



in the fullness of time

Advent Devotional 2025

 **NORTH SHORE**
COMMUNITY BAPTIST CHURCH

About the Cover Art

Behold, I am making all things new

Kelly Cruse | Painting

Selected for the cover by Adam Kurihara

This painting was made with acrylic ink, acrylic, texture medium, silver, copper, and gold foil on canvas. It is a triptych (three-panel piece) consisting of three 64"x24"x1.5" panels:

Panel 1: *A beautiful inheritance: the double portion*

Panel 2: *Every valley exalted: covered with the robe of righteousness*

Panel 3: *Crowned with everlasting joy: the garment of praise*

I was drawn to Kelly Cruse's resurrection triptych, *Behold, I am making all things new*, because it shows the story and pattern of God's revelation in the world. God allows things to unravel before setting them right. C.S. Lewis writes of this pattern in his book *Miracles*:

"In the Christian story God descends to reascend. He comes down; down from the heights of absolute being into time and space, down into humanity; down further still, if embryologists are right, to recapitulate in the womb ancient and pre-human phases of life; down to the very roots and seabed of the Nature he has created. But He goes down to come up again and bring the whole ruined world up with him."

Take a moment to look carefully at the cover art. What do you see? What do you notice in yourself? Is there something you are carrying this season that needs to fully descend for God to resurrect it?

This is a gift of the arts—they invite us to pause, to see, and to reflect on our own life. It is our hope that the art in this booklet (and available for viewing at the church) will reveal a truer and deeper meaning of the advent and Christmas season.

In the Fullness of Time

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son,
born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who
were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

Galatians 4:4–5

Introduction

Adam Kurihara and Sarah Bartley

Do you find it peculiar that the first page of the New Testament is not an announcement of the gospel, not an explanation of salvation through Christ, but a list of names? A genealogy. A *Genesis*. The Bible contains a lot of these. What's compelling about *this* genesis, and what gives us great hope, is who it contains. The family tree of Jesus (see Matthew 1:1-17) includes saints and sinners, good people and corrupt rulers, murders, adulterers, prophets, priests, and kings. God works with everyone and *through* everyone. This list roots Jesus firmly in a particular human story—a story still being written today through imperfect people like you and me.

Our 2025 Advent devotional, *In the Fullness of Time*, invites us to reflect on how Jesus entered human history at a particular time and place. The result is a Jesse Tree of sorts—a centuries old illustration that shows how God's story has been written through particular people and comes to its fulfillment in Jesus.

“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.” (Galatians 4:4-5)

The wonder! Again and again, God chose incarnation—a faithful presence in the world through humanity. So let us attend to the story that began with a promise millennia ago, finds fullness in Christ, and is unfolding to this day through His church.

“Abraham was the father of Isaac.”

Maybe the first page of the New Testament is good news after all.



We thank each and every artist and writer who contributed to this project. In particular, we thank the artists whose work is present on every page: **Mark Horvath** (calligraphy), **Shauna Anthony** (branch watercolors), and **Kristin Gelin** (page layout), **Sarah Bartley** (production and editing) and **Adam Kurihara** (production and art direction).



This is the GENEALOGY of Jesus the Messiah the SON of David, the SON of Abraham:

Abraham was the father of Isaac,
Isaac the father of Jacob,
Jacob the father of Judah and
his brothers,
Judah the father of Perez and
Zerah, whose mother was Tamar,
Perez the father of Hezron,
Hezron the father of Ram,
Ram the father of Amminadab,
Amminadab the father of Nahshon,
Nahshon the father of Salmon,
Salmon the father of Boaz, whose
mother was Rahab,
Boaz the father of Obed, whose
mother was Ruth,
Obed the father of Jesse,
and Jesse the father of King David.

David was the father of Solomon,
whose mother had been
Uriah's wife,
Solomon the father of Rehoboam,
Rehoboam the father of Abijah,
Abijah the father of Asa,
Asa the father of Jehoshaphat,
Jehoshaphat the father of Jehoram,
Jehoram the father of Uzziah,
Uzziah the father of Jotham,
Jotham the father of Ahaz,
Ahaz the father of Hezekiah,
Hezekiah the father of Manasseh,
Manasseh the father of Amon,
Amon the father of Josiah,
and Josiah the father of Jeconiah
and his brothers at the time of
the exile to Babylon.

After the exile to Babylon:
Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel,
Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel,
Zerubbabel the father of Abihud,
Abihud the father of Eliakim,
Eliakim the father of Azor,
Azor the father of Zadok,
Zadok the father of Akim,
Akim the father of Elihud,
Elihud the father of Eleazar,
Eleazar the father of Matthan,
Matthan the father of Jacob,
and Jacob the father of Joseph, the
husband of Mary, and Mary was
the mother of Jesus who is called
the Messiah.

Thus there were FOURTEEN GENERATIONS
in all from Abraham to David,
fourteen from David to the exile to Babylon,
AND FOURTEEN from the exile to the Messiah.

Matthew 1:1-17

Throughout this Guide

The Genealogy of Jesus

Mark Horvath | Calligraphy

When I began writing the names in Matthew's genealogy, I had no expectations of any spiritual profit. But calligraphy requires that one proceed slowly, with intense focus. It becomes as much a meditation as practice with a pen. What this assignment taught me was that our Savior was not, by any stretch of the imagination, the descendant of perfect people. They were both saints and sinners, good and dysfunctional families. But none of that thwarted God's intention. The same unstoppable will of God that brought His Son into the world to save us will be applied to us, in all our sin and dysfunction, to bring us safely into His kingdom.

About the Author

Mark Horvath retired after working for 31 years at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. His interest in calligraphy began in art school when he lived in Connecticut.



Our Savior's Lineage

Shauna Anthony | Watercolor

As I worked on the vine to represent the lineage of our Savior, I reflected on the organic way in which our God uses His imperfect people to bring about His plans, through His design, despite our brokenness; the resilience of nature being a metaphor for the wisdom and steadfastness of its Creator.

About the Author

Shauna Anthony has been attending NSCBC for some time now and enjoys participating in the Artist Fellowship collaborative projects. Her primary medium is watercolor and her favorite subject matter is plant life.

ABRAHAM

ISAAC • JACOB

JUDAH • PEREZ • NEZRON

RAM • AMMINADAB

NAHSHON • SALMON

BOAZ • OBED • JESSE

DAVID

SOLOMON • REHOBAM

ABIJAH • ASA • JEHOSHAPHAT

JEHORAM • UZZIAH • JOTHAM

AHAZ • HEZEKIAH • MANASSEH

AMON • JOSIAH

JECONIAH

SHEALTIEL • ZERUBBABEL

ABIJUD • ELIAKIM • AZOR

ZADOK • AKIM • ELIJUD

ELEAZAR • MATTHAN

JACOB • JOSEPH

JESUS



The Starry Night | Vincent van Gogh

Abraham

Shine Like Stars

Bobby Warrenburg | Reflection

|| *Read Genesis 15:5-6; Matthew 1:2*

Of all Vincent van Gogh's masterpieces, the most well-known is *The Starry Night*. It was painted after he voluntarily checked himself into the Saint-Paul Asylum in Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, after the infamous incident with "his ear." The view is from his asylum window. It's a combination of what he saw outside and what he remembered from places he loved. It's a bridge between heaven and earth—a sleepy village below and a swirling starry night above. Notice that the lights of heaven are reflected in the lights of the houses. The colors of heaven are replicated in the community below. And the tip of the steeple is the one place that connects heaven and earth. Even in his darkest moment, van Gogh "believed" and art critics ever since have "credited it to him" as his finest masterpiece.

The Scriptures teach that one day we will shine like stars in the kingdom of God: "Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many

to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever" (Daniel 12:3). Even Jesus said, "Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Matthew 13:43).

Our destiny is to burn like the celestial lights . . . just like God said we would.

The image given to Abraham is not just of a great multitude—other symbols could have fit that purpose. But the multitude God has in view is reflecting the "hosts of heaven" above (Genesis 1:16, 2:1): the sky rulers—seraphim, cherubim, angels, etc. They are "signs" that point to the beauty, truth, and goodness of their Creator God. One day we won't just admire the celestial lights, but we will be invited into their *glory*. We will radiate, each in our own peculiar way, the abundant generosity of God.

And who was chosen to paint this masterpiece of impossible grace? A man who was broken, exhausted, frightened, guilt-ridden, and possessing a body that was "as good as dead" (Romans 4:19). Like Abraham, he was invited outside (Genesis 15:5) to make a connection between heaven and earth. And as we all know, the darker the sky, the brighter the stars.

It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dulllest and most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship or a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations . . . There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal . . . Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbour is the holiest object presented to your senses." –C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*

About the Author

Bobby Warrenburg is NSCBC's Senior Pastor. He lives in Hamilton with Julie and two of their four children. Bobby enjoys cycling, reading, Netflix, meals with friends, and (don't tell anyone) bird-watching.

Stars in the Sky

Art installation from Joanna Hewitt and North Shore Kids

|| *“Look toward the heavens and count the stars—just so shall your offspring be.” (Genesis 15:5)*

During this Advent season, our children will help us see God’s promises with fresh eyes. Just as God invited Abraham to look up at the stars and imagine a family too numerous to count, our youngest members will create stars of their own—each one bearing a name, a bit of color, and the wonder of being known and loved by God.

As our preschool through fifth-grade children decorate their stars, they remind us that God’s story continues to unfold through each new generation. Their hands and imaginations reflect the same promise Abraham saw in the night sky—that God’s faithfulness is unending, and that we, too, have a place in God’s great story.

Their decorated stars come together as a single artwork, serving as a living symbol that each name, each life, shines as part of God’s family and that the story of redemption connects us all. This display reminds us all—children and adults alike—that we are part of God’s unfolding story of light, love, and promise.

Reflect:

As you reflect on this piece created by our children, take a moment to remember that you, too, are part of this story. God’s promise includes you—your name, your life, your light. Together, we reflect the glory of the One who came in the fullness of time to bring light to all people.

Pray:

God of promise and light, thank You for knowing us by name. Bless our children as they learn to see themselves in Your story. May their stars—and ours—shine with Your love, reminding us that we are all part of Your great family. Amen.

**This art is displayed at the main entrance
of the church above the doors facing the parking lot.**



isaac

Mourning to Dancing

Nan Powlison | Reflection

|| Read Genesis 21:1-16; Psalm 30:11; Matthew 1:2

When was the last time you laughed out loud in complete disbelief and awe at something God did? Something so out of this world, so perfectly timed, that you just had to laugh? Well, this is what happened to Abraham and Sarah when Isaac was born. Abraham was 100 years old! “You are kidding me,” laughed Sarah. “Huzzah!” laughed Abraham. Mourning turned to dancing as they named their boy Isaac—*Laughter*.

Isaac’s birth and obedience foreshadow Jesus—his miraculous virgin birth and his willingness to die in obedience to his Father’s will, “not my will but thine be done” (Luke 22:42). Abraham obeyed God’s command to offer up Isaac and Isaac didn’t run away. At the eleventh hour with knife to throat, seeing Abraham’s faith, God provides a ram in the thicket for the offering instead of Isaac—Christ, the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). And so, Isaac is raised up, returns home with Abraham, and you can imagine that mourning turned to dancing in the house that night!

When Abraham’s servant prays, is led to Rebekah at the well, and returns with a wife for Isaac, there is laughter and dancing! And then Rebekah, barren like Sarah, prays and births twin sons—Jacob and Esau. Lots of laughter after years of discouragement and throwing in the towel trying to get pregnant!

As seasons unfold sadly, more mourning comes to Isaac’s family. The most memorable is the struggle between Jacob and Esau and the challenges around their birth prophecy. The younger Jacob would rule over the elder Esau.

Now Isaac is *really* old with poor eyesight. Division, favoritism, jealousy and deception are rife in the home. Isaac, fearing he will soon die, seeks comfort and refuge in his favorite tasty dish with his foodie son Esau, then plans to secretly give him the blessing of the firstborn. Rebekah, suspecting something is up, takes things into her own hands to make sure the prophecy comes true, before her favorite son, Jacob, gets axed from receiving the blessing of the firstborn. What a mess!

God is in the mess and uses imperfect human beings and messy situations to bring about His perfect design and will.

But when you think about it, there is always mess in life. Jesus was born in a stinky, messy stable, and He died a bloody, messy death on the cross. God is in the mess and uses imperfect human beings and messy situations to bring about His perfect design and will. Somehow through it all we are carved and chiseled to look more like Him!

At the end of Isaac’s life, estranged Jacob and Esau meet and shake hands and later join to bury their father Isaac with his fathers before him. And there are a myriad of kids and grandkids around them, like stars in their midst, like sand on the seashore.

Through His death and resurrection, Jesus turns our mourning into dancing.

Here are two ways to consider responding this Advent: 1) pray for God to give you a divine appointment with a person who might be mourning with whom you can share the joy of Christ in this Advent season; and 2) sing the hymn “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” as a prayer.

Le Chat Qui Rit (or God Gets the Last Laugh)

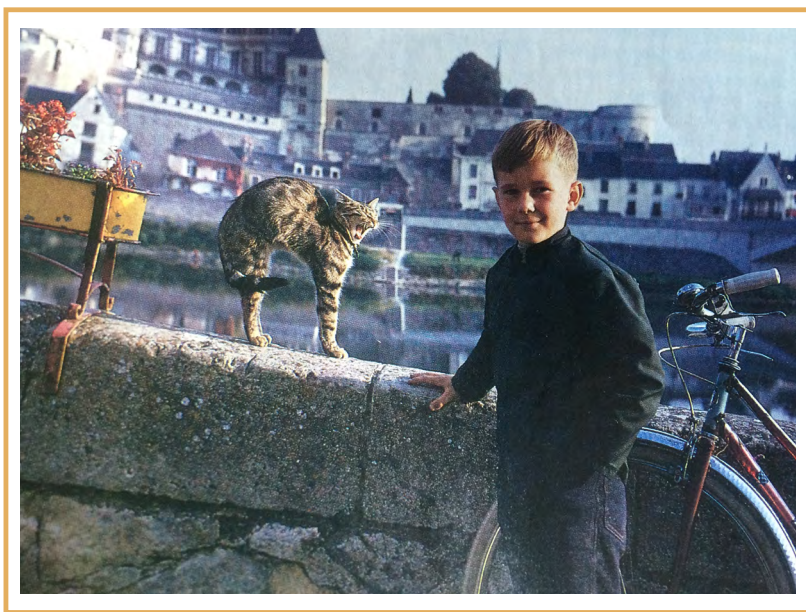
Nan Powlison | Photography

Our bus was nearing the destination—Amboise, France—in the Loire Valley, where Leonardo Da Vinci is buried. My seatmate had been reading Ayn Rand, and our discussion had escalated into a loud debate with the whole bus of UVM students versus me defending the resurrection. When we arrived, everyone clambered off the bus laughing at my naïve stupidity. Fighting back tears, I descended the steps and an angel boy, Laurent, seemed to be waiting for me. He spoke with me like a dear old friend, he showed me his pocketful of “marrons,” guided me through his village, and helped me with my luggage. The others left me in the dust, so he pointed me on my way across the bridge to the Chateau. Before we parted, I asked if he would pose for a photo beside the sleeping cat in the sun on the wall. Laurent smiled and “La Vache qui rit” became “Le Chat qui rit” right before my eyes!

Fifteen years later, married with two children, in Philadelphia, PA:

Harvard Magazine advertises a photo contest for amateur photographers. I enter this picture and win an honorable mention. But my Jesus, the laughing cat, and my angel boy win first place. I may have won a photo prize, a nice check, and the honor of being published in *Harvard Magazine*, but God won my Ayn Rand seatmate to Himself through further conversations, L’Abri contacts, and Francis Schaeffer books. In light of all this and remembering how I was laughed off the bus in Amboise, I think the photo should be called: “God gets the last laugh.”

God loves, saves, and sends ministering angels. He turns our mourning into dancing, tears to laughter. He even makes amazing photographs happen! *Soli Deo Gloria!*



Le Chat Qui Rit, Chateau Amboise, France in background, 1970 | Nan Powlison

About the Author and Artist

Nan Powlison is fairly new to the area having moved here a year ago from Philadelphia where she lived for about 40 years with her late husband David, an author and pastoral counselor. She grew up in Newton and spent summers in Truro on the Cape. She has three children and seven grandchildren.



JACOB

Jacob's Grip Loosens

Sam Solberg | Reflection

|| Read Genesis 32–33; Matthew 1:2

They named him *heel grabber*. From the moment Jacob was born, his tiny fingers clinging to his brother Esau's heel, he was labeled a supplanter. The name implied the opportunistic, cunning seizure of advantage.

Jacob more than lived up to this title. His story is filled with such deception. He exploits his older brother Esau's hunger to gain his birthright (Genesis 25:29–34). Later, he impersonates Esau to steal the firstborn's blessing from his blind father—a trick that ends with Jacob fleeing from his vengeful brother (Genesis 27).

Jacob's twenty-year refuge with his uncle Laban is a back-and-forth of trickery between the two men—over wives, wages, livestock, you name it—that culminates with Jacob's family secretly fleeing before agreeing to a new boundary with Laban (Genesis 29–31).

Jacob puts his uncle behind him, but there's a problem: his path home leads right back into the arms of Esau. Jacob is wedged between two powerful, resentful victims of his scheming. How will the heel grabber escape this one? Is there another grand deception brewing?

In his moment of greatest need, instead of grasping for an advantage, Jacob prays.

O God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac . . . I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant . . . Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau, for I am afraid . . . But you have said, "I will surely make you prosper and will make your descendants like the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted." (Genesis 32:9–12)

Amid fear, Jacob clings to the promise God already made. Though he does not see the resolution, he steps out in trust because of the one who issued the promise.

That night, Jacob is met by a man (God) with whom he wrestles until daybreak. Jacob refuses to let go until he is given his combatant's blessing. God gives Jacob more than a blessing. He renames him Israel, meaning *one who wrestles with God*. At his birth, he was defined by his grip on his brother (cunning, grasping for advantage), but now in his rebirth, Israel is named for the tenacious hold he kept on the Lord on this most desperate night.

More than protected, Jacob is met by Esau with joy. When Esau refuses to take his gifts, Jacob, the brother who once connived to take all that was rightly Esau's, responds, "Please accept my blessing that is brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me" (Genesis 33:11). Jacob's assurance of God's faithfulness allows him to open his once-grasping hands in generosity.

From the line of one who went to extreme lengths to steal a blessing, came one who descended an unfathomable distance to take on a curse that was rightly ours.

This Advent, we reflect on many who, amid fear, doubt, and hardship, chose to cling to a transformational promise—and more than a promise, a reality that we have now received. From the line of one who went to extreme lengths to steal a blessing, came one who descended an unfathomable distance to take on a curse that was rightly ours. From the grasper who claimed another's birthright, came one who did not consider his own divine birthright a thing to be grasped. He is the promise and, along with Jacob, we cling to his bruised heel.

Think of a time you faced a challenge. Did you seek your own advantage? How? What would it look like for you to step forward in trust of God's promises and plan?

About the Author

Sam Solberg is a member at NSCBC and has been attending the church since 2017, serving as a small group leader, deacon, and service leader. After graduating from Gordon College, he settled in Hamilton where he now lives with his wife Sarah, two sons Paul and Harvey, and dachshund Della.



tamar

See What Beauty He Is Weaving

Julie Funderburk | Reflection

|| *Read Genesis 38; Matthew 1:3*

We all have stories that we are hesitant to share. If we shared them, we'd risk being misunderstood—or understood better than we'd like. Tamar can be easily misunderstood and labeled as vengeful, immoral, or even promiscuous. We might wonder if Genesis 38 is a chapter better left alone.

Yet Tamar appears again, many hundreds of years later in a list of names that beckons us to come closer to her story. We read of a woman who seems unscrupulous to our modern eyes, yet is called, “more righteous.” A deeper gleaning tells us that she is acting with conviction towards what is true and right. The scarlet thread around her son's wrist identifies the firstborn but could also seem like a reminder of a painful and desperate time in her life, when she ironically had to put herself at risk in order to save herself. Things could have easily gone very wrong, and we would have never known her name.

Like Tamar, we are known by a God who sees the worst and knows
that it is an ample medium for his redemptive creativity

We're not that different from Tamar. We all have our own scarlet threads—bright reminders of the parts of our story that we associate with our deeper anguish or our desolate moments that we'd rather forget. But like Tamar, we are known by a God who sees the worst and knows that it is an ample medium for his redemptive creativity. We can avoid the scarlet threads, but we would miss out on discovering where they might lead if we held on to them. These aren't cut strings, but connections to Jesus.

We can believe the narrative that our shameful stories are dead ends, or we can take Jesus' hand to dive deeper into them and see what beauty he is weaving. Like Tamar, we are allowed to be in touch with our needs, to feel the injustices of this life, and to trust that God's promises will remain true. We may not see the whole story unfolding yet; Tamar could not have known she would be named in the genealogy of the Messiah. But our God delights to blaze his light into our shadowy corners and allow the beauty of his redemption to be seen. Our challenge is to let him closer and to offer our own scarlet threads for God to weave into the larger narrative. Maybe we know someone like Tamar, who holds a gritty story with hard injustices; maybe that someone is us. Tamar's story is told in its fullness, which bids us to have the courage to face our own stories, allowing God and others deeper in, allowing God to be our courage and living with audacious faith in the truth that God's promises will remain, even in the most unlikely of stories.

About the Author

Julie Funderburk works with the lovely youth of NSCBC. She enjoys spending as much time outside as possible gardening and walking in the woods with her husband and baby girl.

Enough: A Prose Poem about Tamar

He was the son of a second son who wrestled with God. His pockets jingled with silver as he left the Promised Land. Words of smooth red velvet flowed from his mouth, a ribbon on his gift to me: A new family, a new home. But soon that scarlet cord encircled my ankles, my wrists, and I was quietly bound by his promises—unkept.

Ribbons of red flowed from the hand of his firstborn. Ribbons upon ribbons until Yahweh said, “Enough!” Then his second born lightly cast aside the seeds of promise, spilling them on the floor like precious rubies tossed to swine. Again, Yahweh said, “Enough!”

Twice a widow, I too was cast aside—unkept—made to bear the weight of the sins of his sons. He saw me as the curse, the specter of death coming for his third-born, only a boy. He offered me shreds of the red gift ribbon—“I will bring you back when he is of age”—but that was never his intent. He hoped to bury me in silence; with a crimson rag, he gagged my mouth.

I saw red with anger and cried out, “Enough!”

He erected stone walls and threw me outside. But I found the gap in the defenses and broke through, demanding justice. I seized his imperial red cord, his staff, his signet ring. And though he fought back with fire, I raised a flag of gules¹, streaming in the wind, a herald of a new era for the downtrodden and forgotten.

“Examine, please,” I said as I showed him his cord, staff, and ring. Echoes of decades past reverberated. “Examine, please,” he’d said as he’d held the bloodied coat of many colors. Examine yourself, please.

“She is more righteous than I,” he conceded. Broken, changed, he followed the rusty road back to Canaan. And onward to Egypt, where he would offer his life in exchange for another.

My twin promises, now kept, soon bore fruit. Zerah’s² fist came forth first, shining bright like the dawn. A red string was tied around his wrist, marking him my firstborn. But ah, my other baby would not accept this injustice. He found the gap, and he broke through.

“What a breach you have made for yourself!”

The unseen, yet true, red ribbon of hope surrounded my Perez³, the seed of blessing, Yahweh’s chosen one. The ribbon flowed forth, weaving second sons and women, foreigners and outsiders, into the family tapestry. A scarlet cord hangs from a city wall, encircles a sheaf of gleaned grain, adorns star-called gifts of gold and myrrh, eases a jar into Jacob’s well, decorates a church at the end of the world.

1 A term for red, typically used in coats of arms

2 Zerah means “to come forth,” dawn, or brightness

3 Perez means “breach,” referencing a gap in the city’s defensive walls



Enough

Jessi Rennekamp | Prose poem

The tapestry is a common metaphor used by Christian writers and preachers. From the back, it looks like a mess of threads going every which way; this represents our view of life and history as we're living through it. But from the front, a tapestry is intricately beautiful, with each thread exactly where it needs to be to make up the big picture; this represents God's view. It's hard to imagine a messier thread than Tamar's life—yet she played a pivotal role in God's tapestry of redemption.

I love that the Bible doesn't shy away from telling even the darkest and most disturbing stories—and showing how redemption can still move forward. But a hyper-realistic retelling of Tamar's story may not be appropriate for this devotional (yikes). So, I chose to write a symbolic "prose poem."

I started with the image of the red thread tied around the firstborn baby Zerah's wrist, and then I expanded upon it with other red images to show how the twins' birth is connected to key moments in salvation history both before and after. Tamar's story is placed in the middle of the Joseph story, marking a change from the "old Judah" who sold his brother into slavery for a few pieces of silver and the "new Judah" who offered his life in place of his brother Benjamin's. The unjust way Judah treated Tamar eventually led him to be convicted about his unrighteous character. In fact, Tamar used the very same words—"examine, please" or "do you recognize these?"—as Joseph's brothers used when they presented their father Jacob with Joseph's bloodied cloak, drawing a connection between Judah's two unjust and selfish stories.

Shortly after selling Joseph into slavery, Judah moved to Canaan, married a Canaanite woman, had three sons, and married the oldest son to Tamar. She became one of several foreign women to be included in the genealogy of the Messiah. Likewise, her son Perez became one of several sons to defy the tradition of primogeniture (the right of the firstborn son to inherit the estate and the blessing), showing that God's family is broader and deeper than most expected. At the end of the piece, we see Tamar as a "mother" of Jesus' and a commission to include people from Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth in God's family. The red thread connects Tamar with Rahab, Ruth, the Magi from the East, the Samaritan woman at the well, and finally, NSCBC or another church from a geography that would have been completely unknown to the biblical authors.

Tamar's story weaves together threads of both cosmic and personal redemption. Tamar is not just important to God as a vessel of the "seeds of promise" that will one day lead to the Messiah. She herself is precious to God, beloved and made in His image. God holds accountable the Israelite patriarch who treats her unjustly, who has taken away her power and standing in the community. In my poem, Tamar's cry for justice—"Enough!"—intentionally mirrors God's. Both she and second-born Perez "break through" and fight for justice.

About the Artist

Jessi Rennekamp enjoys bringing to life the stories of women in the Bible and helping modern readers better understand how the experiences of ancient people can inform their own. She is the author of children's books that do just that: The Call of Rebekah and The Evangelist at the Well. Her day job is as a solopreneur communications and social impact consultant for life sciences companies.

The Scarlet Thread of Faith

Laura Range | Reflection

|| Read Joshua 2; Matthew 1:5

The city was trembling. Word of the exodus had spread, and the people were *melting in fear*. Behind Jericho's fortified walls, everyone clung to whatever security they could find—everyone except a woman with nothing to cling to. Rahab was a prostitute, powerless in her society, living on the city's edge both literally and metaphorically. She had every reason to be afraid—of her king, of the spies she hid, of the God whose power had undone nations. And yet, somehow, Rahab was moved to faith instead of fear. In a world where she had no standing, she dared to stand—and to trust a God she had only heard about to show mercy when the walls fell.

Rahab's faith was not based on her past experiences of God's faithfulness nor in her current reality. Yet, she had heard the stories: how Israel's God split the sea, fed His people in the wilderness, and made provision for them. "Your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below," she told the spies (Joshua 2:11). It was enough. She lowered the rope and staked her life on the promise that mercy would find her home when judgment came.

That's what waiting in faith often feels like—the quiet courage of hanging onto a promise rooted in the character, word, and faithfulness of God, regardless of our perceived circumstances. And Rahab glimpsed that God's promises could extend beyond the people of Israel. The scarlet thread in her window pointed not only to her own rescue but to the greater rescue that would come *in the fullness of time*—a salvation wide enough for every nation, tribe, and tongue. Centuries later, another woman would believe an impossible promise. Mary, too, waited for the Messiah to be formed in her own body.

Matthew remembers Rahab by name in Jesus' genealogy. Like the rope that marked her house for mercy, she is woven into Jesus' family line—a cord that runs through generations, binding together Jew and Gentile, saint and sinner, outsider and heir. From a Canaanite prostitute to the Son of God, the line of redemption moves forward—patient, surprising, unstoppable. God's story has always included those who were far off, drawing near all who dare to believe that His promises will hold.

As we wait in Advent, we also hang our hopes on promises not yet fully fulfilled—healing still to come, prayers still unanswered, peace still unseen.

As we wait in Advent, we also hang our hopes on promises not yet fully fulfilled—healing still to come, prayers still unanswered, peace still unseen. Yet we wait with the same assurance as Rahab: that the God who keeps His word will not forget us.

This week, tie a red ribbon or string somewhere visible to you. Let it remind you that hope is not passive. It is the lifeline we hold as we wait for God's salvation to unfold.

About the Author

Laura Range has been the Minister of Children and Families at NSCBC for three years, but has loved and belonged to our church much longer. She believes Advent invites all of us—no matter our age—to slow down, hope, and wonder again.



The Ties that Bind

Christine Kurihara

Pen and ink (poetry), pastels

I was inspired by considering how Rahab used a rope to let down a few men from her roof where she had been hiding them. Later, she used a scarlet cord to indicate her location so that they could easily identify it and spare the occupants.

It seemed to me that tying or binding was a vital element of this story, and it caused me to reflect on the phrase, “the ties that bind.” In Joshua 2:17–18, the men said, “This oath you made us swear will not be binding on us unless, when we enter the land, you have tied this scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down.” The oath itself bound them and the cord itself was bound.

The Ties that Bind

Bind is a contronym
one meaning: enslave
another: unite

This duality reminds us of God

His laws bind us

His promises free us. Unite us.

Rahab joined God's story

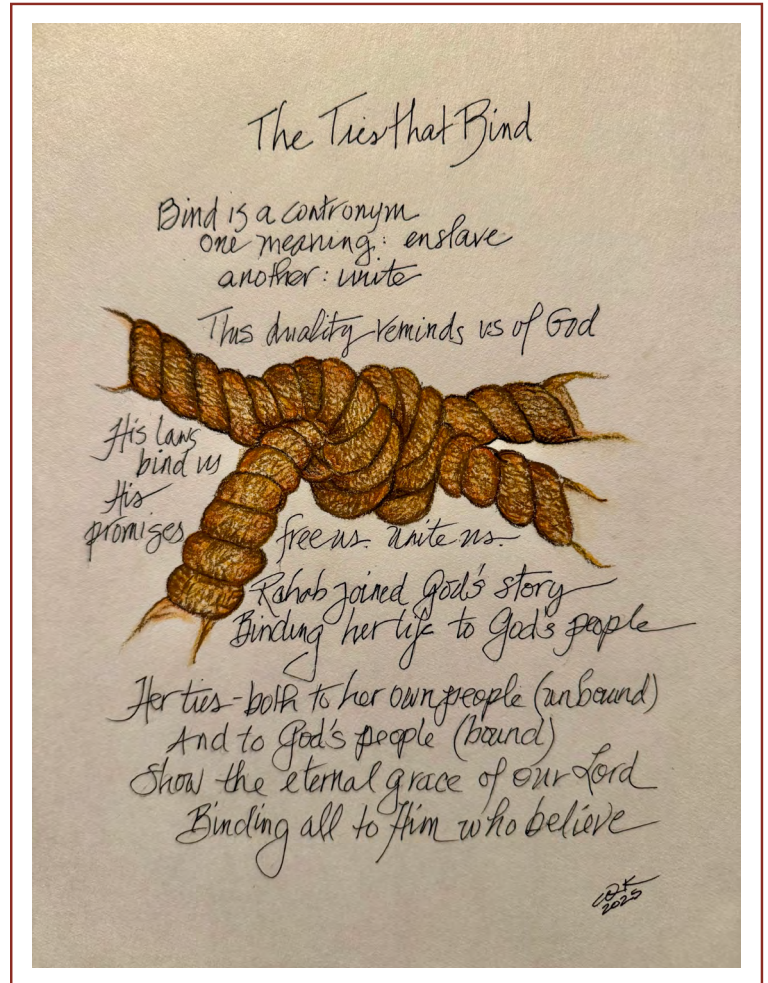
Binding her life to God's people

Her ties—both to her own
people (unbound)

And to God's people (bound)

Show the eternal grace of our Lord

Binding all to Him who believe.



The Ties that Bind | Christine Kurihara

About the Artist

Christine Kurihara is a wife, mother and brand-new grandmother who has been attending NSCBC for a few months since she and her husband, Steve, moved to Beverly to be near their children and grandchild. She is an amateur poet and artist but loves these opportunities to go deeper in the Word and connect with the Lord in new ways.

BOAZ

Boaz and the Redemption of Masculinity

Andrew Rennekamp | Reflection

|| *Read Ruth 3–4; Matthew 1:5*

In the fullness of time, God sent forth his Son—born of woman, born under the law—to redeem. But long before Jesus walked the earth, redemption was rehearsed in the fields of Bethlehem, in the quiet courage of an upright man named Boaz.

Boaz enters Ruth's story not as a warrior or prophet, but as a landowner—a man of means, yet not of self-interest. What sets him apart is not status, but posture. In a world where women like Ruth were vulnerable, Boaz chooses protection. Where power often meant control, he chooses covenant. Where law could justify exclusion, he chooses embrace.

His story is earthly—set in fields and threshing floors, amid harvest labor. Ruth, a foreign widow, risks everything to approach him in the dark. She lies at his feet, a gesture heavy with cultural meaning and personal risk. Boaz, startled awake, must decide what kind of man he will be.

He could exploit her. He could shame her. He could protect his reputation. Instead, he listens. He blesses. He covers her—not just with his cloak, but with his covenant. In a world where power preys on vulnerability, Boaz chooses tenderness. He chooses honor. He chooses her.

Boaz embodies a masculinity that is strong but not domineering, tender but not passive. Protective, not performative. Sacrificial, not self-serving. He acts with integrity when no one is watching. He uses strength not to dominate, but to dignify. He shelters Ruth not for gain, but to honor God.

And God honors this posture. Through Boaz and Ruth, a new lineage is born—a line that leads to David, and ultimately to Jesus. In Boaz, we glimpse the kind of man his descendant will become—one who lifts burdens, honors the overlooked, and lays down his life to redeem.



And in the fullness of time,
he embodied the same posture Boaz
once modeled—welcoming the outsider,
lifting the lowly, offering redemption
to all through sacrificial love.

Jesus did not arrive through empire, but through covenant. He inherited not conquest, but compassion. And in the fullness of time, he embodied the same posture Boaz once modeled—welcoming the outsider, lifting the lowly, offering redemption to all through sacrificial love.

In a time when masculinity is often distorted—weaponized or erased—Boaz offers a hopeful alternative. He shows us that true strength serves, and that lasting redemption begins with courageous faithfulness in daily work. His story invites us to imagine what it means to be men and women who incubate hope in our communities—not through dominance, but through dignity.

Today, consider one way you can use your power or influence to shelter someone in need: speak a blessing, offer protection, and/or share generously. Choose dignity over dominance. Like Boaz—and Jesus—let your strength become a sanctuary.

About the Author

Andrew Rennekamp is someone who moves between strategic planning and hands-on problem-solving, whether it's in church leadership, medical communication, or home projects. He cares about clarity—especially when the stakes are high—and tries to bring warmth and thoughtfulness into group settings. He's drawn to complexity, but doesn't idolize it; he wants things to be useful, truthful, and rooted in love. He values dialogue that's both honest and mature. He's still learning, always curious, and is trying to steward what he's been given well.



Ruth

An Unlikely Ancestress of Jesus

Russ Bjork | Reflection

|| *Read Ruth 1-2; Matthew 1:5*

The Old Testament book of Ruth tells the story of a Moabite woman of that name. Ruth's future mother-in-law, Naomi, was from the town of Bethlehem and had crossed the border into Moab with her husband and two sons because of a famine in their land. There, Naomi's two sons married Moabite women—one of them Ruth. Naomi's husband and both of her sons died, leaving Naomi and her two daughters-in-law widows. When Naomi learned that the famine in Bethlehem had ended, she decided to return to her own country, and urged both of her daughters-in-law to go back to their families in Moab. But one of them—Ruth—insisted on going with Naomi to Bethlehem. Her words to her mother-in-law, “Where you go, I will go,” are often quoted out of context in weddings. But perhaps the most significant thing she said comes later in the verse, “your God (will be) my God” (Ruth 1:16).

In Bethlehem, a warm-hearted and generous man named Boaz—a close relative of Naomi's deceased husband—took care to protect and provide for Ruth. She eventually became his wife, the great-grandmother of David, and ultimately an ancestress of Jesus as recorded in Matthew 1:5.

Ruth is one of five women to be included in Matthew's genealogy of Jesus. Her inclusion is unusual, since it was the normal practice to include just fathers in a genealogy. In fact, she doesn't appear in the “official” genealogy of David in I Chronicles. Ruth is especially unusual, since she was a foreigner and, as a widow, a person of no standing in society.

The inclusion of Ruth highlights the truth that it has always been God's plan to bring men and women from all the nations into His kingdom, as He promised Abram.

The inclusion of Ruth highlights the truth that it has always been God's plan to bring men and women from all the nations into His kingdom, as He promised Abram. Ruth was from a people that had long been bitter enemies of Israel. Yet when Ruth embraced Yahweh, the God of Israel, she became a member of God's people.

Moreover, numerous Bible passages speak of God's special care for people like Ruth. One example is, “He protects the immigrants and cares for the orphans and widows” (Psalm 146:9). The phrase “immigrants (or sojourners, aliens), widows, and orphans” appears over and over in the Old Testament. Ruth, of course, was two of these—an immigrant and a widow.

This week, read Ruth. The book is just four chapters. It's a beautiful story of God's grace and transforming power. As you reflect on the inclusion of this very unlikely person in Matthew's genealogy of Jesus, ask God to help you grow in seeing how He turns enemies into friends. Grow in experiencing His special care for people of little significance in our society—immigrants, widows, and orphans.

About the Author

Russ Bjork is a retired professor at Gordon College and an Elder at NSCBC. He is married to Janet and has three children and seven grandchildren.

Hands of Generations

Joanna Hewitt | Photography

In this photograph, three generations of hands cradle a red heart: my son's hands held by my sister's, enclosed within my mother's. This simple image of nested hands reflects the interwoven faithfulness of generations, echoing the story of Ruth, whose devotion bound her to Naomi and, in time, was woven into the lineage of Christ.

Through Ruth's brave and loyal declaration to Naomi—"Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God" (Ruth 1:16)—God's redemptive plan moved forward, one choice and one generation at a time, until, in the fullness of time, that love was made flesh in Jesus Christ. Ruth's story is one of steadfast love, *hesed*, a love that chooses faithfulness even when the future is uncertain.

These hands speak of that same sacred continuity—love received and given, faith held and shared, the heart of redemption entrusted from one generation to the next. They remind us that God's work is not abstract or distant but takes shape in human stories—in families, in relationships, in the ordinary acts of care that ripple outward through time.

As Ruth's faithfulness helped shape the family into which Christ was born, our everyday love and obedience become threads in the same divine story, the story that began long before us and continues through us. In these hands—holding, protecting, offering—we glimpse the tenderness of that belonging and the enduring mystery of a love that spans generations, gathering us all into God's family.

About the Artist

Joanna Hewitt is a photographer who finds beauty in the everyday, ordinary moments of life. She seeks to capture images that are honest, heartfelt, and true—revealing the light and grace that dwell in each of her subjects. Through her work, she hopes to reflect the presence of God that can be found woven gently through it all.



Hands of Generations | Joanna Hewitt

David

The Geometry of God

Beth Pocock | Reflection

|| Read 2 Samuel 7:4-16; Matthew 1:6

Early in my childhood, my parents realized that I understood pictures better than words. Fortunately, my father appreciated visual learners and would often draw pictures or graphs to help me understand concepts. As the youngest of three, I had a tough time understanding how I would never be able to catch up to the age of my sisters. Dad drew a graph with three right ascending lines that always stayed the same distance apart and my young mind understood. This drawing represents the graph that my sisters drew to show my continuing inferiority.



My visual mind sees a graph in the one verse given to David in Matthew's genealogy. The mention of King David immediately calls the reader to remember God's promise made to David that his throne would be established forever. This promise would never deviate. It was based on the faithfulness of God and would be represented as a constant: "And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever" (2 Samuel 7:16, ESV).



But, within this same short verse, the reader is also reminded of David's greatest shame: "David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife" (Matthew 1:6). David's kingdom, although great, was soon to be marred by his own personal failings. His son, Solomon, was a wise king but weakened by his extensive accumulation of wealth and

by foreign wives who introduced idolatry. Solomon's reign led to internal strife and ultimately, the kingdom's division. The kings following Solomon were definitely a mixed bag but the line trends downward. It was stunning how quickly things fell apart. The graph line for the hope of a human fulfillment to God's promise would rapidly decay.



Looking at a graph of God's faithful promise and David's lineage, the question becomes, "How could the eternal, holy kingdom promised to David be based on the fickle, wavering kingships following David? How could these two truths intersect?"

The truth is they could never intersect. But God is not limited by our charts. The solution was given to Joseph in an angelic dream: "Joseph son of David . . . what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 1:20).

The permanent promise to David is fulfilled only by the righteous intervention of God alone. Both promise and holy lineage intersect in the child Jesus, who was both the Son of David and the Son of the Most High.

All the names that have gone before can be narrowed down now to these two specific names. All of history has been leading up to this one point when Someone would finally come with a Name above all names, a Name that will never be forgotten, a Name that will spell Life itself.

"He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David." (Luke 1:32)

About the Author

Beth Pocock is a retired librarian and spiritual director who now spends her time reading and studying and helping with grandchildren.



The Lord is My Shepherd

Arely | Original song

The Lord Is My Shepherd is a piece inspired by the life and faith of King David. The work highlights three characteristics that define his story—the staff, the harp, and the crown—using them as symbolic elements to trace his journey from shepherd boy to devoted musician to chosen king. Through simple, heartfelt language and a melodic structure suited for worship, the song celebrates God’s constant presence, guidance, and care.

Shaped by my love for Scripture and music, the piece blends biblical storytelling with musical rhythms inspired by my Mexican cultural heritage. By weaving these rhythms into the song, I hope to share a part of my culture with others while making the message accessible, memorable, and joyful. Through these three defining symbols of David’s life, I invite listeners of all ages to experience the peace and assurance found in knowing that the Lord is our Shepherd.

About the Artist

Arely loves playing the saxophone and writing songs in Spanish—her native language—for her students, as well as composing songs in English for her church, weaving her cultural roots into every piece. She has continued to develop her musical gifts over the years, sharing them with her community and inspiring those around her.



The Lord is My Shepherd

Chorus:

The Lord is my Shepherd,
He watches over me.
He gives me strength and peace,
I know He’s here with me.

Verse 1:

David had a shepherd’s staff,
Leading sheep along the path.
Brave and strong, he faced each day,
God was with him, he had no fear.

(Chorus)

Verse 2:

David played his harp each day,
Praising God with every song.
With his heart he loved to play,
Joyful music for his King.

(Chorus)

Verse 3:

David was chosen young and small,
God placed a crown upon his call.
He became a powerful king,
Following God in everything.

(Chorus)

Tag:

I know He’s here with me.
I know He’s here with me.
I know He’s here with me.



Scan the code or visit nscbc.org/david to hear this song.

Bathsheba

God Intervened

Brian Indrelie | Reflection

|| *Read 2 Samuel 11-12; 1 Kings 1; Matthew 1:6*

Once again, Bathsheba found her life in danger. It had not been the first time. Many years prior, in a move that would have made the pharaohs of Egypt proud, David had sent for her, even though she was Uriah's wife. To refuse a king's summons usually meant death in those times, so she went. As a result, David had murdered Uriah, her child had perished, and she had been put into his harem. Yet God had intervened.

The prophet Nathan, who spoke with God's voice, had confronted David, and he had repented. God through Uriah's wife had given David an heir for Uriah, and her son would rule once David was gone. Yet all that was in doubt now. David was old and weak, and David's other children were scheming to do away with the embarrassment their father's sin had brought on their family. Adonijah by human descent should have been heir, and many powerful people including the high priest and the commander of David's army were in on the plan. Bathsheba and her son were once again in danger, loose ends to doubtless be tied up by violent men like Joab once the king was no more. Yet once again, God intervened.

The prophet Nathan this time went to Bathsheba, giving counsel to her on how to be God's instrument of deliverance for her and her son. In response to her intervention, David showed that he still had his wits about him in his infirmity, and had appointed Solomon as co-regent king, ending Adonijah's short-lived conspiracy and establishing

Uriah's heir. Uriah had been a Hittite convert, and yet through his wife his legal heir would rule Israel, and another of his heirs would redeem all nations, a profound mystery that we think on this advent season.

At times though, it can't have been easy for Bathsheba, and she likely wondered where God was in a world dominated by evil and violent men. Each of David's earlier heirs replicated his sin, seeking to plunder his daughter or wives, but did not follow in his repentance. For a time, their sins went unpunished, and their conspiracies wrought havoc on the kingdom. While they might seem repugnant today, the ancient world belonged to violent men like them, and many a vulnerable woman like Bathsheba was broken by the schemes of these men who were considered the heroes of their time. But God intervened, and through Uriah's wife he not only brought peace to the kingdom, but he brought salvation to the world.

The news cycle is filled with heart-breaking stories of people just like Bathsheba, innocent victims of the whims of the powerful. And as in their world, the schemes and whims of the powerful dominate world events. We ourselves likely have times where we wonder if God sees us, and if he sees any who suffer. Bathsheba reminds us that God intervenes, and that while the powerful will be broken by their schemes, God will work salvation through his beloved.

About the Author

Brian Indrelie attends NSCBC with his wife, Joy, and daughters, Leah, Lydia, and Lizzie. He has been a member for over twenty years, having served on the leadership council and in Christian education ministry in the past. Today Brian enjoys volunteering in hospitality ministries and making music with his family. He teaches at Bradford Christian Academy where he is the chair of the religion department and serves part-time as the Christian chaplain at Emerson College in Boston.



solomon

Hear Thou in Heaven

Aaron Wright | Reflection

|| Read 1 Kings 3–11; Matthew 1:6

In his Gospel account, Matthew introduces Solomon, widely known for his wisdom, in this way: “And Jesse begat David the king; and David the king begat Solomon of her that had been the wife of Urias” (Matthew 1:6, KJV). *This is a peculiar introduction for the great king Solomon.*

There is a distinct wisdom in recognizing that one has much to learn, and even more to publicly claim ignorance. In his dream, we find Solomon, in dialogue with the Lord, acknowledging, “I am but a little child,” a servant amidst an innumerable people (1 Kings 3:7). Aside from identifying himself on account of his youth, he appeals to the Lord, the life source of wisdom, as a servant and the son of King David.

Servant. Son. Child.

Curiously, this plea for wisdom can be translated as a request for an “understanding heart.” Distinct from how we might conjure the image today, the Hebrew context of “heart” encapsulates more than sentimentality or passion. Here it is the epicenter of the young ruler’s thoughts, will, and emotions—all that which shapes his orientation. In this sense, Solomon’s plea and the “largeness of heart” which is bestowed upon him reflect the need for an overwhelming orientation toward righteousness in favor of the Lord’s beloved.

Simply imagine such a prayer: *Lord, turn all of me toward loving those whom you love.*

This certainly invokes a more passionate reading of “heart” and, arguably, the fundament of empathy—an understanding heart, passionate about the Lord’s own.

Who teaches such a thing to a servant? A son? A child?

An obvious throughline is the archetype of a patriarch, a father, with the intimate privilege of shaping his dependent’s heart and convictions. Solomon repeatedly acknowledges his earthly father’s impact and virtue, and

yet, speculation permitting, Solomon’s confronting his origin and David’s shortcomings—namely the circumstances which permitted Matthew’s introducing him as “the son of her that had been the wife of Urias” (Matthew 1:6)—is an experience seemingly heavy enough to motivate a desire for wisdom and empathy.

Fittingly, Solomon’s eventual prayer unto the Lord for his people is this: “Then hear Thou in Heaven, thy dwelling place . . . and forgive” (1 Kings 8:39, KJV). Interspersed by a recognition of all the ways in which humanity’s failures compel a wise and empathetic Father, Solomon’s words beckon the coming Christ child. Jesus, a servant in his love to mankind, is the very enlargement of the Lord’s heart—the pinnacle of Solomon’s prayer, a reflection of his having heard in Heaven the world’s need for wisdom and empathy.

Our receiving of Christ is thus our mutual acknowledgment and confession that we, too, are children in need of one who will turn all of Himself toward loving us. In our humanity, we respond in love.

Take a deep breath in and let it go freely.

Pause and consider: What would it mean to turn wholeheartedly toward loving whom he loves? Consider simply asking the Lord for wisdom and empathy in this space.

Take a deep breath in, and offer the following unto the Lord:

I come as a servant and child; hear Thou in Heaven, thy dwelling place, and forgive where I have offered less than love to those whom you love. Grant me wisdom and empathy, Lord, that my thoughts, will, and emotions might be wholly oriented toward your own.

About the Author

Aaron Wright is a recent graduate of Gordon College, currently studying how the brain processes language and emotion. He is interested in the cultural and interpersonal dynamics that form our lived experiences—within and external to communities of faith—and how these are expressed in and shaped by conversation. This reflection represents a framing of King Solomon’s story with attention placed on the language of his heart in dialogue with the Lord, and what it suggests about the heart of the incarnate Christ.

manasseh

A King Prays

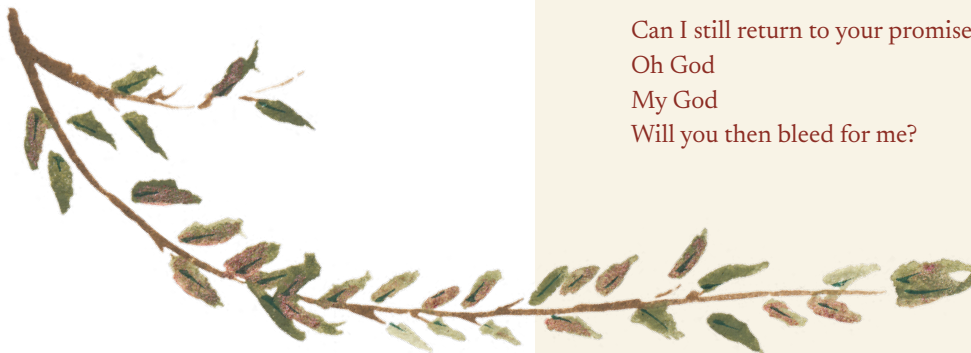
Porter Sprigg | Poem

2 Chronicles 33:13 says “Then Manasseh knew that Yahweh is God.” In this poem, I reflected on the prayer leading up to that newfound awareness. Manasseh was an incredibly evil king, who seemingly had an insatiable lust for idolatry. And yet, in 2 Chronicles, we see him step into an incredible repentance and transformation. While the idols he’d been pursuing had offered him everything and given him nothing, Yahweh’s covenant offered him a restoration to true life. In his return to covenant, Manasseh received a glimpse of God’s character that we see more fully in Manasseh’s offspring, Yeshua.

I too have experienced the poisonous promises of sin that linger and lie, producing all sorts of wreckage and dismay. Often, it feels like the solution is to punish myself, but this only perpetuates the cycle. The miracle of mercy is that restoration comes not through the shedding of our blood, but through the shedding of Christ’s blood. I, along with Manasseh, must reckon with the beauty of a God who gives Himself in love.

About the Author

Porter Sprigg works as a Resident Director at Gordon College and is pursuing his Doctorate of Ministry at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Arts, Mission, and Ministry. He delights in good stories and good friends.



A King Prays

I’ve felt this hook far before they tore me here
I’ve been mocked by Baal,
Mutilated with Asherah,
Molded by compulsion herself,
And now
I bleed on Babylonian brick for them.

I’ve felt the grit in my mouth far before they
dragged me here
Idols stick.
Idols pester
With promises that poison.
I have given them my own flesh.
And now
I bleed on Babylonian brick for them.

I have spat on your shalom,
Fought you, armed with adultery.
I reek
With the stench of desert
And deserted covenant.

I hear.
You whisper.
Manasseh
you are mine.

Can I still return to your promise?
Oh God
My God
Will you then bleed for me?

Josiah

A Heart Like No Other— And Yet Not Enough

Richard Wallace | Reflection

|| *Read 2 Kings 22–23:30; Matthew 1:10*

“Neither before nor after Josiah was there a king like him who turned to the Lord as he did—with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength, in accordance with all the Law of Moses.” (2 Kings 23:25)

Jesus’ genealogy can read like a lineup of failures, flawed king after flawed king. But finally, we get someone with promise: Josiah. No king before or after had a heart like his, and Josiah’s wholehearted commitment to God led to remarkable action—the recovery of the books of the Law, the reformation of the priesthood, the purging of idols and shrines from top to bottom of the kingdom, and the reinstitution of Passover.

What a high point for the kingdom of Judah! This must be the king Israel has been waiting for! The “Shema King,” loving God with all his heart, soul, and strength. Surely *this* is how God’s kingdom will thrive?

But the story has a bitter turn. Despite doing everything right, Josiah couldn’t save Judah. God’s judgment would still come upon the people, and soon (2 Kings 23:26–27).

This should make us uncomfortable. If Josiah, with all his zeal, passion, and ability to reform God’s kingdom, couldn’t save his people, what hope do we have of seeing true change in ourselves?

Reflecting on this sobering reality, the prophet Jeremiah offered this diagnosis: Josiah’s reforms were great on the surface, but they lacked the power to penetrate the hearts of the people (Jeremiah 3:10). We know this because the external changes Josiah brought were immediately abandoned once he died.

Josiah was an impactful reformer, but Judah needed recreation. He could tear down high places, but he couldn’t create new hearts. Through Josiah we learn that even great human faithfulness lacks the power to transform in the way that’s needed, a transformation from within.

We’re trying to reform
what needs to be recreated.

We face the same reality. Our attempts at change don’t stick—not because we lack sincerity, but because we lack power. We resolve to be more patient, more generous, more faithful, only to find ourselves back where we started. We’re trying to *reform* what needs to be *recreated*. Like Judah under Josiah, we can clean up externals while our hearts remain unchanged.

Like Judah, we don’t need another reformer. We need someone with the power to recreate us.

This Advent, we don’t long for greater willpower or New Year’s resolutions. We long for the Re-creator—Jesus, who forms new hearts within us and reorders our loves from the inside out. The King with the power to truly make all things new.

Where have your attempts at reform in your life failed? Where might you be exhausting yourself trying to change what only Christ can recreate? Josiah’s story frees us from cycles of failing reform and instead points to rest in the One with the power to make all things new.

About the Author

Richard Wallace grew up in Northern Ireland, serving at two churches there before coming to New England to study at Gordon-Conwell. He and his wife, Tess, have been members of NSCBC since 2016 and together with their sons Finn and Caelan live in Beverly Farms near the church. Richard serves as our Associate Pastor.



On High Places | Johnny Paul-Faina

On High Places

Johnny Paul-Faina | Painting on cardboard

On High Places is a meditation on the empty altars we have built throughout our lives to aspirations, dreams, and idols that we have held onto for too long. This picture is an invitation to resurrender to the freeing Exodus of Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection. Painted on cardboard, the image gives the impression of makeshift street-art, asking us to "unbox" the parts of us that we have yet to give over to Jesus, our Savior.

Let freedom now ring

"Let freedom now ring on the earth, in high places!"
was the shout all of heaven released on the day
King Josiah set those idol wood poles ablaze—
"Let freedom now ring!"

The bodies enslaved to idolatrous love, they
First kissed the bitter, unleavened bread in ages,
The Passover present of God's love without pay.

Centuries later, an unseemly King would raise
the tables and taxes in the Temple, the same,
then die on a wood altar, proclaiming the phrase,
"Let freedom now ring!"

Let freedom now ring

Johnny Paul-Faina | Poem

Let freedom now ring is a poem in the French form of the roundel, reflecting on the monumental reforms King Josiah made to worship in Judah, recorded in 2 Kings 22–23 and 2 Chronicles 34–35. Poetic parallels are drawn between Josiah and King Jesus in a lyrical melody, emphasized by the roundel form—both kings purify the Lord's House, the Temple, and proclaim what true freedom looks like for God's people.

About the Artist

Johnny Paul-Faina is a Romanian-American artist and creative writer currently finishing up his studies at Gordon College. Johnny is passionate about the intersection of art, faith, and culture, and hopes to use his multifaceted artistic gifts in missional work presently and in the future.

A Wicked Ancestor

Rich Schoenert | Reflection

|| Read Jeremiah 22:30; Matthew 1:11-12

Jesus' family tree points out the fulfillment of an interesting prophecy:

"Josiah [was] the father of Jehoiachin* and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon. After the exile to Babylon: Jehoiachin was the father of Shealtiel" (Matthew 1:11-12).

Back in 597 B.C., Jehoiachin was such a wicked king (he only reigned for three months), that God put a curse on his offspring:

"This is what the LORD says: 'Let the record show that this man Jehoiachin was childless, for none of his children will ever sit on the throne of David to rule in Judah. His life will amount to nothing'" (Jeremiah 22:30).

God meant business! Jehoiachin was the last king in the line of David. He was succeeded, not by his son, but by his uncle. Not one of Jehoiachin's sons ever again returned to the throne.

But now we have a problem. For Jesus to be our messiah and king, He had to come from the line of David and therefore be a descendant of Jehoiachin. But how could He ever rule as king without violating this prophecy that no descendant of Jehoiachin would ever reign? God had to devise a plan by which Jesus would be the *legal* heir to the throne but, at the same time, would not be in the *bloodline* of David as a descendant through Jehoiachin.

God did it by means of the virgin birth—bypassing the bloodline of Jehoiachin—and yet still maintaining Jesus' royal right to reign. It's a fantastic thing how God guarded every single detail through the miracle of the virgin birth.

Mary's virgin conception of Jesus would fulfill another prophecy declared centuries before through the prophet Isaiah:

"All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call Him Immanuel'—which means, God with us.'" (Matthew 1:22-23; cf. Isaiah 7:14)

What does it all mean for us? Here are two lessons to contemplate:

The incarnation of Jesus made it possible for Him to die for sins. This Child would be named "Jesus." In Hebrew, that's "Joshua"—"the Lord is salvation"—because of His mission: "He will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). Jesus came into the world to die in our place and thus deliver us from the consequences of sin and restore us to fellowship with God. Imagine, He did this for you!


Jesus, by means of the incarnation, came to experience all of the pain and trials of life. He knows what it is to be weary, disappointed by people, deserted by friends, and rejected by family, to feel grief and sorrow, to weep and to be tempted. He entered into these things; He experienced them. Therefore, He encourages us to come to Him in prayer, knowing that He understands and cares about what we are going through (Hebrews 2:18; 4:15-16).

This Advent, reflect on the fact that Jesus' advent miraculously fulfilled prophecies given to a king named Jehoiachin and a prophet named Isaiah in a way that would enable Him to die for us and care for us!

About the Author

Rich Schoenert served as our Senior Pastor at NSCBC from 1976-1988 and as Intentional Interim Pastor from 2012-2015. He now lives in Minnesota with his wife, Valerie.

* The names *Jeconiah* and *Jehoiachin* refer to the same person.



Give us a secure home in the land

In every little one, multitudes
—fruit, flowers, or grain—hidden in seeds.
So, give them a secure home in the land
where they may take root.

Fruit, flowers, or grain (hidden in seeds)
unanchored; blown in the wind, driven
where they may take root
or hollow out on hardened terrain.

Unanchored, blown in the wind, driven
on harsh, unfamiliar land—ground down
or hollowed out on hardened terrain
not retaining its beauty.

On harsh, unfamiliar land ground down
a stake in the future
not retaining its beauty.
Indeed the land was for blessing—

a stake in the future,
given in sacred trust.
Indeed! The land was for blessing
you, too, heir of the harvest,

given in sacred trust,
made of dirt and divine breath!
You, too, heir of the harvest,
host a table for neighbors

made of dirt and divine breath.
So, “give us a secure home in the land!”
Host a table for neighbors—
(in every little one) multitudes.

Give us a secure home in the land

Sarah Bartley | Poem

The final section of the genealogy—the ‘from-exile-to-Christ’ era—is mostly people whose stories are unknown to us. Yet, all of Scripture gives witness to their longing for a secure home in the land.

The poem is a pantoum—a poetic form composed of four-line stanzas in which the second and fourth lines of each stanza serve as the first and third lines of the next stanza. This creates reverberation or resonance, as lines repeat but shift meaning. The form reminds me of the poetic construction of the Bible. When people choose what is right in their own eyes, God first laments the resulting scarcity, pain, and hostility. Then, future generations experience it on the land. Like a good poem, the story details remix and reappear as if cascading across generations, repeating in each generation that defies God’s wisdom and healing in each generation that practices righteousness in the land.

I wrote seven stanzas to reflect the repetitions of seven present in the creation narrative and sabbath cycles that were essential to Israel’s righteous stewardship of the land. I chose the metaphor of seeds because the Bible sets people and seeds on analogy. Both contain infinite potential for blessing. Both require equitable enfranchisement in the land as a condition for holistic prosperity. The unplanted seed is like the disenfranchised person—displaced, vulnerable, ground down, hollowed out, robbed of the chance to shape decisions that impact them. This remains true today; a home is the platform for comprehensive healing.

The prophets extend the seed metaphor, depicting Israel as a seed, planted by God in the land of promise. Once they began to commodify the land, they became increasingly oppressive and violent. They produced bad fruit and were scattered in exile, but held on to hope of future replanting. Jesus invokes the seed metaphor when he describes God’s word as a seed that takes root in fertile hearts, empowering people to bear good fruit. Mary invokes the idea, too! Go, read Luke 1:50-53. Notice the seed language, repeated words and ideas.

This poem celebrates the hope of Jesus’ ancestors: “Give us a secure home in the land.”

About the Artist

Sarah Bartley loves Jesus, who offers endless inspiration for a lifetime of peacemaking. She is currently on sabbatical, but her vocation is community-building with a focus on safe, stable housing.

ZERUBBABEL

Building in the Spirit of God

Melissa Zaldivar Sawyer | Reflection

|| *Read Zechariah 4:6–9; Matthew 1:12*

The enemies of Israel have taken over. They are no longer the nation they once were. Their temple, the pride of the people, has been destroyed. The hallways are haunted. The courts are empty. The raised walls are now rubble.

Israel is no longer a sovereign nation. They are overtaken by those who do not share their values or culture. The Babylonians took over and the Persian leaders are calling the shots now.

To be one of the Israelites is to be a person of lament. The glory days are over.

Zerubbabel is a man who could have—had things gone very differently—been king. He was related to the great King David. In another life, he would call the shots. Instead, he leads under the rule of the Persians. He has a hollow sovereignty, given a role of governor by the Persians. He represents his people, but he is at the mercy of someone else.

I wonder how much this kind of humbling wears on a man? How often did he whisper frustration that this is now how things should have gone. He should be king, but now he's ruled over in exile.

Still, the voice of God is louder than the proclamation of any government.

When we think of the word “calling” we often imagine a moment in which we are given a directive that makes us take hold of the future. There is a certain power or social status that comes with a word like “calling.” But truly? That word literally is translated as “invitation.” And an invitation can be extended to anyone.

God invited Zerubbabel to lead the charge and rebuild the temple. He starts and the work is slow at best. And the new temple isn't as big as the one where his ancestors sat enthroned. People are vocal about the ways his temple is inferior.

God is a God of invitation.

The project stalls—for 17 years. But God is a God of invitation and He intends to see things through. Zechariah 4:6 says, “This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: ‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit.’”

God himself assures Zerubbabel that this is still the right way to go.

The temple Zerubbabel built was not what the people had hoped for. His work was not on his own timeline. His role was far from the kingly one that his bloodline promised. Still, he was faithful and humble and listened to the invitation of God that reminded him, “It will not be your might. It will not be your power. It will be my way. And it will be enough.”

Five hundred years later, in the once-underwhelming hallways of Zerubbabel's temple, a rabbi teaches and heals and begins his ministry. And his name is Jesus.

What if Zerubbabel had listened to the haters? What if he had turned down the opportunity to be a builder instead of a King? What if his pride got the better of him?

The Lord imagined a future that Zerubbabel could not have foreseen, but had he not been obedient and patient, he never would have succeeded.

Perhaps your year didn't go how you thought, or your career is different than you hoped. Perhaps you've been left behind or feel lost. Either way, the Lord is inviting you to something. Listen for it. His imagination for your life and for the generations yet to come is better than the story in your head.

What hope. What hope.

About the Author

Melissa Zaldivar Sawyer has called NSCBC home since 2013. She lives next door to a cheese shop with her husband, Ken and loves to introduce friends to the beauty of the North Shore. She's aunt to so many nieces and nephews that she's probably lost count, which is the delight of her life.

The Lord's Signet Ring

Grace Romeo Stout

White stoneware clay, glaze

“On that day,’ declares the Lord Almighty, ‘I will take you, my servant Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel,’ declares the Lord, ‘and I will make you like my signet ring, for I have chosen you,’ declares the Lord Almighty.” (Haggai 2:23)

A reunifying character in the line of David and a picture of the Messiah to come, Zerubbabel is likened to a signet ring of the Lord. In this time, signet rings were symbols of authority and power, each carrying a design unique to its possessor used to sign and seal official documents. As Zerubbabel follows the Lord's direction in leading the reconstruction of the temple in Jerusalem, he is honored by being likened to the signet ring of the Lord, once lost by earlier generations, but now restored permanently. This restoration reunifies the lineage of David while reigniting hope in the future Messiah to come.

While Zerubbabel foreshadowed the coming of Jesus, we live in the reality of Jesus' life and death. Carved in the slab of clay is what could be the imprint of a signet ring. The leaves and growth point to the tree of Jesse, celebrating the fulfillment of prophecy in Jesus' birth.

About the Artist

Grace Romeo Stout is a designer and artist who combines digital and graphic design with tactile processes including ceramics, printmaking and painting.





Mary

From Ordinary to Extraordinary

Jane Tinsley | Reflection

|| *Read Luke 1:26–56; Matthew 1:16–24*

Mary wasn't particularly special, or so she thought. She was just a young woman who was to be married to Joseph—and by all accounts, had a thoroughly average life ahead of her. But then an angel greeted her as highly favored. Of course, the whole appearance of a real angel to her (of all people) was greatly troubling to her—wouldn't we feel the same if an angel came and spoke to us, in our own house? But when Mary received the news that she would conceive and give birth to the Savior of the world, the one who would reign over Jacob's descendants forever, she showed remarkable faith, trusting that the Lord's word would be fulfilled. And for this exemplary trust in God, Elizabeth calls her blessed: "Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her" (Luke 1:45)!

Mary's joy in the Spirit overflows in the form of a song that reads like a psalm. In her song, three words are repeated twice: humble, merciful, and mighty. As is the case with many characters in the Bible, the Lord sees, loves, and does his work through the lowly and average: "He has been mindful of the humble state of his servant" (Luke 1:48). Mary is no exception, in fact, she a key example. She sings that the Lord "has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble" (1:53). Even though earthly rulers seem to hold so much power over the way the world is run, we are reminded that God can work wonders through average people in ways they didn't think were possible.

Since we have living, breathing evidence of how God has moved in the past, we can have no doubt that God is still capable of moving today, in this very moment.

Mary calls God the Mighty One who has done great things for her. Since we have living, breathing evidence of how God has moved in the past, we can have no doubt that God is still capable of moving today, in this very moment. Mary certainly knows that He has kept His promises, so she trusts that her Lord will keep this one to her. And since the Lord is so mighty, Mary is grateful for His mercy, which extends to those who fear Him, from generation to generation. She references the Abrahamic covenant, remembering His promise be merciful to Abraham and His descendants forever.

Mary's song is such a good reminder of the Lord's mercy, mightiness, and favor on the humble in heart. No matter how ordinary we think we might be, He can still use us to do profound, kingdom-impacting work on this earth. As we celebrate the birth of our Savior this Christmas season, consider how you have seen the Lord do great things through the ordinary this year.

About the Author

Jane Tinsley is a senior at Gordon College in Wenham studying English. She has attended NSCBC for three years and has found a truly valuable church family there.



Magnificat

Kaitlin Weidmann & Lucy Coburn
Original composition for
voice and recorder

This piece is an arrangement of Mary's Song from Luke 1:46-55, commonly referred to as *The Magnificat* which means "my soul magnifies the Lord." It is a popular passage to set to music, and it has been arranged in many different ways by many different composers. The tune we chose, titled "UFFINGHAM," was written in 1701 by Baroque composer Jeremiah Clarke. It has been used as a setting for many hymns throughout the years, including *The Magnificat* in a 1906 edition of the English Hymn Book. Baroque music, like this tune, tends to have a timeless quality to our modern-day ears, reflecting the theme in Mary's Song of how God has been mighty and merciful across generations.

We chose to include a reading of a Hebrew retro-translation of the song, as this is the language that a first century Jew like Mary would have used in religious contexts, and the Hebrew language is representative of the history of God's people through the Old Testament and beyond. We also decided to involve the recorder as it is a staple instrument of the baroque period and has similarly survived centuries of musical evolution. This piece reflects God's constant faithfulness from generation to generation, despite human inadequacy, eventually culminating in His provision of a Savior through Mary.

About the Artists

Kaitlin Weidmann and Lucy Coburn are music education students at Gordon College and have been attending NSCBC since September 2025. They are flute and voice majors, respectively, and have been learning to play recorder for a month.

Magnificat

Trad. Hymn

1. My soul shall mag - ni - fy the Lord and with my
2. Be - hold I am for - ev - er blessed for God has
3. The Lord has shown His might - y arm, those proud in
4. The hun - gry with good things are filled, they see God's
5. The Lord helps his be - lov - ed ones, in mer - cy

spi - rit I re - joice my sav - ior has re - gard for
done great things for me his mer - cy rests in those who
heart he shall put down; the haught - y from their thrones re -
kind - ness ev - 'ry day; but on the rich no bless - ing
He His cov - nant heed; just as He pro - mised long a -

me he hears his low - ly ser - vant's voice
fear who hon - or his name most ho - - ly
- moved the low - ly have God's bless - ing found.
rests, with emp - ty hands they're sent a - way
- go, to A - bra - ham and to his seed

Magnificat | Kaitlin Weidmann and Lucy Coburn



Hear this song performed
live at the ArtsFeast on
December 7. Scan here or
visit nscbc.org/artsfeast
to register for the event.



A New England Jesse Tree

Laura Gallant | Sculpture

Many biblical figures and values are traditionally represented through plant symbolism. In the Protestant church the Easter Lily represents purity, resurrection, and the triumph of life over death. In the Catholic church, the Madonna Lily, a plant native to the Middle East, is used to represent Mary and she is often depicted holding one. In the Orthodox church, basil represents Christ and there is legend that it was found growing at the site of the true cross.



For this Jesse Tree, I represent each person in the lineage of Christ with a plant. I started by researching the traditional plant symbolism for each person and then applied my knowledge of native flora to find New England plants that could be analogous to the traditional plants. I collected native plant specimens and pressed them into clay to create each “leaf” of my Jesse Tree. The impression was stained and then wiped back to make the deeper lines stand out and glazed. The backs of the leaves are carved with the names of each person represented as well as the name of the plant. A list of the biblical figures, their traditional plants, source, and the New England analog is listed on the next page.

I made the Stump of Jesse as a vase-like sculpture to hold the branches and my ornaments. The stump also has symbolism. There is, of course, the literal stump reference “A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots” (Isaiah 11:1). I also designed the stump to evoke the cross, with nails through the severed branches and a tree “wound” in its side. I hope this piece in its entirety allows you to reflect on the lineage of Christ and our connection to the beauty of the natural world through creation.

About the Artist

Laura Gallant loves creating ceramic pieces that integrate the natural world. She works primarily with stoneware clay at a community studio in Beverly.



Person	Biblical Plant	Reference	New England Equivalent	Symbolism
Abraham & Sarah	Oak of Mamre	Genesis 18:1	White Oak (<i>Quercus alba</i>)	Covenant, enduring faith, rootedness
Isaac	Tamarisk at Beersheba	Genesis 21:33; Genesis 26:23–25	Eastern Red Cedar (<i>Juniperus virginiana</i>)	Covenant worship, endurance, sacred place
Jacob	Almond Blossom	Jeremiah 1:11–12; Numbers 17:8	Grey Alder (<i>Alnus incana</i>)	Watchfulness, divine care, renewal near water
Tamar	Date Palm	Psalms 92:12	Sugar Maple (<i>Acer saccharum</i>)	Righteousness, uprightness, life-giving sweetness
Rahab	Hyssop	Exodus 12:22; Psalm 51:7	Hyssop (<i>Hyssopus officinalis</i>)	Cleansing, deliverance, faith through obedience
Boaz	Barley	Ruth 2:1–23	Meadow Foxtail (<i>Alopecurus pratensis</i>)	Provision, humility, redemption
Ruth	Wheat	Ruth 2:23; Matthew 13:24–30	False Oat-grass (<i>Arrhenatherum elatius</i>)	Faithfulness, belonging, gathered into God's people
David	Olive Tree	Psalms 52:8	Black Cherry (<i>Prunus serotina</i>)	Kingship, anointing, covenant faithfulness
Bathsheba	Pomegranate	1 Kings 7:18–20; Song of Songs 4:3	Apple Tree (<i>Malus domestica</i>)	Fruitfulness, beauty, restoration
Solomon	Cedar of Lebanon	1 Kings 5:6; 6:9–10	American Elm (<i>Ulmus americana</i>)	Wisdom, majesty, permanence, temple-building
Ahaz	Briars and thorns	Isaiah 7:23–25	Multiflora Rose (<i>Rosa multiflora</i>)	Judgment, desolation, encroaching faithlessness
Hezekiah	Fig Tree	2 Kings 20:7	Serviceberry (<i>Amelanchier spp.</i>)	Healing, restoration, answered prayer
Zerubbabel	Olive Branch	Zechariah 4:2–6, 11–14	American Beech (<i>Fagus grandifolia</i>)	Endurance, God's Spirit, temple restoration
Joseph	Lily	Matthew 1:19	Tulip Tree (<i>Liriodendron tulipifera</i>)	Purity, steadfastness, upright strength
Mary	Rose	Song of Songs 2:1	Multiflora Rose (<i>Rosa multiflora</i>)	Divine love, beauty, Theotokos, God-bearer

A New England Jesse Tree | Laura Gallant



The Garden Made New | Shauna Kurihara

The Garden Made New

Shauna Kurihara

Mixed media on watercolor paper

Those who know me probably know that I love trees. I am inexplicably drawn to them, feel more myself when I am surrounded by them, and I feel more grounded and can breathe more deeply in places that are filled with trees. Perhaps I am drawn to trees because of the way we see them woven throughout the entire story of Scripture. Trees are life, trees are promise, trees are healing, trees point toward the final restoration of the Garden. Isaiah 55, Jeremiah 17,

and Ezekiel 47 all point us to the healing promise of the new creation in Revelation 22. While impossible to capture the glory in the new creation, this painting tries to imagine this image of the Garden remade: the Tree of Life on either side of the river, bearing fruit, whose leaves are for the healing of the nations.

About the Artist

Shauna Kurihara is an artist and spiritual director who believes in creating beauty that cares for the soul. She is mom to Maggie, wife to Adam, and loves living in Beverly, starting her day with a good cup of tea, and sitting in the sunshine.

Visit the Gallery!

The art featured throughout this devotional is on display at the church throughout Advent. We encourage you to visit the gallery.

If you are moved by a piece of art or meditation, reach out to encourage the person who made it. Our artists would be delighted to know how their work is blessing our community. We will also celebrate the work of God through the arts this season on two occasions:

ArtsFeast

Sunday December 7 at 7pm

2 Butman St. Beverly (The Big Yellow House)

Join us for a special night to celebrate how God is at work through the arts at NSCBC. Share a meal together, hear testimonies of what the Lord has done through our artists, and encounter the work of the Holy Spirit through the inspiration (lit. spirit filling) of artists. Johnny Paul-Faina leads our time, with special guests Valerie Crisman of Pilgrim Church, and Greg Deddo, art professor at Gordon College. All are welcome! Register by scanning the code or visiting nscbc.org/artsfeast.



Interact with the Creators

Sunday December 14 at 11am

Friendship Hall, NSCBC

Join us during the Sunday school hour to hear from our devotional writers and artists about their creative and meditative process. This session will be led by Porter Sprigg. No registration necessary.



