



Dear Friends,

I love Advent! A time to prepare my heart for our Lord, O come O come, Emmanuel. The word Emmanuel means, "God-with-us" That is truly good news! Our God is with us every step of the way. I have reflected on those words many times before, but this Advent, God-with-us gives me more comfort in an uncertain times in our history. Ten months ago, I would have never imagined we would face a worldwide pandemic that would change our lives so dramatically. But here we are, even as our daily lives have been disturbed, one thing has not changed: the love of God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Just like you, I am home a lot more than usual and I'm limited to where I go. Just like you, I'm unable to gather with my family, and I am filled with worry. I'm convinced of the need to spend time in prayer, more time designated for my God.

In my personal prayer space, I have an image of the Holy Family and have been reflecting on the special love between Joseph and Mary, the perfect models of discipleship. I ponder what was in their hearts and minds as they awaited the birth of Jesus. They show us how to live with hearts completely available to God, and when we are completely available to God, we are completely received by him. The Holy Family remained faithful, and God provided. Let's remain faithful.

You're invited to attend an at-home retreat! The following pages are filled with scripture, prayer, meditation, and activities.

*Father, I humbly ask you to make this Advent my best ever. Help me to find you deep within.
Teach me how to love with the freedom with which Mary and Joseph loved.*

Advent Blessings,

At Home Retreat

When getting ready to have an at-home retreat, one still must act as if they are on a retreat. It's helpful to prepare yourself and your surroundings if you are able.

Prepare your Advent wreath. Place it on a table where you can see it during your quiet time of prayer. If you do not have a wreath, use what is ever available in your home. Be creative!

Bring other symbols of Advent/Christmas into your sacred space. (Christmas tree, lights, angels and a manger) Keep it simple.



Have a warm blanket available, in your favorite chair. And, a warm beverage.

Here are a few suggestions:

1) **Begin all prayers by asking for God's assistance.** The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans" (Rom 8:26-27).

2) **Silence external noises.** We need to silence the external noises, find a quiet place with little to no distractions, preferably a place of solitude where one can be alone with God. The best time to pray is early in the morning when our mind has just woken up and is not preoccupied with the business of the world like work, family life, etc. or in the evening before sleep.

3) **Silence internal noises.** I recommends reading a short passage from Scripture. Enclosed in this booklet are Advent prayers. Each day begin by focusing on your Advent wreath, read the prayer for that week (found on page 3). Taking part in repetitive vocal prayers, *Be Still and know that I am God or Lord, make us turn to you; let us see your face and we shall be saved* or *saying the rosary*. These prayers can be accompanied by deep breathing exercises to take "our concentration from the world and reorient our mind to be sensitive to our being and living in the present moment.

4) **Silence our heart and soul.** Using Scripture as a tool to listen with the ears of our hearts is one of the most powerful tools available. We are not silent for the sake of silence, but it is a means by which we can encounter and experience a real, personal and all loving God.

5) **Encounter God.** In the end, it is not the destiny of the process or the fruits of prayer or whether it was a productive time that matters. It is the fact that we spent time with God, it is about the encounter.

We need to pray with our whole being — the body, intellect, memory, imagination, emotions, heart and soul — not just with

A Guide for praying Lectio Divina

Praying with scripture can help you to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit by stirring inside your heart and inviting you to hear God, who speaks through the words of the Bible.

For this, there is an ancient practice called "lectio divina". This means "**divine reading**". It is a method of reading and praying on scripture. It has had many forms in the Church's history. God will knock and wait. With "lectio" we open the door, and give God space in our hearts.

Preparing for the holy reading

Place. Find a quiet time and place to pray. You can pray alone, or have a group "lectio". Here is how you can pray alone.

Posture. Be relaxed and comfortable.

Select a passage. Normally you would select a theme and a passage from scripture related to it.

But since we are in the season on Advent, I would invite you to use the scripture provided in this booklet.

Begin: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

– **Faith in God's presence:** Lord, we truly believe that you are present among us, and we want to ask You to help us open our minds and hearts, to understand and to welcome your word into our lives.

—Body of prayer. Reading from the Bible

"Reading" is the first movement after the beginning acts of the "lectio". One begins by the slow and mindful reading of the passage from Scripture. Try to concentrate on the message. What is God telling me in this passage? As you read, be alert to any word or phrase that seems to "come forward" for you and highlight them.

– Moment of silence

This is the moment for personal meditation. After trying to understand the Bible's message, you think about how the reading applies to your own life. We pause to have time to reflect and ask, "God, what do you want to tell me in this?"

***Behold, the Lord comes to save his people;
blessed are those prepared to meet him.***

4TH WEEK OF ADVENT

PEACE

Sunday, December 20 —Gospel Luke 1:26-38

Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord.

May it be done to me according to your word.

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, full of grace! The Lord is with you."

But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.

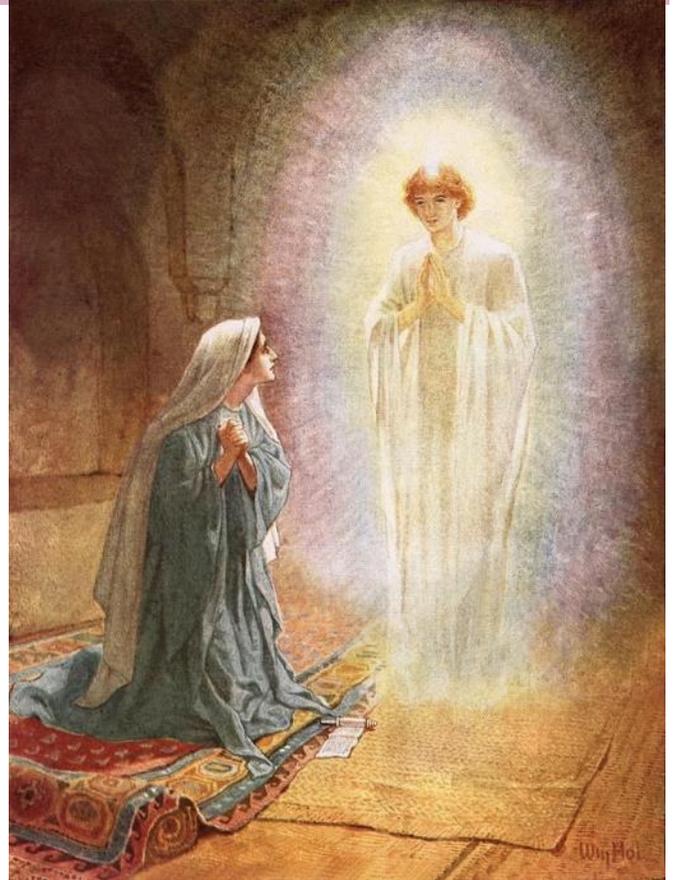
Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

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 ac-



*God of Peace, do not let me forget
that you are the most essential part of my life.
Keep reorienting me to your presence
as I move through this time of year.*

Peace is more than the absence of conflict. It is an attitude about life. The prophet Isaiah writes that those who trust God are the ones who have peace. We can't keep all the hustle and bustle out of our lives. We can't avoid some daily conflicts and difficulties but we can give ourselves in trust to God. How? Each time we feel distress, act unlovingly, surrender to anxious worrying or get caught

***Blessed are you who have believed, that what was spoken to you
by the Lord would be fulfilled. -Luke 1:45***

