



Mary, Our Guide Through Advent

A Mini Retreat for Yourself or in a Group
45-50 minutes □ Designed for Caregivers

Leader: Advent is a season of anticipation and preparation as we await the birth of Christ. Being a caregiver, this time can also be a period of meditation and renewal, allowing Mary, the Mother of God, to be our guide. This mini prayer retreat is designed to help you find peace, strength, and inspiration through Mary's example during Advent.

Let's begin our retreat by centering our mind and heart in prayer.

Opening Prayer

All: Loving Lord, as we enter this sacred time of Advent, we seek the intercession of Mary, the Mother of Jesus. Grant us the grace to follow her example of faith, hope, and love. May we find solace and strength in her guidance as we care for those in need. Help us to prepare our hearts for the coming of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Mary's Journey

Reader 1: Mary's journey throughout Advent holds a central place in the liturgical season, emphasizing her unique role in the Incarnation and her anticipation of the birth of Jesus. This sacred journey begins with Mary's initial acceptance of God's plan for her life, continues through her visit to her cousin Elizabeth, and culminates in her travel to Bethlehem for the census. Each step of Mary's journey is marked by profound experiences of joy, holy haste, trust, and awe as she carries Christ and moves closer to the celebration of Christmas.

The journey commences at the Annunciation, when Mary accepts God's will for her to bear His son. This pivotal moment marks the beginning of her journey and offers a model of faith and openness for all believers. Mary's acceptance becomes a meditation for the holy season of Advent, inviting reflection on her willingness to embrace God's plan in a caring and loving way.

Reader 2: Following the Annunciation, Mary sets out to visit her pregnant cousin Elizabeth. This key event is filled with joy, as Mary shares her happiness with Elizabeth, who in turn recognizes her as the mother of her Lord. In response, Mary proclaims the Magnificat, saying, "My soul magnifies the Lord." The Visitation highlights the importance of sharing joy and finding spiritual rest in God during the Advent season.

Mary's journey involves trusting God in the face of challenging circumstances, such as telling Joseph about her pregnancy. She demonstrates a willingness to wait and not grasp for control, turning inward to God instead of isolation. As caregivers, we can relate to her strength during challenging circumstances on a daily basis.

Throughout Advent, her journey is a reflection of the longing for the coming of the Messiah. It includes anticipating the birth of her son, a child she carried within her.

Reader 3: Mary's journey to Bethlehem, a scene often portrayed in Nativity displays and celebrated in traditions such as Las Posadas, marks the final stage of her Advent pilgrimage as she approaches the birth of Jesus. This journey was filled with challenges, most notably the 90-mile journey and the difficulty in finding shelter upon arrival. The Holy Family's search for refuge and their eventual settling in a humble place serve as a powerful symbol within the Advent season.

The hardships faced by Mary and Joseph on their way to Bethlehem mirror the greater message of hope that Advent brings. Their resilience and faith, even in modest and uncertain circumstances, reflect the promise that hope is present even in the simplest and most unexpected places. Through their experience, we are reminded of the profound meaning found in the Advent journey as we prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ.

Meditate and Share: Spend a few minutes meditating on Mary's journey during the first Advent. Consider her role as a caregiver and the challenges she faced with grace and strength.

- ◆ Share how you can emulate her trust in God in your caregiving role?
- ◆ Consider the physical and emotional journey Mary undertook while pregnant to Bethlehem and meditate on the patience and resilience she demonstrated. Share how you can apply her perseverance to your own personal and caregiving journey.
- ◆ Do you remember Mary's role at the birth of Jesus, welcoming the Savior into the world with love and humility. Share how you can show similar love and humility in both your personal life and caregiving?

Meditation and Prayer with Mary

Reader 4: Find a comfortable position, close your eyes, and take deep breaths as you meditate for 7-10 minutes on the following themes:

- ◆ **Trust:** Visualize Mary hearing the Angel Gabriel's message. Feel her initial fear and then her growing trust. Say silently, "Mary, help me trust in God's plan."
- ◆ **Patience:** Imagine Mary traveling to Bethlehem, focusing on her patience amid uncertainty. Repeat to yourself, "Mary, grant me patience on my journey."
- ◆ **Love:** Picture Mary holding the newborn Jesus, overflowing with love. Whisper, "Mary, teach me to care with love and kindness."

Silent Prayer and Meditation —

Spend 3-5 minutes in silent prayer, meditating on what you have learned and ways that it may help you in your personal life and career. Allow Mary's presence to fill your heart and guide your thoughts.

Closing Prayer

All: Dear Mary, Mother of God, thank you for guiding us through this time of meditation and prayer. Your life is a testament to the power of faith and love. Help us to carry these lessons into our days as we care for others.

May we always seek your intercession and follow your example. We ask this in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Leader: Take a moment to bless yourself with the Sign of the Cross, while asking for God's peace and strength as you continue your caregiving journey. Remember, you are not alone, and Mary's guidance is always with you.