

## Imaginative Contemplation – Glory to God in the Highest



### Introduction

The most frequent way of praying that Saint Ignatius uses is that of imagining ourselves in a Gospel scene. We imagine ourselves as a character in the story. We take part in the story, seeing Jesus and all the other people, being aware of what's going on and how we are feeling. The purpose of praying with the imagination is to allow Christ in the Scripture to speak to us. To bring the Gospel stories to life for us. We are not trying to recreate history. It doesn't matter if your imagination takes the story off in a different direction to the Scripture. It doesn't matter if the story takes place in 1st century Palestine or where we live now in the 21st century. What is important is what God wants to say to us through this passage.

Let us sit and relax so that together we can contemplate the Gospel using our imagination.

## **Prayer**

We acknowledge we are in the presence of God so let us say together:

Direct O Lord and guide and influence all that is happening in my mind and heart during this time of prayer: all my moods and feelings, my memories and imaginings; my hopes and desires; may all be directed and influenced to your greater glory, praise and service and to my growth in your Spirit.

Amen

Let the Spirit enter our hearts and enlighten our minds to the peace of which the angels sing.

## **Reading      Luke 2:1-14**

Now at this time Caesar Augustus issued a decree for a census of the whole world to be taken. This census - the first - took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria, and everyone went to his own town to be registered. So Joseph set out from the town of Nazareth in Galilee and travelled up to Judaea, to the town of David called Bethlehem, since he was of David's House and line, in order to be registered together with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.

While they were there the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to a son, her first born. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger because there was no room for them at the inn.

In the countryside close by there were shepherds who lived in the fields and took it in turns to watch their flocks during the night. The angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone round them. They were terrified, but the angel said, 'Do not be afraid. Listen, I bring you news of great joy, a joy to be shared by the whole people. Today in the town of David a saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. And here is a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.'

And suddenly with the angel there was a great throng of the heavenly host, praising God and singing:

'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace to men who enjoy his favour'

## **Contemplation**

Our waiting is over. Here at Midnight Mass we hear about the birth of Jesus according to the Gospel of St Luke. In Luke's narrative, we hear about the census that brings Mary and Joseph from Nazareth to

Bethlehem where Jesus is born. Place yourself in the scene. Imagine you are Mary, heavily pregnant, or Joseph caring for his pregnant wife, making this long arduous journey to Bethlehem in order to be registered.

- Who are you in the scene? How do you feel about taking this long journey to be registered? How do you travel to Bethlehem?
- How was the journey? How long did it take? Were you worried in case your baby would be borne along the way? Would you rather have stayed at home until the baby was born where you would have been surrounded by friends and family? Do you wonder what God is up to? Or do you feel you are part of God's plan and trust in his ways?
- Are you worried and afraid because when you reach Bethlehem it is time for the birth of your baby. Are you anxious because you cannot find anywhere to give birth? How do you feel about being offered a place in the stable of the inn? Who helps you prepare for the birth of your baby? Perhaps the inn keeper's wife or a servant girl?
- Do you feel sad and anxious that your baby is born in such poor conditions; being wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger where the animals feed? Do you feel powerless as parents that you could not have provided better conditions for your baby to be born? Do you feel lonely because you are far away from family and friends? Are you exhausted because you have a new born baby to feed and comfort? Or do you just feel joy and gratitude that your baby has been brought into the world safely? Happy that the innkeeper has welcomed you and made room for you to have your baby despite the poor conditions?
- Does it sink in that your baby is the Son of God, Saviour of the world? Or do you just marvel at this new life that has been brought forth into the world? Are you surprised that your son, the Son of God has been born into the world through such obscure and surprising circumstances?

Now imagine you are a shepherd out in the field watching your sheep?

- What is the evening like? Is it just the same as any other? Are you cold? Are you warming yourself around a fire? Is it a warm night?
- How many of you are there? Are you chatting as you are watching your sheep? What are you talking about?
- When the angel appears, how do you feel? Are you afraid? Do you wonder what is going on? Or are you in awe of the brightness that filled the night?

- What do you think when the angel tells you of good news that the Messiah is born? Are you happy because this is what you have been hoping and praying for? Do you wonder if it is true because he is born in a stable in Bethlehem? Are you convinced it is when you hear the choirs of angels praising God and giving glory to him? Do you wonder why you, humble shepherds, have been chosen to be the first to hear the good news?
- Do you wonder about this peace the Saviour will bring? Is there any evidence of peace in the world you are living in? Or do you think that the angels are talking about peace in your heart regarding the news that the Messiah you have been waiting for has been born?

Speak to God our Father about the surprising way in which he chose for his Son to be born; about the simple ordinary people he chose to proclaim the Good News to and ask him to help you understand the mystery that is the Incarnation.

Let us now spend ten minutes in quiet contemplation

### **Sharing**

Let us now share what we thought, felt etc. only if you are comfortable to do so.

### **End Prayer    Suscipe of St. Ignatius of Loyola**

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty,  
 my memory, my understanding,  
 and my entire will,  
 All I have and call my own.  
 You have given all to me.  
 To you, Lord, I return it.  
 Everything is yours; do with it what you will.  
 Give me only your love and your grace,  
 that is enough for me..

Scripture texts: from the Jerusalem Bible 1966 by Dartington Longman & Todd Ltd and Doubleday and Company Ltd