

Invitation to the Manger

Getting Ready

Prior to beginning your retreat

- Ensure potential *distractions are taken care of*. Setting boundaries is good and helps to ensure you can fully engage in the retreat. This can include:
 - Family, housemates, students or coworkers notified that you will be unavailable
 - Work or house projects passed off, set aside, or completed
 - Deciding what you'll turn off on your phone
- *Pray for the retreat* and the time away. Ask that God would keep feelings of anxiety, guilt, or shame from infiltrating the retreat. Jesus often found time to go off to a solitary place. Matthew 11 includes this invitation:

"Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly." *The Message*



Supplies

While there is nothing you *need* to bring with you for this retreat, you may want to consider these:

- A Bible: the passage is included in this guide, but you may use another translation if you wish.
- Art/craft supplies: you'll have time to do something creative if you want.
- Journal and favorite pens
- Earbuds or headphones
- Water bottle and coffee tumbler

Find a place ahead of time that is comfortable and where you can have some space to yourself. This can be in your home, at a retreat center or coffee shop, or a local church or park. This will help you prepare well, in terms of traveling time, anticipating what distractions may be there, what the weather might be like and how that will affect your choice of place, etc. You'll want a journal and pens, as well as your phone (for the playlist) and earbuds for this section.

Releasing

Take 5ish minutes to sit comfortably and quietly, becoming present to God, the One who loves you and is delighted that you've set aside this time.

- Take deep breaths, relax your shoulders, let your shoulders and arms hang loose.
- If it is helpful, select a simple word (come, peace, love, or something else) to repeat slowly in your mind and center yourself.

Songs 1-3 on [this playlist](#) are appropriate for this section and may help you settle and relax. Listen to one or all of them.

Once you feel settled, pray: Welcome God's presence and ask God to meet you this day in ways that show God's delight in spending time with you.

Reflection

Look back over your last month of ministry. If it helps to take out your calendar then do that. What went well? Where do you feel that you were your best self? When did you experience joy? Now, ask the Spirit, to help you see where there might have been missed opportunities. Or where were you not your best self?

How are you coming in?

Now, with these reflections in mind, look at the feeling wheel found at the end of this guide. What feelings are connected to these reflections? Allow yourself the space and time to feel those feelings, both the ones that seem "good" and the ones that seem more difficult.

Come into an awareness of God's presence with you. Talk with God about your last month. Tell God how you felt about this last month, as if you were sharing with a friend or colleague.

Now, ask God how he felt about your last month of ministry. Listen for his response.

Before moving to the next section, take a 15-minute break. Grab a beverage, take a short walk, or move to a different space. There's no rush to get through everything.

Resting

The work of releasing can be hard and tiring. You don't have to jump into producing something or "dive deep into" scripture. Sometimes even after feeling you've settled, there is still more to release, and you'll need space for that.

Songs 4-26 on [this playlist](#) are appropriate for this section and may help you worship if you'd like to. You may also use a playlist of your own.

For the next 2 hours, do something restful for yourself. It may be an art project, slow walk (rather than a hike or run), reading for fun, or resting and taking a nap. It doesn't have to be just one thing. Do what **you** want to do and what God might be inviting you to join in on.

If possible, put your phone out of reach and if you have smart watch, take it off.

Renewing

Spending time in scripture can be one of the best ways to renew our hearts, minds, and souls. There are many different ways to engage God's Word. Here are 3 different ways to hear and see the text. For each style, you will use Luke 2:1-21. It is one of the better known and recognizable passages about Jesus birth, hopefully allowing you to engage more deeply. Spend as much time as you would like on any or all of them.



Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina, or Holy Reading, is an ancient practice that is meant to go slowly, so take your time. You may use the Scripture included in this guide or [use this recording](#) to listen to it.

1. *Lectio*: Read or listen to the passage, listening for a word or phrase that speaks to you in this moment. Take a couple of minutes before continuing.
2. *Meditatio*: Read or listen to the passage again. Reflect and think about how it applies to your life. Pay special attention to feelings that arise and ways that God is speaking to you. Return to the feelings wheel if it will be helpful. Take a couple of minutes before continuing.
3. *Oratio*: Read or listen to the passage again. Respond by praying and opening your heart to God. Remember, this is a conversation with God. If you keep a journal, record your prayers to God and God's response to you. Take a couple of minutes before continuing.
4. *Contemplatio*: Read or listen to the passage one last time. Reflect on all that you heard. Sit in silence, resting in God's presence.

Bible Study

One of the more common ways to engage scripture is through study of it directly. Select one of the translations provided at the end or use your own Bible. Make as many notes on the page as you like.

1. *Observe*: What stood out to you as you read? What movement did you notice? How did people in the story react to what was happening? What questions came up? Take each character in turn reflect on their response to the Christ child? Consider what changes they must make to welcome this child.
2. *Consider*: Choose **one** of the characters in the story. Ask the Spirit to guide you. Become that character in your imagination as you take in the scene. How do you feel? What are your reactions? Who do you most want to sit and have a conversation with?
 - a. Joseph
 - b. Mary
 - c. Shepherds
 - d. Angels
3. *Reflect*: What changes have you made in your life to welcome Jesus in? How might you welcome Jesus more fully in my life today? Are there changes God is asking of me? Let the Spirit lead you here.
4. *Pray*: Offer up prayers of praise and thanksgiving for the coming of the Christ-child. Ask for the faithfulness of Mary and Joseph, wonder of the shepherds, and the joy of the heavenly host. End with some silence to listen for anything God might say to you.

Musical Worship

We all worship in different ways, having learned different songs and in a variety of traditions. Tracks 27-32 on [the playlist](#) are a sampling of songs reflecting a variety of styles, but all related to Advent and the birth of Christ. Some are very contemporary while others are more likely to be heard in a mainline denominational church that has a choir and organ in worship. Try to listen to them all, even if they are not your usual taste in music. As you listen, keep in mind these reflection questions:

- Are there scriptures I recognize in the lyrics? Where did they come from?
- Which songs feel invitational, drawing me in? Which feel distant? Which songs are more like those I grew up with? Which might I add to my own playlists?
- What emotions come up in me as I listen? What emotions are conveyed in the songs?

As you conclude this section, take some time to reflect on the day so far.

- What do I sense God is saying to me? What is God's invitation to me? How might I add something new to my regular rhythms? Where and how can I invite others to join me?
- Imagine students on my campus are like the shepherds: what kind of invitation will cause them to say "let us go and see this thing..."? How am I inviting them in to see Jesus?
- I think about each of the leaders I am working with now. I let their faces come to my mind. I pray for each one by name that they would welcome Jesus more fully into their lives. Consider following up with each one, telling them of your retreat and what you have prayed for them. Ask them how they might welcome Jesus more fully into their lives.
- What is one thing I can take with me out of this time? What can I hold on to? A new practice to learn more about? A new way of experiencing scripture? An invitation to offer someone?

Before moving to the next section, take a 15-minute break. Grab a beverage, take a short walk, or move to a different space. There's no rush to finish the day.

Rejoicing

Again I say Rejoice! There is nothing better than partaking of the joy of the Lord. No matter how you have spent this time, God is delighting in you and with you. Take some time to offer up your praises to God. Here are a few ways you can do that:

- Spend time praising God, thanking Him for the time together. Tracks 33-37 on [the playlist](#) are great for a time like this. Dancing as you listen is highly encouraged.
- Write down a story of a joyful, memorable holiday season from your childhood, pondering the memories as Mary may have done in the years that followed Jesus birth.
- If you've been inside all day (and the weather is nice enough), head outside and enjoy creation.
- Write a thank you note to God. Be explicit about what you're grateful for.

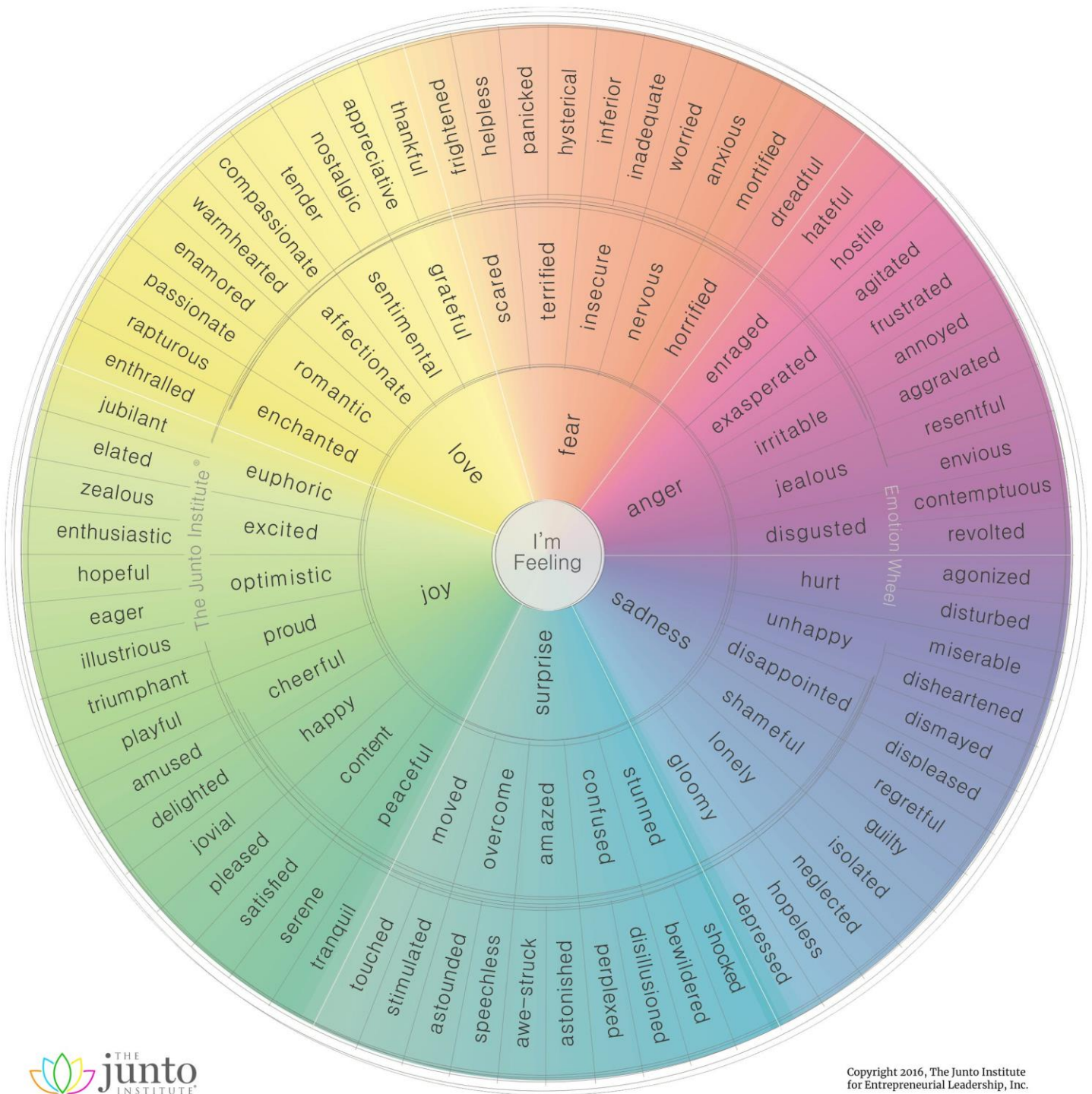
Closing

Return to the feelings wheel. Remind yourself of how you came into the retreat. How are you feeling now? The same? How has their intensity changed? Did any new feelings surprise you? Why might that be? How did you notice or not notice God during your day?

End with a prayer of thanksgiving.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Resources



Luke 2:1-20

The Birth of Jesus (NRSV)

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them. And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Luke 2:1-20

The Birth of Jesus (The Message)

About that time Caesar Augustus ordered a census to be taken throughout the Empire. This was the first census when Quirinius was governor of Syria. Everyone had to travel to his own ancestral hometown to be accounted for. So Joseph went from the Galilean town of Nazareth up to Bethlehem in Judah, David's town, for the census. As a descendant of David, he had to go there. He went with Mary, his fiancée, who was pregnant. While they were there, the time came for her to give birth. She gave birth to a son, her firstborn. She wrapped him in a blanket and laid him in a manger, because there was no room in the hostel. There were shepherds camping in the neighborhood. They had set night watches over their sheep. Suddenly, God's angel stood among them and God's glory blazed around them. They were terrified. The angel said, "Don't be afraid. I'm here to announce a great and joyful event that is meant for everybody, worldwide: A Savior has just been born in David's town, a Savior who is Messiah and Master. This is what you're to look for: a baby wrapped in a blanket and lying in a manger." At once the angel was joined by a huge angelic choir singing God's praises: Glory to God in the heavenly heights, Peace to all men and women on earth who please him." As the angel choir withdrew into heaven, the shepherds talked it over. "Let's get over to Bethlehem as fast as we can and see for ourselves what God has revealed to us." They left, running, and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. Seeing was believing. They told everyone they met what the angels had said about this child. All who heard the shepherds were impressed. Mary kept all these things to herself, holding them dear, deep within herself. The shepherds returned and let loose, glorifying and praising God for everything they had heard and seen. It turned out exactly the way they'd been told!

Luke 2:1-20

Humble Birth (First Nations Version)

When the time came close for Bitter Tears (Mary) to have her child, the government of the People of Iron (Romans) ordered that the people be numbered and put on the government rolls. This happened during the time that Powerful Protector (Quirinius) was the governor of Bright Sun (Syria). All the Tribal Member were required to travel to their own ancestral village to register. He Gives Sons (Joseph) and Bitter Tears (Mary) set out on a long journey from Seed Planter Village (Nazareth) in Circle of Nations (Galilee), to House of Bread (Bethlehem) in the Land of Promise, the village of their ancestor, the great chief Much Loved One (David). The time for Bitter Tears (Mary) to have her child was upon her! But no place could be found in the lodging house so *He Gives Sons (Joseph) found a sheep cave where it was warm and dry*. There she gave birth to her son. They wrapped him in a soft, warm blanket *and laid him on a baby board*. Then they placed him on a bed of straw in a feeding trough. That night in the fields nearby, shepherds were keeping watch over their sheep. Suddenly a great light from above was shining all around them. A spirit-messenger said to them, "Do not fear! I bring you the good story that will be told to all nations. Today in the village of Much Loved One (David) and Honored Chief has been born who will set his people free. He is the Chosen One!" the spirit-messenger continued, "This is how you will know him—you will find the child wrapped in a blanket and lying in a feeding trough." Suddenly, next to the spirit-messenger, a great number of spirit-warriors from the spirit-world above appeared giving thanks to Creator, saying "All honor to the One Above Us All, and let peace and good will follow all who walk upon the earth." When the messengers returned to the spirit-world above, the shepherds said to each other' "Let us go and see this great thing Creator has told us." So they hurried to the village of Chief Much Loved One (David) and found Bitter Tears (Mary) and He Gives Sons (Joseph) and the child, who, just as they were told, was lying in a feeding trough! The shepherds began to tell everyone what they had seen and heard about this child, and all who heard the story were amazed. Bitter Tears (Mary) kept these things hidden in her heart and wondered what all this would mean. The shepherds returned to their fields, giving thanks to the Great Spirit for the wonders they had seen and heard.