

ADVENT LECTIO DIVINA

FOR FAMILIES



PRAYING WITH SACRED SCRIPTURE

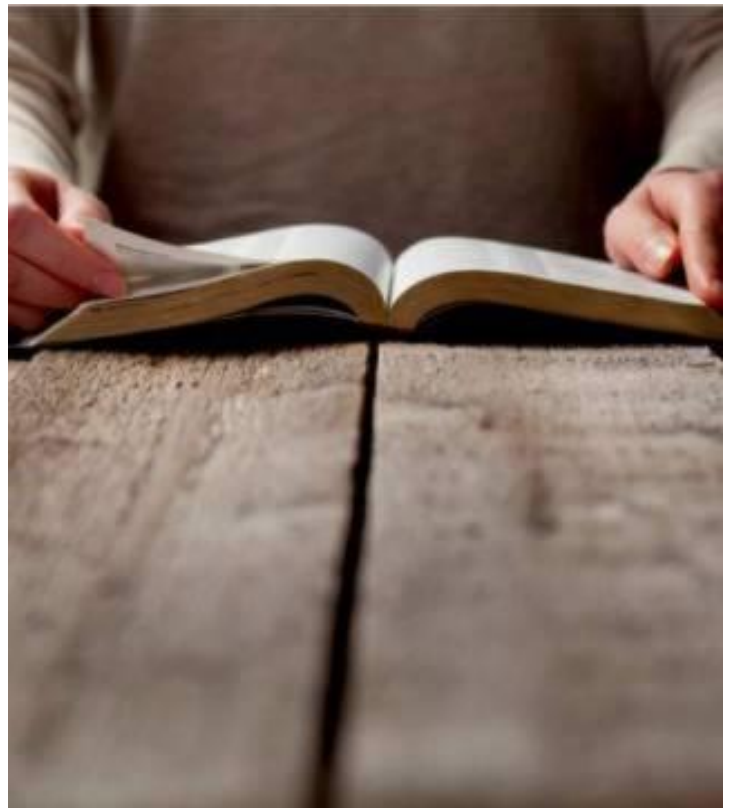
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Introduction to Lectio Divina

Lectio divina (divine reading) is an old monastic form of meditation on a passage of scripture. As we read the Word of God, we contemplate not only its meaning, but we discern what God is saying to us. As we become more comfortable with lectio, God's Word becomes a lens for understanding our daily experiences. We begin to notice the Divine in the ordinary. We are transformed.

Lectio divina is a great way to prepare your family spiritually for Advent and Christmas. Explain to your children that God wants to be our friend, and friends sit together and chat. He communicates with us in many ways, including through the Traditions of our Church and through Sacred Scripture. During Advent, we can use lectio divina to listen to God talk to us in Scripture. God will teach us, guide us, and lead us into a deeper understanding of ourselves, each other, and our purpose in the world.

Invite: Light a candle as you begin your family lectio divina. Don't expect perfection and mature piety in your children. Small children benefit from snuggles and encouragement during lectio. If praying together is new in your home, you might encounter complaints and resistance from your big kids. With warmth and firmness, require them to join the family for prayer time. You don't want them to miss it! In particular, the final movement of lectio is so important for older children. In this stage, we sit in stillness and silence, allowing the Divine to fill the quiet space in the room.



The Big Picture

Basic Steps in Lectio Divina

1

Lectio (read)

A parent or child reads the scripture while the rest of the family listens.

You can use the reading provided in the reflections, or alternatively you can find the same verses in a children's bible.

2

Meditatio
(meditate)

A parent or child reads the scripture again.

What words or sections of the passage stand out to you? Does anything in the passage challenge you or comfort you?

3

Oratio (pray)

Pray together as a family. Thank God for any insights you've gained during the meditation.

Offer up any intentions for friends or loved ones who came to mind during the meditation.

4

Contemplatio
(contemplate)

Now, sit silently for a minute or two.

In our noisy world, our children aren't used to sitting in silence, waiting for God to speak or for the Holy Spirit to inspire them.

Advent Lectio Divina

FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT: TRUST

Opening Prayer (from the Collect, Fourth Week of Advent)

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

Pour forth, we beseech you, O Lord, your grace into our hearts, that we, to whom the Incarnation of Christ your Son was made known by the message of an Angel, may by his Passion and Cross be brought to the glory of his Resurrection. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

1. Read

Parent or child: Read the following Scripture aloud.

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 according to your word." Then the angel departed from her. —Luke 1:26-38

2. Meditate

Parent: God communicates with us in many ways, including through Sacred Scripture. Advent is coming to an end. I wonder what God has to say to you as you look forward to the Feast of the Nativity. Let's listen to the passage again. Imagine yourself in the scene. Perhaps you're sitting next to Mary or busy doing chores when the angel appears. Pay attention to any words or parts that stand out to you.

After the second reading, allow time for sharing:

- Did anything catch your attention?
- What did you experience as you imagined yourself in the scene?
- What do you think it means to be "a handmaid of the Lord"? (*A handmaid is a servant.*)

Explain to your children:

This passage is about the Annunciation when the angel told Mary that she would bear the son of God. At first Mary was startled, but the angel comforts her: "Don't be afraid." What would you think if you had been Mary? I think I would be scared! Mary could have said no to the angel. But she didn't. She said yes to the mission God had in mind for her. I'm not sure she could have known what it all meant, but she said yes anyway. This shows her heart for God.

Have you ever felt like you didn't know why I asked you to do something, but you did it anyway? Why did you do it? (*Allow time for responses. Your children may talk about how they trust you, or they want to be obedient because they respect and love you. Tell your children how much you honor their trust in you.*)



“The Annunciation” by Filippo Lippi, 15th century

Going Deeper

Long before we were born, we all received a call from God to love him, know him, and serve him, just as Mary did. We are all invited to become God’s servants; we all have a mission in God’s kingdom. Mary was ready to receive her mission because she spent time in prayer, and she was pure of heart.

Even though you’re young, God is already preparing you for your mission. Like Mary, we all must cooperate with God as he prepares us; we must spend time with him in prayer so that we notice when he gives us a job to do.

What do you think gets in the way of hearing God’s call? (*Our sins, preoccupations, distractions.*)

When we trust God and say “yes” when he asks us to do little jobs each day, we will be better able to respond with a “yes” to the big missions he sends our way. Pay attention to the little jobs God invites you to do today. Maybe he will ask you to play with a sibling, sit quietly with him in the back garden, or offer a word of encouragement to a friend who’s having a hard day.

3. Pray

Lord, we thank you for the perfect gift of your son, received into the world by Mary, perfect

mother. We want to say “yes” to your invitations to us to serve you, but sometimes we’re scared. We’re not sure what the yes will mean. We pray for trust in you, and we ask for the protection of our Blessed Mother as we discern your mission for us today and every day. [*Allow time for personal petitions.*]

4. Contemplate

Parent: Now let’s sit quietly in God’s company for a few minutes. Ask God to reveal any fears you have that keep you from serving him. (*Sit for thirty seconds to five minutes, depending on your children’s maturity.*) Allow time for sharing.

End with the following antiphon:

Loving mother of the Redeemer, gate of heaven, star of the sea, assist your people who have fallen yet strive to rise again. To the wonderment of nature, you bore your Creator, yet remained a virgin after as before. You who received Gabriel’s joyful greeting, have pity on us poor sinners.

Glory to the Father,
and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit.
As it was in the beginning,
is now, and will be forever. Amen.



Art to Contemplate

“The Immaculate Conception”

by Bartolome Esteban Perez Murillo (c. 1665)

According to the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, Mary was conceived free from the stain of original sin, making her a pure and holy instrument for the Incarnation, by God’s grace. The nature of this grace is unique to Mary. The term “full of grace,” which the angel calls Mary at the Annunciation, is a translation of the Greek word *kecharitomene*, the perfect passive participle of *charitoo*. In the perfect tense, the word suggests that Mary received this grace in the past and the grace continued into the present. A devotion to the Immaculate Conception was widespread very early in Spain, and many early images of the Immaculate Conception come to us from Spanish artists, including Bartolome Esteban Perez Murillo.

Murillo produced two dozen paintings of the Immaculate Conception, including the stunning painting we see here. In all his paintings, Mary has a similar stance: her hands are crossed over her bosom or brought together in prayer, and her eyes are lifted in a heavenward gaze. In this painting, Mary wears her familiar blue mantle; blue is a symbol of her grace. She wears a white gown beneath her mantle to signify her purity. The angels are at her feet in honor of her. The lily symbolizes Mary’s perfect purity, and the roses call us to prayer, especially the rosary. As we “read” the painting and contemplate it, Mary offers us hope with the palm, a symbol of victory, and the olive branch, a symbol of eternal peace. Through our perseverance in prayer and devotion, our Blessed Mother will protect us beneath her mantle.

On the following page, you’ll find a full-page copy of Murillo’s painting. Allow your children to contemplate this painting over several days. Ask them questions to guide their contemplation. Who do you think the beautiful lady is? What objects do you see? What are the angels doing? What feelings do you have as you gaze at the painting?

