



'Tis the Season . . .



We Wish You a Feminist Advent (as if there could be any other!)

Anna Lisa Gross

Mary sings: *The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because God has anointed me to preach good news to the poor, proclaim deliverance to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor* (Luke 4:18). **Advent is when we wait**, most poignantly, for Jesus to break into our world, **God-in-flesh, liberator, teacher, healer**.

As our (Northern Hemisphere) nights stretch and days dwindle, darkness claims more hours. As violence claims more news headlines and cruelty invades more public discourse, worry might be taking over your heart or mind. We long, in each hemisphere and throughout history, for *light* to break through the darkness. The moon's powerful light, the sun's warmth, the stars' reassurance. The light of Christ to bring **hope, peace, joy, love** and **good news** this Advent.

The good news of Advent is liberating, world-changing, transformational news. No wonder it's a poor young woman and infant boy who proclaim Advent! Birth is something that we simply cannot do alone. It takes at least four: two parents, one child, one Spirit of life to animate combining cells.

Birth is an interdependent act which counters individualism and breaks into our isolation. It carries with it the promise of regeneration and renewal. All life begins with a seed, and inside each seed is yet another seed seeking to flower forth and to bear fruit. In birth we are not only participant nurturer, but also the agent of liberation.



The desire for liberation – to burst forth in all loveliness and to be saved from the fearful void of isolation – is the spark of the Divine, the Spirit of God, pulling us toward integration or wholeness. Just as I could not be born biologically alone, so I cannot be liberated or reborn alone.

Ruthann Knechel Johansen shared this wisdom at a Church of the Brethren women's gathering in 1978. Nearly 42 years later, we still long for regeneration and renewal to break through our individualism and isolation. We continue to participate in liberation, yet we long for more.

What are you *giving birth* to? In your personal creativity, in your family, within your congregation, as a town or city – what new life, story or movement is *coming into this world* through you? What is **coming to life** in your midst? Who are your *midwives* in this birthing process? *Who are you helping* as a midwife?

To enrich and enliven your Advent, to warm up your winter, to stir up your soul, we offer these feminist Advent resources, that is to say, these resources which tell the Advent *good news* story as a world-changing, transformational, liberating story!

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HYMNS

Mary's song is a powerful, prophetic proclamation! There are several hymn versions. We particularly recommend *My soul cries out* by Rory Cooney in the *Sing the Story* hymnal supplement (available through Brethren Press) which you can also find online (sometimes with the title *Canticle of the Turning*). Other hymns of Mary's song include *My soul proclaims with wonder*, Hymnal 181.

🕊️ Proclaim peace passionately, sing of God's Kin(g)dom come:

- ✧ *People, look east*, Brethren Hymnal Supplement (Supp) 1036
- ✧ *Cuando el pobre, (When the poor ones)* Supp 1080
- ✧ *Blest are they*, Supp 1085
- ✧ *Touch the earth lightly*, Supp 1094
- ✧ *Brothers and sisters of mine*, Hymnal 142

🕊️ Invite peace in the storm, quiet in the chaos, prayer deep in the soul:

- ✧ *You are the sacred mystery*, Supp 1033
- ✧ *Kindle a flame*, Supp 1034
- ✧ *Spirit, Spirit of Gentleness*, Supp 1110
- ✧ *Spirit of Life*, Supp 1129
- ✧ *Love came down at Christmas*, Hymnal 208
- ✧ *Joyful is the dark*, Hymnal 233
- ✧ *O Holy Spirit, by whose breath*, Hymnal 291

🕊️ Proclaim that women and/or the Feminine Divine are part of God's story, at Advent or any time:

- ✧ *Bring many names*, Supp 1088
- ✧ *Woman in the night*, Hymnal #223
- ✧ *Gathered here in the mystery of this hour*, Supp 1046

Christmas has been commercialized and cute-ified, yet birth is not a sweet or simple process. How are you **grieving** the miscarriages, stillbirths, premature and delayed births, expected and unexpected offspring (metaphorical and literal) in your life and community? May these prayers, poems and sacred translations minister to you.

PRAYERS

- ✧ *A prayer for the path* by Dawn Ottoni Wilhelm, Supp 1079
- ✧ *Litany for community peace* by Kimberly McDowell, Supp 1093
- ✧ *Offertory prayer* by Jean Keith, Supp 1123
- ✧ *Listening prayer for unspeakable times* by Julie Garber, Supp 1126
- ✧ *Prayer for a new day of reconciliation* by Glenn Mitchell, Supp 1146

- ✧ Advent liturgy in *For All Who Minister*, p. 27-35
- ✧ Creator of worlds . . . *For All Who Minister*, p. 92
- ✧ A prayer for faltering disciples, *For All Who Minister*, p. 103
- ✧ O God, our Father and Mother . . . *For All Who Minister*, p. 104
- ✧ Many prayers, liturgy and stories at <https://globalwomensproject.org/worship-resources/>
- 🕊️ Poems, reflections (find online or in your library if you aren't reading this online with clickable links):
- ✧ *After Annunciation* by Anna Wickham (1912)

REST, little guest,
Beneath my breast.
Feed, sweet seed,
At your need.
I took Love for my lord
And this is my reward
—
My body is good
earth,
That you, dear plant,
have birth.



- ✧ Annunciation by Denise Levertov with reflection by David Lose
- ✧ *Our Lady* by Janine Canan (from *She Rises Like the Sun*, 1989), excerpt:

O take me, Unattainable and
Only Lady
over your great loom and weave me
according to design.

Guide me through chaos, and though I
cannot find You
be with me as any creature in the field
now and always, living or dead,
on the vast arcs of energy certain and
turbulent,
or lost tossed in your void,
Great Wombed Mother.

(Thanks to Barbara West, one of our Annual Conference Luncheon speakers, for this poem)

- ✧ Advent Candles for St. Teresa of Avila by Pamela S. Wynn
- ✧ Mary's Defiant "Let it Be" by Joe Kay
- ✧ *The Inclusive New Testament* by Priests for Equality, to read the Christmas story with inclusive language, e.g. from Mary's song in Luke 1:49-53:

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*For you, the Almighty, have done great things for me,
and holy is your Name.*

*Your mercy reaches from age to age
for those who fear you.*

*You have shown strength with your arm,
you have scattered the proud in their conceit,
you have deposed the mighty from their thrones
and raised the lowly to high places.*

*You have filled the hungry with good things,
while you have sent the rich away empty.*

- ✧ *Psalms for Praying* by Nan Merrill, for contemplative prayer without distractions of exclusive language or externalized blame, e.g. a sample from Psalm 34:

*When I searched for Love, the Beloved
answered within my heart,
and all my fears flew away.*

*Look to the Beloved, and your
emptiness will be filled,
your face will radiate Love.*

*For when you cry, the Beloved hears
and comes to you,
your troubles disappear.*

*The Beloved sends angels to those
who call on Love
to awaken them from their fears.
O taste and see!*

The Beloved is within you!

- ✧ From Lauren Winner's *Wearing God*:
The next time you're belting out a hymn in church, consider that the hymn is the music that helps the laboring mother God focus on delivery. Perhaps our music, our new song, helps God in birthing the new creation. God is redeeming us, yet we are the singers encouraging God in the work of delivering a renewed creation.

DAILY ADVENT JUSTICE STUDY

Too easily, December is full of shopping lists, baking cookies, going to pageants, hosting parties, and feeling that sense of MORE – get more stuff, do more things, eat more sweets...all the opposite of what Jesus is about. A season of

greed for MORE gifts, rather than gratitude for the greatest gift already given.

Recall Mary's song when she learns she will bear Jesus: *God has brought down rulers from their thrones, but has exalted the humble. The Lord has filled the hungry with good things, but has sent the rich away empty* (Luke 1:52-53).

We commend Global Women's Project's Advent Calendar (written by Anna Lisa Gross with artwork by Jessie Long) to nurture gratitude (rather than greed) within the midst of Advent. This calendar is filled with scripture, prayer prompts, activities and taxes, along with a color-by-day Christmas image. **Download and print the calendar; it's free to use and share (we hope you will donate your "taxes" to GWP).**

Advent comes on slightly different dates each year; this calendar is for December 1-25 so you can use it in any year. You can use the calendar in personal prayer time, with your family around the dinner table, in a Sunday school class or small group with weekly check-ins, or as a congregation.

Download the Advent Calendar at globalwomensproject.org/advent-calendar

How to share the calendar

- ☛ Lead Sunday school or other activity time that could be inter-generational or happen simultaneously in multiple classes. Download a game and Group session handout at globalwomensproject.org/advent-calendar
- ☛ Themed potluck: recipes from Extending the Table, More with Less, Simply in Season, etc., OR "simple" foods OR "global" foods OR "Christmas" foods
- ☛ Post on bulletin board in church with donation box
- ☛ Send out daily prompt by email/facebook
- ☛ Discuss weekly in Sunday school and/or worship to share insights from previous week
- ☛ Share in Advent morning devotionals or Bible studies
- ☛ Invite your family to give the Advent calendar as a gift to one another, rather than buying presents.

What ideas do you have?

We seek to be midwives for justice this Advent and in all seasons – Christ, Liberator, Light of the World, break into this world! Amen.



River of Fire

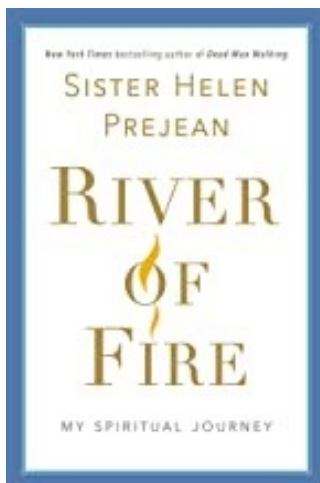
Anna Lisa Gross

The only reason not to pick up Sister Helen Prejean's *River of Fire* immediately is if you're waiting for the audio book. Prejean's words are always best in her voice – being with her writing is like sitting next to her in a small room. You may stay with her book as the hours pass, light moves across the walls, and finally you must stop to eat or rest.

Prejean writes with the intimacy and availability preachers strive for, and the energy and attention that journalists seek. Whether the topic is devastatingly grand (accompanying persons to their execution in the bestselling *Dead Man Walking*) or simply routine (*River of Fire* is its spiritual memoir prequel), Prejean quickly gains readers' trust and earns their attention. Why read another spiritual memoir in an era when *most* people think their individual experience will fascinate and edify others? Because Prejean explores her motivation and memory with skill and honesty. Readers will strive to live with more insight and love in response.

Prejean's life of deep faith, unwavering commitment to prayer, and steadfast service to others are all evident in her memoir. Her writing is a powerful and passionate expression of the *already and not yet* that Christians face – the Kin(g)dom of God is *already and not yet* and Jesus is *already and not yet* with us. The world (including each of us) are both broken and beloved. Prejean writes as a white person who grew up in a culture even more boldly white supremacist than it is today. She confesses without any drama, self-pity, or humble-bragging, the racism she was raised in and still benefits from. She brings readers into her struggle to live another way.

Similarly, the church she devotes her whole being to is drenched in sin, and she names brokenness even while she loves the church and cares for its future. Learning about Vatican II through Prejean benefits any of us whose hearts are broken by conflict and sin in the Church of the Brethren or Christianity. If you're wondering how churches can transform, if you're wrestling with your own participation in a despairing church and world, if you're listening for God's call in your life, Sister Helen Prejean will be your spiritual companion through these pages.



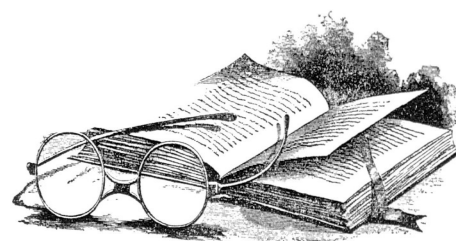
Graduation Celebration

One of our Steering Committee members, Jonathan Bay, is graduating from his doctoral program on November 29th. He now holds his doctorate in Creative Writing, Poetry with the University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, Scotland. The title of his thesis, which is both a creative and literary criticism project, is *Edge(work) / Beginnings: Towards a Trans- and Gender Non-Conforming Poetics*. Jonathan is joyfully taking a break from writing and researching and is now back permanently in California. Currently, much of 2019 has been lived out of a suitcase or two; this poem of his encapsulates both his time as an expat and moving into new spaces.

Packing List

You take only your old clothes
so no one but you
will want them,
your worst shoes --
nothing that is treasured.
Like the good camera
you left on a train,
or your father's chunky sweater.
Pick carefully,
you tell me,
try to think of them
as gifts to strange cities

— Jonathan Bay



The Vulnerable Pastor

Anna Lisa Gross

Mandy Smith's *The Vulnerable Pastor* resonates with my own experience in pastoral ministry – and I expect it will be affirming and useful for other pastors, too. She demonstrates her message (that leading through vulnerability is both faithful and effective) in her writing mode. She invites readers into her own process, the reactions and instincts she realizes do not serve herself, her family, her church, her faith – then takes us along for the ride of releasing those impulses and leaning into transparency and away from glory. I would have appreciated more editing (I didn't need quite so many

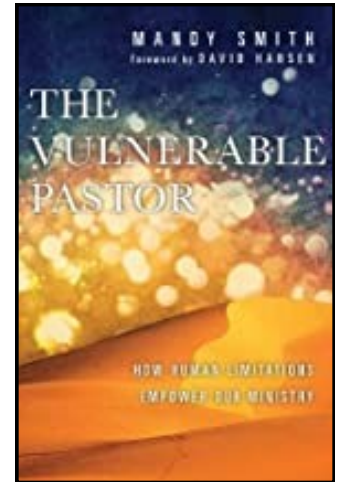


details of old journaling, e.g.) but the book would lose its soul and integrity if she didn't offer her stories and teach through experience. Smith's images or metaphors for God are limited and lacking; she only uses male pronouns and often the term Father. I found this distracting

and disappointing; the heart of this book is a feminine (and potentially) feminist philosophy and practice of leadership. Smith describes how traits traditionally

considered masculine (confidence, ambition) are honored as leadership, while traits traditionally considered feminine (vulnerability, humility) are demeaned. Smith learns another way from Jesus, but shares it in *The Vulnerable Pastor* with plenty of latent sexism.

Occasionally she appeared to me as a blushing girl, beaming at being loved by her Father. And then I check my own sexism – why can't we honor that aspect of ourselves, whatever our gender or age – that giggles with nervous delight when we are adored? I hope that Smith, through the commendable work of writing this book, deepens her own trust in its content. And I hope we will courageously lead through vulnerability; the church, our families, our communities, and our own health will be better for it. If you enjoy Brené Brown and also love Jesus' teachings, this book belongs on your nightstand.



✧ ✧ ✧ SAVE THE DATE ✧ ✧ ✧

Clergy Women's Retreat plans are being finalized. All commissioned, licensed or ordained Church of the Brethren clergy women are invited to gather for a time of retreat, reflection and renewal at the Franciscan Renewal Center in Scottsdale, Arizona, January 6th—9th, 2020. **Mandy Smith**, lead pastor at University Christian Church in Cincinnati, Ohio, will be the presenter and

facilitate some workshops. She is a regular contributor to *Christianity Today* and Missio Alliance and the author of *The Vulnerable Pastor: How Human Limitations Empower Our Ministry*. Mandy previously led the Church of the Brethren New Church Planters Conference. Free time will be included in the retreat schedule for walking, reflecting and other activities.

An online brochure is available at: www.brethren.org/

ministryoffice/documents/2020-clergywomens-retreat.pdf.

Registration began in August. Womaen's Caucus contributes financial support to this event and is directing those who need financial assistance in attending to apply for a scholarship through the Mary Blocher Smeltzer Scholarship fund. Follow this link for more scholarship details: <https://tinyurl.com/y2wye3g5>. More details to come!



Womaen's Caucus Needs Your Financial Support to Continue

With your continued support Womaen's Caucus can do so much to help further our mission of decreasing prejudice within the Church, empowering women and advocating for people on the margins. This year we have put focused energy into growing our steering committee and commitments. We continue to find tangible ways to live out our mission and build community.

Options: complete the form below, visit our website at www.womaenscaucus.org and use the donate button, and/or select Womaen's Caucus to receive 0.5% of your purchases at smile.amazon.com.

Make checks payable to: Womaen's Caucus

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District/Home Church (if applicable) _____		<input type="checkbox"/> Send by mail
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Visit

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bZRlEsiIr-k&feature=youtu.be>

to watch the video of our Annual Conference Luncheon.

Visit our website at

www.progressivebrethren.org/womaenscaucus

for other resources.