

GOD UNBORN: NINE MONTHS BETWEEN THE ANGEL AND THE MANGER

*“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,
and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son
from the Father, full of grace and truth.”*

JOHN 1:14

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As Christians, we celebrate God's incarnation in the person of Jesus. And for over 1,600 years, some church traditions have set aside a day at the end of March to celebrate that truth.

The Feast of the Incarnation celebrates the awesome truth of God the Son being fully human and fully divine.

WHEN YOU HEAR THAT WORD, 'INCARNATION', WHAT AND WHO DO YOU SEE?

When you think of the humanity of Jesus, perhaps you picture Him walking with His disciples, healing the sick and teaching beside the Sea of Galilee.

You may remember and give thanks for His sacrificial and saving love, picturing Him publicly and painfully displayed on the cross. And then wonderfully restored in bodily resurrection three days later.

Or do you think of Christmas, and see him as a tiny newborn in the manger?

In visualising those scenes, we know that Jesus joined us in all our humanity, vulnerability and dependence from birth to death.

God's plan could have been that Jesus would appear in the desert as a 30-year-old man ready to proclaim the good news.

Or that He would be found as a baby – as Moses was found by Pharaoh's daughter – to be raised up and then deliver His people.

But that wasn't the plan. His human embodiment didn't only take the form of an adult or begin at birth.

His incarnation, His human journey, began pre-birth. He developed in the same way we did until His birth, which we celebrate at Christmas.

God chose to come as an embryo.

FOR A FEW MINUTES TODAY WE WANT TO STAY IN THE WONDER OF THAT MOMENT. TO DWELL IN AND MEDITATE ON GOD'S PLAN; HIS CHOICE TO JOIN US IN AND THROUGH THE FULLNESS OF HUMAN EMBODIMENT. FROM CONCEPTION.

The One who created all, was Himself created in His mother's womb.

The Word who spoke the universe into being and calmed the storm in an instant, also submitted to waiting nine months, during which He would grow, develop and prepare to be born.

There were nine months between the angel and the manger.

Let's dwell on those nine months of development. Beginning in a form smaller than the eye could see, growing from an embryo into a baby in the womb.

Nine months of waiting. Nine months of growing from an invisible, to a visible, pregnancy. Nine months of rumour, gossip and suspicion. Was He despised and rejected by some already (Isaiah 53)?

The Alpha and the Omega. The Ancient of Days. The Lion of Judah. A baby growing inside a pregnancy bump. God incarnate in utero, in the womb. The profound truth that we are His image-bearers from conception gives value, dignity and worth to every human being – from that point.

Have we forgotten, or do we rush past and miss the beautiful truth of what God chose and how He decided to begin His human journey? That being made in His image and being His image-bearers on earth includes us in our earliest form, because that's where and how He joined us.

GOD UNBORN.



THE INCARNATION

I was asked by Both Lives Matter to convey the incarnation through painting, specifically focusing on 'God unborn'.

To portray the awesome reality that Jesus is fully God and fully human in one piece of art was quite overwhelming, as I wondered how to convey that the Creator of the universe came into the world as humbly as you and me.

*I took John 1:5 as my starting point:
“The light shines in the darkness and the
darkness has not and will not overcome it.”*

I've always been amazed that God, who separated light from shadow and has full power, could have time for me and love me and even more so in the days when I was overwhelmed. However, He did and does because He understands it fully; from the darkness of the womb to the darkness of the grave.

I painted *The incarnation* with acrylics, wet on wet into a base of black paint with an explosion of light which encircles the womb to portray Christ's power and divinity. His humanity is shown via reference to His physical connection to Mary. She is acknowledged by the use of blue, referencing the Renaissance imagery of her, where she was usually depicted with a cloak of lapis lazuli. Christ's divinity is further shown by the inclusion of purple, recalling 'Tyrian purple' which is traditionally associated with royalty and nobility. The use of gold additionally shows royalty and power but also the devotion of humanity. I included an obvious heart to show how much Christ loves us – to the point of willingly obeying His Father and giving His life for us, to save us.

Ali Craig

LET US PRAY

Flourish

God of grace and mercy
All powerful Lord
We come to You in humble adoration

Lord of life, You entered into our world
In utter vulnerability and weakness.
Carried in and by one whom you created.
In Mary's womb, protected, supported,
as You grew and kicked and moved
Utterly dependent upon others

LORD OF LIFE, WE WORSHIP YOU

Lord of all, born in water and blood
Coming to us in weakness, validating life
Being fed, changed, cleaned and carried
The Creator now carried in the arms of the created

LORD OF ALL, WE WORSHIP YOU

Lord of hope, we pray for all children born
and still growing in a womb
Enable each to experience love, hope and joy
May future generations flourish in Your care,
Let forgiveness, mercy and peace enable life to flourish

LORD OF HOPE, WE WORSHIP YOU

Lord of grace, we pray for all mothers
We ask for encouragement, support and understanding
Help us all to value life and live in love
Help us to demonstrate love, that all may flourish

LORD OF GRACE, WE WORSHIP YOU.

Amen.



GOD UNBORN LECTIO DIVINA

There were nine months between the angel and the manger; from the time Mary gave her “Yes” to God the Father to be the mother of God the Son.

Over the following days we invite you to similarly sit in and with the mystery of God unborn. To set aside time to hear from God and to take your thoughts and prayers to Him.

The outline below suggests how to take the seven scripture passages we’ve provided, beginning on Sunday and ending on Saturday. We hope these verses will help you pray and reflect on the awesome truth of the incarnation – that God the Creator of all chose to become human. And that this mystery of the incarnation began not when He was born, but nine months before, when He was conceived in His mother Mary’s womb.

With the daily suggested scripture passage and using the Lectio Divina pattern of read, meditate, pray and contemplate, we invite you to spend time with God, dwelling on the unborn God living, developing, and growing.

As you do, we hope that you too will find the joy, hope, faith and blessing that comes from this mystery.

Each day we will:

READ (LECTIO)

Make yourself comfortable. Take a short passage of scripture and read it. Often the shorter the better. Read it slowly, several times over.

MEDITATE (MEDITATIO)

Think about the passage you have just read. What does it say? What does it mean to you? What might it reveal about God's heart? Does it link perhaps to something in another part of the scriptures? Is there a word that stays with you from the passage? What might God be trying to say to you through this?

PRAY (ORATIO)

Take it to God and have a conversation with Him in your own words about what you have read in the scripture passage and what you have been thinking and meditating on. Share your thoughts with God and ask questions too.

CONTEMPLATE (CONTEMPLATIO)

Rest in the presence of God with what you have been reading and praying about. Ask God the question: what should I remember or take away, and am I being called to action? You might continue to pray on the message as you sit in this moment.

The following seven passages from scripture have been chosen to help reflect on the truth and mystery of the incarnation of Jesus, at His conception in His mother's womb.

SUNDAY

*“You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call Him Jesus.”
(Luke 1:31)*

READ (LECTIO)

Make yourself comfortable.

- Take a moment to clear your mind of any distractions.
- Read the scripture above three times, allowing it to sink in.

MEDITATE (MEDITATIO)

Think about the passage you have just read.

- What does the word “conceive” mean to you?
- Can you imagine Jesus in Mary’s womb before He was born?
- Think of the growing body of the baby Jesus and each movement He made felt by Mary.
- Imagine what it was like for Mary to know that she carried in her womb the Son of God.

PRAY (ORATIO)

Turn your attention to our heavenly Father.

- Talk to God in your own words about what you have read.
- Tell Him how you feel about Jesus being an unborn baby.
- Ask Him to give you the grace to hold the wonder of this mystery in your heart.

CONTEMPLATE (CONTEMPLATIO)

Rest in the presence of God.

- Read the scripture again.
- Ask God, what should I remember or take away from this moment?
- Do you feel called to share anything about this scripture with a family member or friend?

MONDAY

*“The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.”
(Colossians 1:15)*

READ (LECTIO)

Make yourself comfortable.

- Take a moment to clear your mind of any distractions.
- Read the scripture above three times, allowing it to sink in.

MEDITATE (MEDITATIO)

Think about the passage you have just read.

- What does it mean to you that Jesus is the “firstborn over all creation”?
- Reflect on the mystery that the Son of God, who has always existed with the Father, became an unborn baby.
- Think about God creating you in His image from the moment of your conception.
- How does Jesus help you in your relationship with the Father?
- Think about Joseph – God chose him to be the earthly father of Jesus, protecting Him pre-birth, as he cared for Mary. Consider that, as part of God’s plan, Joseph represents something of the invisible heavenly Father through his love and protection of the unborn Son of God.

PRAY (ORATIO)

Turn your attention to our heavenly Father.

- Talk to God in your own words about what you have read.
- Praise God for the wonder of creation and for what He has given us – life, the earth, a future.
- Ask Him to give you the grace to hold the wonder of this mystery in your heart.
- Thank God for the grace He gave to both Joseph and Mary in choosing and preparing them to be the earthly parents of His Son from the moment of conception.

CONTEMPLATE (CONTEMPLATIO)

Rest in the presence of God.

- Read the scripture again.
- Ask God, what should I remember or take away from this moment?
- Reflect on your surroundings and sit in the wonder that God has created everything and that He holds all things in existence.

TUESDAY

“For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.” (Psalm 139:13–16)

READ (LECTIO)

Make yourself comfortable.

- Take a moment to clear your mind of any distractions.
- Read the scripture above three times, allowing it to sink in.

MEDITATE (MEDITATIO)

Think about the passage you have just read.

- What words stay with you or jump out from the passage as you read them?
- Imagine yourself as an unborn baby and God watching over you in the darkness.
- Did you know that a strand of DNA actually looks like wool being knitted or woven?
- Imagine Jesus slowly forming and developing in Mary's womb.
- Think about the mystery of God the Son being formed and watched over by God the Father who sees all.

PRAY (ORATIO)

Turn your attention to our heavenly Father.

- Talk to God in your own words about what you have read.
- Praise God for the mystery of life, for how it comes to be created in the womb, over approximately nine months.
- Thank God for His care for each and every life, and that all lives are made with purpose and for a purpose.
- Ask Him to give you the grace to hold the wonder of this mystery in your heart.

CONTEMPLATE (CONTEMPLATIO)

Rest in the presence of God.

- Read the scripture again.
- Ask God, what should I remember or take away from this moment?
- Maybe you know someone who is pregnant at the moment – perhaps you might give them a call or visit them to see how they are and share in the joy of the new life they are carrying.

WEDNESDAY

*“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart.”
(Jeremiah 1:5)*

READ (LECTIO)

Make yourself comfortable.

- Take a moment to clear your mind of any distractions.
- Read the scripture above three times, allowing it to sink in.

MEDITATE (MEDITATIO)

Think about the passage you have just read.

- What word or phrase stands out to you today?
- Reflect on the fact that Jesus was known before birth. Mary could feel Him as He grew in her womb, but God the Father knew His Son before He was formed. Jesus was set apart and came to be one of us in human flesh because of His Father’s plan from the beginning.
- Do you take comfort in knowing that God knew you even before you were conceived?
- What does it mean to know you are special (set apart) to God?
- Reflect on the fact that God holds you in existence constantly. How awesome does that make you feel to know the God of all creation loves you that much?
- Think about Jesus, set apart – choosing to be human in His mother’s womb for the sake of you.

PRAY (ORATIO)

Turn your attention to our heavenly Father.

- Talk to God in your own words about what you have read.
- Thank God for remembering you, for willing you, for caring for you and for holding you in existence.
- Praise God for His wisdom in sending His Son to join us in our humanity and for setting Him apart to save us.
- Ask Him to give you the grace to hold the wonder of this mystery in your heart.

CONTEMPLATE (CONTEMPLATIO)

Rest in the presence of God.

- Read the scripture again.
- Ask God, what should I remember or take away from this moment?
- Do you know anyone who would be blessed by hearing that God has set them apart and known them from before they were conceived – maybe you could share this good news with them?

THURSDAY

READ (LECTIO)

Make yourself comfortable.

- Take a moment to clear your mind of any distractions.
- Read the scripture above three times, allowing it to sink in.

MEDITATE (MEDITATIO)

Think about the passage you have just read.

- What does the word “conceive” mean to you?
- Imagine Mary, who knew that Israel had been waiting for the coming of the Messiah for hundreds of years, realising that she was chosen to be the mother of that long-foretold Messiah.

*“Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call Him Immanuel.”
(Isaiah 7:14)*



- Think of Mary holding that news from the angel – the time has come for the Messiah, and He is coming as a baby, a baby that will grow in her womb, move, kick and somersault until He is ready to be born.
- Do you believe that God can work wonderfully through you – and that He wants to? Can you think of when and where God has worked through you? How do you know the truth of ‘Immanuel’ (God is with us)?

PRAY (ORATIO)

Turn your attention to our heavenly Father.

- Talk to God in your own words about what you have read.
- Pray about the mystery of the incarnation, foretold hundreds of years before it happened.
- Ask God to give you the grace to hold the wonder of this mystery in your heart.

CONTEMPLATE (CONTEMPLATIO)

Rest in the presence of God.

- Read the scripture again.
- Ask God, what should I remember or take away from this moment?
- Stay with the thought of Immanuel – that God is with you.

FRIDAY

“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.’” (Luke 1:41–44)

READ (LECTIO)

Make yourself comfortable.

- Take a moment to clear your mind of any distractions.
- Read the scripture above three times, allowing it to sink in.

MEDITATE (MEDITATIO)

Think about the passage you have just read.

- Reflect on the unborn John the Baptist leaping in Elizabeth’s womb when Mary greets her. John recognised the presence of Jesus, the unborn baby in Mary’s womb. How does that make you feel?
- Have you ever thought that a woman, Elizabeth, is the first person to recognise and proclaim Jesus as Lord and she does so before Jesus is even born?
- Think about the two unborn babies – one is in the third trimester and the other is in the first trimester – both growing, developing, and known by God before birth. And both felt by their mothers before birth.

- Elizabeth announces “joy” – can you stay in this moment and hold the joy and wonder of the incarnation – Jesus taking on humanity in His mother’s womb?
- Do any other words jump out at you that help you focus on God unborn?

PRAY (ORATIO)

Turn your attention to our heavenly Father.

- Talk to God in your own words about what you have read.
- Thank God for the joy of the two women in the passage – Elizabeth and Mary – two mothers rejoicing in God’s presence.
- Praise God the Father for His inclusion of women in the mystery of the incarnation.
- Ask God to give you the grace to hold the wonder of this mystery in your heart.

CONTEMPLATE (CONTEMPLATIO)

Rest in the presence of God.

- Read the scripture again.
- Ask God, what should I remember or take away from this moment?
- Perhaps you might share with a female friend or family member your thoughts on how God included women in the mystery of His incarnation.

SATURDAY

*“The Word
became flesh
and made his
dwelling among
us.” (John 1:14)*

READ (LECTIO)

Make yourself comfortable.

- Take a moment to clear your mind of any distractions.
- Read the scripture above three times, allowing it to sink in.

MEDITATE (MEDITATIO)

Think about the passage you have just read.

- What word sits with you from the passage? What is important to you about it?
- Jesus is the Word, existing from before creation, and yet He joins His creation at the same point and in the very form we do – in the flesh. God is embodied in the womb.
- How has your understanding of the incarnation developed, grown, changed or heightened over the past seven days?
- Can you imagine the joy that Mary had during the nine months she carried Jesus in her womb?
- God chose to dwell with us – He did this before the manger even came into view.

PRAY (ORATIO)

Turn your attention to our heavenly Father.

- Talk to God in your own words about what you have read.
- Praise God for His wisdom in taking on human flesh, to be one like us, for our salvation.
- Thank God for the nine months between the angel and the manger – the mystery of Jesus dwelling in His mother's womb before He was born. The Son of God unborn.
- Ask Him to give you the grace to hold the wonder of this mystery in your heart.

CONTEMPLATE (CONTEMPLATIO)

Rest in the presence of God.

- Read the scripture again.
- Ask God, what should I remember or take away from this moment?
- Do you feel called to share anything about this scripture or any of the previous scripture passages from this week with a family member or friend?

THANK YOU FOR JOINING WITH US AS WE'VE TAKEN TIME TO DWELL ON THE MYSTERY OF GOD UNBORN.

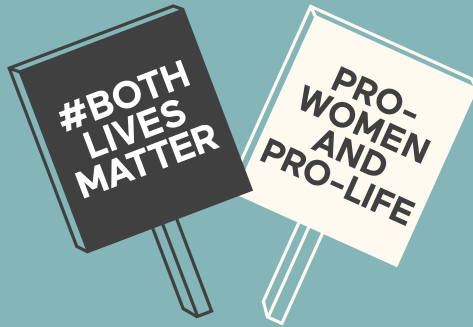
Perhaps you've found the concept of God unborn challenging. The mystery of His conception, and His decision to dwell in the womb, to be part of a family and find home in community, have much to say to us today.

Our prayer is that you will be blessed by God's plan for His own and our human journeys. That you will increasingly be filled with wonder and joy because Jesus the Son of God, the second person of the trinity, submitted Himself to this level of dependence and vulnerability – for you.

We pray that as you sit in the mystery, you will feel God's grace and presence with you.

We would love to hear how God has met with you during this week. If you'd like to get in touch and talk with us about this resource, please email stand@bothlivesmatter.org

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