first time. Each significant milestone feels like a threshold. When I prepare to cross those thresholds, I look for the people and communities waiting on the other side, people and communities to anchor me and hold me in the nebulous spaces of change, uncertainty, and fear.

When my parents crossed over from being Korean to being Korean American, it was the local church pastor (also a Korean immigrant) who greeted them at the threshold, after they made their way through borders and customs at LAX.<sup>4</sup> He picked them up in his car and took them to an apartment complex to get them housed. Next, he took them to meet members of his church who worked at ticketing at LAX. My parents worked the next few years at Korean Airlines ticketing and baggage claim, hourly jobs that paid the bills and gave them footing in a new country. The final stop was the Korean immigrant church that would be their community as they settled in a new country, with a new language, and, in some ways, a new understanding of Christian faith. It was the Korean immigrant church folk who anchored them to this new land. My parents arrived and were greeted by Korean American people who embraced them, settled them, and invited them to participate in building sustaining faith and peoplehood together.

Elizabeth greets Mary on the threshold, not only of her door but the threshold of something new in Mary's life and for the world. Mary is met by her cousin who greets her with welcome, anticipation, and a powerful blessing. So rich was the blessing that the baby in Elizabeth's womb leapt up and greeted Mary and the baby in Mary's womb. Any fear Mary had was met with the contagious courage of Elizabeth, courage enough for them both. They were one another's spiritual midwives—birthing together transformation, grounded in one another's courage and steadfastness. They wondered together in liminal space, on the threshold of a new world. And through their spiritual and relational partnership, Mary and Elizabeth framed the path of partnership for their children too.

<sup>4</sup> The Los Angeles International Airport in California.



The Golden Cradle | Carmelle Beaugelin  
*Acrylic, gilding paint, canvas collage on handmade reclaimed paper*

Tuesday | FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION...

We see God in each other

READ Luke 1:39-45; 56-58

FROM THE ARTIST | Carmelle Beaugelin

Mary and Elizabeth have found in each other a sisterhood amid their precarious and unusual circumstances. An older Elizabeth (perhaps losing hope of ever nursing a child at the loss of her monthly cycle) welcomes a young Mary (pledged to be wed at the first sign of her cycle, yet seemingly pregnant before she has even wed). Despite their difference in age, the two cousins find comfort in each other in the midst of the unconventional timing of their expanding families. All along, as the two women whisper together of the growing promises hidden in their wombs and unconventional lives, Mary and Elizabeth themselves are cradled by the guiding arms of the God who moves them beyond cousins into sisterhood.

Reminiscent of Haitian folk art figures, Mary and Elizabeth are portrayed wearing traditional Afro-Caribbean style headdresses as their silhouettes face one another in a stoic greeting. For new Haitian mothers, a tradition of preparing sacred tea leaves, as well as postpartum herbal baths, offers solidarity between the more seasoned women and a new mother. Often—as displayed by the relationship between the two women in this story—grandmothers, cousins, and other close female community members act as surrogates in this sacred practice for those who have been displaced from their own families.

*The Golden Cradle* expands on the imagery of Mary's golden "yes" to her call, meeting Elizabeth's "yes" to a holy birth of her own. In their meeting, the promises they carry leap for joy at this first encounter, offering us a picture of the kind of communal solidarity we often find along the journey of the unfolding story of God in our own lives. Even in moments of isolation, we often encounter surrogates who step in with divine provision when we need it the most.

PRAY

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.



Dance of the Soul | Hannah Garrity  
*Paper lace with watercolor*

We see God in each other

READ Luke 1:46-55

FROM THE ARTIST | Hannah Garrity

Passed down from generation to generation, my grandmother's painting palette still had watercolors on it when I opened it the other day. She placed them there so long ago. I think that the last painting classes she took were in 2005. Like her mother before her, she was a painter. Nana loved watercolor. She and I traveled to France during my gap year between high school and college. Despite her hip that needed replacing, we walked to the Mediterranean water's edge every day. I carried many of her things and would get her set up to paint. She painted *en plein air* on the banks while I swam, or drew, or took photographs, or watched her paint. It sounds like a poem as I write these words. What a gift; I can't believe it, really.

The brushes we used for this Magnificat painting were one of the few gifts I received from her over the years, and certainly the most personal and precious. She gifted me two watercolor brushes; she saw the artist in me. My mother, my daughter, and I added water to the paint that Nana had placed on her palette so many years ago. We took turns with the brushes. Adding water, letting generations flow into one another, we painted.

As I studied the text, I was drawn into the energy of praise. "My spirit rejoices..." (Luke 1:47) Drawing inspiration from long exposure images of dancers, I overlaid three poses, which made the flow of light become abstract. The front foot steps forward while the figure leans back. The dancer leaps, one knee pulled up toward the chest, head and hands forward. The head almost touches the toes in a 'c' shape while the arms spin outstretched. The energy of Mary's soul creates a trinitarian flow as she rejoices in the hope, the healing, and the freedom from oppression that her son will provide as a precedent for generations to come.

PRAY

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.



## EVERY YEAR

My heart and I have an agreement.  
Every year we show up here—  
here in the sanctuary,  
here with the candles and the tall ceilings,  
here with the creaky church pews  
and the songs of silent nights.

My heart and I have an agreement.  
Every year we show up here—  
at the end of the year,  
after another 12 months  
of humanity, of me  
trying to  
keep it all together,  
trying to  
keep my head above water,  
trying to  
keep up appearances.

Every year we show up here.  
We drop it all.  
We leave it at the door.  
We come into this space  
and I could swear it feels different.

Maybe it's God.  
Maybe it's hope.  
Maybe it's love.  
But whatever it is,  
I need it  
every year,  
so we show up here.  
Tell us again the story of tonight.

My heart needs it.

*Poem by  
Rev. Sarah (Are) Speed*

## We tell this story

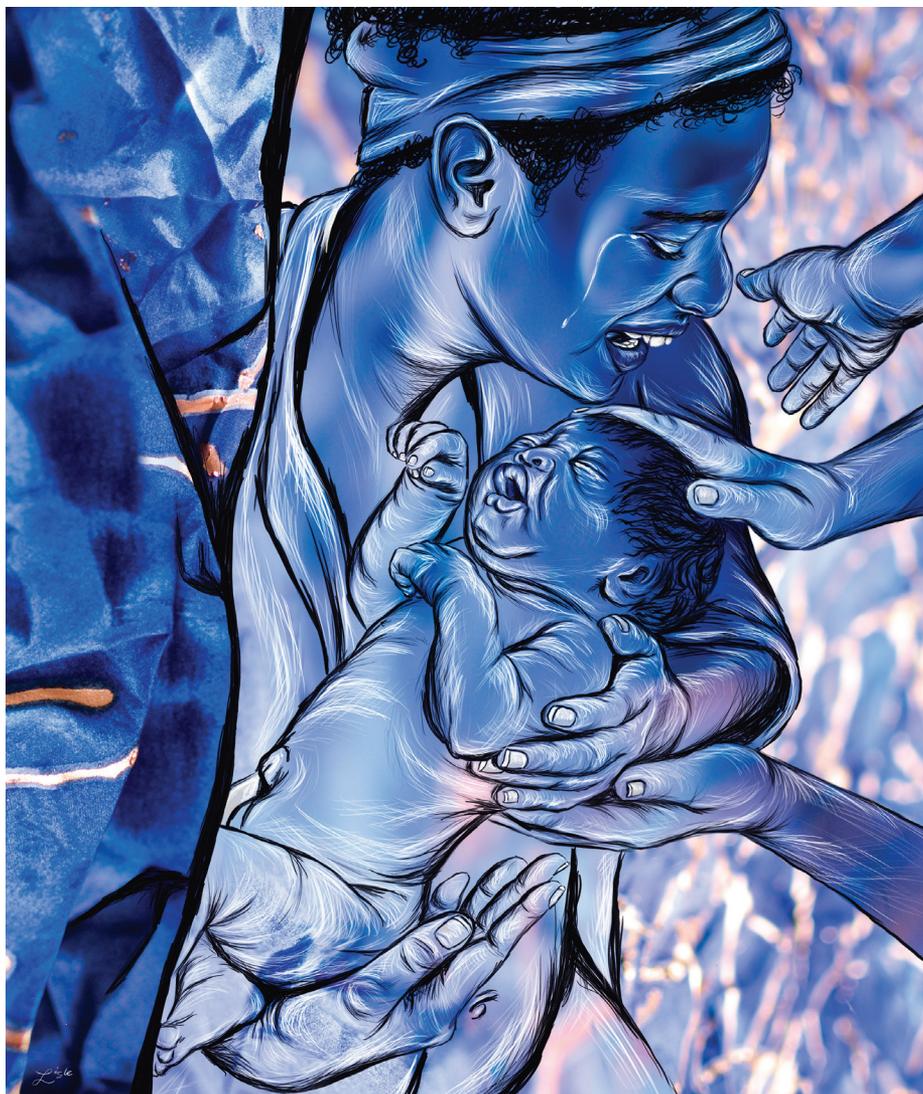
READ Luke 2:1-20

COMMENTARY | Dr. Christine J. Hong

Different cultures have different birthday rituals. In Korean culture we practice the tradition of eating *Miyeok-guk* on your birthday. *Miyeok-guk* is a nutritious and delicious seaweed soup made with beef or seafood broth. The flavor is rich and savory, and when you eat it with a bowl of hot rice and kimchi, it's a comforting and homey meal. Korean people eat *Miyeok-guk* on their birthdays because it is an age-old tradition to eat *Miyeok-guk* after women give birth. The iodine and vitamin-rich seaweed soup restores energy, cleanses the blood, and increases the rate of physical healing from the trauma of giving birth. It also increases the flow of breastmilk. Korean women will sometimes eat *Miyeok-guk*—and only *Miyeok-guk*—until they are a few months postpartum. It is usually your mother or grandmother who makes *Miyeok-guk* for you.

We eat *Miyeok-guk* as the first meal on our birthdays not only to celebrate growing another year older, but also to remember and honor the labor of our mothers. Now, as an adult, on the rare occasion that I get to eat *Miyeok-guk* made by my umma's (mother's) hands, I feel a deep sense of gratitude with each bite. Now, I make *Miyeok-guk* for my children on their birthdays, a tradition I'm passing down because it connects my children to their Korean culture and to the ancestral ties alive in this simple and delicious soup. This soup provides an intrinsic connection—like an umbilical cord—to mothers, grandmothers, and great-grandmothers who used and tasted the same ingredients throughout their lifetimes.

After the birth of Jesus, we turn our attention away from Mary who labored to give birth to the infant in the manger. Yet can we keep our eyes on Mary too? Can we offer her some nourishment? Can we remember her as the person who carried salvation in her womb? On Christmas Eve, let's look to the ancestral ties Jesus leaves with us on earth by focusing on his mother and her courage and vulnerability—a woman who needed postpartum care, a good meal, compassionate partners, and rest. When we remember the birth of Jesus, let us also remember Mary as mother, our hearts full of gratitude.



How God Shows Up | Lisle Gwynn Garrity  
*Silk painting with digital drawing and collage*

## We tell this story

READ Luke 2:1-20

FROM THE ARTIST | Rev. Lisle Gwynn Garrity

This year, I come to this story with deep reverence for the complexity and beauty of childbirth. At the time of creating this art, I am about 6 weeks away from giving birth to my first child—who will be born in the same hospital where my mom died from cancer 20 years ago. My daughter will take her first breath in the same place where I heard my mother's last exhale. Much of my pregnancy has been a journey of healing—of inviting joy into the house where my grief lives, of preparing to become a mother as a motherless child. The more I learn of others' experiences around birth, I realize how closely joy and grief can coexist in each of our stories.<sup>5</sup>

And so, as I return to Jesus' birth story, my imagination leads me to wonder about how Mary experienced both grief and joy. Apart from Elizabeth, did she have support throughout her pregnancy? Was her own mother involved? Did she have generational trauma she needed to grieve? Did the stress of their travels to Bethlehem cause her labor to happen sooner than expected? As she labored, did a midwife come? Was she afraid?

In this image, as if looking past a curtain, we peer into this threshold moment when excruciating pain gives way to ecstatic joy as Mary draws her baby to her chest and he takes his first breath. As Mary holds her baby, additional hands reach in to support them both. Maybe these are the hands of strangers, of Joseph, or of a midwife who was summoned. Perhaps they are simply the hands of angels.

Each year, we tell this story because it is raw with joy, pain, and the complexities of being human. No matter how your story is unfolding, may you find that this sacred story holds space for you. For this is how God shows up—in a child who cries, in hands that hold, in human flesh, in life and in death.

## PRAY

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.

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<sup>5</sup> If you have pain, grief, trauma, or longing related to pregnancy and childbirth, we hold space for you. In this Christmas season, may God meet you in grief and joy and every moment in between.