

Introduction to the Advent Prayer Retreat

This four-week retreat, rooted in Ignatian spirituality, invites you into a season of reflection and contemplative prayer. As a spiritual director with over 37 years of experience, I am honored to share this journey, inspired by St. Ignatius's lifelong mission to help others discern God's presence—the "whisper" that comes from stillness.

Advent is a profound invitation to transformation, calling us to recognize God in all things. Our retreat will use the journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem as a metaphor for our own spiritual path. We will join with Mary and Joseph and learn from them about God and how God is in our own lives. Just as Mary and Joseph faced uncertainty and hardship, we too encounter challenges as we move from the familiar toward new life. Their story reminds us that, despite obstacles, God's guiding presence remains constant.

Over the past 18 months, my own life has undergone significant changes, deepening my understanding of this journey of faith. Like Mary and Joseph, we are invited to trust God's direction even when the way forward is unclear. And just like them, it often involves leaving the known and being called to the unknown, trusting that the God behind the scenes is always at work. This trust brings not fleeting emotion but a deep, transformative joy—an undercurrent as my Spiritual Director on my 30-day retreat shared with me so many years ago and has grown to a fuller understanding of what she meant— a joy rooted in knowing that we "live and move and have our being in God." (Acts 17:28)

During these four weeks, we will engage with Scripture, reflection, and prayer to discern the movements of God's Spirit within us. I encourage you to set aside 15 minutes twice daily for this practice. Begin each session by inviting the Holy Spirit to awaken your heart, then ask for the grace you seek—especially a deeper awareness of God's love. Share from your heart as if you are sharing with a friend. And then listen and watch for the Lord. He always comes; you need to be open to new.

Conclude your prayer time with a prayer of thanksgiving. Ignatius also encourages those praying to say the Our Father, Glory be, and the Hail Mary if you choose.

Our first readings will center on finding God in creation and experiencing His tender, compassionate love. I will provide Scripture passages for your meditation. Thank you for joining this journey. I hope that, by Christmas, you will experience a renewed, more intimate relationship with Jesus and the Trinity as you welcome new life within. (The tender compassion of God dawns from on high, breaks upon us. Luke 1:78 The Benedictus)