

The Ignatian Imagination Prayer is a sensory, engaging spiritual practice that encourages one's imagination to run free with with the Spirit through scripture. Teresa A. Blythe writes in her book, *50 Ways to Pray*, that the intent of this practice is "to imagine that you are physically present" in a particular scripture, "and to allow that scene to become a prayer for you." (p 100)

Especially for passages that we know (or think we know) well, this spiritual exercise invites us to look, listen, and feel again. To be open to an awareness of words and emotions we hadn't noticed before. To let the scripture speak to us in our present experience.

This practice can be used by individuals or in a group. To use it on your own, simply read slowly through the passage and the questions, taking the time you want to enter into each portion. Allow about twenty minutes to go through the following scripture. Jot down your experience in a journal, if you like, and any insights that dwelling in the word brought you.

For use in a group, read through the passage and questions, allowing more time than you think might be necessary. (As one who has received guided meditation before, I often feel rushed in my imaginings!) You may want to invite shared reflection at the end.

Prayer of preparation

Spirit of New Life, I/we ask for grace:

that all my/our intentions, my/our actions, and my/our imaginings
will be used for the service and praise of the Divine. Amen.

Ignatian Imagination Prayer

Within a few days [of the angel Gabriel's visit to her], Mary set out and hurried to the hill country to a town of Judah, where she entered Zechariah's house and greeted Elizabeth.

Take a moment to imagine yourself in this scene, not necessarily taking on the character of Mary or Elizabeth (or Zechariah). Simply be an observer for now.

What do you notice about Mary as she hurries down the roads of Judah? Does her face tell you anything about how she's feeling?

What time of year is it in Judah? What do you smell?

What does Zechariah and Elizabeth's house look like? As Mary nears the house, when does she call out to Elizabeth? What does she say? Where is Elizabeth when she hears Mary call her name?

As soon as Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

In your mind's eye, notice how Mary and Elizabeth meet face-to-face.

What does it look like as the Holy Spirit settles on Elizabeth? Is there a visible change, or do you feel a shift in your surroundings?

Imagine Mary notices you, and calls out to you, too, to join their delighted embrace. Does anything move in you—does your heart beat quicker or your stomach do little flip flops? Stay there, in the scene, as a full participant in the story.

In a loud voice, Elizabeth exclaimed, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! But why am I so favored, that the mother of the Messiah should come to me? The moment your greeting reached my ears, the child in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who believed that what our God said to her would be accomplished."

What is the energy like in the room as Elizabeth shouts this blessing? After her long journey, how does Mary react to Elizabeth's words? Does anyone or anything else in the area also join the scene, drawn in by Elizabeth's excitement?

Do you eagerly join in the blessing, or do you hold back?

Mary said:

*"My soul proclaims your greatness, O God,
and my spirit rejoices in you, my Savior.
For you have looked with favor
upon your lowly servant,
and from this day forward
all generations will call me blessed.
For you, the Almighty, have done great things for me
and holy is your Name.*

What does Mary's song sound like? Is it in a major key or minor key; a rapid tempo or meandering pace? Does she start out tentatively or boldly? How is she moving her body?

Do you feel an impulse to sing or sway along? What is Elizabeth doing?

*You have shown strength with your arm;
you have scattered the proud in their conceit;
you have deposed the mighty from their thrones
and raised the lowly to high places.
You have filled the hungry with good things,
while you have sent the rich away empty.*

What emotions cross Mary's face as she describes God's actions? Are there hints of rage, hope, frustration, or joy? How does the tune and volume of her singing shift in these stanzas?

As you hear her revolutionary words, sung there in your presence, do you feel nervous...or comforted?

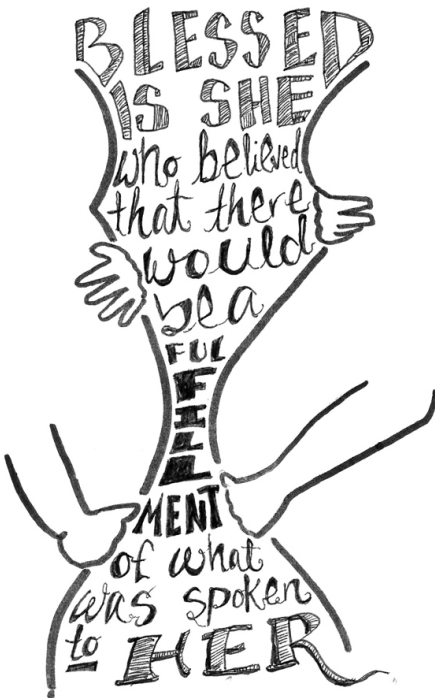
*You have come to the aid of Israel your servant,
mindful of your mercy—
the promise you made to our ancestors—
to Sarah and Abraham
and their descendants forever."*

As Mary's song ends, survey the scene again. Look all around you. What do you notice? Has anything changed between Mary's arrival and now?

Notice your body in the scene—emotions, sensations, tension.

What do Elizabeth and Mary do following this greeting, blessing, and song?

Let your full imagination run free now. Allow the scene to change in any way you feel inspired. Linger and interact with the characters there. What are you doing? Do you go off to tell someone about your experience? How do you describe what happened?



Either in a journal or in a group discussion, take time to reflect on the experience. What does it mean to make ready for the birth of the Divine within us? Consider how Mary and Elizabeth prepared. What does this mean to you? What part of the story helps you lean into a welcoming spirit? What part of the story disturbs you most? What insight does this imaginative exercise provide?

Close by offering a prayer of thanksgiving to God or pray a version of the Prayer Jesus Taught.

Image: Everett, Trey. Blessed Is She, from **Art in the Christian Tradition**, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN. <https://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=57818> [retrieved December 20, 2021]. Original source: www.treyeverettcreates.com.