

## Imaginative Contemplation – God is with us



Annunciation to Joseph – Sieger Koder

### 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 be open to the different ways we encounter the will of God.

## **Reading      Matthew 1: 18-25**

Jesus is born of Mary who was betrothed to Joseph, son of David. This is how Jesus Christ came to be born. His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph; but before they came to live together she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a man of honour and wanting to spare her publicity, decided to divorce her informally. He had made up his mind to do this when the 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 she has conceived what is in her by the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son and you must name him Jesus, because he is the one who is to save his people from their sins." Now all this took place to fulfill the words spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and they will call him Emmanuel, a name which means "God-is-with-us". When Joseph woke up he did what the angel of the Lord had told him to do: he took his wife to his home.'

## **Contemplation**

Today is the fourth Sunday of Advent and St Matthew tells the story of the birth of Jesus from Joseph's perspective. He, like Mary is an essential part in the Incarnation. He, like Mary received the message of the Angel and he like Mary had to say yes to God's invitation for Jesus to be born. Let us enter the scene and see how he handles the dilemma of Mary's pregnancy which happened before they were to live together.

- Who are you in the scene? Are you Joseph? Perhaps you are a friend of Joseph to whom he is recounting the story?
- As Joseph goes off to sleep, what do you think is uppermost in his mind? How do you think he feels when he discovers that Mary, the woman he loves, the one he is betrothed to, is

pregnant. Confused? Betrayed? Angry? Wondering how she could be unfaithful? Wondering who the father could be? Do you think he feels his plans for a future with Mary have been thrown into disarray?

- Why do you think that he decides to divorce Mary informally and to spare her publicity? Because he loves her and knows that she could be sentenced to death if her pregnancy was made public? Because he is a good, kind and sensitive man who wants to do what he thinks is best for everyone? Because he wants to fit in with God's will? Because he wants to protect her? What would you do if you were faced with such a decision?
- When Joseph finally falls asleep, do you think it is a peaceful sleep or a restless one? Do you think as he is going to sleep he is praying for God's guidance? What do you think is going through his mind when he encounters the Angel of the Lord who tells him about the child Mary has conceived and about his and the child's role in God's plan? That the child was conceived by the Holy Spirit? That the child would fulfill Isaiah's prophesy: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and they will call him Emmanuel, a name which means "God-is-with-us"? How would your logical, practical mind explain such a dream?
- We read that when 'Joseph woke up he did what the angel of the Lord had told him to do: he took his wife to his home.' What do you think was going through his mind knowing that he was not the father of the child he was going to look after and nurture? Do you think that his trust in God made him more open to God's plans? Do you think that his trust in God helped him believe the message of the Angel? To be reassured that he was making the right decision? To rejoice in the news that the child Mary would bear "is the one who is to save his people from their sins"?
- Have you ever had a dream that upset your original decision? Can you think of a situation when you were called to look beyond your own understanding and knowledge? Who did you put your trust in? God or your own self knowledge? Can you think of the angels in your own life who have guided you through a difficult situation?

Speak to Jesus about how you can invite the Spirit to prompt you. Talk to him about how ready you are to hear what the Spirit might be suggesting.

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  
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