

The Gentle Protector of Christmas (Matthew 1:18-25)

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Guidelines: Protect confidentiality and follow the leader's prompts

Lectio Divina Rhythms/Process (Repeat three times):

- (a) Read the Scripture passage ("Lectio")
- (b) Reflect on the focus question below ("Meditatio")
- (c) Respond in quiet prayer/journaling ("Oratio")
- (d) Rest in God's invitation for you then pray/share out loud if you want ("Contemplatio")

Introduction: Joseph is engaged to Mary, a young virgin, and preparing their new home. But when she returns from a three month trip to visit her cousin in the hill country she's pregnant! He plans to take care of things quietly to not disgrace her. Then she tells him about the angel and the miracle virgin birth, but he doesn't believe her. Then he has a dream with an angel in it who confirms Mary's story and he decides to believe it's all true. So despite great public criticism, he marries her and adopts her baby as his own, naming him Jesus. Mary and baby Jesus are very vulnerable and he's tender and strong to watch over them. Joseph shows us that the Lord God is "Immanuel," our Gentle Protector.

Opening Prayer: "Immanuel... 'God is with us.'" (Matthew 1:23, MSG)

Read Scripture: Matthew 1:18-25 (MSG)

18-19 The birth of Jesus took place like this. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. Before they came to the marriage bed, Joseph discovered she was pregnant. (It was by the Holy Spirit, but he didn't know that.) Joseph, chagrined but noble, determined to take care of things quietly so Mary would not be disgraced.

20-23 While he was trying to figure a way out, he had a dream. God's angel spoke in the dream: "Joseph, son of David, don't hesitate to get married. Mary's pregnancy is Spirit-conceived. God's Holy Spirit has made her pregnant. She will bring a son to birth, and when she does, you, Joseph, will name him Jesus—'God saves'—because he will save his people from their sins." This would bring the prophet's embryonic sermon to full term:

Watch for this—a virgin will get pregnant and bear a son;

They will name him Immanuel (Hebrew for "God is with us").

24-25 Then Joseph woke up. He did exactly what God's angel commanded in the dream: He married Mary. But he did not consummate the marriage until she had the baby. He named the baby Jesus.

1st Reading: What is one word or phrase the Holy Spirit impresses on you? Meditate on that.

2nd Reading: Enter into the Scripture passage. What do you feel? What specific situation in your life today relates? Write down a prayer or pray quietly.

3rd Reading: What is God's personal invitation for you from the Scripture? You can write down what God may be saying to you or a prayer of thanks. Or rest quietly in God.