

# *Imaginative Prayer: The Christmas Story*

Luke 2:1-20

## **What is Imaginative Prayer?**

Imaginative prayer is a way of meeting with the Lord by using our imagination to enter a gospel story. Using our imagination to experience the sights and sounds of the scene helps to bring our whole selves into the presence of Christ. The purpose of this prayer is to meet Jesus face to face and grow in intimacy with Him

## **Leading your Family and Friends through Imaginative Prayer**

The below is merely a guide to help you lead others this Christmas through imaginative prayer. You can begin your time saying something like,

*"We will now enter into Imaginative Prayer. As we prepare to celebrate the first coming of King Jesus, we will spend time in this space witnessing the story we have heard all of our lives in a new and personal way."*

[NOTE: Whatever is bolded, is the Section header. Whatever is unbolded, is what you read to those participating in the prayer practice]

### **Prayer<sup>1</sup>**

Lord, we place ourselves in your presence and we ask that you reveal yourself to us in the intimacy of our prayer time. Protect us from all outside distractions. Direct our memory, will, and imagination to you. We desire to grow in greater freedom, to be able to recognize what is of you and what is not. So allow us to experience what is truly from you and not simply of our own design. For this we pray through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

### **Centering Yourself**

Take a deep breath and allow yourself to rest fully in the loving presence of God.

Settle into a comfortable position and close your eyes. Continue to breathe deeply.

Become present with each breath. Breathing in God's personal love and exhaling any distractions or concerns. One by one giving them over to Him with each breath. Take your time to fully enter this reflection and meet with Christ.

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<sup>1</sup>If you prefer music during your prayer, you can begin playing it at this point. The music you choose should be soft and without lyrics. Ideally you will not listen to music where the tune will distract you from the prayer exercise.

Today, God invites you to use the imagination He gave you to step into a gospel story. Let yourself be transported to winding paths and starry nights and a musty stable. Allow this story to come to life so that you can encounter our living King Jesus, and hear His call upon your life.

We are going to read from Luke 2:1-20 two times today. This first time, simply familiarize yourself with the story. Take note of the setting and the people involved. Liken this to a movie– you are simply watching and taking in all of the details as a viewer.

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## *Reading #1*

### *The Birth of Jesus (NIV)*

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*In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. **2** (This was the first census that took place while[a] Quirinius was governor of Syria.) **3** And everyone went to their own town to register.*

***4** So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. **5** He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. **6** While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, **7** and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.*

***8** And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. **9** An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. **10** But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. **11** Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. **12** This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”*

***13** Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, **14** “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”*

***15** When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”*

***16** So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. **17** When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, **18** and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. **19** But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. **20** The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.*

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## Ask

- Can you picture where the story is taking place? Who is there? What was said? Remember, for this practice, you don't need to worry about historical accuracy. Just let your mind fill in the details so that this story comes to life for you.

*15-20 second pause*

- As you hear the text for a second time, let yourself become someone in the story. You are no longer a removed viewer but a character in the story. You can choose to either become a person that is actually mentioned—maybe Caesar Augustus, Joseph or Mary, one of the shepherds, or an angel—or you can simply be a bystander watching how these events unfold.

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## *Reading #2*

### *The Birth of Jesus (The Message)*

**2-5** *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.*

#### **An Event for Everyone**

**8-12** *There were shepherds camping in the neighborhood. They had set night watches over their sheep. Suddenly, God's angel stood among them and God's glory blazed around them. They were terrified. The angel said, "Don't be afraid. I'm here to announce a great and joyful event that is meant for everybody, worldwide: A Savior has just been born in David's town, a Savior who is Messiah and Master. This is what you're to look for: a baby wrapped in a blanket and lying in a manger."*

**13-14** *At once the angel was joined by a huge angelic choir singing God's praises:*

*Glory to God in the heavenly heights,  
Peace to all men and women on earth who please him.*

**15-18** *As the angel choir withdrew into heaven, the shepherds talked it over. "Let's get over to Bethlehem as fast as we can and see for ourselves what God has revealed to us." They left, running, and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. Seeing was believing. They told everyone they met what the angels had said about this child. All who heard the shepherds were impressed.*

**19-20** *Mary kept all these things to herself, holding them dear, deep within herself. The shepherds returned and let loose, glorifying and praising God for everything they had heard and seen. It turned out exactly the way they'd been told!*

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## Ask

- As someone in these scenes, what do you see? Smell? Hear? What specific scene are you in? Are you static in one scene or are you moving from scene to scene as the story unfolds?

*15-30 second pause*

- How do you feel about what is going on around you? What emotions do you sense from each of the different scenes unfolding?

*15 second pause*

- Take notice of what character you are and what scene you are in. If a shepherd, how did you respond upon seeing the angels? What were you doing before they arrived and what did you do after they left? If an angel, what did you notice about the shepherds upon telling them the Good News? If Joseph or Mary, what did you notice on your journey to Bethlehem? How did you feel upon not finding a place to deliver Jesus? If a bystander, who are you most drawn to observe?

*15-30 second pause*

- Whoever you are in this story, what is going through your mind as you anticipate your first glimpse upon Jesus's face? What feelings are you experiencing leading up to your first meeting with the long awaited Savior? What do you want to say to Him? Do you want to kneel before Him and sing praises with your voice? Do you want to say something quietly to Him, and have Him hear you as a babe, turning to look at you?

*15-30 second pause*

- You are now in the presence of Jesus. What does he look like? What does His face portray about who He will become? What expression does He have? Does He turn to look at you? Remain now in the presence of Jesus- the God man.

*30-60 second pause (or more)*

- Having taken the time to live in this story, you might want to ask Jesus why certain aspects of this story stood out more than others, or why you identified with a particular person. Let your curiosity lead you into conversation with Jesus.

*30-60 second pause*

- As we conclude our time of imaginative prayer, consider what God might be communicating to you through this experience. Recall what happened when you were living in the scene. What did you feel?
- How do you want to respond to Jesus now?

*30-60 second pause*

## **Prayer**

Thank you for your living and active Word that is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. May we never be the same upon encountering you, King Jesus. Amen.

**We are now going to take some time to reflect upon our experience with Imaginative prayer**

## **Discuss**

Share about your experience “living” in the story:

- What did you see, smell, hear, taste, feel?
- Were you surprised by what you witnessed?
- Who did you become in the story?

If comfortable, share your experience seeing Jesus:

- Did you sense the Lord speaking to you- did he give you a word or phrase or picture that spoke to something going on in your life?

## **Close in prayer**

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## *For Families with Children*

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### **Leading Your Family Through Imaginative Prayer**

Below is merely a guide to help you lead your family this Christmas through imaginative prayer. Give yourself lots of grace. If your kids start running around, aren't answering the questions, or seem uninterested, that is okay. The fact that you are reading God's Word with and to your kids and helping them see how they are part of God's story— this is what matters! Check out the "tips" on the following pages to see ways to adapt the guide as needed.

#### **Say Out loud To your Child(ren):**

We're going to read a story about Jesus, and then we're going to imagine what it would be like to be in the story.

Close your eyes and let's take a few deep breaths together. [take 3-5 deep breaths]

God, I pray that you will release our imagination and help us to hear you speak to us during this time together. We open our hands to you. We open our ears to you.

*(pause 8-10 seconds)*

I am now going to read the Christmas story. As I read, I want you to close your eyes and imagine you are either a shepherd, an angel, an animal, or Mary and Joseph.

## Read Luke 1:1-20

[For Younger Children, Consider reading from *The Jesus Storybook Bible*]

Who did you imagine that you were? [Let each of your family members answer. If one child has a hard time deciding, maybe pick a character for them].

I am going to read the story one more time and I want you to close your eyes and pretend you are in the story. Let's see what you smell, hear, and do as your character.

## Discuss

Share again who you were in the story. Why did you choose that character?

What did you see? What did you smell? What were you doing? Did you meet baby Jesus? Did you meet Mary and Joseph? What about the angels or the shepherds?

Do you want to ask Jesus anything?

## Tips for Imaginative Prayer with Older Kids and Teens<sup>2</sup>

- Upon the first reading, Invite older kids and teens to spend several minutes silently imagining the scene in detail. If it helps, they might think of themselves as movie directors arranging all of the details of a scene: What is the weather like? Is it cool or warm? What can you smell? What are people saying to one another? Who are the major characters, and how are they dressed?
- Upon the second reading, they should place themselves in the scene: Who are they? One of the characters from the Bible, or another anonymous participant? Either way, they should imagine themselves as physically present in the setting of the scene, not as an omniscient observer.
- Then invite them to let the action of the scene as described in the Bible story unfold but with the addition of details that they supply with their imagination. What was Joseph thinking as he traveled to Bethlehem? What were the shepherds talking about right before the angels appeared? How did Mary feel when they couldn't find a place to sleep? What was it like to hold Jesus for the first time? Consider having your children journal about this for the next several minutes.

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<sup>2</sup> Tips taken and edited for our purposes from <https://www.teachingcatholickids.com/teach-your-kids-imaginative-prayer/>

- After some time—five or ten minutes—ask your kids to “come back” and tell you about their experience. The discussion you have is part of the prayer experience, too, because you’re going to focus on discerning what God might be communicating through the imagined experience. Ask: What happened? Why? How did you feel? Did you speak or act? Did anyone (particularly Jesus) speak to you? And finally: What do you think God might be communicating to you through this experience?

### **Tips for Imaginative Prayer with Younger Children**

- Younger children will probably need more hands-on guidance, so rather than asking them to spend ten minutes silently imagining the scene, try “playing pretend” with them. Make clear that this is a way of praying!
- Your “pretending” might take the form of shared storytelling. Ask your child to supply the details of the story using some of the question prompts above. It may help to use a children’s picture Bible or storybook as a text. Finally, ask: “Well, who would you want to be if you were meeting Jesus for the first time? What would you do? What would you say to Jesus? If he could talk as a baby, what would he say to you?”
- Alternatively, you might “act out” your pretending, much as you might play house or store.

As always when you’re praying with little ones, aim high but stay relaxed about the outcome. If things fall apart the first time you try, try again some other time.