



ADVENT STORYTELLING

*HOW TO USE THE
ADVENT GUIDE*

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 3** **Introduction**
- 4** **Advent Week One:**
From Longing to Hope
- 7** **Advent Week Two:**
From Wilderness to Peace
- 10** **Advent Week Three:**
From Brokenness to Joy
- 13** **Advent Week Four:**
From Loneliness to Love

Sarah Bourns Crosby writes poetry around themes of hope, waiting, lament, love, and God's faithfulness. She lives in Columbus, Ohio, with her husband, Paul, and twin sons. You can read more of her work at sarahbournscrosby.com.

INTRODUCTION

The following 5 poems may be used to creatively tell the Advent story through artistic means– graphic videography, stage performance, reflective readings or spoken word monologues.

These written pieces could be part of church services, staff and volunteer celebrations, holiday gatherings, Advent sermon series, devotional reflections, Christmas Eve service, etc

Poetic Series Summary

Visually and artistically telling the gospel message as a journey from:

Longing to **HOPE**

Lack to **PEACE**

Loss to **JOY**

Loneliness to **LOVE**

These creative pieces display Israel's history using common imagery from the Old Testament– **barrenness, wilderness, brokenness, darkness**. Each theme is a pathway leading to the Messiah. They are essentially 4 ways to tell the same story of why Jesus came and what He rescues us from. Each Old Testament narrative points to the coming Christ.

The poems capture the very human emotions of **longing, lack, loss and loneliness** with which we are all too familiar. And each leads to Christ the Messiah as the one who meets us and offers himself as the perfect and true Hope, Peace, Joy and Love.

Get creative! Partner with the artists and performers and creatives among you to bring the good news in a fresh way through imagery and art.

ADVENT WEEK ONE

FROM LONGING TO HOPE

BARRENNESS

We yearn and wait for what we do not have, and yet He fills our emptiness and meets us in our longing.

SCRIPTURES

Matthew 1 (genealogy), Luke 1, Hebrews 11

CREATIVE PRESENTATION IDEA:

One church selected 8 women to read/perform this poem– the 6 women in the lineage of Jesus, plus Mary, and a narrator for the final stanzas. The women all stood in a row, each stepping forward to recite their own portion, and said aloud together the final stanza (blessing).

BLESSED IS SHE

By Sarah Bourns Crosby

I am Sarah
Bitter and barren
Burnt out by this promise that never
came Worn out from waiting
Laughing to hide the aching
Longing for these empty arms to hold
a baby But oh . . .
How could that be?

I am Tamar
Tired of trying so hard
Pushed away, cast aside
Left with no one to provide
Longing for these wrongs to be made
right But oh . . .
How could that be?

I am Rahab
Used and abused
Body broken, soul bruised
Working late into the night

Weary, just trying to survive
Longing for some good to come from this
tattered life But oh . . .
How could that be?

I am Ruth
Grieved and alone
Left with nothing, far from home
Back, breaking
Heart, aching
Leaving so much behind
Longing to start a new life
But oh . . .
How could that be?

I am Bathsheba
Angry and ashamed
It was never supposed to be this way
Years of resentment
Tears of regret
Longing for this story to be redeemed
But oh . . .
How could that be?

I am Elizabeth
Washed up and nearing the end
Disappointed, again and again and again
Wanting things to finally change
Wondering if it's just too late
Longing for faith to still believe
But oh . . .
How could that be?

I am Mary
Overwhelmed and afraid
Young and small and anything but brave
I had plans, I had dreams,
But now everything has changed
And I don't know if I'll have what it takes

But I do know I'll trust you anyway.

Oh Abba,
Why me?
Oh Abba,
How will this be?

The Holy Spirit will come upon you
And the power of the Most High will
overshadow you So this child to be born of you
Will be the Savior of the world.

For behold,
She who was said to be barren has conceived
And she who nearly lost hope still believed
And she who was worn out from waiting, held a
baby And she who was grieved, her story was
redeemed And she who was broken, was
honored and healed.

For nothing
Is impossible
With God.

Blessed is she
Who believed
That there would
be A fulfillment
Of the promise
Yet to be seen.

*(And,
Blessed are you
Who still believe
That there will be
A fulfillment
Of the promise
Yet to be seen).*

POSSIBLE THEMES/LANGUAGE/IMAGERY FOR CREATIVE PRESENTATION:

Waiting, hoping, unmet expectations, unfulfilled promises
Disappointment, longing, hope deferred,
Child loss, infertility, unanswered prayer
Unmarried, dreams unrealized
Barrenness in scripture always means God is about to do a miracle, pay attention,
he's up to something new.
Abundance, fullness, newness, wholeness
Filled and Fulfilled
A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices
We can always ask for hope
Two hands: hope in one hand and surrender in the other

ADVENT WEEK TWO FROM WILDERNESS TO PEACE

WILDERNESS/WANDERING

We live with anxiety, chaos, and a sense of lack which leads us to Jesus the provider, sustainer, and PEACE.

SCRIPTURES

Exodus 14-18, Isaiah 40, Psalm 23, Matthew 1

CREATIVE PRESENTATION IDEA:

One church filmed a (black and white) video of a person walking on dusty, desolate roads but eventually coming into a green, lush field (in color) while a narrator read the poem.

FOR THOSE WHO WANDER

by Sarah Bourns Crosby

Dry and dusty, vast and empty
This is a desolate place
Wandering in circles
Weakening every day.

Feet stumbling with each step
Voices grumbling, under breath.

How did we ever get here?
Why did we leave what we knew?
When will we ever get there?
What will we find if we do?

How long, O Lord? Will you forget us?
How long will we lack what we need?
How long will we wander this
wilderness?
How long will we search for peace?

But . . .
Into the darkness
Over the stillness
A voice
Crying
In the wilderness:

Prepare.
His.
Way.
Make these desert paths
Straight.

These dark mountains,
made low These bleak
valleys, raised high This hard
soil, new growth
This dry ground, fresh life.

And the glory of the Lord
Will be revealed
And all people
Will see it.

Do you not know?
Have you not heard?
The Lord is the everlasting
God Creator of the ends of
the earth.

Yes, your Shepherd is coming
You shall want no more,
Leading you by still waters
Restoring your soul.

Though you walk through the
valley He'll stay right beside
you
His rod and His staff
Gently comfort and guide you.

He prepares an abundance
In your enemy's presence
Sets a table before you
Brimming with blessing.

And your cup
Overflows
And goodness and
mercy Follow

You

(Yes you)

All the days of your life.

And you shall dwell,
No more in the desert,
But in the house of the
Lord Forever.

POSSIBLE THEMES/LANGUAGE/IMAGERY FOR CREATIVE PRESENTATION:

Protection and provision
Dry desert, desolate
The lord is my shepherd, I have all that I need-- if I don't have it, I must not need it
Pursuing peace by numbing, coping, withdrawing,
Never enough, lacking what we need
Unrest, anxiety, spiraling, chaos, fear, worry, not being taken care of
What if walking in the wilderness is the point?
From wilderness to promised land
He makes me lay down in green pastures and by still waters

ADVENT WEEK THREE FROM BROKENNESS TO JOY

BROKENNESS

We experience heartbreak, loss, suffering and sadness which becomes the pathway toward Christ putting our broken pieces back together again and giving us JOY.

SCRIPTURES

Jeremiah 18, Jeremiah 31, Psalm 126, Matthew 2

CREATIVE PRESENTATION IDEA:

One church had a "spoken word" artist dramatically perform this poem (like a memorized monologue). You could also play music behind the recitation and have a dancer perform a piece choreographed to reflect the words.

MOURNING MERCIES

By Sarah Bourns Crosby

There were tears that first
Christmas
too

The loud wailing and heaving
kind The deep groaning and
grieving kind

Voices heard in Ramah,
Lamentation and bitter
weeping, Rachel grieving,
Refusing to be comforted,
For her children are no more.*

A collective cry
That filled Bethlehem with
despair

Oh, how could Jesus be there
too?

How could such pain exist
At the same time
In the same town
As Peace?

How could this overwhelming
grief Leave any room leftover
For Joy?

How could their sorrow
Not overshadow
This bright Hope for
tomorrow?

How could lament
Live alongside
Love?

But it did.

And it does.

So, too,
Your cries are not a contradiction
To the coming
Of the Christ.

Your fears are not an affront
To the faithfulness
Of the Father.

Your tears need not
Steal away
Your trust.

This Christmas
You have permission to have a broken
heart
You are welcome to weep and to wail,
You are allowed to lament your losses,
Your sorrow is safe in the hands of the
Savior.

Heartache is simply a given in this broken
world. But joy is given
By a good good Giver.

May He give you this
Christmas Grace in the
wilderness** Gladness for
sorrow**
Joy for your mourning**
Bright hope for tomorrow.**

*JEREMIAH 31

** ALSO JEREMIAH 31-BECAUSE GRIEF AND JOY CAN EXIST AT THE EXACT SAME TIME.

POSSIBLE THEMES/LANGUAGE/IMAGERY FOR CREATIVE PRESENTATION:

From mourning to dancing, from thorns to crowns, from crying to laughing
World feels like it's falling apart, crumbling, coming apart at the seams
It's not the way it was supposed to be
Unsteady, unsettled, shaky, earthquake, upended, disoriented, upside down
Kintsugi-- pottery when put back together is stronger than before
Tears watering the ground that will sprout up new life
Broken dreams, broken bodies, broken relationships, broken countries, broken
churches
Depression, grief, lament, mourning, falling apart, groaning, world gone mad
Hold joy and sorrow at the same time

ADVENT WEEK FOUR FROM LONLINESS TO LOVE

ISOLATION/SEPARATION

Being alone and without community leads us toward Jesus, Immanuel, who wants to be WITH us. His nearness and presence is one of LOVE.

SCRIPTURES

1 Corinthians 13, John 1, Matthew 1:23

CREATIVE PRESENTATION IDEA:

One ministry filmed a video with footage of people coming together to share a meal. Some came from living alone or traveling a long distance. The video culminates with everyone around the table. [See video.](#)

WITH

By Sarah Bourns Crosby

Love wants to be with
Love needs to be near
Love can't stay away
Love has to be here.

Love comes close
Love holds tight
Love moves over
Love sits beside.

Love pours out
Love leans in
Love goes first
Love tries again.

Love leaps over hurdles
Love jumps through hoops
Love stays despite struggles
Love still chooses you.

Love looks for the
lonely Love lives on the
margins Love crosses
all boundaries Love
seeks the forgotten.

Love becomes flesh
Love moves in
Love is here
Love dwells among.

Love is within us
Close by us
Around us
Beside us.

The very definition of LOVE is:
WITH.

Near enough to touch
His presence here to dwell
God. With. Us.
Our Immanuel.

POSSIBLE THEMES/LANGUAGE/IMAGERY FOR CREATIVE PRESENTATION:

Distance, separation, hidden, alone
Friendship, closeness, nearness, to dwell here among
In person, face to face, eye to eye, hand in hand
God did not want a long-distance relationship
Presence matters
Incarnation= came to walk among us, moved into the neighborhood
Love came near
Acceptance, belonging,
Alone, lack of community, abandoned, neglected, without friends,
Journey out of isolation and loneliness toward family

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