

2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8b-12,
14a, 16

Psalms 89:2-3, 4-5, 27, 29

Romans 16:25-27

Luke 1:26-38



REFLECTION

Have you ever received a cryptic text message that you weren't sure about? It could have been something like, "We need to talk—Mom." Are you in trouble? Are your parents taking you to Disneyland? Who knows? You sit and think about what it could mean.

Mary receives a message from the angel Gabriel that she isn't sure about. Then she is told wondrous news; that she will bear the Son of God to the world. God has chosen her, a young virgin from Galilee, to be the mother of the messiah. What could it all mean? She ponders these words in her heart and asks questions, but she never doubts. She embraces her call through faith. Mary leans into God's blessing.

Mary's actions can teach us about our own response to God. Do we hear God's Word speaking to us? How often do we look for God in our daily lives? Do we take the time to discover God's presence throughout our day? Listen to his call and follow his will. Learn to accept God's plan and lean into his blessing.

Before jumping to conclusions in a situation and reacting without thinking, take the time to ponder. Invite God into your process. Dwell in God's presence and allow his holy wisdom to guide you.

QUESTIONS

- ❖ What do today's readings teach you about the Christian life?
- ❖ Where do you see God present in your daily experiences?
- ❖ How can you be more like Mary in your response to God's call?

Fourth Sunday of Advent

December 24, 2023

ACTION

Reread the passage from Luke 1:26-38. Imagine yourself in this scene, either by being one of the characters, or being a bystander watching these events unfold. What is it like? What are the colors that you see? Try and use all your senses to fill out the details of the scene. Engage in how you feel being a part of the annunciation. Ponder this scene in prayer and reflect on what it means to you today.



Learn about using your imagination in prayer from this article, "How Do We Pray With Our Imagination?" <https://onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/Imagination/Intro.html>



December 24, 2023

FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

LECTIONARY #11B

2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8b-12, 14a, 16

Psalms 89:2-3, 4-5, 27, 29

Romans 16:25-27

Luke 1:26-38

Prepare for the Word

The following elements may be used by the catechist, teacher, or youth minister to prepare to facilitate today's session with teens. You may integrate this information into the reflection and discussion on today's readings.

Leader's Context

About two weeks ago on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, we heard the same Gospel reading we have today. However, where that feast focused on Mary, today we will try to focus on Jesus and what this means for his coming into the world. In many ways, this is a fantastical reading—an angel appears to Mary, tells her that she will miraculously conceive a son who will be a king and ruler forever. And this will all happen through God, who has already worked a miracle in granting that Elizabeth could naturally conceive a child in her old age. Jesus gets quite the introduction in this story and today's reflection will focus on the significance of Jesus' lineage (through his foster father, Joseph), as part of the house of David.

Q FOCUS: *Jesus is the fulfillment of the royal line of King David.*

Liturgical Calendar Connection

Today is somewhat unusual, as the Fourth Sunday of Advent is coinciding with Christmas Eve. Because of the importance of Sunday and of Christmas, Catholics are obligated to go to church twice in these two days. You should attend once for a Mass that celebrates the Fourth Sunday in Advent (either a Saturday vigil Mass or a Sunday morning Mass), and once for a Mass that celebrates Christmas (either a Sunday evening Christmas vigil Mass or a Mass on Monday celebrating Christmas). The most important

thing is recognizing that these two occasions are celebrating two separate things, even though one leads us to the next. Because of the two Masses close together, this year might be a good opportunity to encourage your families to attend Christmas Mass on Christmas day itself instead of going to church on Christmas Eve to celebrate Christmas.

Church Teaching Connection

"The promised Messiah is to be 'great,' and the heavenly messenger also announces that 'he will be great'—great both by bearing the name Son of the Most High and by the fact that he is to assume the inheritance of David. He is therefore to be a king, he is to reign 'over the house of Jacob.' Mary had grown up in the midst of these expectations of her people: could she guess, at the moment of the Annunciation, the vital significance of the angel's words?" (Redemptoris mater, 15)

Hear the Word

Use this resource, a Lectionary, or a Bible to proclaim the reading. The book should be held reverently or placed on a lectern. If possible, light a candle that is placed near where the Gospel will be proclaimed. Gesture for teens to stand.

Gospel Acclamation

Use the same musical setting that is used in your parish or at school Masses. Teens may help with music and proclaim the Gospel.

Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Luke 1:26-38

Reader: A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke.

All: Glory to you, O Lord.

All make the sign of the cross on their forehead, lips, and heart.

The angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming to her, he said,

“Hail, full of grace! The Lord is with you.” But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.

“Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” But Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?” And the angel said to her in reply, “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 called holy, the Son of God. And behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God.” Mary said, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her.

Reader: The Gospel of the Lord.

All: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Everyone may be seated.

Reflect on the Word

When beginning the reflection and discussion about today's readings, first refer to the handout for today. Ask teens what they learned about themselves and about Christian discipleship from performing the action for the week and journaling. Ask teens about the readings of the day: What struck them? What do they think the readings mean? How do the readings affect their own lives? Then begin the following reflection:

Today's Gospel is the same passage that is used for the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary that we celebrated on December 8. On that day, we focused on Mary and how God saved her from being born with original sin so that she would be prepared to be the mother of God. But today, we will focus on how Jesus had been foretold by prophets, and how he was descended from the great kings of Israel.

► **What do you know about your ancestry? Why do you think people want to know who they are descended from?**

When Gabriel announces to Mary that she will bear a son, he mentions that “God will give him the throne of David his father.” David was a very important person for the people of Israel. In the Old Testament, before David, the people of Israel had been oppressed and driven out of their home many times. When David (this is the same David who was the young shepherd boy who defeated Goliath) became king, God promised to give the people of Israel a home they could have of their own. God also promised to make David's name great, and that the throne of David's kingdom would last forever. Joseph was from of the house of David and it was through him that Jesus became part of this lineage, even though Joseph was not Jesus' biological father.

The Jewish people lived for generations believing in the hope of the promises made to David. That's not to say they went without doubt or troubles. By the time Jesus was born, the Roman Empire had already conquered Israel. So, what did that mean for their nation, for their promised sovereignty? When Gabriel says that the Lord God will give Jesus the throne of David, this was a sign that God's promise was coming to fruition. This is part of why the people were so excited to hear John the Baptist's proclamation that the savior was coming, and why they were so eager to follow Jesus. He didn't just come out of nowhere—the arrival of a savior and the promise of the greatness of David's throne had been prophesied, and the Jewish faith was grounded in that belief.

► **Have you ever waited a long time for something? When it finally happened, did it meet your expectations?**

Despite God's promise, there were still many who questioned and doubted Jesus. Those Jews who had power and wealth during the Roman rule, like some of the religious authorities or government officials, might not want the upset to the status quo of their power that the arrival of the promised messiah might bring. Others thought that the messiah was going to be a political and earthly king who would usurp the Roman rule, and Jesus' actions and humble

beginning didn't match that. For whatever reason, not everyone was expecting Jesus to come as he did and do what he did. Not everyone believed in him. Yet, he was and is the fulfillment of God's promise of salvation that was made long before even King David.

Wrapping It Up

Consider these points to conclude the discussion and reflection. Integrate the thoughts and ideas that surfaced during the discussion as well as the "Church Teaching Connection" on page 96.

Jesus had long been foretold as both a savior and a descendant of David's royal lineage.

God's promises are always fulfilled.

The people of Israel believed in the promise of the Savior, so they wanted to follow Jesus.

Act on the Word

Ignatian Contemplation

For this activity, you will need space for the students to spread out. You can also play light instrumental music while you lead this activity.

Share with the young people that this activity will guide them through a process of imaginative prayer. In this type of prayer, which is an important part of Ignatian (Jesuit) spirituality, we place ourselves within a moment of Scripture. By imagining ourselves there, we allow the experiences of biblical figures to speak to us in a different way.

To begin this prayer exercise, invite students to find a place and posture where they are comfortable, but not where they will be lulled into sleep or inattention. They should also remain close enough to hear you as you lead the activity. Then lead them in the following reflection.

"I am going to reread this Gospel passage to you. As we slowly and deliberately read this, imagine yourself within this scene. You could be anybody in this scene, whoever you feel called to be, even if that person does not speak in this passage. Take a few moments to decide whose role you feel called to take in this moment of Scripture. As I read this, use your imagination to create as clear an image in your mind as possible. Decide what time of day it is, what the temperature and the weather are like. Ask yourself how things look and sound during this story. As you enter further into the story, be attentive to your role in the passage. What is said, and by whom? How does this make you feel? How do you respond?"

Then read the Gospel passage slowly and deliberately, pausing enough so that the teens can imagine the circumstances, but not so much that they lose track of the story. After the reading is over, leave a few minutes for silence. Then invite the young people to share their experience out loud: who were they within the scene? What did they experience? How did this type of prayer make them feel?

Closing Prayer

O God,
from eternity have you promised a king
who is the desire of all the nations.

May Jesus, your Son,
rule us and make us all one in the
Body of Christ.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity
of the Holy Spirit,

God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

For Next Sunday

To help teens prepare for next Sunday's Mass, print, email, or share on a blog or social media the handout found on the next page. The JPG and PDF files are available at www.ltp.org/lwgr. Encourage teens to attend Mass with family or friends.