



A Guide for Spiritual Formation

Theme for Advent:	The First Christmas
Text for the Week:	Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 1:39-45; 2:5
Message for the Week:	The First Christmas: The Couple
Theme for the Week:	The scandal of Christ and the Gospel

Week 3

Opening:

What is one low (a bad thing) and one high (a good thing) that happened to you this past week? Write them down and take turns sharing them with the others in your group.

Where have you seen the work of the Holy Spirit in your life this past week?

Share the story of how your parents met.

Preparation:

Spend 1-2 minutes in silence with God to center and prepare yourself for your time with God today.

Read:

Read / Have two people in your group read [Matthew 2:18-25; Luke 1:39-45; 2:5](#) out loud.

[Clicking this link will bring you to multiple translations.]

As you read and/or listen to the text being read, circle, take note of, highlight, or underline what words, phrases, or ideas grabbed your attention and heart in these verses?

Write them down below and/or share them with those who are with you.

Respond / Reflect:

Mary and Joseph's engagement/betrothal had variables that threatened to tear their relationship apart. What were some of those variables? Why did their engagement succeed?

What, if any, connections do you notice between Joseph and Mary's marriage arrangement, betrothal, and marriage and what Jesus came to do for us?

Wondering questions spark our desire to learn more. What do you wonder about regarding the story for this week? For example...I wonder, "How did Mary's family feel when she told them she was going to have a baby?"

Have you ever been involved in a scandal?

Jesus' life begins in a scandal ([Mark 6:3](#)). What is the scandal of the gospel? ([1 Corinthians 1:18](#))

"Try It!"

Read a different minor prophet (Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi) this week than you did last week and see what connections you can make to the Christmas story.

Prayer:

Spend time in prayer with/for the other people who are with you.

God, during this Advent-time we remember Mary and Joseph, giving thanks for their faithfulness, courage, and obedience, stepping out into the unknown in the strength of your Spirit, playing their part in the fulfilment of your plan to bring your prodigal people home again. We pray that their example might be the pattern of our lives, that when your gentle whisper breaks through the clamor of this world and into our small corner, we might be ready to listen, and having listened, to act. AMEN.

Missional/Spiritual Practice for the Month: Intentional Conversations

During the month of December, practice Intentional Conversations. [Intentional Conversations](#) challenge us to slow down and go much deeper than transactional conversations. This approach to conversation invites us to connect with others at a deeply personal and authentic level – to understand this practice as deeply spiritual where we begin to encounter the presence of Christ that dwells within the soul of each person we meet. As you engage in conversations throughout the day imagine you are greeting the risen Christ during each conversation. Listen deeply and seek to be fully awake to the presence of Christ that dwells deep with the soul of each person you meet. This way of living begins to profoundly impact the care and thoughtfulness with which we approach each conversation as though we were in conversation with God.

Matthew 1:18-25
New International Version

¹⁸ This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about^[a]: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. ¹⁹ Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet^[b] did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

²⁰ But after he had considered 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 home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus,^[c] because he will save his people from their sins."

²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³ "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"^[d] (which means "God with us").

²⁴ When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. ²⁵ But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

Luke 1:39-45
New International Version

³⁹ At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, ⁴⁰ where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. ⁴² In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! ⁴³ But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ⁴⁴ As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵ Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!"

Luke 2:5
New International Version

⁵ He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.

Matthew 1:18-25

The Message

¹⁸⁻¹⁹ The birth of Jesus took place like this. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. Before they enjoyed their wedding night, Joseph discovered she was pregnant. (It was by the Holy Spirit, but he didn't know that.) Joseph, chagrined but noble, determined to take care of things quietly so Mary would not be disgraced.

²⁰⁻²³ While he was trying to figure a way out, he had a dream. God's angel spoke in the dream: "Joseph, son of David, don't hesitate to get married. Mary's pregnancy is Spirit-conceived. God's Holy Spirit has made her pregnant. She will bring a son to birth, and when she does, you, Joseph, will name him Jesus—'God saves'—because he will save his people from their sins." This would bring the prophet's embryonic revelation to full term:

Watch for this—a virgin will get pregnant and bear a son;

They will name him Immanuel (Hebrew for "God is with us").

²⁴⁻²⁵ Then Joseph woke up. He did exactly what God's angel commanded in the dream: He married Mary. But he did not consummate the marriage until she had the baby. He named the baby Jesus.

Luke 1:39-45

The Message

³⁹⁻⁴⁵ Mary didn't waste a minute. She got up and traveled to a town in Judah in the hill country, straight to Zachariah's house, and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby in her womb leaped. She was filled with the Holy Spirit, and sang out exuberantly,

You're so blessed among women,

and the babe in your womb, also blessed!

And why am I so blessed that

the mother of my Lord visits me?

The moment the sound of your

greeting entered my ears,

The babe in my womb

skipped like a lamb for sheer joy.

Blessed woman, who believed what God said,

believed every word would come true!

Luke 2:5

The Message

¹⁻⁵ About that time Caesar Augustus ordered a census to be taken throughout the Empire. This was the first census when Quirinius was governor of Syria. Everyone had to travel to his own ancestral hometown to be accounted for. So Joseph went from the Galilean town of Nazareth up to Bethlehem in Judah, David's town, for the census. As a descendant of David, he had to go there. He went with Mary, his fiancée, who was pregnant.