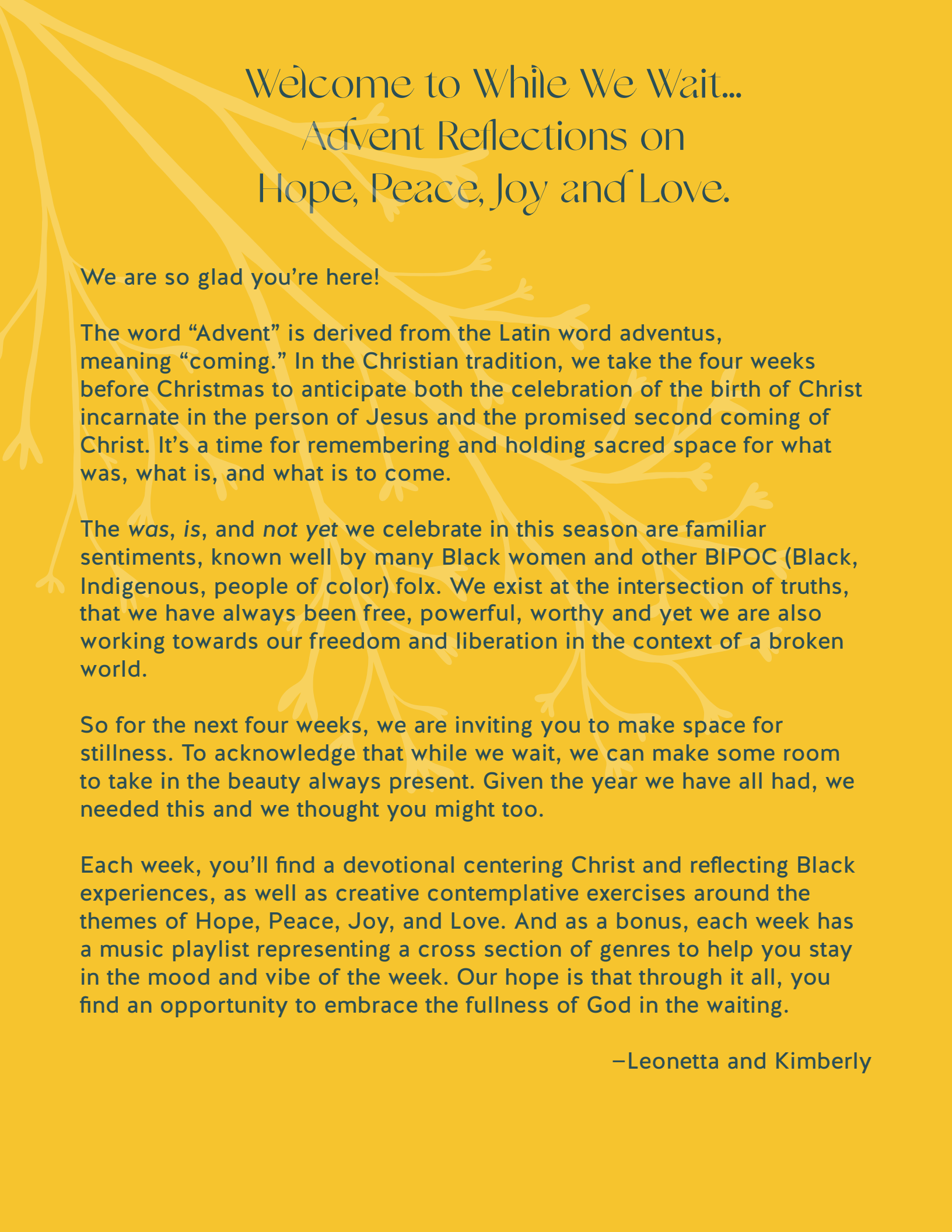


beautifulē

# While We Wait...

Advent Reflections on  
Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love





# Welcome to While We Wait...

## Advent Reflections on Hope, Peace, Joy and Love.

We are so glad you're here!

The word "Advent" is derived from the Latin word *adventus*, meaning "coming." In the Christian tradition, we take the four weeks before Christmas to anticipate both the celebration of the birth of Christ incarnate in the person of Jesus and the promised second coming of Christ. It's a time for remembering and holding sacred space for what was, what is, and what is to come.

The *was*, *is*, and *not yet* we celebrate in this season are familiar sentiments, known well by many Black women and other BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, people of color) folx. We exist at the intersection of truths, that we have always been free, powerful, worthy and yet we are also working towards our freedom and liberation in the context of a broken world.

So for the next four weeks, we are inviting you to make space for stillness. To acknowledge that while we wait, we can make some room to take in the beauty always present. Given the year we have all had, we needed this and we thought you might too.

Each week, you'll find a devotional centering Christ and reflecting Black experiences, as well as creative contemplative exercises around the themes of Hope, Peace, Joy, and Love. And as a bonus, each week has a music playlist representing a cross section of genres to help you stay in the mood and vibe of the week. Our hope is that through it all, you find an opportunity to embrace the fullness of God in the waiting.

—Leonetta and Kimberly



Week 1 – November 29 – December 5

# Hope

Reflection by Kimberly Goode

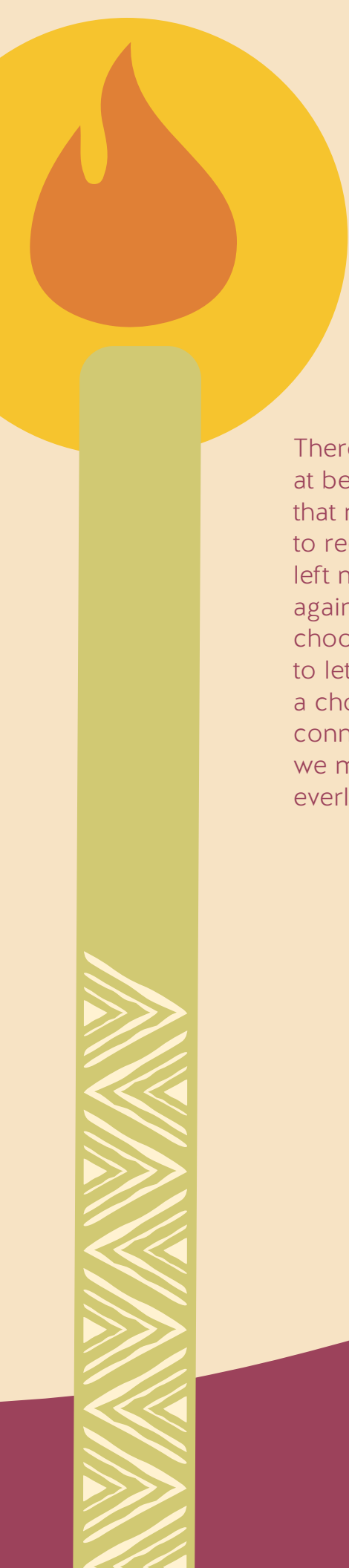
*What a fellowship, what a joy divine,  
Leaning on the everlasting arms;  
What a blessedness, what a peace is mine,  
Leaning on the everlasting arms.*

*Leaning, leaning, safe and secure from all alarms;  
Leaning, leaning, leaning on the everlasting arms.*

*“Leaning on the Everlasting Arms”*

My mother has never been a singer, but when I was a child, on Saturday mornings, music poured out of her like Mahalia Jackson. While cleaning the kitchen, she'd belt out songs like “Leaning on the Everlasting Arms,” smiling, throwing her head back, and letting the melodies momentarily take her to the choir pews of her childhood church.

It was so much more than my mother's praise filling our home on those joyful mornings. In her voice I could hear my grandmother and the songs that put the rhythm in her sway during Sunday services. I could hear my great grandmother and the songs that embodied her life's trials and triumphs. Through an enduring hope that has been passed down from one generation to the next, this music connected me to women I had never met. These songs testified to faith that could, in fact, be leaned on time and time again. A prayer that began as a Negro spiritual composed by my enslaved foremothers became the hymns of my mother's heart. How many women had this faith flowed through before making its way to me? How many women believed beyond what they could see so that my spiritual eyes could one day be opened?



Matthew 1 tells us there were fourteen generations from Abraham to David, fourteen from David to the exile in Babylon, and fourteen from the exile to the Messiah.

That's forty-two generations of waiting on and trusting in God. Forty-two generations of sustaining hope.

Forty-two generations of letting faith flow down so that one day, when a child was born in Bethlehem, he would be recognized as God's promise fulfilled.

There have been many moments this year when my hope has, at best, felt fragile. Photos of protestors crying out for justice that mirror those captured sixty years ago, and simple requests to recognize each other's full humanity falling on deaf ears have left me tempted to lower my expectations, and to stop believing against the odds. But God offers us invitations to courageously choose hope, as a radical act of resistance. Hope is a choice not to let today's challenges blind us before tomorrow's blessings. It's a choice to carry a prayer forward. And it's a choice to let God connect our faith to people we may never meet, and inspire songs we may never hear, through a hope that is truly safe, secure, and everlasting.

# Week 1: Hope

## Contemplative Practice

*“This is the shadow of hope. Knowing that we may never see the realization of our dreams, and yet still showing up.”*

– Austin Channing Brown, *I’m Still Here: Black Dignity in a World Made for Whiteness*

Find some time this week to take a meditative walk. It can be a quick ten-minute walk around your neighborhood, a longer walk at a local park, or it can be a walk up and down a quiet hallway. Let each step be an intentional reminder of the long journeys we often take as we hope for change. As you walk, here are some questions to consider based on this week’s reflection:

1. Consider the past... who have been the “holders of hope” in your life and family lineage? Who are the ancestors and elders that have modeled hope while they waited for you? Offer a prayer of gratitude for those people.
2. Consider the present... God has given each of us an opportunity to be a part of an everlasting song. What unique notes are you adding to the melody in this season? What does hope sound like in your own life today?
3. Consider the future... As you think about the generations that will come after you, how will you be a part of the chain of hope that connects us? Are you passing down the expansiveness of your faith and holding on to hope? Where is there room to grow?

When you return from your walk, if there was anything that came up for you related to the past, present, and future as you thought about hope, please take some time to capture it in your journal.

## Breath Prayer

Throughout the week, we invite you to find a few moments to center and focus on your breath.

Inhale: **As my soul waits,**

Exhale: **My hope is in you.**

# Playlist

Songs to inspire  
& invite HOPE

Optimistic - August Greene featuring Brandy,  
Common, Robert Glasper, and Karriem Riggins

Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel - The Music of Revelations,  
Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater

Leaning on the Everlasting Arms - Urban Nation Choir

Love Like There's No Tomorrow - The War and Treaty

Won't He Do It - Koryn Hawthorne

Light of the Holy Spirit - India Arie

What You Done - Mali Music

Someday at Christmas - Andra Day and Stevie Wonder

Square Root of Possible - Madalen Mills

Hills and Valleys - Tauren Wells

You can download this playlist on Spotify [here](#).





Week 2 – December 6 – December 12

# Peace

Reflection by Leonetta Elaiho

*“Made a picket sign off your picket fence.  
Take it as a warning.”  
–Beyoncé*

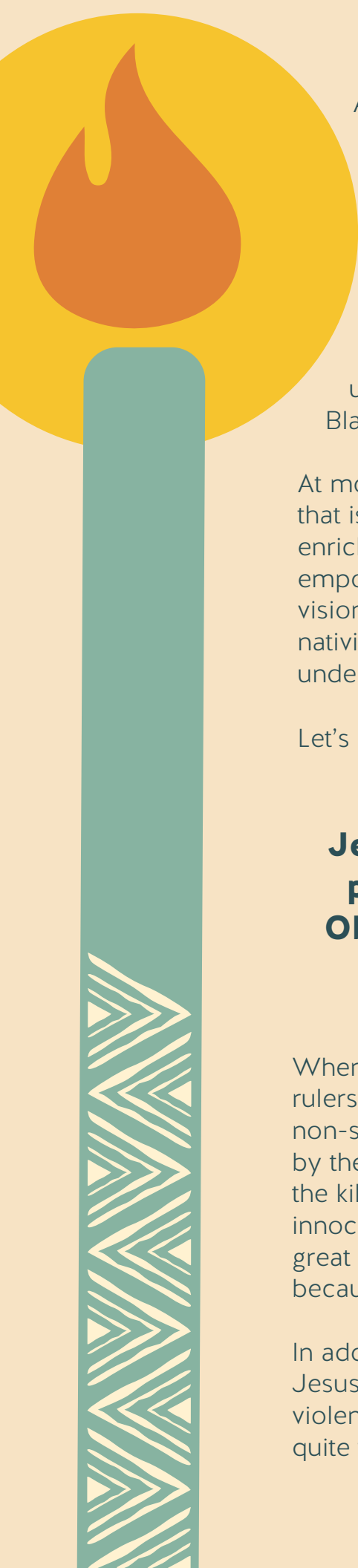
*No justice, no peace. Know justice, know peace.*

*“There can be no peace in the world unless there’s justice,  
and there can be no justice without peace. I think in  
a sense these problems are inextricably bound together.”  
–Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*

*“Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth.  
I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.”  
–Jesus, Matthew 10:34*

When I think of peace, I think of Saturday mornings. My partner usually sleeps in, my son is usually with his grandparents, and the subsequent quiet in the house feels like it is a warm invitation to quiet the noise in my head too. In this sense, peace is the absence of something. It opens up spaciousness to not be responsive to anything but my own whims and fancies. Fuzzy blanket, homemade oat milk matcha tea latte, and a good book? Yes, please!

Enter 2020. With all of the dysfunction, disappointment, and pain that the year brought, there aren’t enough Saturday mornings in a year to quiet all of this.



A global pandemic disproportionately impacting the lives of Black and Brown people, wildfires raging through forests and communities, fists, knees and bullets all coming for the lives of Black people, the death of our legends, the death of our children, the death of too many. It has not been a year of peace.

For months, we raised the collective consciousness by protesting, marching, making, educating, posting, and unapologetically proclaiming in whatever way possible that Black Lives Matter.

At moments like this, it becomes clear that we need a vision of peace that is much bigger than my Saturday morning refuges, more enriching than self-care Sundays, and more lasting than the empowering quotes that I love to repost on Instagram. We need a vision of peace more honest than the cleaned up version of the nativity with a porcelain skinned blonde-haired baby Jesus glistening under a banner proclaiming, "Peace on Earth."

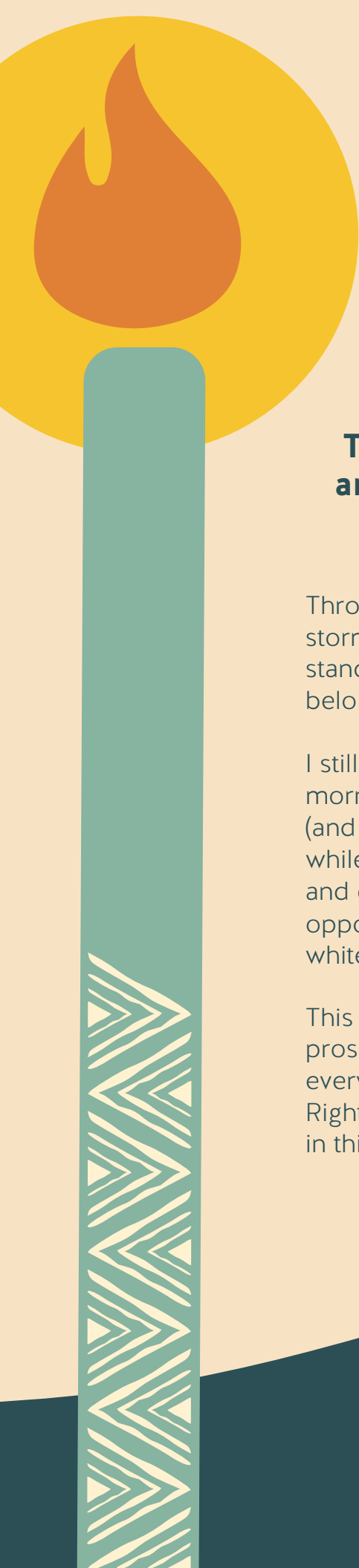
Let's keep it *100*.

**Jesus' birth no more brought simple notions of peace on earth than the election of President Obama brought an end to racism. If anything, it completely exacerbated the situation.**

When Christ was born, the grasp on power was so tightly held by the rulers of the time that the idea of being unseated by a new ruler was a non-starter. In fact, King Herod, in his insecurity, became so incensed by the possibility of another king, even a baby one, that he ordered the killing of every boy under two years old. This slaughtering of innocent children led to the "voice heard in Ramah of weeping and great mourning" from mothers weeping and refusing to be comforted because their children were no more. (Matt 2:18)

In addition, this put Mary, Joseph and newborn brown baby Jesus on the run as refugees, fleeing from this politically-inspired violence against children happening in the land. So again, this is not quite the picture of peace.





So where is the vision of peace for us? If not the absence of war, killing, disease, racism, fascism, poverty, white supremacy, where can we look to receive peace in this season?

Through Jesus, we see that peace is not the absence of disruption, chaos, pain, or even a good fight. But rather, peace is the assurance that we are stronger than the forces that seek to destroy us.

**The coming of Christ reminds us that Peace is amongst us, right where we are, right where we suffer, while we grieve, while we yet wait.**

Through the tornado of 2020 and all the historic and ongoing storms of our lives, peace is not being swept away. Peace is standing firmly in our indisputable worthiness and undeniable belonging.

I still relish my version of peace (and quiet) on Saturday mornings, but I also look for peace as I'm present to the more busy (and noisy) moments of my life. While I help out with homework, while I face the disappointments and losses in my life, while I cook and clean, while walking with friends, while I lean into opportunities to share my experiences as a Black woman in mostly white spaces and more.

This is Shalom. The fullness of well-being, a holistic prosperity, and a security of peace and wholeness for everyone. A peace that is inclusive, open, and accessible. Right where we find ourselves, in this moment of waiting.

## Week 2: Peace

# Contemplative Practice

This week, we invite you to go deeper into reflecting on the gift of peace available to you.

For this exercise, you'll need a sheet of blank paper and some creative art supplies—pens, markers, colored pencils, watercolor, etc. Whatever you have available will work just fine.

Whether you love creating things or have some art fears, the point of this exercise is to tap into your creativity without inhibition which releases both peace and joy. So give it a try!

1. Once you have gathered your creative supplies, you can set them aside and find a sheet of paper and take a moment and make a list of all the things that bring you peace. This could be places, people, or activities. When do you feel most at peace?
2. Next make a list of all the current things in your life that are taking away from your sense of peace. This could be frustrations, things you are waiting for, illness, challenging relationships, etc.
3. Now take your blank piece of paper and begin to represent the things taking away from your peace on the outer edges of the paper in whatever form you choose. Maybe you just write them out. Maybe you pick a symbol or colors that represent the list.
4. Once you've creatively displayed the things taking your peace around the edges of the paper, you are now going to create your "peaceful center." Go back to your first list for inspiration and create something that represents those things in the center of your paper. Again, maybe you just write them out, use colors or symbols to represent them, or maybe you pick a scene to illustrate that represents your list.
5. When you are done, take a few moments of solitude taking in your creation. Set an intention towards the things that generate peace in your life. Finally, invite Christ into your creation. Imagine that Christ does not come through or exist only at the center, but freely moves throughout the page—with you on the outer edges and with you in the center. Imagine Christ covering the entire paper, edge to edge, and delighting being with you through it all. You might consider a creative way to represent this on the paper as well.

Come back to your creation as often as you feel compelled to be reminded that as you move through the ups and downs of your life, Christ is "God with us" through it all and is offering you peace.

## Breath Prayer

Throughout the week, we invite you to find a few moments to center and focus on your breath.

Inhale: **Fully awake to this moment,**

Exhale: **I center into Your peace.**

# Playlist

Songs to inspire  
& invite PEACE

Refugee King - Liz Vice featuring Hannah Glover

I Am Light - India Arie

We Got to Have Peace - Curtis Mayfield

Rise - Solange

Rise Up - Andra Day

Alright - Kendrick Lamar

Their Eyes Were Watching - Sho Baraka

Make it Home - Tobe Nwigwe featuring David Michael Wyatt

Take Me to The King - Tamela Mann featuring Kirk Franklin

O Holy Night - Leslie Odom, Jr

You can download this playlist on Spotify [here](#).





Week 3 – December 13 – December 19

# Joy

Reflection by Leonetta Elaiho

*“The word became flesh and moved into the neighborhood. We saw the glory with our own eyes, the one-of-a-kind glory, like Father, like Son, Generous inside and out, true from start to finish.”*  
–John 1:14 MSG

*“Conduct your blooming in the noise and whip of the whirlwind.”*  
–Gwendolyn Brooks

Growing up in a Black church gave me an experience that was rich with Spirit, deep with culture, and profoundly communal. And everything was *extra*. And by “extra” I mean over the top with exuberance; the praise and worship, the hats, the Holy Ghost dances, the preaching, and even the casual conversation. For example, simple questions like, “How are you?” would elicit responses like, “Oh I’m blessed and highly favored!” and “The JOY of the Lord is my strength.”

I would know that someone lost a job, an adult son was struggling with addiction, a mother had recently passed, a partner had been unfaithful, but these were still the consistent statements that filled the sanctuary and fellowship hall. I used to think that either people were blatantly lying to each other or they were out of touch with reality.

I realize I had the wrong idea about what it meant to be blessed and to have joy.

In the story of the first Christmas, we learn that God is so driven by love for us that God moves into our neighborhood. So desperate to be in relationship with us, God becomes like us to get to us in a form we can recognize and touch.



## God enters into our world breaking right into the personal and communal pains of the time.

In this sense, God is “extra” and definitely “does the most” to get to us. Because of this we can proclaim, “Joy to the world, the Lord has come,” or as we would sing in my church growing up, “This joy that I have, the world didn’t give it to me.”

Joy is not just available for the perfect or at the perfect time, it comes fleshed in humanity with all its tenderness and vulnerability. It is available to us to choose irrespective of our circumstances. This isn’t a cheap way to fake happiness or to pretend that our pain isn’t real. We don’t choose joy to deny the reality of our personal and communal suffering, we choose joy in the midst of it and through it.

If Black people have shown America anything, we have shown that oppression and violence against us cannot take away our freedom to choose joy. No one knows this better than those born outside the comforts of security and privilege, those born the way Jesus was. We are all invited to choose joy, to lean into our tender and vulnerable parts, and trust that it is okay to dance, sing, delight, and play. To be present to the small wonders of creation and the large moments of connection and community.

While we wait, we are invited to recognize and choose joy amidst it all. Like the mothers of the Black church, be exuberant and willful in your choosing, despite whatever present realities exist. This choosing is an act of resistance and is how we enter into the joy of the Lord.

## Week 3: Joy

# Contemplative Practice



This week, we are inviting you to two creative contemplative exercises to cultivate joy.

1. Be on the lookout for joy! This week, we invite you to try to identify something each day that brings you delight and joy! It could be as simple as the feeling of warm water hitting your skin in the shower, a meaningful conversation with a friend or a stranger, or the taste of a homemade dish you love. It could be a moment of awareness of the presence of God in your everyday moments. Try to reserve five minutes at the end of each day to reflect on where you are finding delight. No delight or joy is too big or small! You can journal your responses, if helpful.

2. Following this week's playlist you'll find a poem entitled "Joy Unspeakable" by Rev. Dr. Barbara A. Holmes. Make some time this week to read the poem and reflect on the joy that your ancestors and elders have found in the waiting. How does this inspire you to think about any way you might find joy in your current reality? Journal any responses that come up for you.

## Breath Prayer

Throughout the week, we invite you to find a few moments to center and focus on your breath.

Inhale: **The Joy of the Lord is here.**

Exhale: **Surprise me with delight.**

# Playlist

Songs to inspire  
& invite JOY

Black Parade - Beyoncé

Say it Loud (I'm Black and I'm Proud) - James Brown

I Want to Dance with Somebody - Whitney Houston

Celebration - Kool & the Gang

Joy and Pain - Rob Base

Golden - Jill Scott

Mood 4 Eva - Beyoncé

Jesus is the Reason for the Season - Kirk Franklin & The Family

Joy to the World - Mariah Carey

Every Year, Every Christmas - Luther Vandross

Listen to the entire playlist on Spotify [here](#).









Week 4 – December 20 – December 26

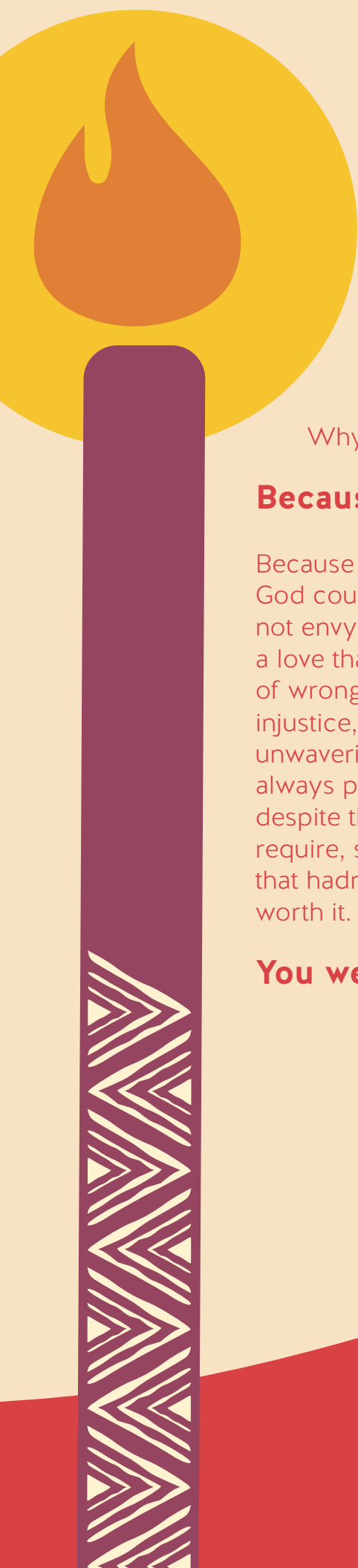
# Love

Reflection by Kimberly Goode

*“This is how much God loved the world:  
He gave his Son, his one and only Son.” – John 3:16 MSG*

Sixty years ago, Lucille Bridges walked with her six-year-old daughter Ruby up to the doors of William Frantz Elementary in New Orleans. Ruby was to be the school’s first Black student. Imagine the challenge before Mrs. Lucille—to balance the everydayness of the morning with the weight of this historic moment. What was it like to help her little girl get into her neatly ironed school dress, buckle her shiny patent leather shoes, tie a ribbon in her hair, then wait for their federal marshal escorts to arrive? What did she feel when she pulled up to the school and looked at the crowd of angry white protesters lining the entrance, then down into her daughter’s tender eyes? What did she hear as the crowd hurled insults toward her little girl’s ears? Did she squeeze Ruby’s hand tighter and draw her close, or simply look ahead?

Lucille Bridges accompanied her daughter to school every day for a year to protect her from the violence that was sparked by Ruby’s attendance at the newly integrated school. From threats of poisoning to mobs following her home, Ruby faced constant reminders that her presence was not welcomed. It makes one wonder how Mrs. Lucille found the strength to send her innocent child into an environment that rejected her day after day. The answer is simple: it was worth it. Something lived on the other side of the tension, the ridicule, and the pain—a possibility that hadn’t existed before. And this possibility was one worth fighting for.



The same was true for God. What was it like to send a child, absent of sin, into a world that would surely reject him? How did it feel to wrap him in the flesh of an innocent baby and share him with a world that would seek to kill him from the very start (Matthew 2:13)? What was it like to know that this son would spend his life healing the sick, fighting for the marginalized, and loving without restraint, only to face the cruelest of deaths?

Why would the Father choose to do that?

### **Because it was worth it.**

Because by sending this innocent child into the heart of our messiness, God could show us a love that is patient, a love that is kind, one that does not envy and does not boast. With this selfless act, God could show us a love that is not self-seeking, not easily angered, and keeps no record of wrongs. It's strong enough to stand in the middle of every hurt, every injustice, every disappointment and not turn away—tested and still unwavering. Through this baby boy, God could pour out a love that always protects, always hopes, always endures, never ever fails. And despite the tremendous sacrifice sending this son into the world would require, something lived on the other side of that choice, a relationship that hadn't existed before. And it was one worth fighting for. That love was worth it.


### **You were worth it.**

## Week 4: Love

# Contemplative Practice

This week, we are inviting you to do some passion writing!

### Passing Notes



Did you ever pass notes in school, maybe to a good friend or to a crush? There was something special about opening up a carefully folded note and knowing that the contents were just for you. This week, find some time to pass notes with God. Write one from you to God. Then write one to yourself, capturing what God might be saying to you in this season.

### A Note to God

Love notes are not collections of clichés and feel-good statements. They are honest, intimate archives of emotion. Let yourself be silent, quiet enough to hear what is really going on inside your heart. Then, capture it on paper. You can write a letter, create a drawing, pen a poem, whatever you'd like. This note is between you and the Divine, for God's eyes only. Where do you need God most in your season of waiting?

### A Note from God

Take a few minutes to reflect on the love that surrounds you. To help, consider reading Psalm 139:1-18 aloud to yourself or reflect on the Maya Angelou poem included following the playlist. God is the lover of your soul. What does the Divine want you to know about how precious you are? Take a few minutes to consider this. Are there aspects of God's love that are harder for you to believe apply to you? This week, find ways to intentionally lean into those areas of vulnerability. Maybe there are scriptures you know intellectually but want to hold at a heart level. Maybe there are areas of self-doubt that need the covering of Heavenly love. Try to write a note to yourself filled with things God wants you to know more deeply in this season. Remember, God often speaks in the form of questions.

## Breath Prayer

Throughout the week, we invite you to find a few moments to center and focus on your breath.

Inhale: **How great, Lord,**

Exhale: **Is your steadfast love toward me.**  
(Psalm 86:13)

# Playlist

Songs to inspire  
& invite LOVE

A Love Supreme - John Coltrane

Better With You in It - MAJOR.

Love - Kirk Franklin & The Family

Worthy - India Arie

No Ordinary Love - Sade

God Is Love - Common featuring Leon Bridges

Love on Top - Beyoncé

As - Stevie Wonder

Communion - Maverick City Music

Give Love on Christmas Day - The Temptations

Listen to the entire playlist on Spotify [here](#).



# Touched by An Angel

By Maya Angelou

We, unaccustomed to courage  
exiles from delight  
live coiled in shells of loneliness  
until love leaves its high holy temple  
and comes into our sight  
to liberate us into life.

Love arrives  
and in its train come ecstasies  
old memories of pleasure  
ancient histories of pain.  
Yet if we are bold,  
love strikes away the chains of fear  
from our souls.

We are weaned from our timidity  
In the flush of love's light  
we dare be brave  
And suddenly we see  
that love costs all we are  
and will ever be.  
Yet it is only love  
which sets us free.

# As We Enter Into Christmas

*“The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”). –Matthew 1:23*

Hope, peace, joy, and love have become words we associate with the Christmas season. We’re used to seeing them in beautiful fonts on the front of our favorite holiday decorations and boxed card sets. But let us not lose sight of all these words have to offer us. Each one is an invitation to experience the miraculous in the everyday—to be able to look to the stars on the darkest of nights and know that God is with us.

Because God is with us, no matter which unanswered questions define our personal and collective periods of “waiting,” there is hope, peace, joy, and love available for us right here, in this moment. May we all keep our eyes open, fully expecting to experience the wonders of the Divine while we wait.

Thank you for journeying with us this Advent season. We are wishing you blessings as we journey forward together.

With Gratitude,

Leonetta and Kimberly



**This project was entirely a labor of love, given freely to you so that we might seek God's presence together.**

If you are able and would like to support by helping to offset the costs associated with the production of this guide or invest in future pieces, feel free to make a donation of any size through Venmo at [@beautifulle](#).



**Kimberly Goode** is a lover of Jesus, outdoor adventures, reading, and all things ice cream. When she is not writing, you'll find her dancing unabashedly in grocery stores to background music that many people ignore.

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