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INTRODUCTION

Encountering Jesus is a four-week series that invites participants to encounter the person of Jesus through the Ignatian contemplation method of prayer. The structure of the series and the content is based on the Second Week of the Spiritual Exercises where retreatants pray with the stories of Jesus' life in the gospels. Participants will pray with gospel passages at home (four days a week) and gather five times as a group for sharing and to pray with five major meditations from the Second Week.

A "Second Week" Experience

A primary focus of St Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises is calling people to a deeper and more intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. That is the mission of this series. *Encountering Jesus* does this by drawing from specific scripture suggestions and meditations from the Second Week of the Spiritual Exercises. The series does not enter the Third Week, Christ's passion and death. Instead, the focus is on building a friendship with the God who chose to enter into our reality and who still lives along side us in the world—the person of Jesus.

How to use Encountering Jesus

This series can be used by parishes, faith sharing groups, universities, or other groups who wish to offer a personal experience of Jesus in the Ignatian tradition. There are five weekly group gatherings, in between which are four weeks of individual prayer. This means that those who participate are committing to making time for personal prayer throughout the week, using the suggestions and pointers found on the Prayer Guidance handouts.

The Prayer Guidance handouts prescribe four days of individual prayer in order to give flexibility to participants schedules for when to pray. Depending on the needs of your group you may add additional scripture passages (see **page 33**).

Since *Encountering Jesus* highlights major stories in Jesus' life from his birth through his public ministry, and not his passion, death, or resurrection, this series can be used during **Advent**, or during the few weeks of **Ordinary Time** between the Christmas season and Ash Wednesday. When to offer it is up to you. See page v for some planning details.

Structure of Weekly Meetings

This is a suggested format, which can be adapted to the needs and desires of your group:



Again, your weekly leader sheets guide you through this structure. Read over the sheet each week to familiarise yourself with the content—especially the meditation—and any special instructions in the sidebar (in red).



WEEKLY GATHERING JESUS' PREPARATION

Presence

As we gather, let us call to mind that God chooses to be with us now, to listen, to speak, to dwell.

► Offer the invitation to the left and then centre those gathered with a bell or a moment of silence.

Grace

During our prayer this week we ask that we grow more closely in friendship with Jesus.

Initial Sharing (20-30 MINUTES)

- ✿ What particular graces or insights came from my prayer this week?
- ✿ How have the Christmas stories deepened for me?
- ✿ What might have been on Mary and Joseph's hearts as they heard Simeon's prophecy about Jesus?
- ✿ How has knowledge of the person of Jesus affected my life?

► Use these questions to guide conversation, to the extent that they are helpful.

► Participant handout is on pages 17-18.

Meditation (10 MINUTES)

We now contemplate something the scriptures don't tell us much about: Jesus' childhood. This is often known as Jesus' "hidden life". We will focus on just two verses from the Gospel of Luke that make up this gap of years in Jesus' life:

"The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him." (Luke 2:40, NRSV)

"And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor." (Luke 2:52, NRSV)

► These scripture verses are on the participant handout.

I invite you to close your eyes and imagine Jesus as a young boy. What might he have been learning and struggling with in his life? Might Mary have told him about the night an angel came to her, foretelling his birth? What was Mary and Joseph teaching Jesus? About carpentry? About God? About the Hebrew scriptures?

► Because this meditation involves greater use of the imagination, leave 2 minutes of silence after each paragraph.

Consider the boy Jesus' relationships, with his parents, with extended family, with the local rabbis, and with his friends. Could Jesus have fallen in love?

The Gospel says that Jesus grew in wisdom. As he grew older, how do you see this unfolding? How did Jesus grow in his understanding of his vocation?

As your imaginings about Jesus' youth continue to unfold in your mind's eye, speak to Jesus about what you've seen. How has this brought you closer to him?

Sharing (10-20 MINUTES)

We now have another opportunity to briefly share about any graces or insights we had during this guided meditation.

► Now is a time for the group to share their experiences of the meditation.

Closing Prayer

God, who became human to be like us and with us:

You knew growth and discovery as a child.

May we discover this week that your vocation and our vocation are aligned, and that you desire to be our friend.

May our hearts be on fire with your love.

► Invite someone to pray the closing prayer or pray it as a group.

► At this time you may hand out the Prayer Guidance sheet for Week Two (on page 19). Remind your group of the next meeting time.



PRAYER GUIDANCE JESUS' BIRTH

Presence

Acknowledge that God is with you right now, desiring to be present to you.

Grace

I ask God that I grow in intimate knowledge of Jesus.

Scripture

Day 1: Luke 2:1-7 – Nativity

Day 2: Matthew 2:1-12 – Visit of the Magi

Day 3: Luke 2:22-39 – Presentation in the Temple

Day 4: Repetition

Consider your prayer with the previous scripture readings this week and the meditation offered at the last gathering. Did one of these prayer periods capture you in a particular way? Do you feel invited back to pray with one of them? This could be a call from God to re-visit one of them in prayer, to offer more fruit to you.

*Howard Grey, SJ says that a **repetition** is the “effort to engage mystery, to center on the depth of riches within revelation, and to discover how God specifically invites this particular man or woman to find the meaning of a gospel event for him or her.”*

Pointers

- ✿ As you pray each day with the assigned scripture passage be sure to notice the detail of the scene and the words used in scripture.
- ✿ See how the passage (and your imaginative prayer) affirms or conflicts with the “popular” Christmas story you grew up with.
- ✿ Make it personal. God became incarnate in this world to be with you.

Colloquy

I speak to Jesus as if he were a friend sitting right next to me. I can trust him, so I share with him the depths of my heart, including my experience of prayer today and any insights I may have received.

*A **colloquy** is simply a conversation with God. In his *Spiritual Exercises*, St Ignatius allows for colloquies with Jesus, Mary, God the Father, and the apostles. In this series, the emphasis is on building a relationship with Jesus so all colloquies are with him.*