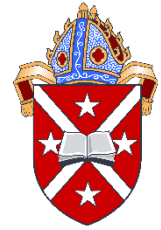


The Birth of Jesus the Messiah



¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah^[a] took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be pregnant from the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to divorce her quietly. ²⁰ But just when he had resolved to do this, an 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, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” ²² All this took place to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

²³ “Look, the virgin shall become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,”

which means, “God is with us.” ²⁴ When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife ²⁵ but had no marital relations with her until she had given birth to a son,^[b] and he named him Jesus.



Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina (“holy reading”) is an ancient Christian practice of listening deeply to Scripture, allowing God’s word to speak to the heart as well as the mind. This resource is designed to help your group or congregation enter the Gospel prayerfully and reflectively.

Before you begin, take a moment to set the scene: create a calm, unhurried space; dim harsh lighting; silence phones; and invite people to sit comfortably. You may wish to light a candle, have the passage printed or projected, or play gentle music.

Encourage everyone to listen without pressure to “analyse” the text—Lectio Divina is about openness, not answers. Each reading of the passage is followed by quiet reflection, allowing God’s Spirit to work within the pauses.

1. Welcome & Settling (1 minute)

Today we are going to take part in a time of quiet reflection for Advent 4.

As we prepare for Christmas, we pause to listen again to the promise of *Emmanuel — God with us*.

Take a moment to settle your body.

Allow your breathing to slow.

Let the noise of the day fall gently into the background.

Ask God to open your heart to whatever grace is waiting for you in this scripture.

When you are ready, hear the Gospel for today

2. First Reading of the Passage (1.5 minutes)

(Read the full passage slowly and steadily. If you have some quiet music, you can play this underneath this the reading and the reflection to follow)

3. Silence & First Reflection (1 minute)

Hold the story lightly.

What word or phrase caught your attention?

Found to be with child?

Joseph, being a righteous man?

Do not be afraid?

He will save his people?

God with us?

Don't force an answer.

Just notice what shimmered for you.

(Pause.)

4. Gentle Guided Reflection (1.5 minutes)

As you sit with that word or phrase,
let the scene come alive around you.

Imagine Joseph—
confused, heartbroken, afraid of what others will think...
yet wanting to do the right thing,
choosing mercy even before he understands the whole story.

Imagine the quiet of the night
as the angel speaks in a dream:
Do not be afraid. God is doing something new.

Where does that invitation meet you today?

Where in your life are you facing uncertainty,
or a decision that feels bigger than your strength?

(Pause.)

5. Second Reading of the Passage (1.5 minutes)

(Read the scripture again, even more slowly. Leave space after key lines.)

6. Deeper Reflection (2 minutes)

Listen for what God might be saying to you through this story.

Joseph wakes and does what God asks—
not with fanfare,
not with full understanding,
but with quiet courage.

What might quiet courage look like for you
in this season of Advent?

Where might God be inviting you
to trust more deeply...
to release fear...
to welcome Emmanuel
into an unexpected part of your life?

Take these questions gently—
not to solve, but simply to notice.

(Pause.)

7. Closing Prayer (1 minute)

Let us pray.

God of tender courage,
you came to us in the vulnerability of a child
and in the faithfulness of ordinary people.

As Joseph listened,
help us to listen.

As he trusted,
help us to trust.

As he welcomed Christ into his life,
help us to welcome your presence
into the places where we feel uncertain or afraid.

Be Emmanuel for us—
God with us, now and always.

Amen.

