



Soul Care Retreat: Advent 2025

INTRODUCTION

The church calendar begins with Advent. Advent comes from the latin word *adventus*, meaning coming or visit. It's the season of preparation before Christmas, when the global Church recognizes the time of expectant waiting and preparation for two things: the celebration of the Nativity of Jesus, and the eventual time when Christ will, one day, make all things new.

Our Christian year begins with four weeks of waiting and longing
...we wait to celebrate the birth of Christ, longing for light to dawn in darkness.
...we wait on the return of Christ, longing to see all things made new.

When we hurry past Advent – focusing on shopping, decorating, and holiday festivities – we miss the work that the waiting, the *advent*, is meant to produce within us.

This retreat guide is meant to help you slow down to listen, notice, and be present to the whispers of the Savior in your own life. This year's retreat will focus on Mary, the mother of Jesus, and her experience awaiting the advent of her son, the Savior of the world.

PART 1: MARY & GABRIEL

Settle in and get comfortable. Take a couple of deep breaths and give notice to God's presence.

Begin with reading Luke 1:26-33. Read it slowly 3 different times, pausing for a minute or so between readings to reflect and pray.

Write down what you observe about the passage, paying particular attention to Mary. (Simple notes are fine – no need to overthink this part.)

I notice.....

I wonder.....

I hope.....

PART 2: MARY'S MAGNIFICAT

Read Luke 1:46-55 slowly and a few different times, pausing between each reading to reflect and pray, conversing with God about the passage.

As Mary overflows in praise to God, what sorts of things does she say?

How does God see and feel about Mary according to this passage?

How does Mary see and feel about God according to this passage?

Spend some time imagining yourself in that moment, sitting in the holiness and beauty of Mary's worshipful and prophetic prayer. Write down your reflections.

I wonder...

I notice...

I hope...

PART 3: REFLECTION ON MARY

God raised up Mary, really just a young girl, who, when asked to do something impossibly terrifying, something that would change the course of her life forever, still said yes, responding to Gabriel, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to Your word."

We know that Mary was favored and blessed as the mother of Jesus because it was spoken over her by Gabriel and Elizabeth; but we also know she was told by Simeon that a sword would pierce her own heart. *How could both of these things be true in Mary's life?* Pause for a moment and sit with this question.

God's favor and blessing meant that Mary would experience the shame of what looked like an illegitimate pregnancy and fear of losing her betrothed husband; it meant that her first experience bringing life into the world would be on the hard ground of a dirty barn in a town she did not call home.

Favor and blessing meant Mary's firstborn son would one day leave home, leave the family business, and teach such a scandalous grace that the world would hate him. Mary would know favor and blessing by watching her son turn water into wine, and bring back people from the grave. Favor and blessing meant Mary would also watch her son be bombarded with criticism, escape riots, avoid attempts on his life, and live a homeless and nomadic existence. Mary would experience rejection as she called to her son and he told her that his true mother and brothers are the ones who do the will of His Father in heaven.

Favor and blessing meant that Mary would watch her son dragged through the city streets with a crown of thorns on his head. She would watch him hung on a cross, in between robbers. A sign above His head declaring Him as Jesus, King of the Jews, this blessed and favored Mary would watch her son die.

When Jesus died, Mary's dreams for him died as well. The hopes of a long life for her son were gone – mothers are not supposed to outlive their children. Dreams of marriage, grandchildren, and a rich, full, and happy life for Jesus were buried. Mary said goodbye to growing old in her firstborn child's home, and instead came under the care of another man whom she did not raise and she did not call son.

This favor and blessing meant that Mary would spend the rest of her life with the image of her oldest son – the one God gave her to raise and care for – bleeding, broken, and dead on a cross. *How is this the life of one who is favored and blessed by God?*

And yet... this isn't the end of the story.

This favor and blessing also meant that Mary, in the midst of terrible grief, would see an empty tomb with a promise of something else to come. Mary's favor and blessing meant waiting in an upper room with all of her son's disciples after his death, experiencing the rushing wind and tongues of fire of his Holy Spirit coming upon her.

Mary's own story is marked by an immeasurable amount of suffering and loss while also walking fully in the favor and blessing of God most high. Mary's own advent came to her in the form of a growing womb, anticipation and excitement from a glorious angelic visitation, which was the beginning of a story she never could have imagined or written for herself.

Spend some time reflecting on Mary's favored and blessed life.
I wonder...

I notice...

I hope...

Offer your own prayer of response and surrender to God and close by rereading Luke 1:46-48.

Part 5: VISIO DIVINA

Mary Consoles Eve (2005) by Sr. Grace Remington, OCSO

Look at the image and let your eyes stay with the very first thing that you see. Breathe deeply and gaze at that part of the image for a minute or more. (Setting a timer or counting your inhale/exhales may help you keep time.)

Now, let your eyes take in the whole image. Take your time and look at every part of the picture. See it all. Reflect on the image for a minute or more.

The artist reminds us in an interview that "The picture is of Mary and Eve, but Jesus is there too. He is, in fact, at the very center." Give some time noticing Jesus in the image.

What emotions does this image evoke in you?

What part of your own story does this remind you of?

How does this image stir your heart toward Mary? Toward Christ?

What sort of prayer response does this stir in you? Respond to God.



CLOSING

Read Luke 2:19. After everything Mary had experienced in her pregnancy, and then at the birth of Jesus, we read that “Mary was treasuring up all these things in her heart and meditating on them.”

Spend some time prayerfully considering your retreat time, reflecting on the following prompts:

What stands out to you from your experience on retreat today? How did the Lord speak to you?

What is the Lord prompting you to “treasure in your heart and meditate on” for this advent season? Are there any action steps to take?

Close with gratitude and prayer.
