

ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

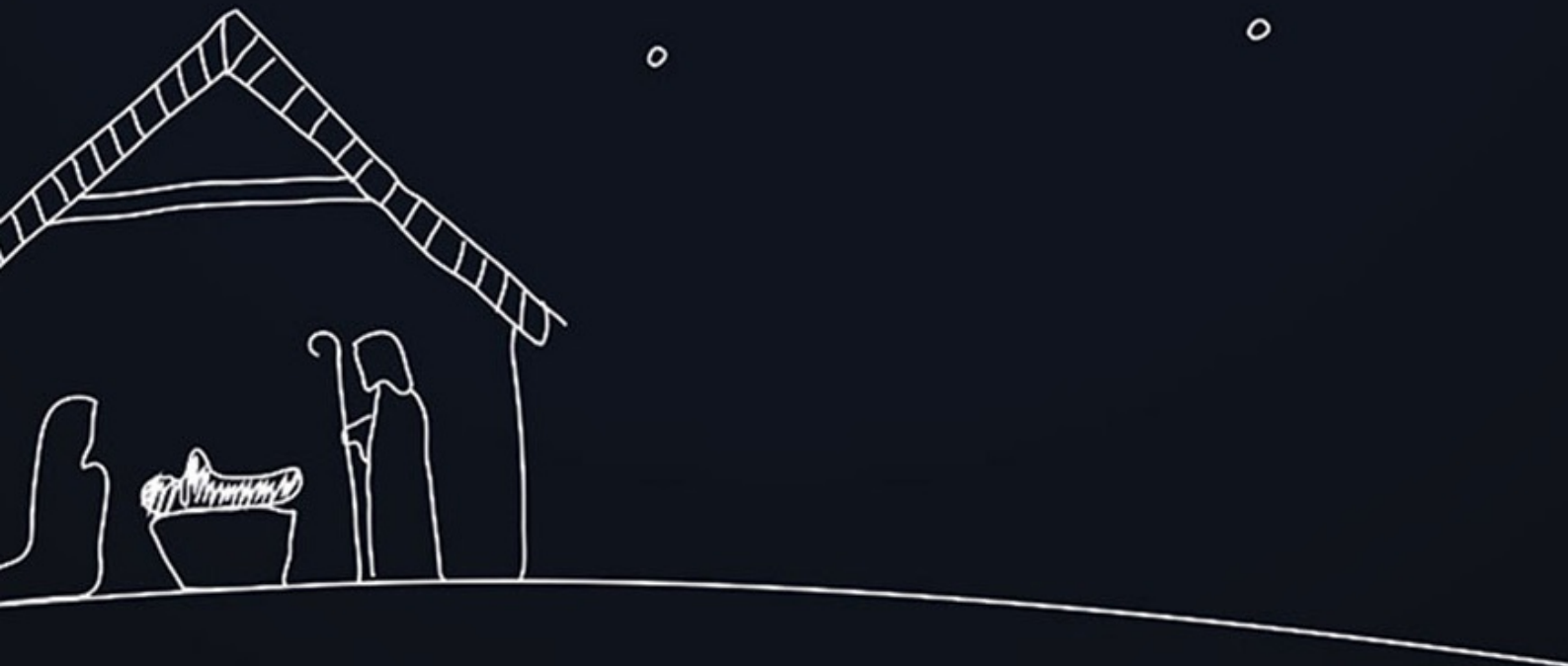


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Rooted in the Reformed tradition, Pittsburgh Theological Seminary is committed to the formation of women and men for theologically reflective ministry and to scholarship in service to the global Church of Jesus Christ.

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World Mission Initiative

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EVENTS

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ADVENT DEVOTIONAL DECEMBER 20, 2020

SCRIPTURE

LUKE 1:5-25

5 In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly order of Abijah. His wife was a descendant of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. 6 Both of them were righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord. 7 But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were getting on in years. 8 Once when he was serving as priest before God and his section was on duty, 9 he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and offer incense. 10 Now at the time of the incense offering, the whole assembly of the people was praying outside. 11 Then there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. 12 When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified; and fear overwhelmed him. 13 But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. 14 You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, 15 for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He must never drink wine or strong drink; even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit. 16 He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. 17 With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." 18 Zechariah said to the angel, "How will I know that this is so? For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years." 19 The angel replied, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. 20 But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur." 21 Meanwhile the people were waiting for Zechariah, and wondered at his delay in the sanctuary. 22 When he did come out, he could not speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He kept motioning to them and remained unable to speak. 23 When his time of service was ended, he went to his home. 24 After those days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she remained in seclusion. She said, 25 "This is what the Lord has done for me when he looked favorably on me and took away the disgrace I have endured among my people."

DEVOTIONAL

The Rev. Dr. Martha Murchison '09

As Christmas nears, we hope. We hope for family to gather. We hope for limited chaos during our children's Christmas program. We hope for song and joy and a baby to be born. We hope for wonderful things. In that hope, we are not unlike Zechariah. Zechariah hoped in God. Throughout his long life he served faithfully in the temple. Like us, he was ready and prepared.

Yet when the angel appeared to him and told him the amazing news that his wife, Elizabeth, would have a son, Zechariah's imagination failed him. He was too old. She was too old. Such things simply could not happen, he told the angel. There was no way the news could be true.

If we used the words of divine visions for our greeting cards and prayers— words such as *Death will be no more*, and *Mourning and crying and pain will be no more*—we might respond in the same manner as Zechariah. There is simply no way mourning and crying and pain will end. We have tried and failed to stop violence. We are weary with seeking an end to suffering. Our imaginations simply fail us. We cannot get them to take us beyond God's beautiful words to our very real and hurting world. We are too old. Such things, we say to the angel, cannot happen.

Yet the angel bends down to us as surely as the angel bent down to Zechariah. He stopped Zechariah's voice from voicing impossibility. The angel whispers to us to stop denying God's vision. The angel urges us to open our eyes and imagine. He asks us to imagine God's vision in our very real world.

The work of Christmas is imagination. The work of Christmas is to make our imagination real.

PRAYER

Lord God, please open our eyes, our hearts, and our imaginations, we pray, that we might better see an image of God's Kingdom in our mind's eye, and from seeing, begin the hard work of helping to make our vision reality. Amen.

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