

The Birth of Christ (Luke 2:1-7)

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Guidelines (For Groups): Protect confidentiality and follow the leader's prompts.

Ignatian Meditation Process: Ignatius chose this Gospel reading for Week 2 of *The Spiritual Exercises*. Read the introduction and then "Ask for the grace". Then quietly read the passage by using your imagination to enter into the story, sensing and feeling what's going on. Don't analyze the passage or seek insights — *experience yourself as a character in the story*. After the second reading have a "colloquy" (short, personal conversation) with the Lord. You can use the prompts and questions at the bottom to guide your prayer time and journaling (and sharing with others).

Introduction: Like any young mother, Mary wants to have her baby in the comforts of her home with her own mother and family there to care for her. But Caesar's census forces her and Joseph to travel on a donkey for 80 miles on a bumpy road! Thankfully, she has Joseph to care for her and protect her and they make it to Bethlehem, the city of David, his ancestor. The guest rooms in all the homes are filled, but a family (traditionally considered an innkeeper) provides shelter for Mary to have her baby in their stable. So the newborn King is laid in a feeding trough, surrounded by animals! In this way the Old Testament prophecy is fulfilled that the Messiah would be born in the little town of Bethlehem (Micah 5:2).

Ask For the Grace: Lord Jesus, I ask for the grace I desire: to know you more intimately, to love you more intensely, and to follow you more closely.

Imagine Yourself in the Gospel: Luke 2 (MSG)

1-5 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.

6-7 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.

1st Reading: Visualize yourself in the Gospel story. Don't seek intellectual insights — stay with the imagery. Use your senses to see, touch, feel, and hear. What part of the story are you drawn to? Which character do you identify with or are you a bystander?

2nd Reading: Experience the story in the role of the character God led you to. Then talk with the Lord. What do you feel? How does this relate to something in your life today? What is God saying to you?