

Advent 2025

Trans Advent

1st Sunday of Advent

Moses Hernandez McGavin

Isaiah 2:1-5; Psalm 122; Romans 13:11-14; Matthew 24:36-44

In the documentary [Pay it No Mind: The Life and Times of Marsha P. Johnson](#), Marsha P. Johnson recounts how her faith is a bedrock of her organizing. At the end of the documentary, Marsha recounts talking to Jesus Christ at a young age about moving to New York City when he says back to her, “You know, you might wind up with nothing.” Marsha retorts back to Jesus, “Honey, I don’t care if I never have nothing ever till the day I die. All I want is my freedom.” As multiple friends and admirers of Marsha P. Johnson can attest, this was how she lived out her life. Marsha could be handed \$2 and a bag of cookies, and by the time that she reached the end of the block, she had given all that she had just received away to others who needed it more than her. Agosto Machado, an artist and friend of Marsha, recalls that she was like “Jesus with the loaf of bread and the fish, Marsha always had something to share. Not only her good will and thoughts - a bag of potato chips, she would just hand it to the group of kids.”

Marsha P. Johnson was one of the co-founders of STAR, or Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries. Her counterpart, Sylvia Rivera, was also a woman of devout faith, and the pair operated a STAR house where they offered transgender youth a place to sleep and food to eat. The STAR house was also a base of organization for STAR’s political project, holding monthly political education meetings, and offering bail, jail and street support to the poor and rejected in their communities.

Marsha and Sylvia and their organizing show us what we need to be doing in this season of waiting. Today, we are endlessly waiting for the worst of what’s to come. The future is horrifying: severe cuts to social spending, war and genocide across the world, an incoming economic crisis, and a descent towards fascism, characterized by the rise of White Christian Nationalism. Our system has crumbled to the point where we know we can’t sit by and wait but instead must prepare ourselves for what’s to come.

I’m sure that there are folks reading this wondering who will be the perfect person that must be coming along to save us. We may have been told to hedge our bets and hopes on the perfect politician who surely will soon be coming out of the woodworks to take a bold and courageous stand. Or we may find ourselves hoping that the Church will finally catch up to the current moment, wielding a power we didn’t realize was there and be able to stop this impending doom in its tracks. We may have even been led astray before by a politician or a pastor who smooth-talked their way into us believing that they really did have the quick and easy answers to what’s ahead of us.

Well, I have some bad news if you came here looking for the quick and easy secret to total social transformation. The only ones who can get us out of this are us, and it’s going to be messy. Marsha, Sylvia, and Jesus all agree.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus urges his followers to be prepared for the coming of the Lord. Much like today, Jesus and his disciples were living and organizing under deeply oppressive, violent, and economically dire conditions, and Jesus and his disciples were building a movement that was young, scrappy, and very broke. Despite being broke, they still managed to undertake massive organizing drives, feeding and healing the most devastated communities across the Roman Empire. Jesus and his movement weren’t waiting for the right ones to come along but these poor and scrappy fishermen realized that if they wanted to be cared for in a sick and wealthy society, they were going to be the ones who had to do it, and they were going to be the ones who had to demand that the system transform to do it too. Like us, his followers could sense that things weren’t getting any better, and so Jesus called on them not to wait passively, but to prepare to fight and struggle for a better world to come.

At the end of this passage, we learn about the nature of the incoming salvation and judgement. What determines what is God and what is not? For this gospel writer and for the early community of Jesus' followers, God is identified very clearly with the least of these - with the hungry, naked, imprisoned - not with the rich and powerful.

This clarity about God and God's will is crucial and especially needed in times like these where the truth is so contested. Those in power assert that God is ok with terrorizing our immigrant brothers and sisters and separating families, that peace will come through violence and war, that God wants us to deny the very existence of trans people, and blame the poor and unhoused for their poverty. Some also insist that God is okay if we keep up with business as usual, not examining the ways that we pray or serve our communities despite these times demanding something different.

Advent, though, is the story of something new breaking through; of the new being born; of God revealing God-self anew amidst and through a time of great suffering. This "new" is not announced to, nor is it received by, those with wealth or power, or even the mainstream church. It is a message that is heard by those on the underside of history: the shepherds of the field, by a barren old woman (Elizabeth), a young mother (Mary), and by an old man struck dumb (Zechariah). It is heard by the poor and marginalized, and the way that Jesus will follow this call is both a critique of the cruelty and unholiness of empire, and a reassertion that God is a God of Justice and freedom. (Walter Brueggemann). This freedom, and this refusal of God to be put into a box or a temple is dangerous to those in power because it means the power of God can't be harnessed, owned, and commodified. God's love for all creation is unbound, and this threat is why Empire thrashes so violently in the face of the new.

As queer, trans, and nonbinary people, we have incarnated this bigness, beauty beyond control, and freedom of God with our courage to be who we are and honor the same in God. This is a source of hope and leadership in these dark times, and our history shows us this truth.

From underground hormone replacement therapy to drag mothers caring for their daughters, the trans community has had to develop ways to live and care for one another for decades. The need for such projects came out of the realization that no politicians, pastors, or even mainstream gay rights movements were coming to save us. Like Jesus' movement, the STAR House met the needs of the trans youth in the community while also politicizing these struggles to organize trans youth and their leaders to fight for a system that would care for all. [Their manifesto](#) in 1970 signaled their commitment to revolutionary change:

"We want a revolutionary peoples' government, where transvestites, street people, women, homosexuals, blacks, puerto ricans, indians, and all oppressed people are free, and not f— over by this government who treats us like the scum of the earth and kills us off like flies, one by one, and throws us into jail to rot. This government who spends millions of dollars to go to the moon, and lets the poor Americans starve to death.

POWER TO THE PEOPLE

-S.T.A.R.

STAR, like Jesus' movement, was also young, scrappy, and very broke. They were raggedy and imperfect, but the boldness in how they organized for the new world shows us what it will take for social transformation: courage to try something new, and a willingness to know that God is on our side, even in the messiness. This Advent season we must prepare ourselves for the fight ahead knowing that we are the ones who will bring about the new world that we are waiting for, and even though it might look messy, it's what God is calling us to do.

*Language for how individuals have described their gender and sexual identity has and continues to evolve. During the time of the gay liberation movement the term "transgender" was not widely used, and individuals often identified as gay, transvestites, or drag queens. It is widely accepted that leaders such as Marsha P. Johnson – who at the time referred to herself as a transvestite and drag queen – was a transgender woman. Later in her life, Sylvia Rivera would identify both as transgender and as a transvestite. Today, the term "transvestite" is seen as outdated and inappropriate, and "transgender" has replaced this terminology, although whatever term one chooses to identify themselves should be used. If you don't know, it's always best to ask.

1st Mid-Week of Advent

Terra Jubilee Greer

Psalm 124; Isaiah 54:1-10; Matthew 24:23-35

I'm scared right now.

Government agencies I've taken for granted my entire life are disappearing. The sun is darkening.

I'm scared when I hear of yet another transphobic law or policy that restricts the rights of trans people to exist in public spaces. Like a bathroom bill, or a policy that sex is immutable and assigned at birth. Or when I hear of another trans person that died way too young under suspicious circumstances at best, like Jax Gratton or Nex Benedict. Or when I have to look up the laws of a state I'm traveling to for my own safety.

I'm scared when I think of my financial situation right now. It's scary for most people, but there's an additional layer for those who are trans. I've seen so many of my trans friends get fired or forced out of their jobs because including them made the workplace "too gay" or "too woke." I've seen trans friends move out of the country because it just became far too dangerous to stay here, and I've strongly considered if I need to leave, too. The money I make right now is just barely enough to keep paying rent and my utilities. And I also have trans friends who are heavily underemployed for their education and experience, despite looking for appropriate work for over a year.

Our world is changing. That isn't debatable. But we have a say in how it changes.

I'm doing things that help our world change for the better. I protest, call my congress people, and organize with others in my community to testify for the causes we believe in.

But that's not all I do to help our world change for the better. I also suggest books for my library to buy, cook delicious food for me and my spouse, watch cool tv shows, and enjoy nature walks. I also play Dungeons and Dragons and video games. I draw, write poetry, and sing.

I advocate for change and find joy.

I've been constantly thinking about a quote from Dan Savage: "During the darkest days of the AIDS crisis we buried our friends in the morning, we protested in the afternoon, and we danced all night, and it was the dance that kept us in the fight because it was the dance we were fighting for."

Joy is resistance. It's what keeps us going, sustains us for the work still ahead of us. It calms us down, so that we can breathe and actually consider how we want to respond. When we are still afraid, we react without thinking or freeze in fear. Our joy and creativity give us powerful tools.

Rest is also resistance. Those in power want us too tired to organize or resist them. They want us too tired to think properly. Rest restores and renews us. With it, we can catch details we might otherwise miss, and our life feels much more worth living. It's easier to find joy when we have rest!

The world as we know it is ending. Our old systems are being torn to shreds. Our systems that are failing now never really worked for everyone. These systems target some people and let others fall through the cracks. The police and ICE and, too often, whole communities terrorize people of color and immigrants. The government uses bureaucracy to keep resources away from disabled people. Parents put their trans children on the streets.

There are more empty houses than people that need them. And yet billions of dollars of our taxes go towards bombs and weapons and armies and gilding the White House. We destroy our natural environment in the name of profits, especially in the vicinity of marginalized communities. These systems are failing. Even when they worked as designed, they failed us.

*“So also, when you see all these things, you know that [Jesus] is near, at the very gates.”
Matthew 24:33 NRSVUE*

When our old systems are failing, when the world as we know it is coming to an end, that is when Jesus is near. Because when our old systems fall away, then we have a blank slate. We can rethink what we really value, and what we want our systems to do. We can focus on making systems that have kin-dom values, like hospitality, sustainability, care for the marginalized.

When our old systems are broken, that’s when the kin-dom of God can break in. Like a dandelion growing in the cracks in a broken sidewalk, God’s kin-dom breaks into our broken systems.

When our systems don’t care for our neighbors, we have to. When our economic system isn’t working for people, we reconnect with our communities seeking help. We find connections that our old system has been trying to isolate us from. We remember our history, and how those that resisted before did that, and use that as a model for how we can resist now.

At the preschool I work at, I’ve learned that kids can have so much power. When 10 kids are disobeying the teacher at the same time, it is remarkably hard for that teacher to regain control of the classroom. Just because all of them decided to do it at the same time, and the teacher only has 1 body to do things with.

If our government starts ignoring its own laws, how much more resistance can a bunch of creative, organized adults put up? With the dismantling of the old deeply flawed systems, we have a new opportunity. We have the opportunity to create new systems, that have fewer cracks for people to fall into. We have the opportunity to forge stronger communities. We have the opportunity to create a world of abundance, where people and nature are cared for first and foremost, rather than money generated for the rich. We have the opportunity to create a world where people don’t have to work at all to get the resources they need, and when people choose to work, they can work less every week and still be full-time.

We can create a world that isn’t rooted in racism, or ableism, or saneism, or sexism, or queerphobia, or white-supremacy. We can create a more loving world, with the help of God. It won’t be easy, it won’t be linear, and there’s no one “right” way to do it. But I know that we are already living into the better world that we can create.

We are living into a better world when we teach our kids how to care for one another with love, and teach them how to regulate their own emotions. We slow down to help each other instead of rushing ahead thinking “not my problem”. We create art for ourselves and for one another. We share a cat video with someone we love. We call someone into greater relationship when they do something harmful. We have compassion and empathy for one another. We dance as we wait in line for something. We resist someone else’s rights being taken away. We seek creative nonviolent solutions to complicated problems, like protesting injustice in an inflatable frog suit.

Shout for joy, oh barren one! Burst into song and shout! The joy will fuel the work, and the fun will sustain you. The creativity and imagination will be tools towards our collective liberation. Enlarge the site of your tent, for all will be included.

And whatever changes await us; God’s Unconditional, Liberating Love remains steadfast through it all.

2nd Sunday of Advent

Beckett Leclair

Isaiah 11:1-10; Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19; Romans 15:4-13; Matthew 3:1-12

At my grandma's house was a giant willow tree. It stood at the edge of a small hill in a meadow, its grand curtain of leaves and branches draping round about it luxuriantly. It was easily ten feet across at its base and seemed to be the closest thing to an immortal being I would ever encounter. Every summer for decades, on whichever occasion saw all the grandkids assembled, we would all clamber up into the nooks and crannies of this living colossus and someone's mom would snap a picture. For years it seemed there was no stopping this time-honored tradition-- as solid as the ancient fixture of that sunny meadow.

But those children became adults. Discomforted pain and unresolved conflict created wedges. Hurt people hurt people. There stopped being days when we all gathered, even at the base of that old willow tree-- even when grandma and grandpa died.

Then, late one winter-- an ice storm. Thousands upon thousands of acres of pine and hardwoods snapped like toothpicks between God's fingers. Dozens of counties were without power, disconnected from the rest of the world by debris-laded roads and telecommunications systems in shambles. Water wells for that most basic modern amenity, indoor plumbing, rendered inoperable for want of electricity. And that mighty willow was laid low, soaring trunks snapping under the weight of the ice coating every square inch of every leaf, twig, and branch. A tangle of once resplendent tendrils knotted up around the jagged, twisted, torn stump that once cradled a generation with ease.

We talk about hope and joy like they're choices. "Choose joy" the word art placards declare from waiting room walls. We announce "seasons of hope" like we can flip a switch or plug in a string of lights and instantly our hearts and souls will be flooded with unrelenting positive affect. It's not so simple as that.

Paul reminds us that hope and joy aren't ours to command into being. They proceed from God. Indeed, God calls us into hopeful lives through the encouragement and instruction of Scripture and the power of the Holy Spirit. But there's a certain amount of "fake it till you make it" at play here. He encourages the Church in Rome to accept one another as Jesus has, even while we may know that this effort doesn't necessarily mean hearts and minds are just going to snap into conformity. But if we never begin to live into a hope unrealized, how is the hope ever to be realized?

In the early stages of social transition, we go through this same kind of living into a hope unrealized. At some point, the only way to become yourself is to start being yourself. I remember the first time I went out to run errands after I began socially transitioning...standing in line at a checkout, I noticed myself thinking about how I needed to stand a certain way to take up less space. I paused and realized that this was coming through the voices of my grandmother, aunts, and mother telling me, countless times in countless ways, to make myself smaller-- to be a lady. "Well, I don't want to be rude and take up more space than is reasonable, but I'm not a lady, and I should stop trying to be what I'm not," I thought, feeling my shoulders stretch back as I mentally inflated into my own body, widening my stance. "Oh, this feels better," I thought. "What if I just--walk however feels right, and stop worrying about what it looks like?"

My gait loosened. I felt the balance of the momentum moving from my hips into the rest of my body as I stopped "walking narrow" like I was wearing high heels without stomping. I felt lighter. I felt...right. I knew that in my fat, curvy body, even with a binder and "boy clothes," I still read as femme to people around me, but

I could feel the change inside.

When the Pharisees and Sadducees approach the River Jordan to be cleansed by John the Baptist, he rebukes them for presuming that this was just another ritual-- a “one and done” moment of atonement rather than a radical reorientation. He knows they’re not doing the internal work to reorient themselves. It’s showing in their behavior. In his very John way, he reminds them of the stakes, that the accident of their birth into God’s chosen people was meaningless if they didn’t live into what it means to belong to God.

All life is transition—changing from moment to moment—a never ending process of becoming, unveiling what God calls us to be. We orient ourselves, in large part, through the vision we hold of what might be. I don’t have a clear mental picture of the man I’m becoming, but every now and again, I get a glimpse of him out the corner of my eyes as I pass a mirror and see him in my shadow. He’s there. I see him. But I’m also not him—yet.

The Prophet Isaiah casts that vision for what the whole world could look like when the Liberating King comes to dwell among the people. He speaks of all the ways that the impossible will come to be: vegan lions, pacifist snakes, even poor people getting a fair shake in our institutions of power. But crucially, he describes how all of this is to come from the stump of Jesse. This monumental new world does not arise out of nothing. This bright future brimming with possibility comes directly out of the death of what was.

We can hold on so tightly to what has been that we forget to make space for what can be. We can grow impatient and anxious as we sit in the tension of the “not yet,” lose sight of the vision behind that longed for hope, and then give up on the being at the heart of becoming. This is why, as Paul says, scripture offers us encouragement and a call to persevere, pointing us to God’s promise of the radical hope of transformation, so hope and joy can run through our whole lives. Rather than demanding an unyielding positivity that ignores the harshness of reality, Paul encourages us to develop deep roots to ground ourselves in God. We can then be reminded of what we’re orienting ourselves toward and let that guide our actions—so that we can experience the fruit of hopeful lives.

In effect, we are choosing joy and living in hope, but we cannot fully live into it without God’s help... a welcome relief from the responsibility of individual instrumentality. There’s effort, to be sure—internal work to do—but God also works things out, albeit in God’s own time. In the meantime, we can rely on the visions cast by those who have gone before—and by our own hearts—to give us the courage to keep at it.

The other day, I drove past my grandma’s house and saw, in that meadow, green shoots rising out of the wide stump of the old willow tree. No children will be climbing into it for decades yet, but there’s hope in what is there. Willow trees are tough like that. Likewise, there is always possibility for renewed relationships and reconciliation among those of us who climbed that grand tree. It might be awkward, and there’s risk that tender shoots may not be sturdy enough to withstand all hardships, but as long as the roots remain, something other than death and mourning is possible.

2nd Mid-Week of Advent

Petra Strand

Matthew 12:33-37

A Tree Known by Its Fruit: Advent, Interpretation, and the Language of the Heart

The Gospel reading for this Advent season plunges us into a moment of high tension and profound theological conflict. In Matthew 11 and 12, people are trying to figure Jesus out. The two chapters build to a crescendo when Jesus heals a blind and mute man, an act of liberating compassion that should be unambiguously good. The crowd wonders, “Is this not the Son of David?”—a title freighted with messianic hope. But the religious authorities, the Pharisees, respond with a corrosive interpretation: “It is only by Beelzebul, the ruler of demons, that this fellow casts out the demons” (Matthew 12:24).

Their words are not a simple mistake; they are a deliberate, strategic inversion of reality. They see liberation and name it possession. They witness healing and call it sorcery. They look upon embodied wholeness and declare it demonic.

It is in this charged context that Jesus speaks the words of our text: a discourse on trees, fruit, and the ultimate source of our words.

“Either make the tree good and its fruit good or make the tree bad and its fruit bad; for the tree is known by its fruit. You brood of vipers! How can you speak good things, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good person brings good things out of a good treasure, and the evil person brings evil things out of an evil treasure. I tell you, on the day of judgment you will have to give an account for every careless word you utter; for by your words, you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.” (Matthew 12:33-37, NRSV)

Jesus’s metaphor is stark and agricultural: a tree’s nature is revealed by its fruit. The internal reality—the health of the root, the nature of the sap—determines the external product. He applies this directly to the human condition: the heart is the tree, and our words are its fruit. The Pharisees’ slander is not a linguistic slip; it is the inevitable harvest of a heart that has chosen fear over love, control over grace, and rigid orthodoxy over liberating truth.

The word for “careless” in verse 36 is ἀργός (argos), meaning “inactive” or “not working the ground.” These are words that spill out un-cultivated, un-considered. But the Pharisees’ words were not thoughtless; they were a calculated “spin.” This reveals a deeper truth: the most dangerous “idle words” often flow from a heart that has been diligently cultivating the wrong crop—tilling the soil of suspicion, watering the seeds of supremacy. This poisonous fruit is not accidental; it is the yield of a carefully tended, but spiritually diseased, inner life.

Advent and the Interpretive Heart

This is where this text becomes a piercing Advent mirror. Advent is a season of watching, waiting, and preparing for the coming of Christ. But how we watch, what we wait for, and who we prepare to meet depends entirely on the condition of our hearts. The Pharisees were, in their own way, watching for the Messiah. But their hearts were so conditioned by a theology of power, purity, and political deliverance that when the true Messiah stood before them—healing, embracing outcasts, and redefining the law through love—they could only interpret him as a threat.

We do not have Jesus in the flesh before our eyes, but we do have the Scripture, the tradition, and the ongoing

work of the Spirit in the world. And what we “see” in them is a reflection of our own hearts. The text becomes a mirror (James 1:23). If our hearts are attuned to Christ’s heart—a heart of expansive love, radical welcome, and a passion for justice—then we will interpret the world and the Word through that lens. We will see the Divine’s hand at work in the breaking down of barriers and the affirmation of the marginalized.

But if our hearts are captive to society’s fears and bigotries, or the will for power and control, then we will interpret the same data through a lens of fear. We will see danger where the Divine is creating diversity, and sin where the Divine is nurturing authenticity.

The Words Spoken Over Us and the Word We Speak

This is not an abstract theological exercise. For my trans siblings and me, this teaching of Jesus is a matter of spiritual life and death. We live in a world where words have power. We are constantly being “interpreted” by others, often by those whose hearts, like the Pharisees, are conditioned by fear.

The same religious spirit that looked at Jesus’s healing and saw Beelzebul looks at a trans person’s journey toward wholeness—a journey of profound self-understanding, integrity, and alignment of the inner self with the outer presentation—and calls it “demonic,” “deceptive,” or “a rebellion against God’s creation.” These are not argos words. They are words that come from a heart that has treasured a narrow, static, and ultimately fragile understanding of creation. The fruit of this heart is a theology that wounds, excludes, and condemns. It is a fruit that Jesus, in this very chapter, identifies as being in danger of committing the sin against the Holy Spirit—the sin of calling good evil, and light darkness.

But Advent invites us to a different hope. It invites us to trust that the final judgment on our lives does not rest in the words of the Pharisees, but in the Word made Flesh. The one who said, “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” is the same one whose heart overflowed with a love that embraced eunuchs (Isaiah 56:3-5), and who recognized and legitimized a category of people ‘born eunuchs’ (Matthew 19:12)—those whose innate identity placed them outside the normative gender structures. Jesus’ heart is a treasure of grace, and the fruit of his lips is a word of ultimate affirmation: that we are all fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:14), and that our calling is to live abundantly in the truth of who the Divine created us to be (John 10:10).

Speaking Ourselves into Being: An Advent Practice

So what is our Advent practice in light of this text? It is a dual discipline of cultivation and proclamation. First, we must, with the Divine’s help, tend the soil of our own hearts. We must guard against the invasive weeds of bitterness and rage that the world’s argos words can plant within us. We must consciously cultivate the good treasure: meditating on scriptures of liberation and inclusion, seeking community that affirms the image of the Divine in all people, and resting in the love of a One who transcends all human categories.

Second, we are called to speak. In the face of words that condemn, we speak words of our divinely-given truth. Claiming our name is not a careless act; it is one of the most deliberate, holy, and cultivated statements a person can make. It is a word that comes from the abundance of a heart that has wrestled with the Divine and humanity and has prevailed (Genesis 32:28). For a trans person to say, “This is who I am,” is to bear the good fruit of a heart committed to integrity. It is to refuse the corrupt tree of a false, assigned identity and to become a good tree, planted by streams of living water, finally yielding the authentic fruit of a life lived in alignment with the Divine’s deep calling.

This Advent, as we wait for the coming of the Christ, we wait for the one who justifies us by our words—by our “Yes” to our created truth, by our testimony to our journey, by our refusal to let the language of Beelzebul define the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. We prepare him room by clearing out the thorns of false interpretation and making space for the flourishing of every good tree. We watch for the day when every idle, weaponized word will be called to account, and when the true Word will speak our name, and it will be a name of love, of belonging, and of home.

Prayer

Holy One of the waiting heart, you see the truth of our inmost being. This Advent, cultivate in us a heart like yours, so that our eyes may see your liberating work in the world and our mouths may speak words of grace and affirmation. When we are interpreted by the fears of others, root us in the certainty of your love. Give us the courage to speak our truth, bearing the good fruit of authentic lives, as we await the fullness of your coming reign. Amen.

3rd Sunday of Advent

Lawrence T. Richardson

Matthew 11:2–11, Luke 1:46b–55, James 5:7–10

Even in the Waiting, We Rejoice

Advent is not a season that rushes. It unfolds slowly, inviting us to pay attention, to hold both hope and sorrow at the same time. And today, on the third Sunday of Advent—Gaudete Sunday—we’re invited to rejoice. That’s what Gaudete means in Latin: “rejoice.” The candles on the Advent wreath shift in color today, from the deep purple of repentance and longing to a rose-tinted light of joy. It’s a visual reminder that even in the middle of waiting, God’s promises are breaking through.

But let’s be honest: joy in the middle of waiting can feel elusive.

This is especially true for many transgender Christians. Some of us are waiting for affirmation from our families. Some of us are waiting for healthcare, for safety, for stability, for churches that will see us as full participants in God’s kingdom. Others are simply trying to hold onto our faith when so many voices tell us we don’t belong.

This Gaudete Sunday, joy may not look like laughter or ease. But there is a joy that can hold space for our realities, our longings, and our dignity. A joy that doesn’t deny hardship—but persists in the face of it.

The Question in the Waiting (Matthew 11:2–11)

In Matthew 11, John the Baptist—once a bold and certain prophet—is now sitting in prison. His future is uncertain. He sends a message to Jesus, asking, “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?”

That question is brave. It comes from someone who has already given everything to prepare the way for Jesus. But now John is unsure. Jesus isn’t meeting his expectations in the ways he thought. Things aren’t unfolding like he hoped. And maybe, just maybe, he wonders if he was wrong to believe.

If you’ve ever felt like that, you’re in good company. Maybe you’ve asked questions like:

Is this faith worth holding onto?

Does God really see me—me, as I am?

Am I still welcome at the table?

Is the good news actually good for me?

Jesus responds with compassion. He tells John’s messengers to go back and tell him what they see: “The blind receive their sight, the lame walk... the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them.”

Jesus doesn’t scold John for asking the question. He doesn’t say, “Just have more faith.” Instead, he says: look at the evidence of life. Look at what is being restored. Look at what love is doing in the world. That’s how you’ll know I’m the One.

To my transgender siblings: your questions are sacred. Your faith is not diminished by doubt. And your life is already part of this holy restoration. When you choose to live into your truth, to speak with love, to care for your community, to seek healing—these are signs of the kingdom coming near. Even in seasons of waiting, even in the middle of questions, joy is possible because God is still moving.

Rejoicing with Mary (Luke 1:46b–55)

Today we also read the Magnificat, Mary's bold, prophetic song. She sings it while she's newly pregnant with Jesus, carrying divine life inside her but not yet seeing the fruit.

She is still a young woman in an occupied land, vulnerable and likely afraid. But even so, she sings: "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior..."

Mary's joy is not naive. It comes from deep trust. She declares that God has scattered the proud, lifted up the lowly, filled the hungry, and remembered the promise of mercy. She sings not because everything is already perfect—but because she believes God is faithful.

This is queer joy. This is trans joy. It's joy rooted in the reality of who we are, in the promises of a God who does not forget the marginalized, the misunderstood, or the misrepresented. Like Mary, we rejoice not because our stories are easy, but because God is in them. God is with us.

Sometimes, transgender joy is survival joy. It's the joy of making it another day, the joy of a chosen family hug, the joy of singing with our full voice, the joy of being called by our real name. Sometimes, it's quiet joy. Other times, it's defiant joy. But always, it is holy.

Mary's song invites all of us—cisgender, transgender, and nonbinary alike—to consider how God is still lifting up the lowly, still turning systems upside down, still speaking through unexpected voices. The Magnificat reminds us: God's joy is for all people. That includes you.

Patient, Persistent Hope (James 5:7–10)

Then we turn to James. In these brief verses, we hear a call to patience. But it's not the kind of patience that waits passively. It's the kind that endures with purpose. James uses the image of a farmer waiting for the rain—something that can't be forced, but must be trusted.

"Strengthen your hearts," he says, "for the coming of the Lord is near."

Transgender Christians are no strangers to this kind of patience. You may have waited for years to transition. Or waited for a name to feel right. Or waited for a community to love you openly. Maybe you're still waiting. James reminds us that waiting is not weakness. Waiting with hope is strength. And we don't wait alone. We are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses—prophets, ancestors, and everyday saints—who also longed, who also struggled, who also rejoiced before the story was finished.

You are not behind in your journey. You are not too late for God's promises. Joy is not something you have to earn. It's a gift that comes right in the middle of uncertainty.

A Word for All of Us

This devotional is written with transgender Christians in mind—but its message is for everyone. Because the truth is, all of us have something we're waiting for. All of us carry longing and doubt. And all of us are called to rejoice—not just when things are easy, but especially in the waiting.

To cisgender Christians reading this: your transgender siblings are not on the margins of God's story. We are already part of it. The call of Advent is for all of us to prepare the way of the Lord—by lifting each other up, by dismantling injustice, by making space at the table. Joy multiplies when we live this way together.

To my trans siblings: you are good. Your life is a signpost of divine creativity. Your presence in the Church is a gift. God is not late to your story, and you are not lost in the waiting. Like John, like Mary, like the prophets of old—you are seen, known, and loved by the One who is coming and already here.

Rejoice, Beloved

On this Gaudete Sunday, may joy rise in you—not shallow or performative joy, but the kind of joy that knows your name, sees your struggle, and still says: you are beloved.

Rejoice, because Christ is coming. Rejoice, because you are not alone. Rejoice, because joy is your birthright, too. Amen.

3rd Mid-Week of Advent

Ellis Billington

Zechariah 8:1-17 NRSVUE

We Are Not Free Until the Smallest Among Us Are Free

Throughout history and in the world today, children are among the most marginalized of social groups, but their oppression often goes overlooked or is not taken seriously. Of course, the injustice children face will be exacerbated in some children more than others because of certain intersections of identity. Black and brown children, for instance, are more likely to be victims of police violence than white children. Girl children are more likely than boy children to be sexually abused, although sexual abuse does happen to children of all genders, usually from within those children's own families. Children in colonized countries such as Palestine are in danger of death or injury from war in a way children from wealthier countries are not. And trans and queer children face harm from non-affirming religious institutions such as fundamentalist churches and conversion therapy centers.

However, even the most socially privileged of children live in precarious positions that leave them subject to violence, simply by virtue of their being children. Children as a class lack many of the protections afforded to adults of similarly marginalized groups. In the United States and many other countries, for example, it is legal to physically punish children in ways that would be deemed physical assault if committed against another adult. Children face greater difficulty escaping abusive situations than adults as well, with the legal removal of children from homes requiring proof of abuse that often does not come until it is too late. Even in less extreme situations, children are often viewed in ways that dehumanize and diminish them. They are seen as too noisy, a nuisance, as not fully capable of human reason and thinking like adults are.

We are all, at each stage of our lives, created in the image of God. This includes children, so much so that when God came to earth in the person of Jesus, he was incarnated not as a "fully formed" adult, but as a child. Not only that, but Jesus became a theologian as early as the age of twelve, in dialogue with the leaders of the temple when his parents lost him for a few days. Later, as an adult, Jesus's ministry lifted up the experiences and agency of children in ways that rebelled against how his society was organized. Think of how he stood up for the children who wanted to come talk to him after the disciples tried to shoo them away!

Jesus' views on children were both radical for his time and remain radical today, but he certainly wasn't the first to advocate for children's liberation and agency. A focus on children's need to flourish appears in much earlier pieces of scripture, including the reading for the Third Midweek of Advent, Zechariah 8:1-17. Unlike Jesus, not many details are known about Zechariah beyond that he is one of twelve "minor prophets" in the Hebrew Bible. He would have written after the period of Babylonian captivity, during which the Israelites were learning to live in peace after a time of great trauma and violence. After all they had endured, it was hard for them to envision what a life outside of bondage felt like, but the prophet Zechariah came in with a vision from God to help them out, "[e]ven though it seems impossible to the remnant of this people in these days."

For the prophet Zechariah, part of what a flourishing society would look like is this: "the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets." Children in this vision as told by Zechariah are not treated as subhuman or as just the property of adults. Their joy is important. Their right to exist as they are, even if that existence is noisy, is important, as is their right to live into old age, when they will sit in the streets instead of playing there.

(Given the emphasis on people, young and old, existing peacefully in the streets, I would also argue that Zechariah's vision of peace hinged upon walkable cities, but I digress...)

For the prophet Zechariah, as for Jesus, liberation is incomplete if it does not include the liberation of children. In the wake of modern injustice like what I described at the beginning of this commentary, it does not seem like this is a lesson we have learned, despite how many times the Bible tries to teach it to us. In fact, we seem in many ways to have gone quite the opposite direction, not only denying children their joy and agency but also using them as pawns in larger political games that harm the livelihood of both children and adults.

The current moral panic in the United States around the transgender community, like so many moral panics throughout history, falsely tells us our children need to be protected from society's scapegoats, which today take the form of drag queens and transgender people. Meanwhile, if children are being harmed, as they often are, it is by the same forces and the same people who are working to oppress the trans and queer communities—not by the trans and queer communities themselves. Children's access to information about trans and queer communities is limited by book bans, taking away children's avenues toward a better understanding of themselves and others. Queer and trans children are hurt and even killed by lack of access to queer-affirming spaces and gender-affirming care, whether this is by suicide or at the hands of people and institutions committing homophobic or transphobic acts of abuse—acts of abuse from which children are often not protected by law. When children are not able to live as themselves, and this includes living as the genders God has called them to be even if these are sometimes not the genders they were assigned at birth, their capacity for a joyful life depicted by Zechariah is taken away.

The third week of Advent represents joy. This is not a shallow, watered-down kind of joy but the joy of justice and liberation, the kind of joy that can only happen when all of us are set free. This is the joy that was proclaimed by Mary in the Magnificat, and this is the joy God has always wanted for Their creation. This kind of joy, in our world today and throughout history, can often be so difficult to envision, but prophets like Zechariah show us that all things are possible if we can see, believe, and work toward them.

Perhaps if you're reading this, you're thinking that what I have written doesn't feel particularly joyful. Perhaps it seems downright angry. However, as God—speaking through the prophet Zechariah—reminds us in this passage, for the joy God wants for all of creation, there must first be a reckoning. The Israelites, God says, have made God angry in the past, provoking God to wrath. However, there is a path forward for peace, reconciliation, and yes, joy to blossom. “These are the things that you shall do,” God instructed to the Israelites then and continues to tell us through scripture today, “speak the truth to one another, render in your gates judgments that are true and make for peace, do not devise evil in your hearts against one another, and love no false oath, for all these are things that I hate...” It is only then that “there shall be a sowing of peace; the vine shall yield its fruit, the ground shall give its produce, and the skies shall give their dew...” It is only then that children will be able to play in the streets, as themselves, joyfully and without fear.

Mississippi Civil Rights leader Fannie Lou Hamer is quoted as saying “Nobody's free until everybody's free.” A world, then, is only as free as its children, who are all too often put in harm's way by the systems of oppression adults have created. We are only free when queer and trans children are no longer in danger of homophobic and transphobic violence, when Black and brown children are no longer in danger of police violence or deportation, when girl children are no longer subjected to the sexualized violence of the patriarchy, and when children in colonized countries like Palestine are no longer victims of the violence of war. We are only free when all children, everywhere, no longer have to fear violence from their parents or other adults who do not afford them the dignity they deserve. There is a lot of work to do, but God calls us toward this pursuit of justice, peace, and joy.

We are not free until the smallest among us are free.

4th Sunday of Advent

Que Josiah Thomas

Romans 1:1-7

God's Love is Always With Us

Oh to be covered by God's love and His only Son with ever flowing grace, peace AND LOVE!!

I love to say, "I'm so glad that God is not like us". God's mercy, love, and grace are ever flowing, covering and protecting us. During this Advent season, we are reminded that even though Jesus was the gift of life through His death, He yet remains. We must not only be mentally or spiritually reminded, but we must through and by Faith know that He is always with us. What a way to celebrate our Risen Savior by walking in the power of His love in that he gave himself to and for us. This is the most precious immeasurable gift we could have ever had and yet still do.

Celebrate with dance, song, timbrel, family, friends, partners all around... for this is a must. Because His love is ALWAYS WITH US!!!

This was abundantly clear when God called me into a new journey. The REEL Center stands for Reaching Everyone Equally with Love. I started this ministry in the confines of my home. It started with a group of peers - all LGBTQIA - because we were expressing ourselves and how uncomfortable it was to fellowship and worship in other "churches", ministries, and faith spaces. We created a non-traditional Bible study initially called G.L.A.D - God 1st Love Accountability and Development. We created an interactive panel that had discussions surrounding faith and sexuality. We would pray, talk, cry and sing. This worship space became our place and then The REEL Center was birthed. We understand the church is likened to a hospital so we love on all people in word and deed! It was love manifest!

As we reflect during this Advent season, even as a peculiar people, let us remember the greatest gift this season ... that gift is LOVE!! This gift should be free flowing and freely given to all.

Let us remember all of God's children - queer, trans, LGBTQIA. It is my hope that you can show God's gift of love to even those who do not look like us. It is not only a gift but a command to love your neighbor as you love yourself. In perilous times such as now, we must show AGAPE and Unconditional LOVE of the Father and His Son to all of our siblings no matter who they are. Love urges us to action in that while we all were yet sinners, Jesus gave His life so that we could live in freedom and liberty.

Free to love, free to give, free to live in our truth.

What shall we say then... that nothing will be able to separate us from the love God has for us. Be kind and do not forget to show love this season to all you encounter, for this is the will of our Father to love all mankind.

But how will you show love to others in this season?

Will the love of God be shown and reflected by all that you say and do?

We also have this promise of God's everlasting love in that for God so loved this world, the Greatest Gift and Sacrifice that He gave His only begotten Son so that we may have life (John 3:16).

What will you give this season? How does this love manifest in your life?

We need a lot of action right now. And at the same time, this love does not have to be extravagant. Give the gift of love to everyone you see or encounter. Most importantly don't forget to love yourself, understanding again that GOD is always with us through grace, through mercy, through forbearance, through sacrifice, through and in forgiveness.

May the favor, grace, peace, joy and love of God, family and friends, surround you this season. May there be an abundance of blessings to those who always show love to everyone in every place and space. Remembering that God's love is available to all people. Don't forget the gift. It may not come wrapped in decorative paper, it may not be under the tree, it may not even be in a stocking over the fireplace, but it is ever flowing and glowing within you, burning to be spread abroad to those who know and believe in this gift straight from God.

What a wonderful way to spread God's purpose and message through the love we show to one another.

We also need to know in our community that we are loved, and this gift was freely given to us all. In moments where we often feel unseen, unheard, and unloved, reflect on God's covenant sealed with the rainbow of promise - each color representing each person from every walk of life. God's promise of love is this: there is NO respect of persons with God and whom the Son set free is free indeed!!

I remember when I finally walked in my freedom and that is where the love of God surrounded and saturated me with God's presence and Spirit. So in the Spirit of love and this season of Advent let us never forget to show and spread love abroad, for this is the will of God and in and through us is God's love made perfect and the most precious gift from above.

To my Trans and Queer siblings, continue to celebrate and love yourselves and each other. If we can share and show love we can be the beacon of light that lights up the days of every season and the light that spread this gift to all around. To know that we are loved in all of our authenticity is the greatest gift we can ever have. I love you all and I'd rather we remind each other of this love daily.

LOVE ONE ANOTHER.

Christmas Eve

Carla Robinson

Isaiah 9:2-7; Psalm 96; Titus 2:11-14; Luke 2:1-14, (15-20)

When the Angels appeared to the shepherds, they delivered a message that was precise and powerful. They told them who is born, where they can find him, and how they will recognize them. This commentary is about the first of those three issues: who is born.

The Angels used three titles to describe this newborn child: Savior, Christ, Lord. As Savior he is the one who has come to deliver God's people from the current distress and to bring them freedom. As Christ, he is the anointed leader to take God's people forward into the future of what we might call the Beloved Community. As Lord, he is the embodiment and source of everything that is good.

You might look at these three titles as identities. These identities are laid upon Jesus, not by his choice, but by virtue of his birth. Jesus is identified as Savior, Christ, and Lord before he does anything. He is Savior before he does a single salvific act. He is Christ before he calls a single follower. He is Lord before he performs any miracle. All those titles were his before he knew what they were. He was all of those identities before he could articulate what they meant.

We too are born into our identities. We did not choose to be two spirit, transgender, non-binary, gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual. We have been born into them, as Jesus was born into his.

By age 12 Jesus was aware of his connection with his heavenly Father. But we are told he continued to grow in that awareness and identity as Savior, Christ, Lord. The scriptures tell us that at age 30, Jesus stepped into his public ministry, knowing who he was. He lived it out in what he did and what he said. His ministry changed the world.

Like Jesus we too grow and develop in our identities. Our awareness of and our ability to articulate our identities grow over time. Some of us live out our identities more publicly. Some of us live them more privately. However, I firmly believe that for us to follow Jesus is to live out identities in whatever way we are called to do so. That is the work of a lifetime.

As Jesus brought the good news of God's love for all, he encountered people who saw in his life who he was by birth: Savior, Christ, Lord. They embraced him. They followed him. They became the community of Jesus, affirming him as Savior, Christ, Lord.

Throughout the gospels he is affirmed in his identity.

Nathaneal said of him, "Rabbi you are the King of Israel."

The people of Samaria said, "He is the Savior of the World."

Peter said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God."

Martha said, "Yes, Lord I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God coming into the world."

The crowd on Palm Sunday said, "This is the Son of David. The One who comes in the name of the Lord."

Thomas said of the risen Christ, “My Lord and my God.”

As trans, non-binary spirit people it is a blessing when we encounter those who affirm our identities. We know the joy of those who say to us, “You are who you say you are. We see you. We affirm you.” Those are the communities that hold us as beautiful and precious, and those are the communities that we hold as beautiful and precious.

However, as we know, there were many who did not embrace Jesus. They did not affirm him as Savior, Christ and Lord.

This innocent baby would become the target of a powerful political figure: King Herod. Because of his identity, Herod wanted him dead. And he was willing to kill other innocent children to get rid of that one child.

When Jesus begins his public ministry Satan himself attacks his identity and demands proof that he is the Son of God. This theme continues in the Gospels until Jesus is dying. Even then his identity is attacked by those demanding proof, saying “If you’re the Christ, save yourself.” From the wilderness to the cross, from the start to the finish, his identity is attacked.

Like Jesus we should not be surprised when our identities are assaulted and when people bombard us with the “Prove it” attack. Our work is to live out our lives as who we are, as best we can. To live our lives with integrity and dignity.

Jesus is not trying to prove his identity. He is living into the identity that he was born into – Savior, Christ, Lord. And too with us, we live our lives. We live our lives knowing that just as there were those who denied the identity of Jesus, there will be those who deny our own. But we keep living as the people we are born to be whether publicly or privately, but we all must live it out.

The angels said that the birth of the child was good news of great joy for all people. And that is true. Still, for many of us, this season is painful as many of us endure the hurt of rejection, estrangement and isolation that is often part of the gender-nonconforming experience. I get that. I feel it too. For too many of us there is not a lot of joy in this season.

However, I would argue that there is still good news even if it doesn’t always bring us great joy. The good news is that you are you, born into your identities, as Jesus was born into his. The good news is that in Jesus God has tasted some of our pain and offers us life and hope in the midst of that pain. The good news is that you are deeply loved by God. The good news is that you carry the image of Christ; crucified and risen. And if there is any group who shows the world another way of living together in peace, it is us. We know the pain of life and hold the hope of new life, for ourselves and for the larger community.

Christmas Day

Erin Swenson

Isaiah 62:6-12; Psalm 97; Titus 3:4-7; Luke 2:(1-7), 8-20

Paradox and Possibility

It had been four years since Mom died, and the announcement of my impending gender change from male to female had hit Dad especially hard. He told me that he had spent three whole days with his pastor searching the scriptures to find anything that would support my changes, to no avail. Dad was clearly worried about me.

Dad lived in the home he and Mom had built in the North Georgia mountains, and I was visiting him before Christmas to help him prepare for the arrival of the family, both of my younger sisters and their husbands and children. We were having lunch in the best place in town, the cafeteria for the junior college.

“How are you doing?” Dad asked as we sat down with our lunch trays.

“Doing OK,” I replied, aware that this was the first time Dad and I had talked alone since my gender transition. “And you, Dad. How are you?”

“Lots of sadness,” he said. “about how much pain you must have been in all those years. It must have been terrible for you. I keep thinking about all the ways I must have made it worse.”

Warmth flushed my body as tears formed in my eyes. “No, Dad, you didn’t make it worse. You were the best Dad I could have had. You encouraged my music and didn’t push me into football. You taught me how to be a caring person. I just regret that I couldn’t trust you with my terrible secret.”

“I’m still sad,” he repeated. “It must be painful for you.” Dad was referring to my ongoing encounter with the Presbyterian Church over my ordination. I needed to retain my ordination as a Presbyterian minister for family reasons. What I didn’t know at the time was that no one had ever changed gender expression as an ordained minister and retained their ordination. I was breaking new ground.

“Dad. I feel nothing but gratitude for my life. My life... my whole life... has been a gift to me. I loved my family. Being a husband and father taught me how to love and how to be loved. And I am very proud of my daughters. I can’t imagine a better way to have spent the last 40 years, and I feel especially privileged that I now get to experience a whole new perspective. I am thankful that I was a man and thankful that I now get to be a woman.”

Dad nodded quietly, his eyes searching mine for reassurance. “I’m trying to understand, really I am. I just worry I’ll say the wrong thing or not be supportive enough.” For a moment, we just sat together in silence, the weight of the years and our shared love filling the space between us. I reached across the table and squeezed his hand, hoping he could feel the honesty in my gratitude and the strength of our bond.

Christmas is paradox: a king born in a stable, wise men travelling great distances on foot in a couple of days, angels appearing to lowly shepherds. Our experience of Christmas can mirror this paradoxical story whether you are cis or trans. Loneliness abounds as memories of better times arise. Christmas Day, the central celebration of the Christian year, can be a reminder of losses. This can be especially true for people who are trans if they have lost connections with important family members.

Yet, within this season of contradictions, there is also an opportunity for hope and healing. The gatherings,

songs, and rituals of Christmas serve as moments to reconnect, to bridge gaps that have formed, and to honor both who we have been and who we are becoming. Even amidst uncertainty and change, the essence of Christmas—love, acceptance, and renewal—remains accessible to us all, inviting us to embrace one another with compassion and understanding.

And as trans people we have a special quality that enhances the holiday, we hold the mystery of possibility and hope. Our lives express hope in a powerful way, particularly important in this time of turmoil.

This is the calling for transgender people during this holiday season. People going through a gender transition can lose vital connections with family. Finding acceptance among friends or support groups can help heal wounds and nurture a renewed sense of self-worth, and even establish new families for us.

Equally important is cultivating love and acceptance within ourselves—recognizing our own resilience, embracing our journey, and allowing hope to take root even in difficult times. During the holidays, it's important to remember that compassion can be found in unexpected places, and that reaching out—whether for support or to offer it—can make a meaningful difference. Small gestures, like a kind word or a shared meal, can foster a sense of connection and remind us that we aren't alone in navigating complex emotions. The spirit of Christmas encourages us to embrace both ourselves and others, creating space for healing and joy even when circumstances feel challenging.

This is the mystery of Christmas, joy found in a manger, a feed-trough for livestock in a humble stable. Dad and I were sitting in a noisy lunchroom with meatloaf on our plates. He reached out and touched me even in his hurt and confusion. Suddenly my loneliness seemed a distant memory

That Christmas with Dad was many years ago, and I don't remember much about the holiday itself. But I do hold those precious moments with Dad in my heart. One of the most important things to remember as people of transgender experience is that we must remain open to the small things that touch our lives.

My gender transition was successful and was complete almost thirty years ago. The Presbyterian Church accepted my gender change, and I became the first mainstream minister to change gender expression and remain ordained.

1st Sunday of Christmas

Zayn Silva

Isaiah 63:7-9; Psalm 148; Hebrews 2:10-18; Matthew 2:13-23

God Born into Trans Flesh, Like Me

As a child, I remember hearing the story of the birth of Christ for the first time. It always felt like magic to me. Animals followed a star, angels appeared from the heavens, and three rich men came from nowhere to kneel before a baby and declare, “All is well.” They brought him gifts fit for royalty.

Growing up in an evangelical Pentecostal Spanish-speaking church, we brought that story to life every Christmas. My mother played Mary once, her round belly hidden under layers of fabric. In one swift motion, her stomach flattened, and a baby doll wrapped in a white sheet from Target appeared in her arms. The crowd gasped. The baby glimmered in the light above the burgundy carpeted pulpit. The congregation erupted in praise, shouting, “¡Nuestro Salvador ha nacido!” Our Savior is born.

When the lights dimmed for the next scene, the small sanctuary held a silence that felt holy. Behind the pulpit, the cast scrambled to change costumes in the cramped office where the offering was usually counted. I sat in the pews, tears streaming down my face. I could not explain why I cried every time, only that something in the story reached inside me.

How could anyone be born this perfectly? How could a star shine so bright, and strangers come bearing gifts just because you exist? I wanted to believe it could be true for me too. That God could be born into a body like mine. But even as a child, I felt the weight of something different inside me, something that made me quiet, something I kept hidden like a secret between me and God.

“It was fitting that God should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings.” — Hebrews 2:10

As I got older, I learned that perfection was not only expected of Jesus, it was demanded of me. Being part of the pastor’s family meant I was watched. People assumed our family carried special favor from God. Every smile, every prayer, every mistake felt magnified. I thought holiness was something we could earn if we followed all the rules and stayed pure. But the moment I was outed, all of that collapsed.

I lost friends. I lost my place in the church. I lost the safety of belonging. I wondered if this was what Jesus felt when the world turned against him. Hebrews says Christ shared in our flesh and blood, that he learned obedience through what he suffered. Maybe holiness isn’t about being flawless. Maybe it’s about how deeply we live through pain and still choose love.

“Since the children share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things.” — Hebrews 2:14

By the time I turned twenty-one, I had been prayed over, fasted for, and rebuked so many times that I thought deliverance might kill me. The church I gave my childhood to had become the place that suffocated me. I wasn’t a confused woman. I was a man in a body that felt like a cage. Leaving didn’t feel like rebellion, it felt like what I had to do to save my relationship with God.

When I left, I felt close to Jesus in a new way. I related to the story of a man who carried truth in a world that refused to understand him. I related to a Savior who was rejected by his own and still chose love. And in that leaving, something happened.

Not long after, I found a queer organization that welcomed me, even with my conservative edges and the pieces of faith that hadn't healed yet. They didn't care about my past or how imperfect I was at unlearning. They made room for me anyway. It felt like the first time someone had opened a door instead of closing one.

Not long after that, I met a trans woman who carried joy like it was her birthright. She walked into a room, and it changed. Her laughter filled the space. She moved with the kind of peace that comes from knowing you belong to yourself. I didn't know it then, but I was seeing God in motion. Not the God of punishment and shame, but the God who shows up in freedom and joy. That night, I went home and prayed. I asked God if this was what incarnation looked like: holiness alive in human flesh.

"It was no messenger or angel, but his presence that saved them." — Isaiah 63:9

A week later, I joined a protest. Someone handed me a drum, an orange Home Depot bucket, and two sticks, and told me to hit it. I did. The rhythm echoed through the streets. The chants rose like hymns. "Hey hey, ho ho, transphobia has got to go." Around me were people the church had warned me about: queer, trans, nonbinary, people of every color and kind, and yet I had never felt closer to God.

The air was alive with praise, even if we didn't call it that. It was breath and sound and resistance, all woven together. It was worship. For the first time, I understood the incarnation, not as a faraway miracle but as something alive in us. God was there, marching beside us, breathing through us, alive in trans flesh.

"Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested." — Hebrews 2:18

That day, I realized that God's presence isn't trapped inside churches or traditions. It moves through us, through our suffering and joy, through every breath that refuses to be silenced. God became trans flesh like me.

To be transgender means that your gender identity does not align with the sex you were assigned at birth. But the word "trans" itself means across, beyond, through. It speaks of movement, of transformation, of crossing over from one state of being into another.

Theologically, that is the heart of incarnation. God crossed from divinity into humanity, from spirit into flesh, from untouchable to tangible. God became love in motion, love with skin, love that bleeds and heals. God became transfigured. God became trans.

When I think about Christmas now, I don't see a perfect manger scene anymore. I see God born into a dirty place, a small cave filled with the stench of animals, straw matted with dung and sweat, the air thick with breath and earth. I see a brown baby born into danger, a family turned away, a mother aching, a father trying to believe. That is what incarnation really is, God showing up where there is no room and making room where there was none.

And yet, there was hope. Hope in a mother holding her newborn close while soldiers searched for him. Hope in a father willing to protect what he could not fully understand. Hope that this fragile life would grow into something that would save them both. They were surviving and fighting for their baby's right to live, to love, to be.

The world wasn't ready for Christ then, and it isn't ready for us now. But God keeps coming anyway. God keeps becoming anyway. God keeps living in trans flesh like mine, like hers, like ours. Because incarnation didn't end in Bethlehem. It continues every time truth takes on flesh, every time love refuses to die.

"Let everything that has breath praise the Lord." — Psalm 148:1

When I praise now, I do it differently. I drum until my palms ache. I breathe like prayer is air itself. I live fully, knowing that my existence is testimony. I remember that Christ's body, like mine, carried scars, and that those marks were not signs of shame but the fingerprints of resurrection.

Into this Christmas season, I carry the story of a God who became love in flesh, who became transfigured through suffering and grace, who crossed every boundary to remind us that all flesh is holy. God became trans flesh like me. God became flesh like them. God became flesh like us.

That is the miracle I hold. A God still being born through us all.

New Year's Day

Megan Rohrer

Ecclesiastes 3:1-13; Psalm 8; Revelation 21:1-6a; Matthew 25:31-46

On December 31, 1862, enslaved and free African Americans gathered for Freedom's Eve. Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation on September 22nd, but it did not become law until January 1st. Gathering in secret, the soon to be liberated sang songs, told stories and counted down the seconds until their freedom materialized.

Honoring the legacy of the first Watch Night, some Black churches sing-in the New Year and tell stories that inspire their community to continue seeking liberation and freedom (internally and externally) from all that is oppressing them. This week's texts similarly encourage us to claim our wholeness, draw closer to God and to dream beyond the limits of what is realistic in the confines of our current world.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-13 reminds us that impossibly hard, hopeless and hurtful seasons can transform as winter shifts into spring. Unlike theologies that blame the oppressed for their lot in life, Ecclesiastes makes it clear that God is the divine clockmaker that recalibrates our hearts, unburdens our mind and orients our lives. God doesn't just liberate us, God delights when we enjoy our work, eat festive meals and experience the joy of life through all of our senses.

Each stanza (1-8) lays out stark contrasting behaviors without judgement. The good, the hard, and the beautiful all have a time and place. Most of the verses begin with seemingly destructive or negative verbs and shift to repair, kindness and peace.

Breaking the pattern, planting is uprooted, embrace leads to letting go and love turns to hate. Is this rhetorical turn meant to keep us on our toes, remembering that life is unpredictable? Could the words be intended to comfort those who have experienced love that is negative? No matter how you relate to each word, the text is a rhythmical reminder that change is an unstoppable force, whether you embrace it or not.

Trans individuals may relate to the idea that seasons of life shift and change. Some may have had a season for pants, a season for dresses, a season of abundance, a season of health, a season of doubt, a season of loneliness, a season of euphoria, a season of unrestrained romantic love, a season of overeating, a season of undereating, a season of loving their skin, a season that left stretch marks, a season of grief, a season of starting again and wonder what is to come in the seasons ahead.

It was illegal to dress in the clothing of the opposite sex in San Francisco on January 1, 1965. The 1863 law originated in the desire to arrest someone in a costume before they attempted to rob a bank. For nearly a century it was used to arrest poor LGBTQ and gender transgressing individuals. At the same time, wealthy, primarily white, vaudeville performers, opera singers and actors were not arrested when they embraced the trans aesthetic or lived openly transgressive lives.

After an arrest, the San Francisco Police Department put the names, home addresses and sometimes the photos of trans and gender non-conforming people in the newspapers. They also called the employers of trans people to ensure that they lost their job before they were released from jail.

Despite the law, José Julio Saria, an Army veteran and the first openly LGBTQ individual to run for political office, openly performed in drag for decades. Throughout the 1950s, José performed arias at the Black Cat Cafe. California's Alcohol and Beverage Control (ABC) authorities, at the persistent nudging of advocates from the

Parent Teacher Association (PTA), regularly sought to shut down LGBTQ spaces. It took nearly a decade of legal battles to close the Black Cat.

Despite the danger, in 1965, José planned a New Year's Day Mardi Gras Ball to raise start-up funds for the Council on Religion and the Homosexual. Created by LGBTQ leaders in partnership with Methodist, Presbyterian, Lutheran and UCC pastors, the Council advocated for the poor members of the LGBTQ community who were most affected by the local laws.

The Rev. Cecil Williams, of Glide Memorial Church, made an agreement with the San Francisco Police Department before the celebration. The local district agreed not to raid the party. Unexpectedly, officers from another police district showed up at California Hall that New Year's Day. The officers brought arrest wagons and began taking pictures of everyone entering and exiting the ball. The next day, the pastors held a press conference and spoke out publicly against the anti-LGBTQ bias in laws and their enforcement. The lawyers arrested at the event, sued the city and ultimately worked to get the laws changed a decade later in 1974.

A year later, in 1975, Diana Sommers won a jury trial arguing that because she was a trans woman, she was not guilty of impersonating the opposite sex. Publicly shamed by the papers, her bravery informed other trans individuals that they could also demand their rights in court. Soon after, a trans man named Reed Erickson, funded a program that enabled Sgt Elliot Blackstone to train trans women and help them retain jobs as secretaries.

These changes were dramatic and radical. San Francisco's Summer of Love continues to inspire people around the world to embrace a new season in their life, love and gender expression. But, these changes did not last forever. As wonderful as San Francisco is, it is not a perpetually ever-flowing stream of justice. Trans people in San Francisco and around the world continue to advocate for employment opportunities, judicial equity, for space in religious spaces and for the right to self-identify.

These days the negative news can easily cultivate feelings of overwhelm and powerlessness. Unhelpful court rulings, economic injustice and racism is still palpably present in our worlds. We need liberation and freedom to dwell with us for longer than a season!

Psalms 8 reminds us that the injustices that loom large in our day to day lives are not visible from space. Zooming out, sitting with photographs that show the ever-expanding beauty of the galaxy can help us detach from the microaggressions that seek to distract us from our calling. Some days we need to untangle ourselves from the weary world to take in the beautifully colored lights of the aurora borealis. Other days, we need to be reminded that God zooms in on our lives, and longs to dwell with us in both good times and in the ache.

The loving undertones of Matthew 25:31-46 and Revelations 21:1-6a become much more vivid when readers pair them with the portions of Ezekiel that inspired them. Too often, contemporary readers with an axe to grind against certain demographics intentionally misuse Matthew's metaphor about sacred sheep and goat sorting to malign others. These readings miss the beloved community that is so powerfully described in Ezekiel 34.

Ezekiel makes it clear that poverty, hunger and economic divides are the problem. There is no mention of embodiment or sexuality as a factor used in the divine's sacred sorting. God gives those who are hurting others a sacred time out and provides food, safety and a shower of blessings to those who lack. In response to bullies, billionaires and bondage, God brings a Covenant of Peace.

Those who have lost hope that justice or peace will come within their lifetime may prefer the reading from Revelations. If it misses us here and now, the promises of a new heaven and earth will find us in the future. God's promise to remove the sting of death echoes back to the story of the Dry Bones in Ezekiel 37. This chapter reiterates God's declaration of a Covenant of Peace.

As the New Year dawns, what are you watching for today? What liberation is needed in your life? How can the faith of African Americans inspire you to actively cultivate liberation here and now? How can the courage of José Julio Saria and the pastors at California Hall inspire you to live and love boldly when you encounter unjust laws or policing? If justice and peace do not find you in this world, what do you hope to be freed from in the everlasting life to come?

This week's texts invite you to shed the fear, shame and harsh words that too often stick to our ribs. Invite God to dwell with you in both the hard and the holy moments of your life. Care for those who are stuck in the muck and mire of poverty. Embrace the new season of sensual joy that is on its way.

2nd Sunday of Christmas

Avery Arden

Sirach 24:1-12; John 1:(1-9), 10-18

*In the assembly of the Most High,
[Wisdom] opens her mouth...:*

*“I came forth from the mouth
of the Most High,
and I covered the earth like a mist. ...*

*Before the ages, from the beginning,
[God] created me,
and till eternity I will never fail.”
- Sirach 24:2-3, 9*

*In the beginning was the Word
and the Word was with God
and the Word was God.*

*The Word was with God in the beginning.
Everything came into being through the Word...
- John 1:1-3*

On the wall above my desk, a Black transfem draped in blue, pink, and white holds up a hand in benediction, while a similarly robed transmasculine figure receives a heavenly crown; a shirtless chest displays a sacred heart tattooed between top surgery scars; a trans angel announces that TO BE QUEER IS TO BE HOLY.

I've been gathering and creating art that commingles trans and sacred imagery since 2016; my wall has become a personal repository of reminders that, as an embroidery hoop I made declares, WE HAVE ALWAYS EXISTED. As hateful people relentlessly describe us as a fad at best or, at worst, a contagion worming its way into previously unsullied society, my constellation of artwork maps out a different story: that we who upend human binaries have been around from the very beginning. Before the very beginning, even — when there was no world, no cosmos, only Divinity, Wisdom, and a Word.

In the beginning, God spoke the Word; and God was the Word; and God was the breath that pushed that Word out into the void to spark life.

In the beginning was Wisdom, flowing forth from God's mouth to unfurl Herself across the earth, seeking out those who'd welcome Her peculiar gifts.

Starting with Paul, who identified Christ as “the wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1:24), Christians have traditionally connected this personified figure — often called Sophia, the Greek word for wisdom — with Jesus. Yet while the Word took on a human body whose features led those present at Their birth to declare, “It's a boy!”, Wisdom is described — and speaks of Herself — in feminine terms.

Sophia, Woman Wisdom, assigned male at birth! Now that's a trans story if I ever heard one.

I honor this transition into a human (yet, queerly enough, still fully divine!) form in my aforementioned embroidery piece: On olive green fabric, the words WE HAVE ALWAYS EXISTED are encircled by symbols of binary-defying biblical figures. Alongside Joseph's colorful coat (Genesis 37) and the Ethiopian eunuch's scroll (Acts 8) stands the manger into which the Word made flesh was lain. How very queer, how seemingly foolish is the Wisdom of God, that relinquishes omnipotence to be cradled in human arms!

The whole of the Incarnation story, in fact, resonates with me deeply as a genderqueer person. Jesus transgressed his culture's expectations for a firstborn son. Instead of settling down and having children, he galivanted across Palestine, sometimes performing women's work like foot-washing and employing feminine language for himself, like when he wished he were a mother hen sheltering chicks under her wings (Luke 13:34; Matthew 23:37). Jesus's behavior upset his family, as living into queerness so often does; on at least one occasion, they worried that he was "out of his mind" and sought to control him (Mark 3:20-35). In the eyes of the world, incarnate Wisdom acts the fool; won't Jesus stop this nonsense and please come home?

I delight in Jesus's disregard for gendered norms! And yet...I still default to thinking of Jesus as male. Why, when many of us have expanded our language for God beyond exclusively masculine terms, does it still feel strange — even inappropriate — to speak of the Person of God who is Jesus as she or they?

...It's the physical body, isn't it? In many ways, Jesus is as constrained by his (/her/their/zir...) assigned gender as the rest of us.

From birth, we are bombarded by messages telling us that our flesh is our gender — that, as feminist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir put it, "biology is destiny." From the moment the Word put on flesh, that flesh (or our assumptions about it, because the Gospels don't actually tell us much about Jesus's physical appearance beyond what we can deduce from his circumcision in Luke 2) sealed Their fate: Creator God can exist beyond human labels, and the Spirit is, well, Spirit; but God the Son is a human man.

But trans folk know deep in our bones that biology is not destiny. Trans wisdom cuts through the bonds of the binary's imposed futures, freeing all of us to imagine new possibilities...and, sometimes, to remember old ones.

Though those of us steeped in Western culture's gender binary may struggle to conceive of Jesus in any body but that of a cisgender perisex man, some of our ancestors in faith were not so troubled by an androgynous deity. Up through the Middle Ages, textual and artistic examples abound of a Christ whose side wound is a vulva birthing the church; or whose lactating breasts nourish Her followers, just as Zir body and blood do in the Eucharist.

In this willingness to experience Christ's corporeal form not as fixed but flexible, our ancestors in faith were able to draw out new wisdom. For instance, Saint Augustine used that nursing image to help explain the Incarnation: "...For just as a mother...transfers from her flesh the very same food which otherwise would be unsuited to a babe...so our Lord, in order to convert His wisdom into milk for our benefit came to us clothed in flesh."

While theologians utilized androgynous images of Jesus for educational purposes, everyday people found divine connection and comfort in them. For example, Christ's side-wound-turned-vulva would be inscribed on medieval birthing girdles, worn while in labor as a reminder that God knows what it is to suffer the kind of agony that brings about new life.

A late example of the ways Christ's body was treated as a malleable site of multi-gender experience is "The Lamentation of Christ." Commissioned by a Belgian convent-hospital, this sixteenth-century painting depicts Jesus's female followers grieving around his dead body, which has breasts.

I wonder what female patients, and the nuns who cared for them, felt as they beheld Divine flesh intentionally

painted to reflect their own bodies. Did it soothe them to see themselves mirrored in their God, to recognize that Christ knows their pain intimately, even unto death?

I can't know for sure, beyond being sure that these women's reactions varied. But I think about how I feel when taking in a piece of art where Jesus looks a little like me, chest bearing top surgery scars. The world calls these marks shameful, signs of mental illness and "mutilation" — but Jesus Sophia scoffs at the "wisdom" of fools. Ze proudly displays the marks of Zir own "shame": the stigmata, those crucifixion wounds that document forever how the very things the world stigmatizes are often a sign or site of sacredness.

At some point, "The Lamentation of Christ" was censored, the breasts painted over to create a flat chest. It wasn't till the late 1900s that restoration efforts revealed the breasts concealed under the paint.

I think about all the stories buried, not by mistake but with the purpose of obscuring the truth that WE HAVE ALWAYS EXISTED. The ancient texts translated in ways that obscure any hint of queerness. The gravestones emblazoned with a name that was dead before the person it identifies. The statues smashed; the laws passed; the books burned; the love explained away.

Those in power do such a good job destroying the evidence that they themselves forget; they accuse us of revising history when we pull fragments from the wreckage and find ourselves. But eternal Wisdom calls to us, reaches through time and space to guide us back to each other.

Holy Wisdom, holy Word, Jesus Sophia,

from the beginning, You bless us.

Remind us of our holiness. Open us to Your peculiar gifts.

Gather us under Your wings, and we will be home.

Epiphany

Danielle Dufoe

Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14; Ephesians 3:1-12; Matthew 2:1-12

The Feast of the Epiphany

In this Epiphany season the birth of Jesus Christ assures us of God's presence and identity in our hearts and in our lives. Because of this we may take solace in times of uncertainty and darkness, for we know that Jesus, the light of the world, has come.

Ephesians 3:1-12

The Apostle Paul's letter of Ephesians was written to gentile Christians to remind them that although they were once alienated from God and God's people, the Jews, they would now be made whole and included within the family of God. Thus, restoration and veneration become sacred acts in Epiphany. It is here where we recommit ourselves as one.

Our country and our faith are deeply divided, and in my assessment, this is because many of us within the faith don't read the Bible, or have a relationship with God. Both are key elements of our faith, but most Christians simply hold fast to the theology of their inner circle, which can be harmful and just wrong. When we connect with the relics of our faith, we come to know God better. When we pray or read our sacred text we can't help but to know the unassailable truth that is frequently distorted. For example, the eunuch found throughout the canon is the archetype for today's transgender person. Therefore, what Jesus says about the eunuch (Matthew 19:12), helps us to understand that some transgender people are transgender because they were born that way, because others made them that way, and some are transgender for the sake of the kingdom of God. In Isaiah 56, the prophet asserts that the eunuch who keeps God's commandments will have a high place in God's house - this is in the text if we only read it. Epiphany demands that God's people be unified. In knowing God, we know the timeless truth — Jesus' birth means that everyone belongs.

We come to know the spirit of God as we commune with God through prayer, meditation, and through assembly. This is why communities of accountability are important, and this is why we need one another. The church is divided because we frequently lean onto our own understanding, because we failed to study, to show ourselves approved, workmen who are able to rightly divide the word of truth.

Of course, the central message of Epiphany is that Jesus the light of the world has come, and in doing so, all have access to God. In Christ there is neither Jew, nor gentile. By itself, the matter of who was Jewish or gentile was highly contentious during the time of the apostle Paul. To add further context, neither Jesus, nor Paul, were Christian. We seem to forget this. In fact, what early church scholars tell us is that in the first century, Christianity was in a fledgling state. So much for today's Christian who can be more worried about a title than the tenants of our faith.

Today, there seems to be an endless stream of things that divide us - race, culture, gender, and our politics. Today, LGBT people are routinely kept from the assembly of God, and transgender people are treated worst of all. Epiphany reminds us that we are all one in Christ Jesus, and it calls us to recommit ourselves to the singular goal of unity under the author and finisher of our faith.

Epiphany is a time for faith leaders to accurately learn and teach the Bible, and for us to know what it means to put scripture in context. Many within our faith wrongly believe themselves to understand accurately the Bible & what it says, but if you survey those closest to you, you'd find that some Christians routinely mix-up Bible figures and wrongly remember biblical narratives. With such high stakes as our spiritual health, our lives and

others in the faith, we should take better care. Epiphany is a time of rededicating ourselves to learning more about our faith, and for getting to know the spirit of the living God that exists in the people of God.

Good theology should be shared like communion, and even challenged or critiqued in community, but because most within the faith hold their theology as inerrant and untouchable, we are divided. Theology should not alienate, but instead unify. The theology of your church should be able to withstand a holy review, and the same is true for any inner-circle-theology, or the theology of a believer's family. For in truth, there is but one theology and that is of Jesus Christ who came that we might all be free.

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Gospel of Matthew (2:1 -12)

As they traverse from lands afar, the Magi show us the way. They cross many different nations and encounter many different people to welcome God incarnate. Their pilgrimage affirms that God is no respecter of persons. With God, social and relational identities do not matter. Every life is of value. Each of the wisemen, gentiles (non-Jews), represent the revelation that Christ is for all people -not just for a select few - transgender or not. Through the epiphany, all are found holy.

Psalm 72 1:10, 10-14

Psalm 72 harkens back to when Kings were commonly revered as God's representatives on earth, and when leadership was said to have walked with God. Some see the Psalm as prophecy, foretelling the coming of Jesus who would be a just & merciful peacemaker. In other instances, we affirm all Jesus continues to accomplish in our lives, even as we pray for those in seats of power today.

As God is made available to all, we are invited to grow in a deeper relationship with God, through prayer and supplication. While the psalmist prayed for God's favor, prosperity and good health, we pray that God protects the vulnerable, provides for the poor and keeps safe all who are at risk of being harmed. We pray that God's will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. We pray that people know the true story of Jesus Christ and not the story of Jesus that has been corrupted by those who seek political gain or those who deceive others only to acquire more money for their coffers. In Epiphany, the story of Jesus has only just begun. He lives. He lives. Christ Jesus lives today.

Epiphany calls us to recommit ourselves to being in relationship with our creator through prayer and supplication. Knowing that, in all things, God has the final say. When distractions cause alarm, we return back to the truth of Epiphany - that Jesus Christ shall reign for ever and ever. God is indeed faithful, for Jesus is King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, hallelujah forever.

Isaiah 60:1-6

Arise, Our Light has Come

As the prophet Isaiah commands -

Arise, Jesus the light of the world will never leave us nor forsake us.

Arise, for all who bear the image of God hold light within their hearts. This is the truth of the imago dei.

Arise, the Lord will keep us safe from the perils of darkness.

Arise, in jubilation.

Arise, in the assurance that the light you hold is the desire of nations.

Sisters feel the warmth of the light. See how it brings protection and provision. Jesus, the light of the world is worthy to be praised.

For darkness is empire that targets and tramples the vulnerable. It is within the unhoused lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth who are pushed into the streets by parents who are not guardians; darkness is the poor-life-quality and low-life-expectancy that yokes transgender people. Darkness is the politicized life completely spent for the abuser's gain.

Brothers, light has come. It is on our backs and at our flanks. It envelops the body and the spirit and warms the heart and cheers the soul. As we rise into the glorious light, she will eternally vanquish darkness. In rising we meet God's grace that helps us to oppose the maniacal and tyrannical forces of our world that seek to devalue our lives and disregard our existence.

Rise to take solace in knowing that God is with us, and the light is in our hearts. We are keepers of the light. We wield the sacred flame. Therefore, there is nothing to fear, for the glory of the Lord is upon us. God is with us even 'til the end of time.

Biography



Moses Hernandez McGavin (he/they) is a teacher, cultural worker, organizer, and writer. They have organized Freedom Church of the Poor, the Nonviolent Medicaid Army, the National Union for the Homeless, and with transgender and nonbinary communities across the country. As an educator, Moses has co-developed and co-taught classes on theater, storytelling, culture, and social movements for Emory University and the Sam & Devorah Foundation for Transgender Youth. He served as a Ministry Coordinator with the Church of the Common Ground, helping to facilitate their weekly foot clinic, Bible Study, and community care practices with unhoused folks in Downtown Atlanta. They also served as Community Program Coordinator and Support Group Leader for Transmission Ministry Collective, an online community for transgender and nonbinary Christians. Currently they serve as the Young Organizers Survival Corps Organizer at the Kairos Center for Religions, Rights, and Social Justice.



Terra Jubilee Greer graduated from Candler School of Theology with a Master's of Divinity in 2020, with a Women's Studies in Theology and Ministry Certificate and a Justice, Peace, and Conflict Transformation concentration. She is a trans person, and is passionate about inclusion in various forms. He is part of the IDEA committee in Wheat Ridge, as well as the Disability Committee for the Mountain Sky Conference of the United Methodist Church, and a member of Affirmation, the founding organization of the Reconciling Ministries Network in the UMC. They have volunteered with the Transmission Ministry Collective, which is a worldwide online community of Trans People of Faith, and she does ongoing inclusion work as part of Juniper Formation in the ONA 2.0 workshops. She brings her experiences from all of these into his preaching, always approaching the texts with an eye to lifting up marginalized communities and stories. They enjoy singing, writing, and experiencing stories of all kinds. She loves to go for hikes and long walks outside, and is always learning new things about the world around him and the people in it. She lives with his spouse, Faryn, and their dog, Selah, in Wheat Ridge, Colorado.



The Reverend Beckett Leclaire is an ordained deacon in the Episcopal Diocese of the Great Lakes and Ministry Developer of the AuSable Inclusion Center, based in Mio, MI. He is a husband, father, godfather, and cat dad. In his spare time, Deacon Beck enjoys reading, playing video games, hiking, and birdwatching. You can learn more about him and read more of his writing at www.beckleclaire.com

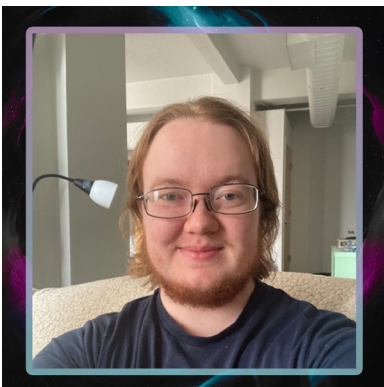


Petra Aleah Strand is a retired Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) clergy member who served congregations in New York and New Jersey for over twenty-five years. A lifelong student of theology, she holds a Master of Divinity from Union Theological Seminary (NYC), where she received the Hitchcock Award and continued postgraduate studies in church history, with a focus on patristics. She is also a professed sister in the Order of Ecumenical Franciscans, having made her lifetime vows in 2001.

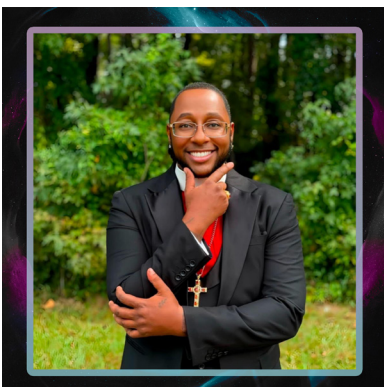
Petra is a transgender woman, wife, and mother of two adult daughters. She and her wife, Karen Booth, recently relocated to Portugal, where they are beginning their new life in Europe.



Rev. Dr. Lawrence T. Richardson is a pastor, strategist, and communicator in the United Church of Christ whose ministry centers courage, covenant, and justice. He equips congregations and leaders through preaching, media training, and organizational coaching, with a special focus on clear communication, digital discipleship, and trauma-aware, LGBTQ+-affirming care. In the Michigan Conference, he is helping guide a five-year strategic planning effort and is advancing initiatives that strengthen connection and vitality across the state. Lawrence's work consistently lifts up the divinity and dignity of every person and invites communities to flourish with clarity, compassion, and hope.



Ellis Billington (he/him) is a longtime grad student, having received his Master of Divinity (MDiv) from Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in spring 2024, and anticipating completion of his Master of Theological Studies (MTS), also from Garrett, in spring 2026. He plans to pursue a PhD and work in academia in the future. His research focuses on theology and ethics for Christians with marginalized sexual identities, including queer and trans communities as well as polyamorous and kink communities. He was born and raised in Golconda, IL, but has moved all around the midwest in his adult life. He will likely have to move (again!) for his PhD studies, but he currently lives in Kansas City, MO, with one human roommate and four feline roommates.



Apostle-Bishop Que Josiah Thomas was born (Openly Trans-Masc) in Alliance, Ohio in June of 1978 to Prophetess Etta and Archbishop Michael Thomas. Que was raised by Prophetess Thomas-Lilly and Mr. Miles Lilly in Canton, Ohio, Texas and eventually South Georgia. Que has 3 other siblings. Que was raised in Holiness, Pentecostal churches. Growing up singing and leading choirs and different praise teams. Also, at a young age being prompted by God, Que began operating prophetically. God dealt with Que in dreams and visions. Prophetess Etta nurtured this gift with Que. Que's biological father was also heavily known for Ministry and Pastoring. Que enjoyed singing/ ministering and basketball. Que went to college at the age of 16 years old on an academic and athletic scholarship. Que was operating under COP Ministries by the age of 18 years old. Bishop Q.S Caldwell was his Leader at the time. As life progressed, Que became incarcerated at the age of 21. During this journey, Que obtained several Ministerial and Chaplaincy certifications for Ministry as well as an advanced diploma from Emory University School of McAfee in Religious Studies. Que was released after 16 years of incarceration. Que has 4 children biologically; ages 23, 25, 27 and 29. Two girls and 2 boys, 3 granddaughters (1 on the way), and 2 deceased grandsons. Apostle Que has resided in the Metro Atlanta area for about 5 years. Que was ordained a Minister in the Lord's Church by Bishop Alana Thompson in 2017 at Empowerment Church. In 2019 under the leadership of Apostle Damyeon Massey of Glory Nation Churches of Atlanta, he was elevated to Elder/Overseer. Pastor Que Josiah Thomas founded The Reel Center of Atlanta in September of 2020 and was installed as the Senior Pastor by Bishop Timothy L. Jackson in July of 2020. Que has always sought to love and serve others. The REEL Center was given to Que in a vision and charged by God to non-traditionally bring others back to God through love and without tradition and religious bonds. He and his friends would talk about having their own ministry due to experiences within the body and the "Church". The vision was given and executed almost immediately. Apostle-Bishop Que is heavy in Outreach, Homeless and Jail/ Prison Ministry especially within the LGBTQIA Community. He loves to give, love, and help others.



The Rev. Carla Robinson, a graduate of Concordia Seminary (St Louis, MO), served as a Lutheran pastor for 13 years before coming to the Episcopal Church. She was received into the communion in 2001 and was an active member of St Mark's cathedral for several years. She has served as the Administrative Assistant for Multi-Cultural Ministry and the Secretary for Vocations in the Diocese of Olympia. Since her ordination in 2009 she has served as the curate at the Church of the Resurrection in Bellevue and as the vicar of All Saints in Seattle's Rainier Valley neighborhood. She has served as associate priest at St Mark's Cathedral, The Church of the Ascension in Magnolia, St James in Kent, Christ Church in the University District and St Matthew San Mateo in Auburn. In 2022 she became the Canon for Multicultural Ministries and Community Transformation in the Diocese of Olympia.



The Reverend Erin K. Swenson, Th.M., Ph.D., was ordained as Eric Karl Swenson in 1973 by the Presbytery of Atlanta, which was then a part of the southern Presbyterian Church in the U.S. Twenty-three years later, after completing a gender transition from male to female, that ordination was sustained by the Presbytery of Greater Atlanta, PCUSA, making Erin the first known mainstream minister to transition from male to female while remaining in ordained office.

Erin is retired from her ministry, which was primarily counseling and psychotherapy with and for the transgender community in Atlanta, GA and across the country. Erin has also been a keynote speaker and presented at conferences at colleges and universities. Erin is enjoying her retirement at Clairmont Place in Decatur, Georgia.



Zayn Silva is a transgender Puerto Rican and Black man from New York City, a preacher, activist, and digital minister devoted to building communities grounded in fierce love, justice, and belonging. He serves as the Digital Minister at Middle Collegiate Church, leading digital strategy, storytelling, and community engagement for one of the nation's most inclusive and justice-driven congregations.

A Ruling Elder at First Presbyterian Church of Brooklyn, Zayn serves on the Commission on Ministry, the ACQ+E Committee for LGBTQIA+ Advocacy, and the Admin Manuals and Operations Team for the Presbytery of New York City. His ministry bridges faith, technology, and liberation—helping churches imagine digital spaces as sacred spaces for connection, healing, and transformation.

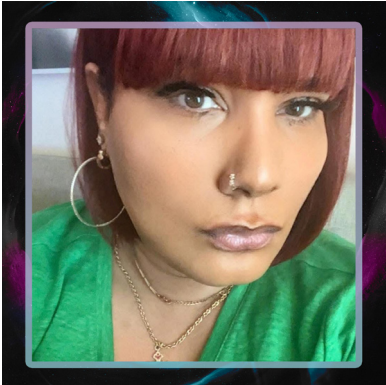
Zayn is also the Vice Chair of the Religious Exemption Accountability Project (REAP) vs. the U.S. Department of Education and the founder of Transalike, a nonprofit dedicated to reconnecting trans and queer individuals with Christ. Through his work in faith and activism, Zayn continues to create pathways for all people to experience God's radical love and inclusion.



The Rev Dr Megan Rohrer has been featured on Netflix's *Queer Eye*, *Cosmo*, *People*, *Time Magazine* and *Good Morning America*. He earned a PhD in Transformative Studies from the California Institute of Integral Studies and a Doctorate of Ministry from the Pacific School of Religion. Megan also received an honorary doctorate from Palo Alto University, was a finalist for the Lambda Literary award in transgender non-fiction and received an honorable mention as an *Unsung Hero of Compassion* by *Wisdom in Action*, with His Holiness the Dali Lama. His latest book for Arcadia Publishing's *Images in America* Series tells the history of San Francisco's Transgender District with historic images from the 1880's through the present.



Avery Arden is an Autistic, genderqueer minister living in Atlanta with zir spouse and two cats. Avery writes gender-expansive, anti-ableist liturgy (binarybreakingworship.com); hosts a multifaith podcast of transgender stories (blessedarethebinarybreakers.com); and creates resources focused on trans & disability theology & praxis (linktr.ee/queerlychristian). They also serve on the national board of More Light Presbyterians.



Rev. Danielle Dufoe, MEd, MDiv, ThM is a woman of many firsts - she is our country's first African American (Black) Transgender woman to graduate from a Seminary, a Divinity School & both kinds of theological institutions. Ordained American Baptist, she is also the nation's first Black trans woman to be ordained by a major denomination.

A native of New Jersey, Danielle is a graduate of ODU, Rutgers, Howard University School of Divinity, & Columbia Theological Seminary.