



## *Journey to the Manger*

### **Christmas Eve, Cross Lanes United Methodist Church**

Journey to the Manger is a six-station guided prayer practice in which we walk the scriptures that led to the birth of Jesus. The art at each station has been made to bring depth, color, and light to your meditation. While there is no wrong way to visit the stations, we hope you will stop, read the scriptures, pray, and reflect. Take your time to allow the excitement of Christmas to fill you today, so that you might share the story with Christmas excitement all year long.

#### **1. The Annunciation, Mary is visited by an angel: *Luke 1: 26-38***

*26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, 27 to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. 28 And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.' 29 But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. 30 The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. 31 And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. 32 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. 33 He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.' 34 Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?' 35 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. 36 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. 37 For nothing will be impossible with God.' 38 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.*

**Reflect:** Mary is visited by an angel that says she will bear a very special child who will be a light to the people. She says “may it be so.” Are there things in your life that are waiting to be born and all you need to do is say, “Yes?”

**Pray:** Daring God, help us take risks so that holy things can be born into our life together. Make us bold and give us strength to reveal your kingdom everywhere we go. Amen.

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## 2. The Visitation, Mary visit Elizabeth: *Luke 1:39-56*

*In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leapt for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.'*  
*And Mary said,*

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.  
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;  
for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.  
His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.  
He has shown strength with his arm;  
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.  
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly;  
he has filled the hungry with good things,  
and sent the rich away empty.  
He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy,  
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,  
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.'

*And Mary remained with her for about three months and then returned to her home.*

**Reflect:** Mary visits her cousin, Elizabeth, while she is pregnant. It is there that she makes a bold statement that this child she is carrying will stand up for the outcasts and bring down the unjust mighty from their lofty positions. Who needs you to advocate bravely for them?

**Pray:** God of justice, open our hearts to outcasts. Make us as those who are hungry; humble us so that we may not count on those with a throne, but on your mercy. Give us eyes to see those in need of an advocate and give us wisdom to move out of the way when others are called to blessed work. Amen.

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## 3. Joseph Dreams: *Matthew 1: 18-25*

*Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do 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 as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and*

*you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.’ All this took place to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:*

‘Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,  
and they shall name him Emmanuel’,

*which means, ‘God is with us.’ When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus.*

**Reflect:** Joseph is worried about being a father to an illegitimate child. But an angel assures him that this will be the role of his lifetime. Where are you willing to go out of your comfort zone to do an extraordinary thing?

**Pray:** Loving God, we do not always see the path you have laid out for us. We worry when it looks different than we expected, and we waste time with concern about how we will be perceived. Open our ears to hear your unexpected call and the gives us the wisdom to follow you into extraordinary places. Amen.

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#### 4. Journey to Bethlehem: *Luke 2:1-5*

*In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3All went to their own towns to be registered. 4Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. 5He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child.*

**Reflect:** Mary and Joseph make a journey to Bethlehem to be counted in a census. A very pregnant Mary rides on a donkey, and when they arrive, there is no place for them to stay. Have you ever felt panicked about your situation? God is with you.

**Prayer:** God of mercy, still our hearts. We sometimes feel trapped by our own brokenness, and the brokenness we carry for others. Yoke up with the faithful today, so that we feel peace and not panic whatever situation arises. Amen.

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#### 5. Jesus is born in a stable: *Luke 2:6-7*

*6While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. 7And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.*

**Reflect:** The child is born in a stable certainly not usually meant for human births. At a time of year when what we “want” seems to get all the attention, what simple things and people do you already have that you are grateful for?

**Pray:** Holy God, instill in us an appreciation for the simple. Increase our gratitude. Raise up in us a thanksgiving, and help us always to know the difference between what we want and what we need. Amen.

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#### 6. The Shepherds visit the swaddled Jesus: *Luke 2: 8-20*

*8 In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10But the angel*

*said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: <sup>11</sup>to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. <sup>12</sup>This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.' <sup>13</sup>And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,  
<sup>14</sup> 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!'*

**Reflect:** Jesus was “swaddled”—wrapped tightly—and laid in a manger on a bed of straw. Know that God wraps you tightly in love and peace. What can you offer as a way of “wrapping others with love and peace” in the coming year? Like the simple straw that lined the manger, what simple way can you prepare a place for Christ to be more present in your heart this year?

**Pray:** God of peace, wrap us tightly in your grace. Be close to us in this season and help us prepare a place for Christ as you have prepared a place for us. Amen