Preparing the Way: An Advent Retreat

A 2-Week Ignatian Prayer Experience on the Mystery of the Incarnation



Domenico Ghirlandaio, *The Visitation*, 1491. Musée du Louvre, Paris

"As the people of Israel waited for generations for the promise of the Messiah, we share in the long preparation for the Savior's first coming by recalling the mysteries in the Gospels of the Son of God becoming man for us. Advent is a time of preparation, of waiting, of longing to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, and a time of renewing our desire for Christ's second coming" (cf. CCC 524)

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Introduction

What is included: 11 days of prayer and 3 spiritual direction sessions

- Preparatory spiritual direction session
- Mid-session: Gathering the Graces spiritual direction session (optional)
- Gathering the Graces spiritual direction session

Package

- Preparing for an Ignatian Retreat - Handout
- Ignatian Prayer Journal - Handout
- Access to the IgnatianRetreats.com blog on how to pray using the methods, teachings and wisdom of St. Ignatius taken from his Spiritual Exercises.

FAQs

- **Start Date and Time:** Begin anytime. Scheduling is between you and your director.
- **Location:** In person or online via Zoom or other technology.
- **Fee:** USD payable to your director via Zelle, Venmo, or other.

Review the **Preparing for an Ignatian Retreat Guide** and the **Ignatian Prayer Journal** on Ignatian ways of prayer. For a directed retreat, meet with your spiritual director before, at the midpoint, and after your retreat.

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Introduction to this Advent Retreat

As Advent unfolds, we follow the scriptural events that prepare for the birth of Christ: the promise of Emmanuel, the coming of the Word as light, the announcements to Zechariah and Mary, Mary's visit to Elizabeth, and Joseph's faithful response. We prepare to contemplate the Child Jesus with Mary and Joseph and, in time, with the shepherds and the Magi. Our prayer is that, as we gaze upon Christ, we may recognize in Him the eternal Son made flesh and receive the Father's love through the Holy Spirit. The Incarnation reveals God's love to us in a personal way: in Jesus, God comes to us, and through the gift of the Spirit we are invited to share in the life of the Trinity.

Through prayer and meditation on the mystery of the Incarnation and the holy scriptures, we open our hearts and minds to receive the grace of an intimate knowledge of God's perfect charitable love for us. We ask for a personal knowledge and graced awareness of His love which moved Him to become man, take on our suffering and die for our sins. In this Advent retreat we prepare our souls to soon behold with the Blessed Mother, Saint Joseph, the shepherds and the Magi the Christ Child who beholds us with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

Two Weeks – Prayer Day Sequence

- Preparation - spiritual direction session
- Day 1: Spiritual Exercises §§101–109 – The Incarnation – First Contemplation, Second Week
- Day 2: John 1:1–5 – The Word – Light in the Darkness
- Day 3: Isaiah 7:14 – Isaiah 9:1–6 – Emmanuel – "God with Us"
- Day 4: Luke 1:5–25 – Announcement of the Birth of John
- Day 5: Luke 1:26–38 – The Annunciation
- Mid-session: Gathering the Graces spiritual direction session (optional)
- Day 6: Luke 1:39–45 – The Visitation
- Day 7: Luke 1:46–56 – The Canticle of Mary
- Day 8: Matthew 1:18–25 – Joseph Visitation by the Angel
- Day 9: Luke 1:57–66 – The Birth of John the Baptist
- Day 10: Luke 1:67–80 – The Canticle of Zechariah
- Day 11: Contemplating the Love of God
- Gathering the Graces spiritual direction session

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Opening the Retreat: Anima Christi

Begin your retreat by praying the Anima Christi.

Soul of Christ, sanctify me.
Body of Christ, save me.
Blood of Christ, inebriate me.
Water of the side of Christ, wash me.
Passion of Christ, strengthen me.
O good Jesus, hear me.
Within Thy wounds hide me.
Suffer me not to be separated from Thee.
From the wicked foe defend me.
In the hour of my death call me
And bid me come to Thee,
That with Thy Saints I may praise Thee
For ever and ever. Amen.

Grace of the Second Week of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius

To ask for an intimate knowledge of our Lord, who has become man for me, that I may love Him more and follow Him more closely.

(SE 104)

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Day 1 — The Incarnation

The Contemplation

The grace of the Second Week of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, which we pray for during Advent, is to ask for an intimate knowledge of our Lord, who has become man for me, that I may love Him more and follow Him more closely.

The invitation in this meditation is to witness and experience the mercy God shows humanity so that filled with gratitude we may open our hearts to love Him more dearly and follow Him more nearly. At the heart of the mystery of the Incarnation is God's personal desire and choice to share His Eternal hope, peace, joy and love with us. God, our Lord, chooses out of His divine mercy and love to become man for us.

In this spiritual exercise Saint Ignatius helps us to see once again how "God our Lord beholds me" (SE 73).

Preparatory Prayer: "I ask God our Lord for grace that all my intentions, actions, and ways may be directed purely to the praise and service of God" (SE 46).

Petitionary Prayer: "Lord, grant me the grace of an 'intimate knowledge of our Lord, who has become man for me, that I may love Him more and follow Him more closely'" (SE 104).

Write in your own words your prayer of petition. What do you desire of our Lord as you enter this mystery?

Prelude

St. Ignatius begins the Second Week of prayer with a meditation on the mystery of the Incarnation by instructing the retreatant to imagine the three Divine Persons looking upon Earth and all of humanity. The Blessed Trinity sees how all humanity is destined for hell and decree that the Second Person should become man to save humanity.

The Meditation: *First Contemplation, Second Week – Spiritual Exercises §§101–109*

Enter Ignatius's contemplation of the world and the eternal saving purpose of the Three Divine Persons. Notice the variety of human life and suffering. Contemplate the Divine Persons' concern for the human race, as you will attend in a later prayer time, Mary's encounter with the messenger, the angel Gabriel. Ask for the grace of a personal, interior knowledge of Christ, who became man for you, so that you may love and follow Him more closely. Ignatius encourages the retreatant to look, listen, and consider what the persons in the contemplation are doing, allowing the scene to become prayer rather than merely an idea to analyze.

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Reflection Questions

What does it mean to you that God willed to become man, to enter human history to save you?

Close the Prayer: Colloquy

The exercise should be closed with a colloquy. "I will think over what I ought to say to the Three Divine Persons, or to the eternal Word incarnate, or to His Mother, our Lady. According to the light that I have received, I will beg for grace to follow and imitate more closely our Lord, who has just become man for me" (SE 109).

Write your own colloquy.

Close with an Our Father.

Journaling: Gathering the Graces

Review and savor God's gifts to you. Make notes for sharing with your spiritual director or your faith-sharing group.

Additional Scriptures

Galatians 4:4–7. In the Fullness of time God sent His Son

John 3:16–17. The Father gives His only Son so that the world might be saved through Him

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Day 2 — The Word – Light in the Darkness

In this second prayer period, we begin at the beginning of time, where here John writes in his Gospel, Jesus, the Word, has been established from time eternal, who is the Alpha and the Omega.

Preparatory Prayer: "I ask God our Lord for grace that all my intentions, actions, and ways may be directed purely to the praise and service of God" (SE 46).

Petitionary Prayer: "Lord, grant me the grace of an 'intimate knowledge of our Lord, who has become man for me, that I may love Him more and follow Him more closely'" (SE 104).

Write in your own words your prayer of petition. What do you desire of our Lord as you enter this mystery?

Prelude

Contemplate the Word who is with God and is God, and who is light in the darkness. Be attentive to the images and metaphors the Evangelist uses to describe Jesus who is about to come.

The Meditation

John 1:1–5 – NABRE

1 In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.
2 He was in the beginning with God.
3 All things came to be through him,
and without him nothing came to be.
4 What came to be through him was life,
and this life was the light of the human race;
5 the light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness has not overcome it.

Reflection Questions

Which words of the Evangelist resonate with you most?

What does this mean to you in anticipation during this Advent?

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What darkness, confusion, or longing do you bring to the Lord?

Close the Prayer with a Colloquy

Journaling: Gathering the Graces

Additional Scripture

Isaiah 60:1–3. "Arise! Shine, for your light has come."

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Day 3 — Emmanuel – "God with Us"

In the third prayer period, we meditate on the words of the prophet Isaiah who professed the coming of a savior, who was promised by God. The child is the prophesied Emmanuel, "God with us." With hope and anticipation, we wait for the coming of Jesus Christ, who is Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, and Prince of Peace.

Preparatory Prayer: "I ask God our Lord for grace that all my intentions, actions, and ways may be directed purely to the praise and service of God" (SE 46).

Petitionary Prayer: "Lord, grant me the grace of an 'intimate knowledge of our Lord, who has become man for me, that I may love Him more and follow Him more closely'" (SE 104).

Write in your own words your prayer of petition. What do you desire of our Lord as you enter this mystery?

Prelude

Pray with the promise of Emmanuel, "God with us." Consider how the name Emmanuel which translates to "God with us" is the ultimate expression of God's desire to be with us and to open the gates of heaven for us.

The Meditation

Isaiah 7:14 – NABRE

14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign; the young woman, pregnant and about to bear a son, shall name him Emmanuel.

Isaiah 9:1–6 – NABRE

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; Upon those who lived in a land of gloom a light has shone. You have brought them abundant joy and great rejoicing; They rejoice before you as people rejoice at harvest, as they exult when dividing the spoils. For the yoke that burdened them, the pole on their shoulder, the rod of their taskmaster, you have smashed, as on the day of Midian. For every boot that tramped in battle, every cloak rolled in blood, will be burned as fuel for fire. For a child is born to us, a son is given to us; upon his shoulder dominion rests. They name him Wonder-Counselor, God-Hero, Father-Forever, Prince of Peace. His dominion is vast and forever peaceful, upon David's throne, and over his kingdom, which he confirms and sustains by judgment and justice, both now and forever.

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Reflection Questions

As you pray over these words, what images, thoughts, feelings, and desires emerge from within you?

Of the names given to this child to be born, which gives you hope as you enter this Advent season?

When have you felt weary and looked for God to give you a sign of His nearness and hope?

How are you being called to trust more in God's handiwork in your life during this Advent?

Close the Prayer with a Colloquy

Journaling: Gathering the Graces

Additional Scriptures

Isaiah 9:1–6. He will be called the Prince of Peace

Micah 5:1–4. She who is to give birth in Bethlehem

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Day 4 — The Announcement of the Birth of John

In this prayer period, we meditate on the Gospel of Luke, which opens with an infancy narrative of John the Baptist. John the Baptist is to be "great in the sight of [the] Lord" and the "prophet of the Most High," who "will go before the Lord." In this Gospel, we relate to Zechariah's doubt and his desire to overcome it with greater trust in the Lord. Zechariah persevered in prayer and expressed a desire to let go of his fears to better trust in the joy and gladness that the angel of the Lord foretells. Imagine the scene and invite the Holy Spirit to speak to your heart.

Preparatory Prayer: "I ask God our Lord for grace that all my intentions, actions, and ways may be directed purely to the praise and service of God" (SE 46).

Petitionary Prayer: "Lord, grant me the grace of an 'intimate knowledge of our Lord, who has become man for me, that I may love Him more and follow Him more closely'" (SE 104).

Write in your own words your prayer of petition. What do you desire of our Lord as you enter this mystery?

Prelude

Attend to Zechariah and Elizabeth in their waiting. Imagine what it was like for Zechariah and Elizabeth to experience the joyful news of the Angel that their prayer for a son had been heard by God and Elizabeth would bear a son and he would prepare the way for the Messiah.

The Meditation

Luke 1:5–25 – NABRE

In the days of Herod, King of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah of the priestly division of Abijah; his wife was from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. Both were righteous in the eyes of God, observing all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blamelessly. But they had no child because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years. Once, when he was serving as a priest in his division's turn before God, according to the practice of the priestly service, he was chosen by lot to enter the sanctuary of the Lord to burn incense. Then, when the whole assembly of the people was praying outside at the hour of the incense offering, the angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right of the altar of incense.

Zechariah was troubled by what he saw, and fear came upon him. But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, because your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall name him John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the sight of [the] Lord. He will drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will be filled with the holy Spirit even from his mother's womb, and he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God.

He will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah to turn the hearts of fathers toward children and the disobedient to the understanding of the righteous, to prepare a people fit for the Lord." Then Zechariah said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years."

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And the angel said to him in reply, "I am Gabriel, who stands before God. I was sent to speak to you and announce this good news. But now you will be speechless and unable to talk until the day these things take place because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled at their proper time."

Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and were amazed that he stayed so long in the sanctuary. But when he came out, he was unable to speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He was gesturing to them but remained mute. Then, when his days of ministry were completed, he went home. After this time, his wife Elizabeth conceived, and she went into seclusion for five months, saying, "So has the Lord done for me at a time when he has seen fit to take away my disgrace before others."

Reflection Questions

Pray with the experience of longing, uncertainty, and unexpected promise.

How has God surprised you and given you hope when times were difficult for you?

Where in your life may God be working in His time now?

What do you want to ask of God in prayer today?

Close the Prayer with a Colloquy

Journaling: Gathering the Graces

Additional Scripture

Psalm 27:13–14. "Wait for the LORD, take courage; be stouthearted, wait for the LORD!"

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Day 5 — The Annunciation

In this fifth prayer period, we continue to pray with the Gospel of Luke and focus on the angel Gabriel's annunciation to Mary. In contrast to Zechariah who questions the angel's annunciation in doubt, Mary questions the angel with wonder and awe. Mary demonstrates courage, trust in God, and without fear, replies humbly, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word."

Preparatory Prayer: "I ask God our Lord for grace that all my intentions, actions, and ways may be directed purely to the praise and service of God" (SE 46).

Petitionary Prayer: "Lord, grant me the grace of an 'intimate knowledge of our Lord, who has become man for me, that I may love Him more and follow Him more closely'" (SE 104).

Write in your own words your prayer of petition. What do you desire of our Lord as you enter this mystery?

Prelude

Imagine Mary's encounter with the Angel Gabriel. Notice how the angel assures her to put her fears away, to be at peace, for "nothing will be impossible for God."

The Meditation

Luke 1:26–38 – NABRE

In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming to her, he said, "Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and He will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom, there will be no end." But Mary said to the angel, "How can this be since I have no relations with a man?" And the angel said to her in reply, "The holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God."

Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Then, the angel departed from her.

Reflection Questions

Contemplate Gabriel's greeting and Mary's response. Stay with the movement from greeting to question, to trustful consent. Consider where God may be inviting you to respond with faith and freedom.

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Where in your life do you notice the desire for peace and to be able to put away your fears?

How does Mary's conviction and her "yes" inspire you?

How is God inviting you to let go of your fears, to trust, to be humble like Mary was during this Advent?

What particular ways have you been trying to go it alone?

What are those areas in your life where you can say "yes" to Him and invite Him into your life in a deeper, more intimate way?

Close the Prayer with a Colloquy

Journaling: Gathering the Graces

Additional Scriptures

John 1:1-4 – The Word became flesh

Hebrews 10: 5-10 – Christ comes to do the Father's will

Isaiah 7:10-14. The sign of Emmanuel God is with us.

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Midpoint

Meet with your spiritual director to discuss what has been happening in your prayer.

"Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word."
Luke 1:38

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Day 6 — The Visitation

In the sixth prayer period we continue to meditate on Mary's journey to the birth of Jesus. Here she is visiting her cousin Elizabeth, who is also expecting a child, and upon hearing Mary's greeting to her cousin, the infant leaps in Elizabeth's womb. We share in the excitement of this particular unborn child as we wait in anticipation for the coming of our Savior Jesus Christ who is now in Mary's womb. Blessed art thou.

Preparatory Prayer: "I ask God our Lord for grace that all my intentions, actions, and ways may be directed purely to the praise and service of God" (SE 46).

Petitionary Prayer: "Lord, grant me the grace of an 'intimate knowledge of our Lord, who has become man for me, that I may love Him more and follow Him more closely'" (SE 104).

Write in your own words your prayer of petition. What do you desire of our Lord as you enter this mystery?

Prelude

Pray with Mary's journey to Elizabeth and the joy of their meeting. Imagine the intimate moment shared between Mary and Elizabeth as they each share in the joys of their pregnancies and excitement of the coming of the Messiah. See how they are filled with joy and love for God who has graced them through the workings of the Holy Spirit.

The Meditation

Luke 1:39–45 – NABRE

Mary Visits Elizabeth

During those days, Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste to the town of Judah, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, "Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled."

Reflection Questions

How have you heard the Lord speak to your heart's desires this Advent?

What areas in your daily life can you offer praise through gratitude?

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With whom in your life do you share your faith, your joys, and your gratitude in the Lord?

Close the Prayer with a Colloquy

Journaling: Gathering the Graces

Additional Scripture

Psalm 103:1–5. "Bless the LORD, my soul."

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Day 7 — The Canticle of Mary

We continue with Mary and Elizabeth's time together in their greetings. The boy John, still in his mother's womb, just leaped for joy, as his mother through the Holy Spirit is shown who was in Mary's womb: the Messiah. Mary's response rises up from her heart proclaims the goodness of God.

Preparatory Prayer: "I ask God our Lord for grace that all my intentions, actions, and ways may be directed purely to the praise and service of God" (SE 46).

Petitionary Prayer: "Lord, grant me the grace of an 'intimate knowledge of our Lord, who has become man for me, that I may love Him more and follow Him more closely'" (SE 104).

As you come before God what is stirring in you – gratitude? longing? What do you desire of our Lord as you enter this mystery? Write in your own words your prayer of petition.

Prelude

Meditate on Mary's Canticle, pause after each movement. Here Mary begins in her own experience of God in a personal praise to the Father, then she opens outward towards how God's kept His promises of mercy and faithfulness to the people.

The Meditation

Luke 1:46–56 – NABRE

The Canticle of Mary – The Magnificat

46 And Mary said:
"My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord;
47 my spirit rejoices in God my savior.
48 For he has looked upon his handmaid's lowliness;
behold, from now on will all ages call me blessed.
49 The Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
50 His mercy is from age to age
to those who fear him.
51 He has shown might with his arm,
dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart.
52 He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones
but lifted up the lowly.
53 The hungry he has filled with good things;
the rich he has sent away empty.
54 He has helped Israel his servant,
remembering his mercy,
55 according to his promise to our fathers,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever."
56 Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.

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Reflection Questions

What word or phrase from this Canticle first drew your attention? How do Mary's words speak for you?

Mary praises God for what He has done in her life. What goodness comes up for you right now?

Mary magnifies the Lord for the great things He has done for His people. Whose stories of challenges of faith or hope in the life other others, can you recall? How has God been faithful?

This Canticle speaks of the proud and mighty are brought down, while He lifts up the lowly. Are there areas in your life that needs correction? What areas in your life do you need to be lifted up?

What do I bring now to this prayer time that I may place in God's hands.

Journaling: Gathering the Graces

Additional Scriptures

Psalm 113:5-9 – A song of praise to God who raises the poor and lifts the needy.

Psalm 34:2-4,9 – A song of praise and trust in God.

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Day 8 — Joseph's Visitation by an Angel

In the eighth prayer period, we now shift our focus from Mary's Annunciation in the Gospel of Luke to Joseph in Matthew's Gospel. God leaves no one out. He sends the angel to appear to Joseph in a dream to tell him that Mary will bear a child through the power of the Holy Spirit. Joseph's silence and his action to do as the Lord commanded are a testament to his obedience.

Preparatory Prayer: "I ask God our Lord for grace that all my intentions, actions, and ways may be directed purely to the praise and service of God" (SE 46).

Petitionary Prayer: "Lord, grant me the grace of an 'intimate knowledge of our Lord, who has become man for me, that I may love Him more and follow Him more closely'" (SE 104).

Write in your own words your prayer of petition. What do you desire of our Lord as you enter this mystery?

Prelude

Notice all of the inner turmoil of Joseph, and God noticed. He comforted Joseph with the truth in a way he could take in such a miracle.

The Meditation

Matthew 1:18–25 – NABRE

Now this is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. When his mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found with child through the Holy Spirit. Joseph, her husband, since he was a righteous man, yet unwilling to expose her to shame, decided to divorce her quietly. Such was his intention when behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife into your home, for it is through the holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus because he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means "God is with us." When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home. He had no relations with her until she bore a son, and he named him Jesus.

Reflection Questions

God speaks to us in dreams, through the scriptures, and in the deepest desire of our heart. *What desires and dreams are stirring in your heart this Advent?*

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In discerning those stirrings, how do you hear Jesus speaking to you through them?

What do you want to say to Him?

Close the Prayer with a Colloquy

Journaling: Gathering the Graces

"Behold, the virgin shall be with child and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means "God is with us."

Matthew 1:23

Additional Scripture

Proverbs 3:5–6. "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, on your own intelligence do not rely."

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Day 9 — The Birth of John the Baptist

In the ninth prayer period we meditate on the miracle of the birth of John the Baptist. His birth was a sign of God's mercy because Elizabeth gave birth to him at a later age. Their neighbors and relatives rejoiced at the birth of their son and gave thanks to God together. Zechariah affirms that he will be named John, a sign that he has let go of his doubt. The story of John's birth is a story that brings wonder and awe at the power of God.

Preparatory Prayer: "I ask God our Lord for grace that all my intentions, actions, and ways may be directed purely to the praise and service of God" (SE 46).

Petitionary Prayer: "Lord, grant me the grace of an 'intimate knowledge of our Lord, who has become man for me, that I may love Him more and follow Him more closely'" (SE 104).

Write in your own words your prayer of petition. What do you desire of our Lord as you enter this mystery?

Prelude

Here we arrive at the home of Elizabeth and Zechariah with their family and neighbors. Consider the responses of those who were present: wonder, awe, curiosity, doubt. Join in their experience of joy of a newborn child and in their astonishment at the miracle of this child's father now being able to speak.

The Meditation

Luke 1:57–66 – NABRE

When the time arrived for Elizabeth to have her child she gave birth to a son. Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy toward her, and they rejoiced with her. When they came on the eighth day to circumcise the child, they were going to call him Zechariah after his father, but his mother said in reply, "No. He will be called John." But they answered her, "There is no one among your relatives who has this name." So they made signs, asking his father what he wished him to be called. He asked for a tablet and wrote, "John is his name," and all were amazed. Immediately his mouth was opened, his tongue freed, and he spoke, blessing God. Then fear came upon all their neighbors, and all these matters were discussed throughout the hill country of Judea. All who heard these things took them to heart, saying, "What, then, will this child be?" For surely the hand of the Lord was with him.

Reflection Questions

They were amazed and recognized God's hand upon this child. *What newness in the spirit brings you amazement this Advent?*

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How has God been revealing Himself to you through this time of a retreat?

How have you responded in awe and wonder of such graces?

Close the Prayer with a Colloquy

Share with Jesus your thoughts and how you feel.

Journaling: Gathering the Graces

Additional Scripture

Malachi 3:1. "Now I am sending my messenger — he will prepare the way before me; and suddenly there will come to the temple the LORD whom you seek."

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Day 10 — The Canticle of Zechariah

In the tenth prayer period, we seek to proclaim the goodness of God along with Zechariah, who recited this prayer of blessing that was put on his heart by the Holy Spirit. We give praise to God, who keeps His promise and with trust that in this Advent He will give strength and mercy to those who love Him. We praise God for His protection from our enemies and express our gratitude for John the Baptist, who encourages us to prepare for the coming of Our Savior by asking for forgiveness for our sins and strength for our weaknesses.

Preparatory Prayer: "I ask God our Lord for grace that all my intentions, actions, and ways may be directed purely to the praise and service of God" (SE 46).

Petitionary Prayer: "Lord, grant me the grace of an 'intimate knowledge of our Lord, who has become man for me, that I may love Him more and follow Him more closely'" (SE 104).

Write in your own words your prayer of petition. What do you desire of our Lord as you enter this mystery?

Prelude

Gifted with the Holy Spirit Zechariah proclaims a prophecy here of his son for "you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways." Here he shares God's goodness through His actions and future promises. Consider here what words speak for you.

The Meditation

Luke 1:67–80 – NABRE

The Canticle of Zechariah – The Benedictus

67 Then Zechariah his father, filled with the holy Spirit, prophesied, saying:
68 "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel,
for he has visited and brought redemption to his people.
69 He has raised up a horn for our salvation
within the house of David his servant,
70 even as he promised through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old:
71 salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us,
72 to show mercy to our fathers
and to be mindful of his holy covenant
73 and of the oath he swore to Abraham our father,
and to grant us that,
74 rescued from the hand of enemies,
without fear we might worship him
75 in holiness and righteousness
before him all our days.
76 And you, child, will be called prophet of the Most High,
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,
77 to give his people knowledge of salvation

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through the forgiveness of their sins,
78 because of the tender mercy of our God
by which the daybreak from on high will visit us
79 to shine on those who sit in darkness and death's shadow,
to guide our feet into the path of peace."
80 The child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the desert until the day of his manifestation to Israel.

Reflection Questions

What words of Zechariah speak for you in praising and proclaiming the good news?

What stirs within you?

How has the Lord been preparing you through this retreat for Christ's coming?

Where are you drawn to proclaim hope, peace, joy, and love because of His tender mercy?

Close the Prayer with a Colloquy

Journaling: Gathering the Graces

Additional Scriptures

Isaiah 40-15. Prepare the Way of the Lord

John 1:19-29. Pointing to Jesus, the Lamb of God

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Day 11 — Contemplating the Love of God: Gathering the Graces

Preparatory Prayer: "I ask God our Lord for grace that all my intentions, actions, and ways may be directed purely to the praise and service of God" (SE 46).

Petitionary Prayer:

Write in your own words your prayer of petition. What do you desire of our Lord today?

Gathering the Graces of the Retreat

Spend a day to review and savor God's gifts to you during this retreat. It is when we review, we are reminded of God's love for us and all of the world for His coming. Make summary notes for your sharing with your spiritual director or with your faith-sharing group.

Additional Scriptures:
What other scriptures come to mind that you desire to pray with?

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End with a Colloquy

Close your retreat with the Suscipe of St. Ignatius (SE 234)

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and all my will — all that I have and possess. Thou gavest it to me: to Thee, Lord, I return it!

All is Thine, dispose of it according to all Thy will.

Give me Thy love and grace, for this is enough for me.

Meeting with Your Spiritual Director

At the end of these days, meet with your spiritual director to share the graces of your retreat.

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Daily Journal Notes

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Appendix

Scripture: New American Bible, Revised Edition (NABRE)

Acknowledgments

Scripture texts in this work are taken from the New American Bible, Revised Edition (NABRE), © 2010, 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, D.C. All rights reserved.

(SE __) indicates the internationally agreed numbers in The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius.

Citations from the Spiritual Exercises are taken from The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: Based on Studies in the Language of the Autograph, trans. Louis J. Puhl, S.J. (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1951), except the Anima Christi and the Suscipe (SE 234), which are from the translation by Elder Mullan, S.J. (1914).