



## JESUIT VOLUNTEER CORPS

### ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS PRAYER SERVICE

We recommend using this prayer service as the end of advent nears. You will need the following: a prayer bell or chime; candle and matches; and a purple cloth (optional) to drape over table. Please sit in a circle at the same level as your community mates to create a unified prayer space. Before you begin, assign a leader of the service and one additional reader.

**Opening (LEADER):** [Leader lights a candle or chimes a bell]

God of unexpected surprises, you continue to act in our world in ways known and unknown to us. Create in us a sense of spaciousness and graciousness. We know that you are always with and among us and we take this time to be mindful of your presence and love for the world. AMEN.

**Reader 1:** A reading from the gospel of Luke (1:39-55)

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb.

And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

And Mary said,

"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

**Reflection (LEADER):** Consider Mary—first she was visited by an angel, and asked to be the mother of God. And she said yes. Now she goes to her cousin Elizabeth, who welcomes Mary, gathers her, blesses her. And Mary's response is to sing of a God who lifts up the lowly, brings down the powerful, and who fills the hungry with good things. The blessing that Elizabeth speaks, her welcome, her gift of sanctuary—this blessing has the power to help us, like Mary, speak the word we most need to offer. Such a blessing gives us a glimpse of the redemption that God, in God's sense of time, has somehow already accomplished. Such a blessing stirs up in us the strength to participate with God in bringing about this redemption in this time, in this world.

Where will we go, like Mary, to find and receive such a blessing? How will we open our heart, like Elizabeth, to offer it?

*[Pause ~3-5 minutes for silent reflection. At the end of the reflection time, consider opening up for sharing.]*

**Intentions (LEADER):** as we bring this time of reflection to a close, for whom or what shall we pray? *[Pause for prayers]* We now bring this reflection to a close with a blessing from Jan Richardson. *[Either recite in unison, or go around the circle each person reading a stanza]:*

### **A Blessing Called Sanctuary**

You hardly knew  
how hungry you were  
to be gathered in,  
to receive the welcome  
that invited you to enter  
entirely—  
nothing of you  
found foreign or strange,  
nothing of your life  
that you were asked  
to leave behind  
or to carry in silence  
or in shame.

Tentative steps  
became settling in,  
leaning into the blessing  
that enfolded you,  
taking your place  
in the circle  
that stunned you  
with its unimagined grace.

You began to breathe again,  
to move without fear,  
to speak with abandon  
the words you carried  
in your bones,  
that echoed in your being.

You learned to sing.

But the deal with this blessing  
is that it will not leave you alone,  
will not let you linger

in safety,  
in stasis.

The time will come  
when this blessing  
will ask you to leave,  
not because it has tired of you  
but because it desires for you  
to become the sanctuary  
that you have found—  
to speak your word  
into the world,  
to tell what you have heard  
with your own ears,  
seen with your own eyes,  
known in your own heart:

that you are beloved,  
precious child of God,  
beautiful to behold,\*  
and you are welcome  
and more than welcome  
here.

—Jan Richardson, “Advent 4: A Blessing  
Called Sanctuary”

<http://adventdoor.com/2015/12/14/advent-4-a-blessing-called-sanctuary/>