

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.

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FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT: WATCH

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

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

Keep us alert, we pray, O Lord our God, as we await the advent of Christ your Son, so that, when he comes and knocks, he may find us watchful in prayer and exultant in his praise. 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.

Jesus said to his disciples: “Be watchful! Be alert! You do not know when the time will come. It is like a man traveling abroad. He leaves home and places his servants in charge, each with his own work, and orders the gatekeeper to be on the watch. Watch, therefore; you do not know when the Lord of the house is coming, whether in the evening, or at mid-night, or at cockcrow, or in the morning. May he not come suddenly and find you sleeping.

What I say to you, I say to all: ‘Watch!’” -Mark 13:33-37

2. Meditate

Parent: Let’s reflect on what God is saying to us through Sacred Scripture. God’s Word is living and active. He wants to guide us and help us become more holy as we begin this journey together through Advent. Let’s listen to the passage again. 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?
- Why do you think Jesus tells us to “be alert” and

to “watch”? What do you think we’re waiting for?

Explain to your children:

Advent isn’t only about preparing for Christmas Day. We are reminded that we need to prepare for when Jesus comes again! We don’t know exactly when that will be. So, we must pay attention to what God is asking us to do until Jesus returns.

All around us, people need to be loved; people need to learn about Jesus. If we watch for these opportunities to love, God is pleased. Sometimes we spend our time doing things that lead us away from God or make it hard for us to recognize his invitations to us to draw close to him. So, during Advent we can examine our lives. Do we have any habits that make it harder for us to love Jesus and others well?

Going deeper:

When we are well-prepared for a race, for a test, or a party how do we feel? (*Calm. You have confidence that you can handle what’s coming your way.*) How do you feel if you spend your time goofing around and avoiding what you need to do to train for the race, study for your test, or decorate and clean for the party? (*Fearful and anxious. You’re not sure you can handle what’s coming your way. You have regret.*)

Christ asks us to be prepared, and then to trust in his care. We need only attend to God’s will for us each day, guarding our hearts and minds against distractions. When we’re ready, we have nothing to fear. No matter what is happening around us, we will have peace.

3. Pray

Thank you, God, for your Word, which illuminates our lives today. During this first week of Advent, open our eyes. May we watch for opportunities to serve one another better and love one another well. May we recognize the people in our midst who need to experience your love. [*Allow time for personal petitions.*]

4. Contemplate

Parent: Now that we've reflected on God's Word, let's sit quietly in his presence. Sometimes he has a little message to give us, but we can't hear it if we're always talking. So we'll sit still and listen. (*Sit for thirty seconds to five minutes, depending on your children's maturity.*)

Ask your children whether God impressed any words or insights on their hearts during their contemplation. If they say no, assure them that this is okay; this probably means God just wanted to sit with them, enjoying their company.

End with an Our Father or Hail Mary, and the sign of the cross.



Art to Contemplate

Andrei Rublev's "Three Angels"

Andrei Rublev's "Three Angels" (early 15th century) is one of my family's favorite icons. We studied it in our art history program and display a copy of it on our family altar. The icon depicts the three angels who visit Abraham in Genesis 18:1-8. The angels appear to Abraham as travelers on the road, and how does he respond to them? He is ready and eager to welcome them to his table.

Tradition also recognizes the figures as the Trinity. The figure on the right is the Holy Spirit. His blue garment symbolizes his eternal home in Heaven, while his green outer garment symbolizes new life. The figure on the left is God the Father, who wears gold to represent his divine nature. The Father gazes toward the angel in the middle, who is God the Son. Notice the Son gesturing downward with two fingers; this represents his two natures (divine and human). The golden chalice on the table represents the blood of Christ, offered as a perfect gift for us. We see a place for ourselves at the table; God invites us in just as we are called to make a place for others at our table.

What connections can your family make between the scripture reflection this week ("watch"; "be alert") and this icon?

On the following page, you'll find a full-page copy of "Three Angels." 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. Allow your children to wonder about the icon. Ponder with them. Who are the figures? What might the little vessel on the table be used for? Would you like to sit at the table with them?



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SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT: PREPARE

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

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

Grant that your people, we pray, almighty God, may be ever watchful for the coming of your Only Begotten Son, that, as the author of our salvation himself has taught us, we may hasten, alert and with lighted lamps, to meet him when he comes. 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 beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God.

As it is written in Isaiah the prophet:

Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way. A voice of one crying out in the desert:

“Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.”

John the Baptist appeared in the desert proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. People of the whole Judean countryside and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the Jordan River as they acknowledged their sins.

John was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist. He fed on locusts and wild honey. And this is what he proclaimed: “One mightier than I is coming after me. I am not worthy to stoop and loosen the thongs of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” –Mark 1:1-8



Detail, St. John the Baptist from *Altarpiece of the Coronation of the Virgin*, Niccolo di Liberatore (15th century)

2. Meditate

Parent: Let's reflect on what God is saying to us through Sacred Scripture as we continue our journey together through Advent. Close your eyes. Let's listen to the passage again. Pay attention to any words or parts that stand out to you.

After the second reading, pause for 15 to 20 seconds. Allow time for sharing:

- Did anything catch your attention?
- What do you think about the description of John the Baptist? Why do you think people were so drawn to him?

Explain to your children:

By all accounts, John the Baptist was a kind of celebrity in Jerusalem. He could have taken all the glory and basked in the attention he was receiving. Instead, he pointed away from himself and toward Jesus. "Don't look to me; look to Jesus. I'm not worthy to touch his sandals." He was preparing others to recognize and welcome Jesus.

In what ways can our family prepare others to recognize and welcome Jesus?

Being famous is not the same as being a good person. In our world, somebody can become famous for the wrong reasons. Have you noticed any examples of this? God has given all of us gifts that he wants us to use for the good of others. In particular, he wants us to use our gifts to share the good news of Jesus, just as John the Baptist did. We don't have to wear camel's hair and eat locusts like John; we are called to be Christ in the world in our own time, using our own special gifts.

What gift can you share with somebody today?

3. Pray

Your Word is a lamp to our feet, Lord! May we point others to Jesus, as John the Baptist did. Use our family to proclaim the light of Christ, that others may know the joy of salvation, the forgiveness of sins, and the mercy of God. [*Allow time for personal petitions.*]

4. Contemplate

Parent: Now that we've reflected on God's Word, let's sit quietly in his presence. (*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 psalm and the sign of the cross.

I will hear what God proclaims; the LORD—for he proclaims peace to his people.

Near indeed is his salvation to those who fear him, glory dwelling in our land.

Kindness and truth shall meet; justice and peace shall kiss.

Truth shall spring out of the earth, and justice shall look down from heaven.

The LORD himself will give his benefits; our land shall yield its increase.

Justice shall walk before him, and prepare the way of his steps.

-Psalm 85:9-14



Art to Contemplate

“Virgin of the Rocks”
by Leonardo da Vinci

This week, we’re spending time with “Virgin of the Rocks” (c. 1483). This intriguing painting by da Vinci depicts the three figures arranged in a triangle: Mary at the apex, the infant John the Baptist in the lower left corner, and an angel with the infant Jesus in the lower right corner. The setting is a rocky grotto with a background of water and mountains.

The two babies look identical, so how can we distinguish them? John is kneeling toward Jesus with his hands together in prayer and supplication; Jesus is raising his right hand in a sign of Benediction toward John. Monsignor Timothy Verden, a canon of the Florence Cathedral, interprets Mary’s gestures for us. Look at the right hand of Mary on John’s shoulder. It is tense; it looks almost like Mary is restraining John from moving forward. As the angel points toward John and Jesus blesses John, what is happening? Jesus is blessing John’s mission, which is to announce the coming of Christ. John is “the prophet of the cross,” and Mary, like any mother, wants to protect Jesus from this ending. So her hand is extended not in blessing, but to stop Jesus from moving forward. According to Monsignor Verden, Mary resists the prophecy, but she can’t stop it. Her natural maternal instinct must give way to the supernatural plan.

On the following page, you’ll find a full-page copy of “Virgin of the Rocks.” Allow your children to live with the painting before you identify the figures 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. Ponder the painting together. Who are the figures? Why are the figures in a dark rocky area but the background is lovely and lush?



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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 Cantic 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?



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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?

