

Guide to *Lectio Divina*

Choose a word or phrase of the Scriptures you wish to pray. It makes no difference which text is chosen, as long as you have no set goal of “covering” a certain amount of text. The amount of text covered is in God’s hands, not yours.

Read. Turn to the text and read it slowly, gently. Savor each portion of the reading, constantly listening for the “still, small voice” of a word or phrase that somehow says, “I am for you today.” Do not expect lightning or ecstasies. In *lectio divina*, God is teaching us to listen, to seek him in silence. God does not reach out and grab us but gently invites us ever more deeply into his presence.

Ponder. Take the word or phrase into yourself. Memorize it and slowly repeat it to yourself, allowing it to interact with your inner world of concerns, memories, and ideas. Do not be afraid of distractions. Memories or thoughts are simply parts of yourself that, when they rise up during *lectio divina*, are asking to be given to God along with the rest of your inner self. Allow this inner pondering, this rumination, to invite you into dialogue with God.

Pray. Whether you use words, ideas, or images — or all three — is not important. Interact with God as you would with one who you know loves and accepts you. Give to God what you have discovered during your experience of meditation. Give to God what you have found within your heart.

It is not necessary to assess the quality of your *lectio divina*, as if you were “performing” or seeking some goal. *Lectio divina* has no goal other than that of being in the presence of God by praying the Scriptures. Fr. Luke Dysinger

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Lectio Divina

Sunday, December 19, 2021

4th Sunday of Advent

Opening Prayer

God, we tend to lose ourselves in the hustle and bustle of the day, in our work and in our petty worries. Give us the freshness of heart to seek the things that matter, those that make our lives deeply human, and at the same time open us to Your world and to Your values. Make us long to encounter You with joy, that we may discover again the quality of gratuitous giving, of respect, and of carefree, self-forgetting love, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Gospel Reading – Luke 1: 39-45

Mary set out at that time and went as quickly as she could into the hill country to a town in Judah. She went into Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth. Now it happened that as soon as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. She gave a loud cry and said, "Of all women you are the most blessed, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. Why should I be honored with a visit from the mother of my Lord? Look, the moment your greeting reached my ears, the child in my womb leapt for joy. Yes, blessed is she who believed that the promise made to her by the Lord would be fulfilled."

Reflection

- Luke stresses the readiness of Mary in serving, in being a *handmaid*. The angel speaks about the pregnancy of Elizabeth, and immediately Mary rises and sets out as quickly as she can to go and help her. From Nazareth to the house of Elizabeth there were more than 100 km, at least four days of traveling! There were no buses or trains. Mary begins to *serve* and fulfills her mission on behalf of the people of God.
- Elizabeth represents the Old Testament, which was about to end. Mary represents the New Testament. The Old Testament accepts the New one with gratitude and trust, recognizing in it God's gift which is going to be realized and is going to satisfy people's expectations. In the encounter of the two women the gift of the Spirit is manifested. The child leapt with joy in Elizabeth's womb. This is Elizabeth's faith-filled reading of things.
- The Good News of God reveals His presence in the most common things of human life: two housewives who visit each other to help one another. Visit, joy, pregnancy, children, mutual help, house, family: Luke wants us and the community to see precisely this, and to discover in this, God's presence.

- Elizabeth says to Mary: "Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb!" To this day, these words form part of the most prayed prayer in the whole world: "The Hail Mary."
- "And blessed is she who has believed that the promise made to her by the Lord would be fulfilled". This is the Elizabeth's praise of Mary and the message of Luke for the community: to believe in the Word of God, because the Word of God has the power to fulfill all that it proclaims. It is a creative Word. It generates new life in the womb of the Virgin, and in the hearts of people who accept it with faith.
- Mary and Elizabeth already knew one another. In this encounter, they discover in each other a mystery which they had not known as yet, and which fills them with great joy. Today, we also meet people who surprise us because of the wisdom they possess and the witness of faith that they give. Has something similar ever happened to you? Have you met people who have surprised you? What prevents us from discovering and living the joy of God's presence in our life?
- The attitude of Mary before the Word expresses the ideal which Luke wants to communicate to the community: do not close yourselves off, but get out of yourselves, be attentive to the real needs of people and try to help others as far as possible according to their need.

Personal Questions

- Putting myself in the place of Mary and Elizabeth: am I able to perceive and experience the presence of God in the most simple and common things in everyday life?
- Elizabeth's praise of Mary: "You have believed!" Her husband had difficulty believing what the angel was telling him. What about me?

Concluding Prayer

We are waiting for Yahweh; He is our help and our shield, for in Him our hearts rejoice, in His holy name we trust. (Ps 33: 20-21)



Invest just five minutes a day, and your faith will deepen and grow—a day at a time.

19DEC2021 - FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT (O FLOWER OF JESSE'S STEM)

Your place on the tree

Family trees are an endless source of fascination. Whether you've explored yours through DNA tests or old photo albums and family stories, you know that a ragtag line of other people's chances and choices contribute to who you are. The Advent Jesse Tree teaches children about many risk-takers and seekers throughout biblical history who contributed to the arrival of Jesus. Folks like Jesse himself, the father of David who contributed to the lineage of the kings of Israel and, without suspecting it, the future King of the Universe. What might your legacy be, and how do you claim your place in the great story?

Today's readings:

Micah 5:1-4a; Hebrews 10:5-10; Luke 1:39-45 ([12](#)).

"Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb."

20DEC2021 - ADVENT WEEKDAY (O KEY OF DAVID)

He's on his way

Today's Great Antiphon—the fourth of seven ancient prayers said during Advent vespers leading up to Christmas Eve—is “O Key of David, come and free us!” Each Antiphon is a call to Christ using a messianic title from prophecy, and today's reminds us that we are captives liberated by God's grace. The answer to our cries is embedded in the titles themselves. The seven titles in Latin—*Sapientia, Adonai, Radix Jesse, Clavis David, Oriens, Rex Gentium*, and *Emmanuel*—in reverse order form the acrostic ERO CRAS, which means “I am coming soon.”

Today's readings:

Isaiah 7:10-14; Luke 1:26-38 ([196](#)).

"The Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever."

21DEC2021 - MEMORIAL OF PETER CANISIUS, PRIEST, DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH (O RADIANT DAWN)

Let the light shine

The Protestant Reformation was an age of strife and contestation, especially in Germany, ground zero of the upheaval in 1517. Into the morass stepped a learned Jesuit scholar, amazing preacher, and gifted writer—Peter Canisius, whose rational arguments in support of Catholicism proved quite persuasive. Peter's three written catechisms were so effective, German-born Pope Benedict XVI told a papal audience in 2011, that later generations of Germans simply referred to them as “the Canisius.” On what's the longest night of the year for many, tap the faith of Peter Canisius to reflect upon the ways that Jesus is our Radiant Dawn.

Today's readings:

Song of Songs 2:8-14 or Zephaniah 3:14-18a; Luke 1:39-45 ([197](#)).

"Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled."

22DEC2021 - ADVENT WEEKDAY (O KING OF ALL NATIONS)

God of surprises

God acts in ways we least expect. The long-awaited Messiah was expected to be a military leader who would lead his people, Israel, to victory and out of oppression. Instead, he was born in a stable to a young woman of the village and a carpenter who would be his foster father. Today that young woman makes a bold proclamation, “He has thrown down

the rulers from their thrones but lifted up the lowly.” As we come closer to Christmas, ask God to help you look for him in the unexpected so that he might refashion you. After all, history is full of unexpected saints—why not you?

Today's readings:

1 Samuel 1:24-28; Luke 1:46-56 ([198](#)).

“[God] has looked upon his lowly servant. From this day all generations will call me blessed.”

23DEC2021 - ADVENT WEEKDAY (O EMMANUEL)

Hear our plea

What is more poignant than an expression of heartfelt longing? Today anyone taking part in the longstanding tradition of Evening Prayer, or vespers, sings, “O Emmanuel, come to redeem us!” It’s a plea of yearning. For centuries on this day near Christmas, Catholics have opened their hearts and prayed for a savior. Let this vulnerable prayer of hope and desire for all that Christmas represents—light, life, salvation—be a kind of mantra as you go about your day.

Today's readings:

Malachi 3:1-4, 23-24; Luke 1:57-66 ([199](#)).

“When the time arrived for Elizabeth to have her child she gave birth to a son.”

24DEC2021 - ADVENT WEEKDAY

Thanksgiving on Christmas Eve

For many Catholics, Christmas Eve is brimming with meal preparation, cleaning, wrapping last-minute stocking stuffers, and Midnight Mass. It can also be a difficult day for those missing loved ones. In whatever situation you find yourself, take a moment and join the church in praying the Canticum of Zechariah, also known as the Benedictus. As he awaited the birth of his son John (later known as the Baptist), Zechariah sang a canticum of gratitude to God for setting us free from all that binds. May this prayer bring freedom and joy to us all!

Today's readings:

Morning: 2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16; Luke 1:67-79 ([200](#)).

“In the tender compassion of our God the dawn from on high shall break upon us, to shine on those who dwell in darkness.”

25DEC2021 - SOLEMNITY OF THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD (CHRISTMAS)

The weary world rejoices

The efforts of people of goodwill everywhere in the quest for peace and justice continue, and our leader is born anew today! Spiritual author and priest Henri Nouwen put it well: “The world is not whole. . . . But it is into this broken world that a child is born, who is called Son of the Most High, Prince of Peace, Savior. I look at him and pray, ‘Thank you, Lord, that you came. . . . Your heart is greater than mine.’” Our hope and our hearts increase today. Rejoice!

Today's readings:

Night: Isaiah 9:1-6; Titus 2:11-14; Luke 2:1-14 ([14](#)); *Day:* Isaiah 52:7-10; Hebrews 1:1-6; John 1:1-18 ([16](#)).

“And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.”