

## December 2022 Retreat Guide — Mary's Formation and Me

by Julie Meissner



### Prepare

Be intentional about your time with God. Set aside the day, time, and location just for the two of you to commune together. Print out this retreat guide and gather any needed supplies.

### Arrive

Arrive at your planned retreat location (retreat center, empty church, outdoor preserve, guest house, etc.) Bring only this guide and your Bible, journal, comfortable clothing, food, drink, and art supplies if desired.

### Settle

Get into a comfortable place and position; become quiet, gently inviting your inner self into stillness. “Be still and know that I am God.” (Ps. 46:10)

### Opening Prayer

“You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.”

Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*.

Remain in a posture of silence for a few minutes or as long as you desire. Then journal your responses to the following questions. There's no need to answer them all. Be led by God.

### Look Back by Steven Stuckey

1. What events, people, experiences—or things you have viewed or read—stirred you or made an impression on you?
2. Do you notice any patterns or common themes?
3. Is there an area in your life that needs healing?
4. Is there an area(s) of pain, hurt, or suffering in your life—or something that has been lingering? What do you want to say to God regarding this—in honesty and openness? Consider how God is with you in the midst of this suffering; what does that look like?
5. Do you notice any obstacles in your walk with Christ?
6. What have you noticed in your ministry during the past month?
7. Where have you seen God at work? Have you had a sense of God's absence or silence? How do you want to talk to God about this?
8. Where have you sensed the presence of God in “all of life”—in daily life?
9. What are you thankful for? How are you expressing gratitude to God?

### Devotional — Mary's Spiritual Formation



Phaedra Jean Taylor, *Annunciation: Post*, 2004. Watercolor, ink, and pencil on paper, 5 × 8 ft. Used with permission by <https://www.phaedrataylor.com>.

Contemplate the spiritual formation of a young Jewish woman named Mary. Talk about a major life disruption! And yet, this was **a holy disruption, sent from God**. How often do we have interruptions that we view as distractions to the real plan rather than God-encounters? Mary's response to the angel's announcement reveals **an open heart willing** to be and do whatever God asks of her. Sit with the above painting of the Annunciation. What do you notice in it?

Not only does Mary respond with a humble, submissive heart full of **love for and trust in God**, but she then **seeks spiritual companionship** from her elderly cousin Elizabeth who is also having an unexpected, long-prayed-for baby by the Lord's providence. In Mary's encounter with Elizabeth, she **receives a spiritual word** from her cousin as the baby John leaps for joy in his mother's womb at the sound of Mary's voice. Mary's response? A song of **praise to God** proclaiming what the Lord has done for her and will do for all peoples! She returns home **full of wonder, ready** to bring this holy child into the world **no matter the cost**.



**Mary's spiritual formation** came in the form of a holy disruption from God. She was formed through **INTIMACY**—an open, willing heart, with a love for and trust in God, **CHARACTER**—seeking spiritual companionship for guidance, which led her to exult in God and his provision for all peoples, full of wonder at God's movement in her life, and **MISSION**—giving her body and life as a vessel for bringing salvation for all people into the world.

Take time to read the story slowly, imagining these scenes unfolding. Read through prayerfully (3-4 times if you like). Begin with a minute or more of silence.

1. Simply listen to the text.
2. Note words or phrases that are highlighted to your awareness, resonating more deeply.
3. Stay with what you are noticing. What response rises within you? Express your prayer to God in whatever form you desire (words, music, art, coloring, dance, etc.).
4. Simply rest in God.

## Luke 1:26-56, NRSV

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

<sup>39</sup> In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, <sup>40</sup> where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. <sup>41</sup> When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit <sup>42</sup> and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. <sup>43</sup> And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? <sup>44</sup> For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. <sup>45</sup> And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

<sup>46</sup> And Mary said,

"My soul magnifies the Lord,

<sup>47</sup> and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

<sup>48</sup> for he has looked with favor on the lowly state of his servant.

Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed,

<sup>49</sup> for the Mighty One has done great things for me,

and holy is his name;

<sup>50</sup> indeed, his mercy is for those who fear him

from generation to generation.

<sup>51</sup> He has shown strength with his arm;

he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

<sup>52</sup> He has brought down the powerful from their thrones

and lifted up the lowly;

<sup>53</sup> he has filled the hungry with good things

and sent the rich away empty.

<sup>54</sup> He has come to the aid of his child Israel,

in remembrance of his mercy,

<sup>55</sup> according to the promise he made to our ancestors,

to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

<sup>56</sup> And Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.

### Reflect

1. How do you respond to the “unexpected,” particularly when it changes the course of your plans?
2. Who do you go to for spiritual companionship, guidance, direction—someone who listens to you and listens to God on your behalf, who prays with and for you, speaking God’s truth into your life?
3. If you do not currently meet with a spiritual director, what is holding you back?

A quote by Meister Eckhart speaks a powerful truth to lessons we may learn from Mary as the mother of our Lord Jesus. Consider his words and sit with them. What do they stir in you as you contemplate your own life and ministry?

“We are all meant to be mothers of God. What good is it to me if this eternal birth of the divine Son takes place unceasingly, but does not take place within myself? And, what good is it to me if Mary is full of grace if I am not also full of grace? What good is it to me for the Creator to give birth to his Son if I do not also give birth to him in my time and my culture? This, then, is the fullness of time: When the Son of Man is begotten in us.” —Meister Eckhart (1260-1328)

4. How is God inviting you to bring his Son into the world?
5. Consider writing your own “Magnificat” as a response to God.

### Look Ahead by Steven Stuckey

Another part of retreat is looking ahead to the month in front of you. During the last hour of the day, shift your attention from the present to the future. As you take some time to be still, listen, and seek God’s guidance and will, are there specific commitments you want to make in the following areas:

*How will I function from a place where I am known, loved, and belong to the Lord?*

#### Spiritual

- While all of life is spiritual, is there a spiritual discipline(s) you want to commit to, or re-commit to, this coming month? What will it look like specifically for you?
- What longing and desire do you have for your relationship with God?
- What helps you abide with Jesus?

#### Physical

- Is there any habit(s) related to exercise and eating you are called to?
- How are you finding rest and sleep these days?

#### Relational

- How are the primary relationships in your life, and is there anything you desire to commit to in the month ahead?

#### Mental

- Is there anything you long to commit to for the sharpening of and development of your mind in your walk with Christ?
- What do you do to renew your mind?

### Benediction

“Mary’s ‘How can this be?’ is a simpler response than Zechariah’s, and also more profound. She does not lose her voice but find it. Like any of the prophets, she asserts herself before God saying, ‘Here am I.’ There is no arrogance, however, but only holy fear and wonder. Mary proceeds—as we must do in life—making her commitment without knowing much about what it will entail or where it will lead. I treasure the

story because it forces me to ask: When the mystery of God's love breaks through into my consciousness, do I run from it? Do I ask of it what it cannot answer? Shrugging, do I retreat into facile clichés, the popular but false wisdom of what 'we all know'? Or am I virgin enough to respond from my deepest, truest self, and say something new, a 'yes' that will change me forever?"

Kathleen Norris, "Annunciation," in *Watch for the Light: Readings for Advent and Christmas* (New York: Plough Publishing House, 2001), 53.