

MEDITATING WITH MARY
IN THE MONTH OF MAY

LEADER'S GUIDE



Introduction

Meditating with Mary has been developed to be delivered over three sessions; delivered over three weeks or as a 3-day triduum of prayer.

It centres on the Annunciation, Visitation and the Magnificat. As we continue to provide opportunities for people to gather together, it is our hope Meditating with Mary will encourage parishioners to pray, share and reflect together on the events of Mary's life.

Each session includes a work of art. An image connected to the gospel passage is a great aid for stimulating discussion and can provide a way for people to visually contemplate the events taking place in the Scripture passage. St John Paul II in his Letter to Artists in 1999 wrote:

'Art has a unique capacity to take one or other facet of the message and translate it into colours, shapes and sounds which nourish the intuition of those who look or listen. It does so without emptying the message itself of its transcendent value and its aura of mystery ... 'The theme of beauty is decisive for a disclosure on art ... The link between good and beautiful stirs fruitful reflection.'

Each participant will receive a booklet which will include an image by the artist, a copy of the scripture passage taken from Luke's gospel, points for discussion and a closing reflection and prayer.

Participants are encouraged to use the short reflection prayer included in their booklet for a time of personal prayer at home or in the Church.

Futher copies of this prayer booklet **Meditating with Mary**
can be downloaded from: derrydiocese.org/may-prayer

Suggested overall structure for each session

Opening Welcome & Introduction (5-10 min)

Allow people to arrive and settle, to connect with familiar faces they haven't seen for a while and with new faces. You may wish to provide hospitality; a cup of tea/coffee on arrival.

Indicate to people the finishing time of the session.

Connection questions allow people to settle in and to orientate themselves to the session, e.g. What memories do you have of praying to Our Lady or May devotions as a child? Do you have a devotion or prayer to Our Lady that supports you in your faith? Have you been to visit a Marian Shrine and what impact did this have on you?

Take time to light a candle and place it beside the May Altar, image or Statue of Our Lady.

Make the sign of the Cross.

Encourage people to sit comfortably and to be silent and still.

Invite people to become aware that God desires to speak to us and that this evening, through looking at art and listening to the sacred Word of God we have an opportunity to reflect on Mary's response to God and to consider our own relationship with God and our response to him.

Method of prayer option 1: Visio Divina (5-10 min)

Encourage people to gaze at the image in their booklet.

Allow their eye to be drawn to specific elements.

Speak through the various elements of the art as scripted for each session.

Allow for a time of silence and contemplation of the image.

Invite people to share what struck them in particular from the image.

Visio Divina Session 1:

“DO NOT BE AFRAID, MARY,
FOR YOU HAVE FOUND
FAVOUR WITH GOD”

(Luke 1:26-38)

Fra Angelico's Painting - The Annunciation



1. In this painting by Fra Angelico, the artist takes us back to the beginning - we are taken back to Genesis. Notice the garden and the two figures on the left; Adam and Eve. The artist begins by reminding us of the fall of humanity and the need for redemption. This is the backdrop for the great wonder of the Son of God coming into the World.
2. In the centre of the painting you will notice the Angel Gabriel and Mary. Consider the calmness, the serenity and the humility as they bow towards one another. The angel taking the time to calm Mary with the words: *'Do not be afraid'*.
3. Allow your gaze to be drawn to the radiant light on the top left corner of the picture. God's loving action begins. The Father's hand can be seen sending forth the Spirit. Follow the beam of light, noticing the dove. God sends his Son to be conceived in Mary's womb by the action of the Holy Spirit. The Life and Light of Christ comes into the World.
4. The redemption of mankind was foretold by the prophets. Notice the stone carving depicting the prophet Isaiah. In this scene of the annunciation we have the fulfilment of the prophecy from Isaiah: *'Behold, the Virgin shall conceive and bear a Son and you shall call his name Emmanuel, a name which means God is with us.'* (Isaiah 7:14) It is in this moment of Mary's, 'Yes' that the Word becomes flesh and dwells among us.
5. Allow your gaze to return to the garden. Notice the palm tree. This garden speaks not only of the Garden of Eden, but it points to Jerusalem. The palm tree symbolises Christ's entry into Jerusalem celebrated on Palm Sunday, when Christ is acclaimed King and prepares for his journey to the cross.
6. Finally let us allow our gaze to fall upon Mary. On her lap rests the scriptures – Mary is a woman of faith and prayer. Her faith and prayer helped her to respond to God's call. Her red tunic emphasises her humanity and the blue cloak, the colour

of heaven, tells us that she is full of God's grace. It is this blue mantel of God's grace that Mary wraps around her, the infant in her womb and a mantel in which we too can be clothed and placed in Mary's loving care and protection.

Reflection and Closing Prayer/Litany of Loreto (5 min)

Invite participants to pray the responses/prayer together.

Visio Divina Session 2:

“MARY WENT WITH HASTE TO A JUDEAN TOWN IN THE HILL COUNTRY.” (LUKE 1:39-45)

Goossen van der Weyden's Painting - The Visitation of the Virgin to Saint Elizabeth



1. We look at this image firstly by noticing the landscape. Notice the long, winding path and the uneven terrain. This shows the long and difficult journey Mary undertook in haste to be with her cousin Elizabeth in her time of need. We might think of our own life's journey, the needs that we have, and the needs of others. Be aware that Mary recognises our needs and desires to be with us.
2. In this painting, the greeting between Mary and Elizabeth takes centre stage. Allow your gaze to rest on Elizabeth and Mary's embrace. You will notice Elizabeth's hand on Mary's womb. It is an affectionate gesture, but also one that signifies the importance of the child Mary carries - the long-awaited Messiah, our Saviour.
3. Consider the colour of Elizabeth's garment. She is dressed in red. Red represents her humanity and motherhood. Notice also how Elizabeth's face is aged compared to Mary's. Reflect back to the words of the angel Gabriel who said to Mary, '*...Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren.*' In Elizabeth we can recognise the great plans that God has for each one of us in the various stages of our lives.

4. Notice in the background, almost hidden under the arch stands an elderly man leaning on a stick. It is Elizabeth's husband, Zachariah. Reflect back to the moment when the angel told Zachariah that Elizabeth would conceive a son. Zachariah questioned how this would be possible for his wife in her old age. And in his doubting he lost his ability to speak. Witnessing the greeting of the two women Zachariah grows in confidence and faith and when the time comes he finds his faith and his voice once again, naming his son, John.
5. Observe Mary - dressed in blue, the fabric surrounding her and flowing onto the ground. The colour blue represents Mary who is full of heavenly grace. It also represents peace and tranquility, reminding us of how Mary *'pondered all these things in her heart.'*

In the Old Testament scriptures, a blue cloth was used to cover the sacred vessels in the tabernacle. (Numbers 4:6-12) The blue represents divinity. As Mary carries the child Jesus in her womb we recognise Mary carries God within her. Mary's womb is the Ark of the New Covenant. Mary seeks to bring her son to those in need.

Reflection and Closing Prayer/Litany of Loreto (5 min)

Invite participants to pray the responses/prayer together.

Visio Divina Session 3:

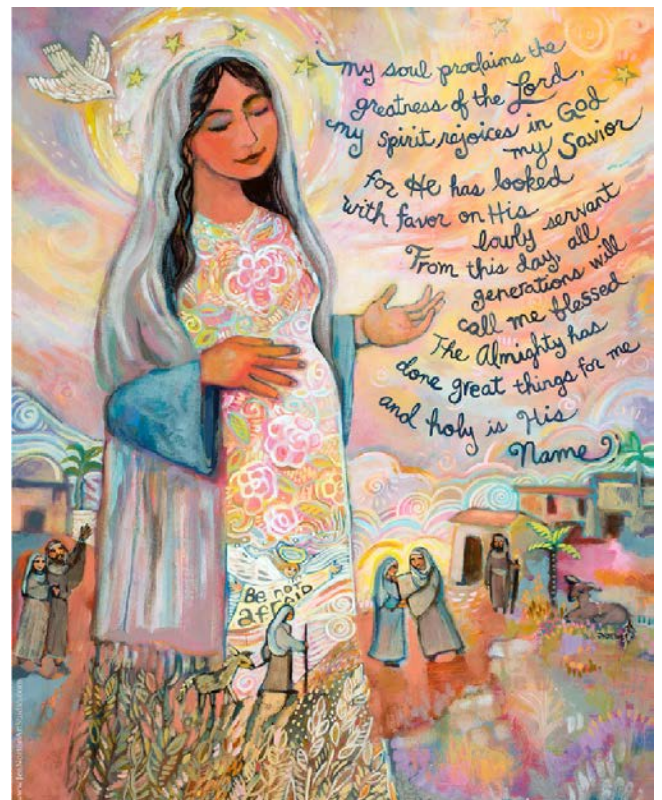
"MY SOUL PROCLAIMS THE GREATNESS OF THE LORD."

(LUKE 1:46-56)

Jen Norton's Painting

- The Canticle of Mary (Magnificat)

1. Let your eyes take in the full image of the painting. See the joy bursting through in Mary's song of praise; notice the words, colours, flowers and the joyful, yet serene expression on Mary's face.
2. In this contemporary painting we allow ourselves to be captivated by the



artists choice of colour and the swirls of the brush strokes in the background. Mary is painted in the feminine pink. We can recall this colour on Gaudete Sunday and Laetare Sunday, when we are invited to rejoice, like Mary, in the knowledge that God is with us!

3. Illustrated across the lower section of the painting is the scene in which Mary says goodbye to her parents, St Anne and St Joachim, as she sets out on her journey. It is a story that is experienced by many parents when their children leave home to travel, work or explore.

We notice the Angel guiding and protecting Mary on her path as the words, "*Be not afraid*" accompany her every step.

At the end of the journey Mary is greeted by Elizabeth. This is a moment of great joy, one filled with the Holy Spirit, a moment where Mary sees the fulfilment of God's promises, that gives rise to her song of joy.

4. Observe how the words of the Magnificat almost dance off the page. As Mary praises and glorifies God, let us be reminded of the joyful moments in which God has touched our lives.
5. Finally, allow your gaze to take in the abundance of flowers throughout the painting; also imprinted on Mary's dress. We are reminded of the beauty of God's creation of which we are all a part. We imagine May altars with bunches of freshly picked flowers. We notice the dove, the sign of the Holy Spirit beside Mary guiding her. May we know the protection of Mary Mother of the Church and guidance of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Along with the flowers we notice the stars crowning Mary; Queen of the Angels and Queen of the May!

Reflection and Closing Prayer/Litany of Loreto (5 min)

Invite participants to pray the responses/prayer together.

Lectio Divina Sessions 1, 2 & 3:

Method of Prayer option 2: Lectio Divina & Discussion (20-30 min)

- **LECTIO (Read):** Prayerful reading aloud of the Gospel twice. Use the Gospel of the day or the Gospel of the Sunday ahead.
- **MEDITATIO (Meditate):** Invite people to meditate on the scripture and to notice words or phrases that stand out.
- **ORATIO (Prayer):** Invite people to speak with God in the quiet of their own hearts.
- **CONTEMPLATIO (Contemplate):** Invite people to take a moment to rest in the presence of God.

DISCUSSION: Encourage participants to share an insight that they had during the time of prayer with the scripture or with the art. Encourage discussion on the reflection question.

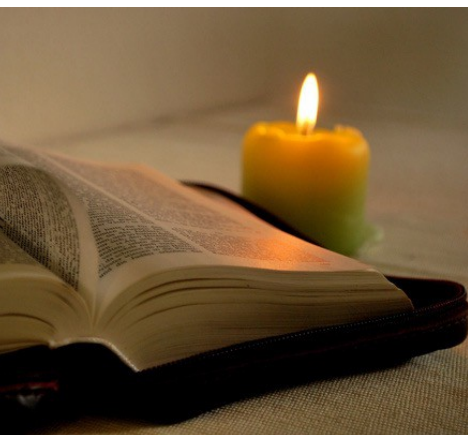
Read the reflection by Pope Francis (5 min)

Direct participants to the personal prayer and reflection

Reflection and Closing Prayer/Litany of Loreto (5 min)

Invite participants to pray the responses/prayer together.

The 4 steps/movements of Lectio Divina



1.) LECTIO (Read)

An attentive, slow, repetitious recitation of a short passage of Scripture.

Familiarise yourself with the passage from Scripture. Take your time and slowly read through the passage.

Read through the passage again slowly paying attention to any words, or phrases that particularly speak to you.



2.) MEDITATIO (Meditate)

Understand the passage in the context of your own life.

Select the word or phrase that stands out to you and ask yourself what is God saying to me? How might this word or phrase relate to me in my life today?

Meditate on this piece of text; ask God as you pray with this piece of Scripture to open your heart to what he would like to say to you.



3.) ORATIO: (Pray)

Conversing with God

After you have prayed with the Scripture you are encouraged to talk to God, in your own words, to share with Him everything that comes to mind.

Offer a prayer to God that connects with the insights that have come to you in the passage.

4.) CONTEMPLATIO (Contemplate)

Reflecting in God's presence

Take a moment to rest in the presence of God.

Allow the message of the Scripture you have just read to sink in.

Allow yourself to be absorbed in the words of the passage and allow the Holy Spirit to draw you into His presence through the Scripture so that your heart and mind are enlightened.