

Advent Visio Divina Bible Study  
First Baptist Church Halifax

Advent 2021

All images used with permission

© a sanctified art | [sanctifiedart.org](http://sanctifiedart.org)





*a Sanctified Art*

visio divina bible study  
guided visual meditation & prayer

Visio Divina, latin for "divine seeing," is a method of meditation, reflection, and prayer through a process of intentional seeing. Visio Divina extends the 6th century Benedictine practice of Lectio Divina, latin for "divine reading," by the use of visual imagery.

**Steps for Viso Divina:**

Centre yourself by taking a deep breath and relaxing your body as best you can. Allow your shoulders to lower away from your ears. Let your arms rest in your lap and let your feet be fully supported by the floor. Feel the weight of your body held by the chair. Spend this time in quiet. Open yourself up to God's voice.

(pause)

Take a deep breath in and out. Continue breathing deeply as you read the image. In this moment, simply notice the visual qualities of what you see: colours, line, shape, form, space, and texture.

(pause)

Now, take a deeper look. What parts of the image are your eyes most drawn to? What parts of the image did you quickly brush by or overlook?

(pause)

And now, use your imagination:

Imagine yourself in this piece. Where would you be and how would you interact with what surrounds you?

Look at the figure(s). What story do you assign to each of them? What emotions would you give to them?

Finally, observe your own emotions. How does this image make you feel?

## Rusty's Advent Reflection

Into being... The words that will guide us through the Advent-Christmas season come from the opening of John's Gospel. This is the Gospel of John's Christmas story, the story of the Word of God coming into our world. Read John's words:

In the beginning there was the Word;  
the Word was in God's presence,  
and the Word was God.  
The Word was present to God  
from the beginning.  
Through the Word  
all things came *into being*,  
and apart from the Word  
nothing came *into being*  
that has come *into being*.  
In the Word was life,  
and that life was humanity's light—  
a Light that shines in the darkness,  
a Light that the darkness has never overtaken.  
(Inclusive Bible Translation)

I find myself hanging onto these words as we approach the 2021 Advent season. There has been a weariness in our world ever since May 2020 when the pandemic began to uproot so much of our lives. Of course, for many people weariness was already a constant—as we read our sacred story it is clear that weariness is nothing new.

But this year, particularly, I find myself longing to move beyond what has been lost. I am tired of simply naming all that is broken in our world, our city, our lives. I'm ready to lean a little further into what can be—a vision of light shining in the most challenging of times and refusing to be overtaken, illuminating God's vision for our world. It's not a denial of loss and brokenness, it is a desire to hope for something more and a new determination to join the Word in making that something new coming *into being* in our own time and place.

It's a determination we will hear on the first three Sundays of Advent as we reflect on the words of the prophets Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Isaiah. They write to their people in a time of exile after the Babylonians had taken the nation of

Judah and forced many Judeans to resettle in Babylon (modern day Iraq). Out of the destruction of what was, these prophets envision new life emerging in exile and encourage their people to work and pray for that vision to come to be, not just for themselves, but for the new people they call neighbours and might one day call friends and even family. It's the Word of God shedding light on the world to bring renewed life *into being*.

As I reflect on these prophetic words, I find myself longing for their vision—a confident assurance that even amidst the weariness of our world (and there is so much we can and should name that is wrong with our world right now)... even in the darkness, the light of the Word shines and, with our help, the light can grow and fill the earth again. But, that begins by stirring within ourselves the kind of confident vision we find in the prophets—we have to envision what a world filled with the light and love of God looks like and then have the audacity to believe such a world can come *into being*.

That's the point of Advent, to name what we anticipate, and then to dare to believe it can come *into being* if we're willing to partner with the Word to make it be. Only if like Mary and Joseph, we dare to get involved. Only if like the shepherds and magi we're not afraid to let a light-filled vision guide us to unexpected places. Only then will the Word begin to come *into being* in our lives, our city, our world.

I'm ready to open myself to a renewed vision, to celebrate the eternal Word of God that is among us, and to believe with confidence that light and life and love will come *into being* out of all that is lost and broken in our lives and world today.

This Advent, may a renewed vision come *into being* through the light of the Word. Amen.

# Spark of Divinity

by Hannah Garrity

Paper lace

Inspired by Mark 13:24-37

This paper lace explores the poetic patterns in this Mark text. Stars fall to the lower part of the frame as a fig tree leafs out in the central circle. The fig tree creates a circular motif reminding us of the tree of life while also representing the sun and the moon in this text. With a celestial flow, lines circulate around the edges of the piece, replicating the pupil of an eye.

*"And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake."*

In the time of COVID and in this season of Advent, we can see, now. We can see that systemic change is not just possible, but immediate. God has tried this before—we have glimmers in history. Can the human collective bring about God's dream for the new heaven and the new earth? I can reach out and touch it. It is possible, immediately. We must choose it.

In one of Oprah Winfrey's masterclasses, the late John Lewis shared how he was shaped by his mentor:<sup>1</sup> "Jim Lawson taught us the whole concept of the Beloved Community, this idea that in the bosom of every human being there is the spark of divinity and it is the spark of something that is sacred, and holy, and special, and that we don't have a right to destroy."<sup>2</sup> The stars in this image depict that divine spark we are born with—that hope, those stars that have fallen from heaven and lodged themselves within each of us. Let us not be found asleep in this moment, this movement. Let us live into our spark. Let us seek it in each person we meet.

---

<sup>1</sup> Jim Lawson, b. 1928, is an activist and university professor. He was a leader and theoretician of nonviolence within the American Civil Rights Movement during the 1960's.

<sup>2</sup> Winfrey, Oprah. "Oprah's Master Class, Remembering John Lewis." *Oprah Winfrey Network*. July 19, 2020. [youtube.com/watch?v=tKmanDEy2ZE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tKmanDEy2ZE).



*Handwritten signature*

# I am the Voice

By Hannah Garrity

Watercolor and ink on paper

Inspired by John 1:6-8, 19-28

“Who are you? Who are you? What do you say about yourself?  
I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness . . .” (John 1:19, 22)

John the Baptist arrived to pave the way for Jesus’ work, to make the path straight. He baptized with water. He foretold a baptism of the Holy Spirit. He led people toward the work of the gospel. He inspired people to join the path that Jesus would tread—to remove the underbrush, to mat down the grass. He told of what was to come.

He was all of these things and more. He was the voice crying out in the wilderness.

How would you answer the questions asked?

I am an artist. I am a mother and a wife, a daughter and a sister. I condemn hate and profess love. I am not perfect; I seek to understand. I am inspired by the work of the gospel, the mindset of love. I am disenchanted by the contradictions in the bible, in my life, and in the world around me. I aspire to humility. I struggle with my faith, yet I struggle on. I am all of these things and more. I am a voice crying out in the wilderness. I am trying to make the path straight.

“Who are you? Who are you? What do you say about yourself?” (John 1:19, 22)  
How are you a voice of one crying out in the wilderness?



# Light

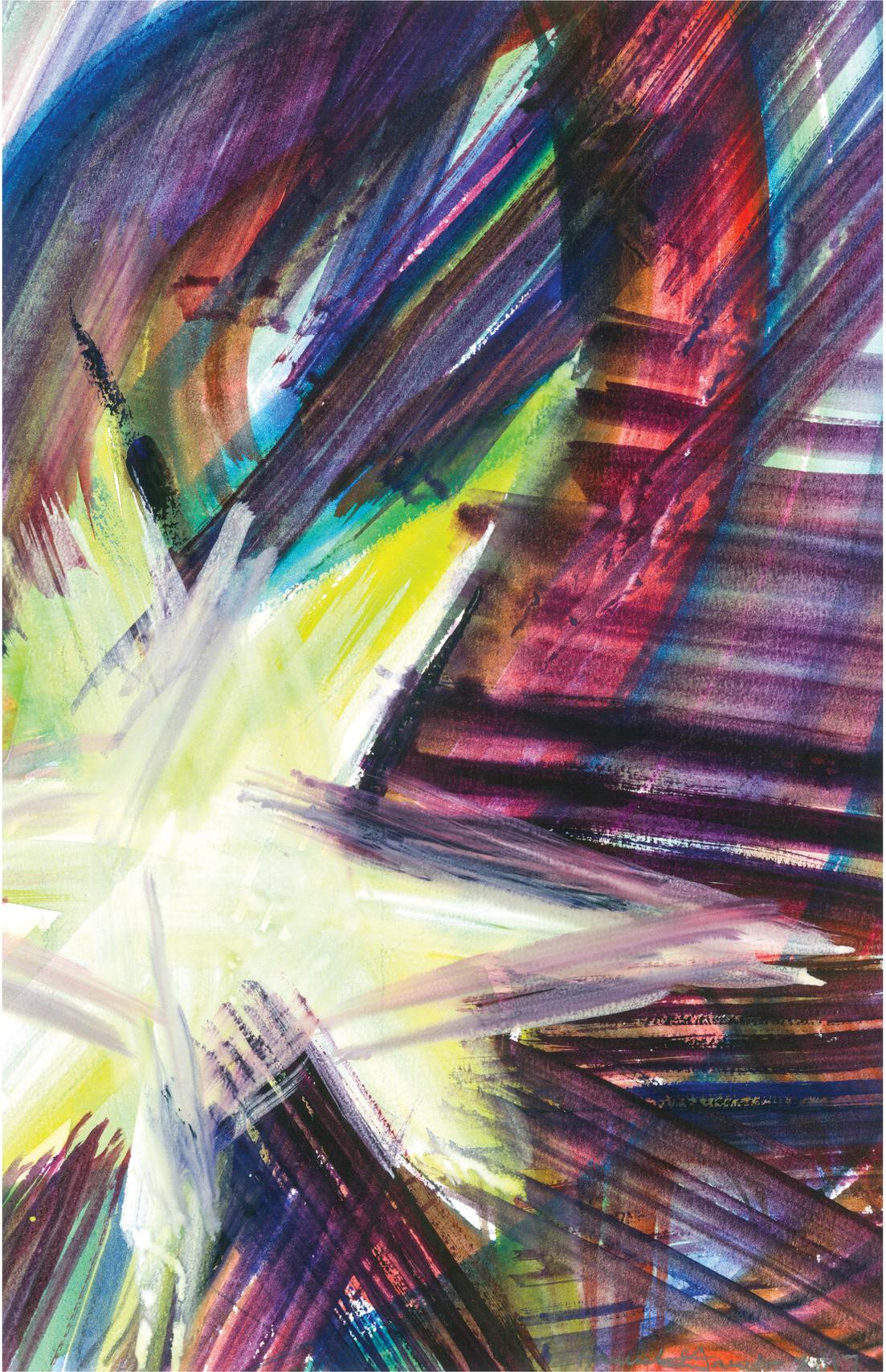
By Hannah Garrity

Watercolor on paper

Inspired by Matthew 2:1-12

Darkness has so many facets. When I'm developing a painting, the shadows must be studied, expanded, and layered to create depth. Isn't that also true for our own shadows? There are so many reasons and explanations for my selfish side, so many layers to my own shadows. I, like Herod, want to protect what I have built in the world. I, like Herod, want to avoid the unknown, to block it out, to willfully misunderstand.

However, the layers of the light shine through. I know better. Herod knew better. God's light persists in me. God is a highlight in my shadows. Her light reminds me of selflessness. Her light reminds me of what is right, what is good, what is kind, what next step to take. Like the magi journeying toward the light then back home, I am in a perpetual journey among the midtones of life, working toward the highlights, pushing away the shadows. In this exploration of light and shadow, God is everywhere.



# Contours of Mary's Dream

by Lauren Wright Pittman

Digital painting

Inspired by Luke 1:46-55

As I read Mary's song this year, I felt a sting of grief, one that I hadn't felt in response to this text before. In the wake of George Floyd's murder, artist Titus Kaphar created an image for Time magazine devoted to Black mothers. In his image, "Analogous Colors," he depicts a Black mother fiercely and lovingly holding her child. However, her child is cut out of the image, leaving a harsh, blank hole with shadows where the child should be. Reflecting on his piece, Kaphar wrote: "In her expression, I see the Black mothers who are unseen, and rendered helpless in this fury against their babies. As I listlessly waded through another cycle of violence against Black people, I paint a Black mother... eyes closed, furrowed brow, holding the contour of her loss."<sup>3</sup>

When I read the Magnificat, Kaphar's image came into sharp relief. How could I image Mary holding the contours of her dreams for the world, while also holding the contour of her loss? Mary's son would be publicly murdered at the hands of the State. Mary's song reverberates for all mothers who have had dreams for their children shattered by senseless violence.

I have this instinct to read the Magnificat alongside the first Creation narrative in Genesis. I imagine Christ taking form in Mary's womb much like I imagine all of Creation emerging at the Creator's voice. I collaged macro photography of patterns, textures, and colors from Creation—such as sunsets, bird's feathers, fish scales, galaxies, leaves, planets, fur, water, etc.—and wove them into her hair. Jesus, the thread of Creation, is being knit together in her womb. God's dream for all Creation is materializing as cells divide in her body; all the while she sings of a dream, still unrealized.

---

<sup>3</sup> Kaphar, Titus. "I Cannot Sell You This Painting." Artist Titus Kaphar on his George Floyd TIME Cover." Time. June 4, 2020.

[time.com/5847487/george-floyd-time-cover-titus-kaphar/](https://time.com/5847487/george-floyd-time-cover-titus-kaphar/)



# Terrifying, Joyous News

By Lauren Wright Pittman

Acrylic & ink on canvas

Inspired by Luke 2:8-20

In this piece, I wanted to highlight the different responses one might have to an angel appearing and saying, "Do not be afraid." I imagine the responses would range from a joyful, "Woah! Look at that! Isn't it beautiful?" to a terrified, "Grab the sheep! Run away! Be afraid, be very afraid!" Don't we all have our own unique way of responding to God radically showing up in our lives?

I think it's soberingly true and almost funny that after the angels' chorus subsides, the shepherds decide they need to hurriedly "confirm" what the Lord had just revealed to them in a dramatic, shimmering, musical fashion. Sometimes we need more tangible evidence of God's movement in the world. Sometimes we need what we have been told to be in line with what we see. In the midst of the dissonance of this world and God's promises, I hope we can step out in faith more often and trust that the promises of God hold true and everything will happen just as we've been told.



# Center Christ

by Lauren Wright Pittman

Digital painting

Inspired by Luke 2:22-40

This passage highlights postures of faithfulness. After intense interactions with angels and seemingly impossible directives from God, Mary and Joseph remain faithful to the Mosaic law.

Despite a long life of anticipation, Simeon remains faithfully diligent, awaiting the coming Messiah. After losing her husband and living a long, solitary life, Anna faithfully worships, fasts, and prays at the temple. Their faithful journeys converge at the temple where Jesus is to be designated holy before the Lord.

I wanted the composition of this image to emphasize the focus of the actions and words of Simeon and Anna. Instead of centering themselves, they center Christ. In the patterning of their clothes, I created icons to visually express the particularity of each person.

Jesus is held high while swaddled in cloth patterned in imagery of radiant starlight and olive branches of peace. Simeon's sleeves are covered with imagery of doves, referencing the Holy Spirit who rested upon him, and eyes representing his witnessing of "a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." The prophet Anna needed no explanation of who the child was; she immediately praised God and shared the Good News with everyone who would listen. Her clothing is patterned with sound waves echoing the light of Christ.

Silence was not an option for either Simeon or Anna, and in the midst of such desperate need for peace and justice in this world, silence is not an option for us either. Faithfulness moves us to action, calls on us to speak of God's dream for this weary world. May we not be silent, and may our faithful journeys lead us to miraculous encounters with God.



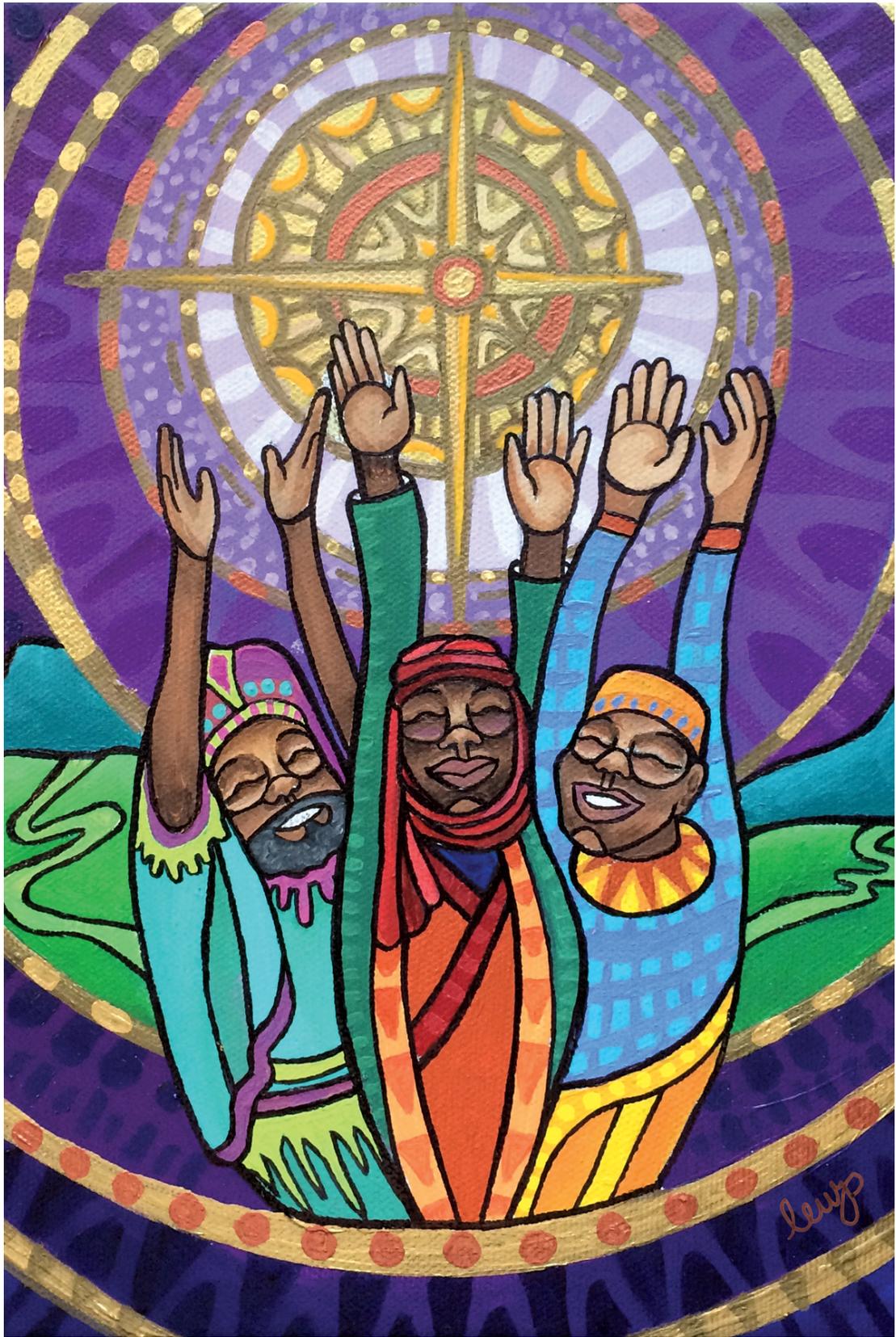
# Shining Hope

By Lauren Wright Pittman

Acrylic on canvas

Inspired by Matt. 2: 7-12

After a long journey, the star hovers, suspended over the wise men's destination. Shining Hope images the joy of this moment and reminds us to revel in wonder of the journey itself.



## Born a Refugee

By Lisle Gwynn Garrity

Watercolor on paper

Inspired by Matt. 2: 13-23

In a season full of gentle manger and nativity scenes, I wanted to also show a glimpse of what happens after the birth: Mary, Joseph, and their newborn fleeing to Egypt to escape the wrath of King Herod. I rendered them minimally, in strokes of black watercolor to emphasize this somber turn in the story. As the figures walk along a barren path, the infant's eyes lock eyes with our own, as if Jesus, even as an infant, is insisting that we dare to see the humanity in the suffering and the refugee.



Lyle