



Advent

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Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture passages are from the New Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition translation of the Bible.

The Magnificat

Luke 1:46-55

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; My spirit rejoices in God my Savior.

For He has looked upon His handmaid's lowliness;
Behold, from now on will all ages call me blessed.

The Mighty One has done great things for me, And holy is His name.

His mercy is from age to age to those who fear Him.
He has shown might with His arm,
Dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart,
He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones but lifted up the lowly.

The hungry He has filled with good things; The rich He has sent away empty.

He has helped Israel His servant, remembering His mercy,

According to His promise to our fathers,
to Abraham and to His descendants forever.

Saying Yes with All My Heart

What was it that allowed Mary to respond to the Angel Gabriel instead of cowering in fear? What prepared her and sustained her on her daily journey? Were her priorities each day similar to our own?

These questions come to mind when I read the Scripture that we commonly refer to as *the Magnificat*. Upon walking into her cousin's home, Mary is immediately recognized by Elizabeth as the mother of the savior of the world. I imagine how this must have felt to be seen, known, and accepted without ever having to say a word. The Holy Spirit gave Elizabeth a deep spiritual insight into Mary's new reality and Gabriel's message to Mary was confirmed.

Mary's response to Gabriel and Elizabeth was unique and unlike one you would expect from young woman who just received a visit from an angel and the Holy Spirit. Mary speaks and the words that come from her heart are verses from Scripture that reveal not only her understanding of the character of God and but her relationship to Him as well. She quotes and interprets more than 20 passages from the Old Testament in her song of praise to God. How did she do this?

There are more days than not that I struggle to rejoice in my circumstances. Often, my soul does not want to rejoice because I am too distracted by the latest notification or text that has popped up on my phone. When my eyes are trained downward, my soul constricts to the size of my phone case.

I know that this is not the life that Jesus wants for me to live. He calls me to love my neighbor, but I have a hard enough time liking my neighbor because they don't bring their garbage cans inside after the garbage has been picked up. I know I need to take the plank out of my own eye before I start pointing out the speck in my neighbor's, but at times I feel like I am just unable to force myself close enough to the mirror for fear of what I will find.

Over the next four weeks, we are going to journey alongside Mary as she guides us to a deeper trust in God. We will pray and ponder the verses she quotes along with some of the verses she knew so well from the Psalms. Mary is a wonderful model of what it looks like when our faith and our day to day life are integrated into a seamless whole. Her words reveal the power of pondering the presence of God.

This Advent, set aside a few minutes each day to talk to God (Pray). Ponder what His Word means to you, now. Rest in the knowledge that He is a merciful God who loves you just as you are. He will reveal what it looks like when we love others in His power (Act).

If we want for our souls to rejoice in God our Savior, we need to discover what allowed Mary to sing. If we want to be able to proclaim the goodness of God and share this with others, our attention need to shift. Our eyes need to move upward, away from our phones and back to seeing the people and God's creation right in front of us which will allow us to discover all that God is trying to reveal to us each day. Let's apply Mary's formula to our own schedule and learn how to Pray, Ponder, Rest, and Act.

This Advent, allow your Spirit to Rejoice. Let's become women who begin to release our fear and say Yes to loving others in God's power.

Advent Week One

PRAY

In the hush of the night, or was it in the quiet of the mid afternoon, the Angel Gabriel visited a young girl. Living in obscurity, her *yes* changed the course of history. Mary's openness to conversation with God's messenger and her willingness to trust that God would reveal what she needed to know when she needed to know it are but two of the many dispositions that we need adopt as our own.

Daily, we too are called to enter into conversation with God and His messengers, yet we are often distracted and unable to differentiate God from the clamor of our every day lives.

We like action plans that are clearly laid out with a beginning, middle, and end. We like projects with deliverables, measurable progress, and achievable results. Efficiency and productivity are our battle cries. We will dedicate the time toward our goal once we value the outcome of our investment.

What is your ultimate goal? Does it have everlasting significance?

With all of this in mind, let's begin our Advent journey. This week, we are going to explore the concept of Prayer from Mary's point of view.

Sunday

Pray

and your righteousness, O God,
reach the high heavens.
You who have done great things,
O God, who is like you?

Psalm 71:19

Ponder: So often, I think that it all up to me. Today, let me rest in the knowledge that God has done and will continue to do great things. Who is like God?

Monday

Pray

He sent redemption to his people;
He has commanded His covenant forever.

Holy and awesome is His name.

Psalm 111:9

Ponder: God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit has always been, is now, and will always be.

Tuesday

Pray

Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
and our tongue with shouts of joy;
then it was said among the nations,
“The Lord has done great things for them.”

The Lord has done great things for us,
and we rejoiced.

Psalm 126:2-3

Ponder: Mary tells Elizabeth, the Lord has done great things for me and holy is His name. Sometimes, this is a disposition that I don't necessarily feel. Often, I don't recognize God's hand in my life. Even though I don't notice, God is at work in my life and in the world around me. What great things has God done for me?

Wednesday

Pray

I declare that Your steadfast love is established forever;

Your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens.

Psalm 89:2

Ponder: God stands by and is faithful to His promises because He is love. Do I believe these words of Scripture to be true? Do I want to talk to God throughout my day?

Thursday

Pray

As a father has compassion for his children,
so the Lord has compassion for those who fear him.

Psalm 103:13

Ponder: Fearing God means recognizing who we are in relation to God. Compassion combines two words: *com*, meaning together, and *passion*, meaning to suffer. Having compassion for someone means that you are willing to enter into their suffering and even go so far as to take that suffering on yourself.

God so loved me that He became a baby and then a man who gave all for me. God loves me. Spend time pondering the meaning of *compassion*.

Friday

Pray

He raises the poor from the dust,
and lifts the needy from the ash heap
Psalm 113:7

Ponder: I don't like to think of myself as needy. I am much more comfortable being in control of everything and everyone around me.

God lifts the needy. I want Him to lift me closer.

What are my needs? Can I allow God to touch those places in my soul that are most in need?

Saturday

Pray

You rule the raging sea;
you still its swelling waves.
Psalm 89:10 NAB

Ponder: There are more days than I care to admit that my mind feels like a raging sea filled with swelling waves. I have a hard time sitting still and prayer seems like a far away place instead of a close conversation with the One I love.

Do I believe that God can rule the raging sea and calm the swelling waves of my mind and my emotions?

Advent Week Two

PONDER

Oh, how my mind wanders just when I sit myself down to pray. It never ceases to amaze me that something as simple as raising my awareness to God in prayer can be made more complicated by the sound of the washing machine coming the next room. In the past, I would beat myself up for my inability to give God all of the attention that I know He deserves. Once I learned to bring Him in on the joke that is my limited attention span, prayer seemed to cause me less anxiety.

We run with a disadvantage toward the goal of unity with Christ. We are weighed down by a myriad of worries, concerns, health issues, and distractions. Where our mind travels once, it finds an easier path to travel again. Therefore, we must take the time to train our mind to start and remain on the track that leads us toward God.

Pondering helps.

Pondering is a deeper thinking that seeks to make connections between disparate concepts, ideas, events, and conversations. Mary not only pondered in her mind, but pondered in her interior, her heart.

This seat of the soul, our heart, is the place where God dwells. Knowing what is in our heart allows us to be reunited with God. Remembering all of the good that God has done instead of paying attention to what we think we lack is a good first step in reclaiming His peace in our heart.

This week we are going to discover what it means to ponder as Mary pondered.

Sunday

Pray

Happy indeed is the man who follows not the counsel of the wicked;
Nor lingers in the way of sinners Nor sits in the company of scorners,
But whose delight is the law of the Lord And who ponders His law day and night.

He is like a tree that is planted Beside the flowing waters,
That yields its fruit in due season And whose leaves shall never fade;
And all that He does shall prosper.

Psalm 1:1-3

Ponder: The image of a tree flourishing next to a stream of moving water helps me imagine what I would look like if I were to spend more time refreshing my soul with the living water of God's word. There are so many thoughts that pass through my mind in a day, many of them self-critical. This Psalm describes a person who spends time thinking deeply on the words of God. I want to spend more time thinking of God's mercy, generosity, and love rather than the ways that I fail to live up to my own expectations. What is my delight? What do I ponder?

Monday

Pray:

When the shepherds saw this [the baby lying in the manger], they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them.

But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.

Luke 2:17-19

Ponder: Mary is more than just amazed at the words of the shepherds from the field, she took these words and allowed them to penetrate her heart where she could reflect upon them as her child grew to be a man. What words do I treasure and ponder? Do I focus more on my inner self talk, both positive and negative? Or, do I also treasure and ponder the words of God?

Tuesday

Pray:

I remember the days of old;
I ponder all your deeds;
the works of your hands I recall.
Psalm 143:5

Ponder: Not only is Jesus the work of God's hands, I am too. How often I forget that I am a masterpiece created by God in order that I may love Him in return. Mary was confident in her knowledge of God's merciful love which came from hours praying with the Psalms.

How better to love God than to accept my strengths and my weaknesses?

Wednesday

Pray

We ponder your steadfast love, O God, in the midst of your temple.
Psalm 48:9

Ponder: There are times when I think that I can manage my faith on my own. Here, the psalmist reminds me that being with others in community and in the Church I am supported in my efforts to ponder the love of God. The Saints have gone before me and intercede for me. I am never alone in my faith journey.

Thursday

Pray

I remember the days of old; I ponder all your deeds; the works of your hands I recall.
Psalm 143:5

Ponder: How do we grow to trust someone? Do we need to see how they act? Is it based upon what we experience or merely what others tell us? How did Mary come to trust God so wholeheartedly?

Friday

Pray

For He satisfies the thirsty, and the hungry He fills with good things.
Psalm 107:9

Ponder: These words from the Psalms are an echo of Mary's words in the Magnificat. God has worked in the lives of real men and women to satisfy their thirst for meaning and their hunger for connection. Jesus in the Beatitudes tells us that those who hunger and thirst for holiness (righteousness) will be satisfied. (Matthew 5:6) Am I thirsty for a deeper relationship God?

Saturday

Pray

You rule the raging sea; you still its swelling waves.

Psalm 89:10 NAB

Ponder: As I get closer to Christmas, each day feels more and more like swirling water in a storm as I think about all that needs to be done before the big day. At times, I just want to crawl back in bed and ask someone to wake me when it is over.

This is why I ponder God's word. If God rules the water, I want to be where He is in control. I know that I need to move forward despite how I feel and pondering God's word strengthens me to face each day.

Are there expectations, worries, or fears that I can leave on the shore as I take my boat out onto the water trusting that God will still my swirling thoughts and emotions?

Advent Week Three

REST

How hard it is for our Spirit to rejoice when we are carrying heavy burdens. Although we know people who make having a hard day (or life) look easy, this is not the case for most of us. We look around and there are so many things that are going wrong that it is hard to remember that God's promises remain true and that we can trust that He is still in control of the universe.

Some of us struggle with being too critical of ourselves and this time of year brings up many unresolved emotions and fears. We worry about what others will think about our inability to lose the last 10 pounds of baby weight (even though our baby is now 21). We overspend on gifts for those we love hoping they will once and for all not have to mask their disappointment when they take the gift out of the bag. We overdecorate thinking we can make the time with our family so magical that they will never want to leave home.

This week, we approach the final days of Advent, let's take time each day to step away from the worries and fears. Rest in the knowledge that God loves you. He is merciful and His mercy is new every day. Whatever is not going to be done in the run up to Christmas, rest in the knowledge that God's story does not change.

This week, spend time pondering how God's faithful promises allow you to rest instead of striving to control all outcomes.

Sunday

Pray

For all the land that you see
I will give to you and to your offspring forever.
Get up and walk through the land, across its length and breadth, for I give it to you.
Genesis 13:15, 17

Ponder: Toward the end of Mary's song of praise, the Magnificat, she refers to the promises made by God to the fathers of our faith. Do I place limits on what God can do in my life by trying to control too many things? What worry am I gripping the hardest? Can I release it, just a little, in order to find rest in God?

Monday

Pray

I will establish my covenant
between me and you,
and your offspring after you throughout their generations,
for an everlasting covenant,
to be God to you and to your offspring after you.
Genesis 17:7

Ponder: God reaches out to each of us, individually, and promises to remain in relationship with all mankind. His promise to be our God is a covenant. Look at our verses from yesterday and today. Are His promises expansive or limited by time or geography?

Tuesday

Pray

Thus says the Lord: Stand by the earliest roads, Ask the pathways of old,
“Which is the way to good?”
And walk it; Thus you will find rest for yourselves.
Jeremiah 6:16 (NAB)

Ponder: I am always asking for advice, whether it is driving directions on my phone or restaurant recommendations from a friend. I look to people (or websites) I trust to figure out which direction to go. How often do I look to Scripture when I am trying to determine how to find rest and still my mind and soul? What do I know about Mary’s pathway that I could emulate to find rest this week?

Wednesday

Pray

You will show faithfulness to Jacob and unswerving loyalty to Abraham, as you have sworn to our ancestors from the days of old.
Micah 7:20

Ponder: When the Angel Gabriel comes to speak to Mary, she recognizes him as God’s messenger. Her childhood spent reading, praying, and reflecting on Scripture allowed her to trust that God would be faithful to His promise to send the Messiah to save His people. If God is faithful to His promise to love me, do I need to worry so much about what other people think of me?

Thursday

Pray

He is your praise; He is your God,
who has done for you these great and awesome things that your own eyes have seen.
Deuteronomy 10:21

Ponder: What awesome things have I seen God do in my life or in the life of someone else?

Friday

Pray

“Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened,
and I will give you rest.
Take my yoke upon you and learn from me,
for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves.
For my yoke is easy, and my burden light.” Jesus
Matthew 11:28-30

Ponder: So much of Mary's beautiful song of praise is about God reaching down to help those who are burdened and struggling. Jesus carries Mary's song forward and beckons me to come with whatever is weighing me down.

Do I believe that integrating a small spiritual practice into my day will move me closer to understanding Jesus's words and allow me to exchange burdens with Him?

Saturday

Pray

You rule the raging sea; you still its swelling waves.
Psalm 89:10 NAB

Ponder: God will calm the parts of my life which distract my focus from Him. Can I allow myself to rest knowing that God is in control of the outcomes.

Advent Week Four

ACT

This week, as we celebrate the birth of our Savior Jesus, we will ponder our need for taking action to help others. There are so many times that I think about reaching out and helping someone... and then I get distracted with the next thing on my to do list and forget all about my initial impulse. Other times, I act too quickly and end up doing the wrong thing and am embarrassed. There are so many needs in my family and community and sometimes I convince myself that I can't make a difference, so why bother at all.

When I think too much about myself and how doing something will affect me, I get in the way of what God is trying to show me. When I take time to pray and check on my motivations for acting, I find that I am more sensitive to God's promptings and find more strength to persevere when the obstacles arise.

Sunday

Pray

For the Lord saw that the distress of Israel
was very bitter;
there was no one left,
bond or free,
and no one to help Israel.
2 Kings 14:26

Ponder: At times it can feel as though God has forgotten me and that what I do does not matter. But, just as God heard the prayers of the Israelites and freed them from captivity in the most unlikely of ways, God came into the world so that I may intimately know Him and share His love with others.

Many people feel as though God has forgotten them, too. Do I know anyone who is bitter? Can I pray for them? What difference would a smile, some words of encouragement, or a hug make for someone else today?

Monday

Pray

But when the goodness and loving kindness of
God our Savior appeared,
He saved us,
not because of any works of righteousness that we had done,
but according to His mercy,
through the water of rebirth & renewal by the Holy Spirit.
This Spirit he poured out on us
richly through Jesus Christ our Savior,
so that, having been justified by His grace,
we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.
Titus 3:4-7

Ponder: While it is important for me to act and love other people, these words from Scripture remind me that my good works are not *the* ticket to heaven.

Jesus, the baby in the stable and the man on the cross, is the One who provides my redemption.

I am so thankful for His Holy Spirit who renews me and allows me to live as an adopted daughter of God. Remaining open to Him, I can love others in His power and follow His promptings to act each day.

This is where true peace is found.

Tuesday

Pray

To the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord,

be *glory, majesty, power, and authority,*

before all time and now and forever. Amen.

Jude 25

Ponder: How can it be that Jesus Christ, the personification of all glory, majesty, power, and authority came to rest in a stable with a young girl as a mother?

Wednesday

Pray

He sets on high those
who are lowly,
and those who mourn are lifted to safety.

Job 5:11

Ponder: It is hard to understand what it means for God to lift the lowly when there are few examples of God lifting the lowly today. God works in mystery behind the scenes. Would you consider Mary, Jesus, and Joseph lowly in the eyes of the community if they lived in modern times? Who do I see that is lowly, who around me is mourning? Can I comfort them?

Thursday

Pray

But he gives all the more grace;
therefore it says,
“God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”
James 4:6

Ponder: Giving grace is an action, how do I extend grace to others?

Friday

Pray

Jesus said, “For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven
is my brother and sister and mother.”
Matthew 12:50

Ponder: Pray the Magnificat. See what verses stand out. Does this help me know what action/s I can take today to do the will of God?

Saturday

Pray

He is your praise; He is your God,
who has done for you these
great & awesome things
that your own eyes have seen.
Deuteronomy 10:21

Ponder: What great things have I seen God do? Is God my praise?