# WALKING WITH MARY IN ADVENT

## an Advent study on bearing God

Greetings, favored one!

As we approach the season of Advent, a season when we are called to quiet our hearts, to look for light in the shadows, and to prepare room for the coming of Christ, we do so in the midst of the increasing noise of Christmas preparations and the chaos of the world. It can feel impossible to sit in anticipation while the demands of the world chant with increasing fervor, "Let me in!" In this time of anticipation, few figures embody waiting, hope, and courage more profoundly than Mary.

Chosen to bear the Son of God, Mary stands at the intersection of heaven's promise and earth's need. Her story is not only one of miraculous birth but of radical trust. Through her words, her silence, her courage, and her song, we see what it means to believe that God is doing something new, even when we cannot yet see it.

This three-week study offers the opportunity to pause and breathe; to walk with Mary as she prepares to bear God. With each step of her journey from angel's greeting to the stable's stillness, from wonder to worship, she reveals God's revolutionary love. We hope you will come and walk with Mary. And as we reflect on her response, may we find ourselves renewed in faith, ready to receive Christ who comes to us born in a manger, born to change the world.

Advent Blessings,

Jacob+, Teresa, & Charlette

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# PROGRAM STRUCTURE

## SESSION ONE

ANNUNCIATION: Luke 1:26-38

MAJOR THEMES: Fear & Hope

## SESSION TWO

VISITING ELIZABETH & THE MAGNIFICAT: Luke 1:39-56

MAJOR THEMES: Connection & Adoration

## SESSION THREE

THE NATIVITY: Luke 2:1-19

MAJOR THEMES: Love

# SESSION STRUCTURE

The resources on the following pages will follow the session structure below. They are designed to allow you to create the program appropriate for your context. Each week, read through the context and grounding, scripture exploration, and Hebrew scripture connections and use that information to build your program. You do not need to use everything under each heading, but you are welcome to!

If you use all the content in these pages, each session will last approximately 60 minutes. For a shorter session, select the parts of the curriculum best suited for your context.

Whatever components you focus on, we encourage you to begin and end each session with prayer. There is time in the middle both for learning and personal reflection. Below is an outline for your planning purposes.

**OPENING PRAYER**

**CONTEXT AND GROUNDING - What is Mary's world?**

**SCRIPTURE EXPLORATION**

**HEBREW SCRIPTURE CONNECTIONS**

**PERSONAL or COMMUNITY REFLECTION - Practices to go deeper. What does this mean for me? What does this mean for us? What does this mean for our Christian life?**

**CLOSING PRAYER**

# SUPPLEMENTAL ART & MUSIC

A great way to enhance the study is to incorporate art and music into each session. As you consider the use of art, we would like to encourage you to choose art that deepens your connection to God. How might you more closely walk with Mary if the people represented in the art reflect the people of the land where Mary lived? How might your understanding of Mary and of God be broadened by choosing art that represents the global majority? Below are a selection of artists and works, sorted by topic, that you could use to enrich your program. Please pay artists fairly for their work and apply your congregation's CCLI and OneLicense to any publication of music.

## SESSION ONE

**ANNUNCIATION:** Mary's Yes Lisle Gwynn Garrity  Favored One Lauren Wright Pittman A Visit John August Swanson  Annunciation John August Swanson Annunciation Ivanka Demchuk Annunciation II Ivanka Demchuk Annunciation III Ivanka Demchuk Annunciation Lyuba Yatskiv National Mosaics in the Basilica of Annunciation

## SESSION TWO

**VISIT TO ELIZABETH:** A Dream Confirmed Lisle Gwynn Garrity  Mary & Elizabeth Lauren Wright Pittman

**MARY'S MAGNIFICAT:** Mary's Song Lauren Wright Pittman  Can't Keep Silent Lisle Gwynn Garrity  A Dance Print Hannah Garrity

## SESSION THREE

**THE NATIVITY:** Ordinary Glory Lauren Wright Pittman  Nativity 2022 John August Swanson She Pondered Lisle Gwynn Garrity  The Shepherds John August Swanson Nativity Ivanka Demchuk Christmas Ivanka Demchuk Mother of Mercy Ivanka Demchuk Nativity Lyuba Yatskiv

# WALKING WITH MARY PLAYLIST




There is a playlist on Spotify that you can use with your small group. It includes the three songs that are used in opening and closing worship each week. It also includes additional music that will enliven your program. The spotify playlist is a way for participants to continue their walk with Mary during the time between sessions.

Walking with Mary Playlist on Spotify

# *Walking with Mary*

An Advent Study on Bearing God

## Session 1: THE ANNUNCIATION

**Designing Your Session:** *The resources on the following pages are designed to allow you to create the program appropriate for your context. Each week facilitators are invited to read through the context and grounding, scripture exploration, and Hebrew scripture connections and use that information to build a program that supports your participants. Each session begins and ends with prayer. The middle includes time for learning and personal reflection. The times listed next to each section reflect a 60-minute session. If you have more time, or a group that longs to go deeper, there is enough material here to support you. Below is an outline for your planning purposes.*

**Part 1: Opening prayer**

**Part 2: Context and grounding**

- **Background**
- **Mary's World**

**Part 3: Scripture exploration: Luke 1:26-38**

- **Divine Interruption**
- **Fear & Uncertainty**
- **The Annunciation**
- **Holding Onto Hope**
- **Active Humility**
- **(Discussion)**

**Part 4: Hebrew scripture connections**

- **Biblical Annunciations**

**Part 5: Personal reflection // OR: Community reflection**

- **(Discussion)**

**Part 6: Closing prayer**

## Part 1: OPENING PRAYER [5 minutes]

*The room begins in full or partial darkness. A single candle is lit.*

Leader Light and peace, in Jesus Christ our Lord.

People **Thanks be to God.**

Reader A reading from the gospel according to Luke (Luke 1:26-38)

> In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "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 holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

Leader The word of the Lord.

People **Thanks be to God.**

Leader Let us pray.

> Pour your grace into our hearts, O Lord, that we who have known the incarnation of your Son Jesus Christ, announced by an angel to the Virgin Mary, may by his cross and passion be brought to the glory of his resurrection; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

*Candles at each table are now lit as Don't Be Afraid by John Bell is sung.*

All **The Lord's Prayer.**

*A blessing is then given (by a priest, if present, otherwise a prayer for blessing is said by the leader)*

# Part 2: CONTEXT AND GROUNDING - What is Mary's world? [10 minutes]

*The content below is intended as preparation for the facilitator. You may use it to shape your session, or you may choose to read it aloud.*

## Background

Imagine you are in Galilee at the beginning of the first century. By this time, your people have gone through a lot. Long gone are the days of the Davidic kingdom. For the Kingdom of Israel has been through exile and the complete destruction of their homeland. And your land has been tossed around like a football at the hands of the powerful nations around you.

The most recent conqueror has been Rome. Rome has treated the region somewhat differently than other empires; there is no expectation that the Jewish people would give up worship to their God—in fact, Rome even made an exception to their general desire that their conquered peoples would worship Roman gods; instead, they are only expected to pray for the emperor during their Temple worship.

Yet, as with any foreign occupation, Rome's control of the region is brutal. This is made worse by a series of revolts by would-be messiahs, which leads Rome to keep a lot of soldiers stationed in Jerusalem.

The class in charge (King Herod, the "client king" appointed by Rome and the leadership of his government, as well as the group known as the Sadducees) are seen as compromisers with Rome, choosing to oppress their own people in exchange for Roman favor.

All of this resulted in communities throughout the region of Galilee experiencing economic hardship, poverty, and social injustice, as both the empire and the upper classes exploited the lower classes, especially through taxation of an already poor populace. Most of the population lived at or below subsistence level (the required amount of food that is considered the bare necessity).

For centuries, your people have been waiting for the promised Messiah—this Messiah will come to deliver the people from their oppressors and to bring God's Kingdom. Because of this, there is a distinct "messianic fervor" in the air.

## MARY'S WORLD

> **Mary lived in the most of all that context**
>
> **She also lived, specifically, in Nazareth—something of a rural backwater (cf. John 1:46, "can anything good come from Nazareth?")**
>
> **It is safe to assume that Mary and Joseph, like most people from Galilee, are likely fairly poor**

**This is the context into which Jesus is born. Imagine the surprise: There is no reason to think that the Messiah would have come from the middle of nowhere, born to poor parents!**

**Mary also lived in a patriarchal society. Women were expected to act with the permission of their fathers or husbands—not of their own accord.**

**Infidelity of women was taken extremely seriously in Israel. Recall, for example, how the woman caught in adultery in John 8:1-11 is set to be stoned to death before Jesus intervenes, even while the male party is seemingly not punished.**

**Mary's conception of Jesus, though it is not from adultery, would naturally be interpreted this way.**

## Part 3: SCRIPTURE EXPLORATION - LUKE 1:26-38 [up to 30 minutes]

*The content below is intended as preparation for the facilitator, to delve into all this passage holds. Highlight the sections that work best to share in your context. Before you begin your close study, ask a participant to read the scripture aloud to reground the conversation in the text.*

> In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "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 holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

### Luke 1:28 – The Divine Interruption

*"Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you."*

In the Bible, when God speaks to or interacts with humanity in a direct way, it is considered something out of the ordinary.

Ordinarily, one might expect life to be something like the book of Ruth—a book where God seems conspicuously "absent" as a character. God's ordinary interaction with humanity is by means of the created world and the love, courage, and kindness of the people of God.

Every once and a while, however, there is what might be referred to as a "divine interruption." All of a sudden, God bursts onto the scene.

Recall, for example, Moses and the burning bush (Exodus 3:1-14). Moses is out in the desert, when all of a sudden, he has a visceral experience of God speaking to him.

## Luke 1:30 – Fear & Uncertainty

*"Do not be afraid, Mary…"*

We might initially expect an experience of "divine interruption" to be a wonderful experience; that it might come while in a heightened state of prayer. But, in Scripture, these experiences are consistently disconcerting, even terrifying! Over and over again, the person experiencing it must be instructed "do not be afraid!"

> **One reason may be that angels and other supernatural agents are often described as being strange and overwhelming in their appearance:**
>
> **Consider, this description of the experience of the angel Gabriel from the prophet David: "I looked up and saw a man clothed in linen, with a belt of gold from Uphaz around his waist. His body was like beryl, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like the roar of a multitude. I, Daniel, alone saw the vision; the people who were with me did not see the vision, though a great trembling fell upon them, and they fled and hid themselves. So I was left alone to see this great vision. My strength left me, and my complexion grew deathly pale, and I retained no strength. Then I heard the sound of his words; and when I heard the sound of his words, I fell into a trance, face to the ground."**
>
> **(Daniel 10:5-9 NRSV)**

A divine interruption is also terrifying, however, because it means something incomprehensibly big is happening! Everything (including our own lives) is about to change.

In our passage, we see that Mary is initially disturbed; "But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be."

In the midst of this overwhelming experience, Gabriel's greeting to Mary strikes her as strange.

Why might a poor girl from a small town like Nazareth be called "favored one"? What could it mean that the Angel said "the Lord is with you"?

Indeed, Gabriel tells Mary to "rejoice" (The word that is translated as "greetings" in the NRSV is the word chairo in Greek, which means "rejoice."). What might it mean that the announcement begins with a command to rejoice?

**Discussion Questions**

Ponder Mary's fear and uncertainty for a moment.

What do you imagine it would it be like to be Mary as she experiences this appearance of an angel?

## Luke 1:31 – The Annunciation

*"And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son…"*

Mary's perplexed feelings could only increase as Gabriel tells her what is to come. The angel said to her, "And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

Note a few things about this announcement:

> **First, of course, the angel tells her she will conceive. As we will explore later, this is perplexing, as she is a virgin. What could the angel mean by this?**
>
> **Second, note the dual focus on Jesus as the Son of God and bearing the "throne of his ancestor David." Here, we have a clear messianic understanding of Jesus, but there is something more. He is the promised messiah, the coming King who will reign over Israel, but he will also be the "Son of the Most High."**
>
> **Some scholars draw a parallel between this announcement and Romans 1:3-4: "the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord."**
>
> **Note the similarities between the two; how Jesus is of the line of David, but is something more—the Son of God.**

Right at the beginning of Luke's Gospel is a clear statement of Jesus' identity and vocation. He is the coming King, not only of Israel, but of all creation, the Son of the Most High, coming to save not only the people of Israel but all people.

## Luke 1:35 – Holding on to Hope

*The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you…"*

In response to the Angel's annunciation of Jesus' birth, Mary asks; "How can this be, since I am a virgin?"

There is much debate in historical and especially modern interpretation of this passage. More than one explanation may be provided as to why Luke and Matthew note Mary's virginity in their birth narratives.

Sometimes, the reasons given from some Christian interpreters—about the need for a virgin birth—focus upon a very negative view of sexuality, and have a problematic emphasis on Mary's "purity" as a virgin.

In contrast to these interpretations, we might look to the Catechism in the 1979 Book of Common Prayer:

> **"Q. What do we mean when we say that Jesus was conceived of the Holy Spirit and became incarnate from the Virgin Mary?**
>
> **A. We mean that by God's own act, his divine Son received our human nature from the Virgin Mary, his mother." (BCP, p. 849)**

> **"Q. Why did he take our human nature?**
>
> **A. The divine Son became human, so that in him human beings might be adopted as children of God, and be made heirs of God's kingdom." (BCP, p. 850)**

As Episcopalians, we affirm our belief in the virgin birth every time we recite the Apostles' Creed, including in our Baptismal Covenant ("he was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, and born of the Virgin Mary").

Our affirmation, however, is expressly not based on a narrow biblical literalism—on a belief that sexuality is bad or evil, or in a belief that Mary would be more "pure" as a virgin. Instead, our affirmation is due to a full-throated affirmation of God's decisive act of creation in the conception and birth of the Son of God.

In the scene of the angel's annunciation of Jesus to Mary, Mary objects because of the impossibility of Jesus' conception (as she is a virgin). This allows the angel to make a much bolder assertion about what is happening: In the conception and birth of Jesus, God is beginning a new creation.

Just as the Spirit hovered over the waters of creation in Genesis, so now Mary will be "overshadowed" by the Holy Spirit as God works an act of new creation in Jesus.

As the New Testament scholar Raymond Brown points out about the overshadowing, "the begetting is not quasi-sexual as if God takes the place of a male principle mating with Mary. There is more of a connotation of creativity. Mary is not barren, and in her case the child does not come into existence because God cooperates with the husband's generative action and removes the sterility. Rather, Mary is a virgin who has not known man, and therefore the child is totally God's work—a new creation." (The Birth of the Messiah, pg. 314)

Jesus' conception marks the beginning of God's decisive act of new creation; all is being made new, everything is about to change. All the waiting which Israel had done is now over—new creation is breaking into the world. Thus, in the midst of Mary's fear and objections, the spark of hope has been lit, and Mary holds on to it.

**Discussion questions:**

What is the hope that Gabriel's announcement offers?

Why is this annunciation such "good news"?

What does it mean that God begins a new creation in the conception and birth of Jesus?

## Luke 1:38 – Mary's response

*"Here am I, the servant of the Lord…"*

As can be seen below in "Hebrew Scripture Connections," one theme in Annunciation stories is that there is an objection. As we explored above, Mary is no exception—her initial response is "how can this be, since I am a virgin?" Mary is not afraid to bring her (very legitimate) question to God, and her objection is accepted–yet this is not always the case in annunciation stories.

> **Just a few verses earlier, in the announcement of John the Baptist to Zechariah, Zechariah also has doubts, but Gabriel's response is different:**
>
> **"Zechariah said to the angel, "How will I know that this is so? For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years." The angel replied, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur." (Luke 1:18-20 NRSV)**
>
> **What do you think sets Mary and Zechariah apart? Why would Gabriel's response be different to what seems like almost identical questions from Zechariah and Mary?**

Mary's question gives us permission to bring our own questions to God. What matters is the spirit with which we do it.

## Active Humility

"Then Mary said, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.'" Mary's final response to Gabriel is illustrative of her attitude—one which we might call active humility.

Often, Mary is held up as the perfect example of humility—too often only thought of in terms of submission. This has regrettably been used to bolster problematic understandings of femininity, reducing it to submissiveness or meekness.

But this is not how Luke portrays Mary.

> **What is missing with Zechariah is exactly this response of humility from Mary; in spite of her questions, she is ready to serve God as God asks her.**
>
> **Pope Francis observes of Mary's humility in this passage, "Mary is receptive, but not passive" (in a Homily delivered on 12.08.14).**
>
> **God does not act without Mary's consent—she will not conceive until God has received her "yes." Mary offers her consent; but more than this, she indicates that she is at God's service.**
>
> **Mary is much more than a vessel! She is not just committing to give birth; will carry, protect, and raise the Son of God. She is the "God-Bearer," God's chosen instrument to (literally) bear God to the world.**
>
> **As noted above, in Mary's society, she would not have been expected to act without the permission of her husband or father. Yet, in this story, she says "yes" without the need to consult a male authority—a bold act of trust and obedience.**

As Jesus himself says in Luke's Gospel, 'My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it'" In the Annunciation, Mary hears the word of God and does it.

Mary is indeed humble; but her humility is active. She is ready to work as God's servant.

> **This is why she is the "favored one" according to Gabriel.**
>
> **As St. John Chrysostom says, "but the one who earns favor in the sight of God has nothing to fear. Hence it follows, 'for you have found favor before God.' But how shall any one find it, except through means of their humility? For God gives grace to the humble."**

Mary's humility is receptive to God's grace and working; it is an active cooperation with the creative act of the Spirit of God.

**Discussion Questions:**

How do you imagine Mary feels as she makes her commitment to God?

How is Mary's "active humility" an example to all Christians?

## Part 4: HEBREW SCRIPTURE CONNECTIONS [Optional: 5 minutes]

*The content below is listed as optional in order to fall within the time parameters of a 60-minute session. If you do not have time to explore the Hebrew scripture connections in your session, you may provide them to participants as a way to continue their study during the week*

**Biblical Annunciations** - One of the parallels between Luke 1:26-38 and the Hebrew Bible is the Annunciation motif itself. In the Bible, there are several annunciation narratives that share five common characteristics:

> **The appearance of an angel of the Lord (or appearance of the Lord)**
>
> **Fear or prostration of the visionary confronted by this supernatural presence**
>
> **The divine message [which has most or all of the following characteristics]:**
> **The visionary is addressed by name**
> **A qualifying phrase describing the visionary**
> **The visionary is urged not to be afraid**
> **A woman is with child or about to be with child**
> **She will give birth to the (male) child**
> **The name by which the child is to be called**
> **An etymology interpreting the name**
> **The future accomplishments of the child**
>
> **An objection by the visionary as to how this can be or a request for a sign**
>
> **The giving of a sign to reassure the visionary**
>
> **– (from *The Birth of the Messiah* by Raymond Brown, pg. 156)**

## Biblical Annunciations

| | **Ishmael** | **Isaac** | **Samson** | **John the Baptist** | **Jesus (Luke)** | **Jesus (Matthew)** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Gen 16:7 | Gen 17:1, 18:1 | Judg 13:3 | Luke 1:11 | Luke 1:26 | Matt 1:20 |
| 2 | Gen 16:13 | Gen 17:3, 18:2 | Judg 13:22 | Luke 1:12 | Luke 1:29 | Matt 1:20 |
| 3a<br>3b<br>3c | Gen 16:8<br>Gen 16:8 | (Gen 17:15)<br>(Gen 17:15) | <br><br>(Judg 13:23) | Luke 1:13<br><br>Luke 1:13 | Luke 1:30<br>Luke 1:28<br>Luke 1:30 | Matt 1:20<br>Matt 1:20<br>Matt 1:20 |
| 3d<br>3e<br>3f | Gen 16:11<br>Gen 16:11<br>Gen 16:11 | <br>Gen 17:19, 18:10<br>Gen 17:19 | Judg 13:3<br>Judg 13:4 | <br>Luke 1:13<br>Luke 1:13 | Luke 1:31<br>Luke 1:31<br>Luke 1:31 | (Matt 1:20)<br>Matt 1:21<br>Matt 1:21 |
| 3g<br>3h | Gen 16:11<br>Gen 16:12 | Gen 17:17, 18:13-15<br>Gen 17:16,19 | <br>Judg 13:5 | <br>Luke 1:15-17 | <br>Luke 1:32,33,35 | Matt 1:21<br>Matt 1:21 |
| 4 | | Gen 17:17, 18:12 | Judg 13:8,17 | Luke 1:18 | Luke 1:34 | |
| 5 | | (Gen 17:20-21) | Judg 13:9,18-21 | Luke 1:20 | Luke 1:36-37 | |

# Part 5: PERSONAL or COMMUNITY REFLECTION [<20 minutes]

*The opportunity to move from cerebral exploration to personal connection is important: What does this mean for me? What does this mean for us? What does this mean for our Christian life?*

**Practices to Go Deeper**

**For a group:** Explore the Practices to Go Deeper section as you prepare and choose one or two activities for the group to explore in addition to the group conversation guide below.

**At home:** Choose one or more practices from those listed with which to embody your prayer, along with the reflections below.

## Personal or Community Reflection:

> "Let us say it three times: "Full of grace!" Everyone: Full of grace! Full of grace! Full of grace! This is how God saw her from the first moment of his loving design. He saw her as beautiful, full of grace. Our Mother is beautiful!
>
> Mary sustains our journey toward Christmas, for she teaches us how to live this Advent Season in expectation of the Lord. For this time of Advent is a time of waiting for the Lord, who will visit us all on the feast, but also, each one, in our own hearts. The Lord is coming! Let us wait for him!" (Pope Francis in a homily, 8.12.13 *Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary*)

## Keeping an eye out for Divine Interruptions

> **God appeared in a special way to Mary; but, in a different way, God appears to us too!**
>
> **Where are some places where God appears to us? What are the moments in our lives that might be considered "divine interruptions"?**
>
> **How can we be attentive to these divine interruptions, and listen to them?**

## "Active" Humility

> **What does it mean to say "yes" to God in our lives?**
>
> **What does "yes" disrupt in our lives? Where might it lead us?**
>
> **How can we emulate Mary in being "receptive, but not passive"?**

## Honesty with God

> **Mary, as we saw, is honest with God about her question, "how can this be?"**
>
> **What are our questions for God? Where do we need to say "how can this be?"**
>
> **How can we trust God with our questions while still maintaining an "active humility"?**

## Holding on to Hope & Joy

> **In the Annunciation, Mary's "yes" can be seen as holding on to the hope and joy which the angel announces.**
>
> **In our own lives, in the midst of troubled times, what is the hope and joy that we might hold on to? How does the Annunciation provide us with these things?**
>
> **Consider this quote from the theologian Alexander Schmemann:**
> **"The world is filled with countless books on struggle and competition, each attempting to show that the road to happiness is hatred, and in none of them will you find the word "joy." People don't even know what the word means. But the very same joy announced by the angel remains a pulsating force, that still has power to startle and shake human hearts." (The Virgin Mary, pg. 30)**

# Part 6: CLOSING PRAYER [5 minutes]

*A time of silent prayer may be observed*

*Don't Be Afraid by John Bell is sung.*

Leader Almighty God, of your saving grace you called Mary of Nazareth to be the mother of your only begotten Son: Inspire us by the same grace to follow her example of bearing God to the world. We pray through Jesus Christ her son our Savior. Amen.

*The light is changed.*

Leader Go in peace.