

ADVENT LECTIO DIVINA

FOR FAMILIES



PRAYING WITH SACRED SCRIPTURE

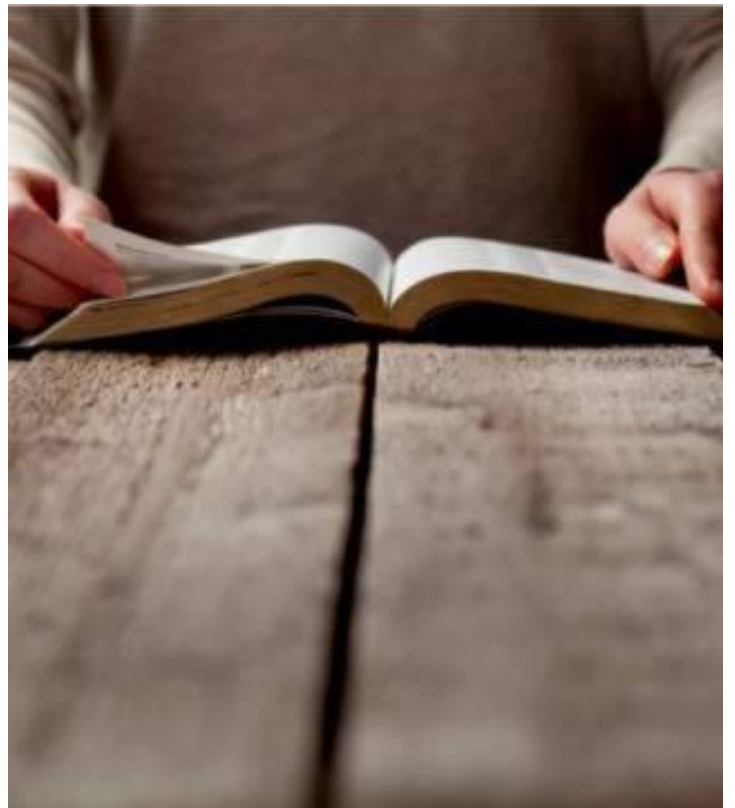
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Introduction to Lectio Divina

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

THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT: REJOICE

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

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

Incline a merciful ear to our cry, we pray, O Lord, and, casting light on the darkness of our hearts, visit us with the grace of your Son. 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.

A man named John was sent from God. He came for testimony, to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He was not the light but came to testify to the light. And this is the testimony of John.

When the Jews from Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to him to ask him, “Who are you?”

He admitted and did not deny it, but admitted, “I am not the Christ.”

So they asked him, “What are you then? Are you Elijah?”

And he said, “I am not.”

“Are you the Prophet?”

He answered, “No.”

So they said to him, “Who are you, so we can give an answer to those who sent us? What do you have to say for yourself?”

He said: “I am the voice of one crying out in the desert, ‘*make straight the way of the Lord*,’ as Isaiah the prophet said.”

Some Pharisees were also sent. They asked him, “Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ or Elijah or the Prophet?”

John answered them, “I baptize with water; but there is one among you whom you do not recognize, the one who is coming after me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to untie.”

This happened in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing. –John 1:6-8, 19-28

2. Meditate

Parent: We read about John the Baptist in our lectio divina for the second week of Advent, and he’s mentioned again this week. He must be very important. Sometimes the Holy Spirit turns a light on for us when we hear God’s word. He’s illuminating our minds and hearts, pointing us to something we need to hear. We’ll notice something we never noticed before. Close your eyes and listen while I read the passage again.

Read the passage again, slowly and reverently. After the second reading, allow time for sharing:

- Did anything stand out for you as you heard the reading?
- Why do you think the authorities are asking John so many questions? (*They don’t understand what he’s saying – they are spiritually blind.*)
- What do you think it means that John “was not the light but came to testify to the light”? (*John was preparing the way for Christ, but he wasn’t Christ.*) Who or what is the “light” in the passage? (*Jesus.*) What does light mean in your life?

Time to Rejoice!

The third Sunday of Advent is called “Gaudete Sunday,” which means Rejoice Sunday. We get to pause on our journey through Advent and cry out with joy that Christmas is nearing. The light of Christ is coming! As we light a new candle each week, our Advent wreath burns more brightly as the Feast of the Nativity approaches. Jesus wants to share his light with us. The more we allow him into our lives, the better we can see him, ourselves, and the world.



Going Deeper

During the dark of winter, the light of candles and fire remind us of the hope that waits even in darkness. Sometimes when you've been in darkness for a long while, you begin to wonder when it will be light again. God gives us light in the darkness to remind us of his love and care. Spring will come. Morning will come. During Advent, we remember that Christ came, and he will come again.

During Advent, we shine a light on our habits; we take an honest look at ourselves. We think about our relationship with God and others.

What are you trying to hide in a dark corner? Are you doing things that you know are wrong but don't want to admit? Have you treated your family members unkindly or unfairly? Have you taken more than your fair share of something? Do you always look to receive gifts and hold back sharing your own gifts? We ask God to shine his healing light on these broken places within us and in our relationships.

What situations in your life make you feel that you are in darkness? Are you worried about a relationship or a challenge? Do you have any projects or exams that feel too difficult? Christ is the light that illuminates our path out of the darkness, out of the deserts of our lives.

3. Pray

Lord, thank you for the joy of this third week of Advent! Thank you for each member of this

family, for their unique gifts and special talents which we have received as a pure gift from you so that we can glorify you. Illuminate the dark places of our hearts. Help us to be more patient, generous, and forgiving of one another this week. [*Allow time for personal petitions.*]

4. Contemplate

Parent: Do you remember what we do during our time of contemplation? We sit quietly in God's presence, listening for his whispers. Sometimes we just sit gazing upon him, and he gazes upon us; we allow our love to speak. (*Sit for thirty seconds to five minutes, depending on your children's maturity.*) After this period of contemplation, allow time for your children to share anything on their hearts.

End with the following prayer from the Canticle of Zechariah in Luke 1:

In the tender compassion of our Lord
The dawn from on high shall break upon us,
to shine on those who dwell in darkness
And the shadow of death,
And to guide our feet into the way of peace.

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

“St. John the Baptist in the Desert”
by Hieronymus Bosch (1489)

What do you make of this intriguing painting by Hieronymus Bosch? It’s called “St. John the Baptist in the Desert,” but where is the desert? We see a lush green landscape with trees, bushes, and plenty of shade. Bosch was a fifteenth-century Dutch painter. In Dutch, the word “desert” doesn’t mean the hot, sandy place we imagine; it means a deserted place. So here, John the Baptist is alone in the wilderness, but it’s not a dry, dusty place. Bosch is highlighting John’s hermit-like qualities: he is alone, he reclines in thought, he eschews worldly pleasure. He is a perfect model of the life of simplicity, prayer, and contemplation. Notice the strange plant in front of him. It’s a huge, heavy, overripe fruit with thorns like razors. It resembles an alien from a movie! This plant stands for the delights and seductions of the world, which John rejects. A bird is eating the fruit; another bird is dead below the fruit; a third bird near the top edge of the painting is safely distanced from the fruit. Notice John’s finger. He points at the lamb, Jesus Christ. John is the prophet and the forerunner of Christ, preparing the way.

On the following page, you’ll find a full-page copy of Bosch’s painting. Allow your children to live with the painting before you identify John the Baptist and the lamb for them. You might like to display it on a screen throughout the day or print it out and post it in a central location in your home. Wonder with your children about the painting. I wonder who the man is in this painting. What do you imagine he’s thinking? I wonder why he is pointing at the little lamb. Would you want to play in this garden? What looks inviting to you or not so inviting?

