

**Instructions:**

Group leaders, take some time before your gathering to look over these questions. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you as you pick 3-5 questions to discuss that pertain to your group's unique style and needs.



**Series: Word: blessings for a new beginning** \*adapted from *A Sanctified Art Advent Series, 2024*

Advent is a time of preparation. We prepare our homes and our hearts to celebrate Christmas once again, when the birth of Jesus ushered in a new age; new ways of living and loving with hope, joy, and purpose. Advent is a journey toward this new beginning. And like on any journey, we need reminders, words of blessing that feel like steady ground as we step forward into the unknown.

Join us this Advent as we return to the familiar scriptures and traditions that root us in the fundamental truths of our faith. You are a blessing, we can't go alone, hope is always worth the risk, and love knows your name.

As you journey through this season, may you find words for courage and hope to begin again as we look forward to celebrating the ultimate Word coming to us; the Emmanuel, God with us.

**Message Description:**

Hope is vulnerable and can feel like a tremendous risk, especially if you've experienced loss or trauma. But Mary shows us a resilient hope that takes risks—she risks her body to bear a son who will become the hope of her people. Similarly, Joseph makes a risky choice to stay with Mary; dismissing her quietly would have kept him safe. But instead, he chooses hope. He chooses to trust the angel, and it makes all the difference. It can feel safer and easier to be a cynic, but the world doesn't need more cynics. It needs people who say, "It can be better," and make it so.

**Key Scripture:** Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 1:47-55

**Questions based on this week's teaching:**

1. When you dare to hope, what other emotions emerge? Why does hope feel vulnerable and risky? When in your life has hope been worth it?
2. The church is often filled with many risk-averse narratives like, "The church is dying; no one is going to come," or "We don't have enough money or people to do \_\_\_\_\_." Can we dare to live a different story? What does hopeful risk-taking look like in your community?
3. In her book, *Hope: A User's Manual*, Dana McKibben distinguishes between optimism and hope. She writes: "Optimism relies on external circumstances lining up in a certain way. Hope isn't mathematical; it's philosophical, physical, maybe even musical. True hope defies cause and effect and has impact regardless of outcomes." In your own life, what does it look like to put hope—instead of optimism—into practice? How does the Magnificat point us to hope and not to optimism?
4. Reflect on how you can embody hope in uncertain times. How can you, like Joseph, use your influence to protect and uplift? How can you, like Mary, voice a hope that challenges the status quo and sings of a reality where justice and mercy reign?