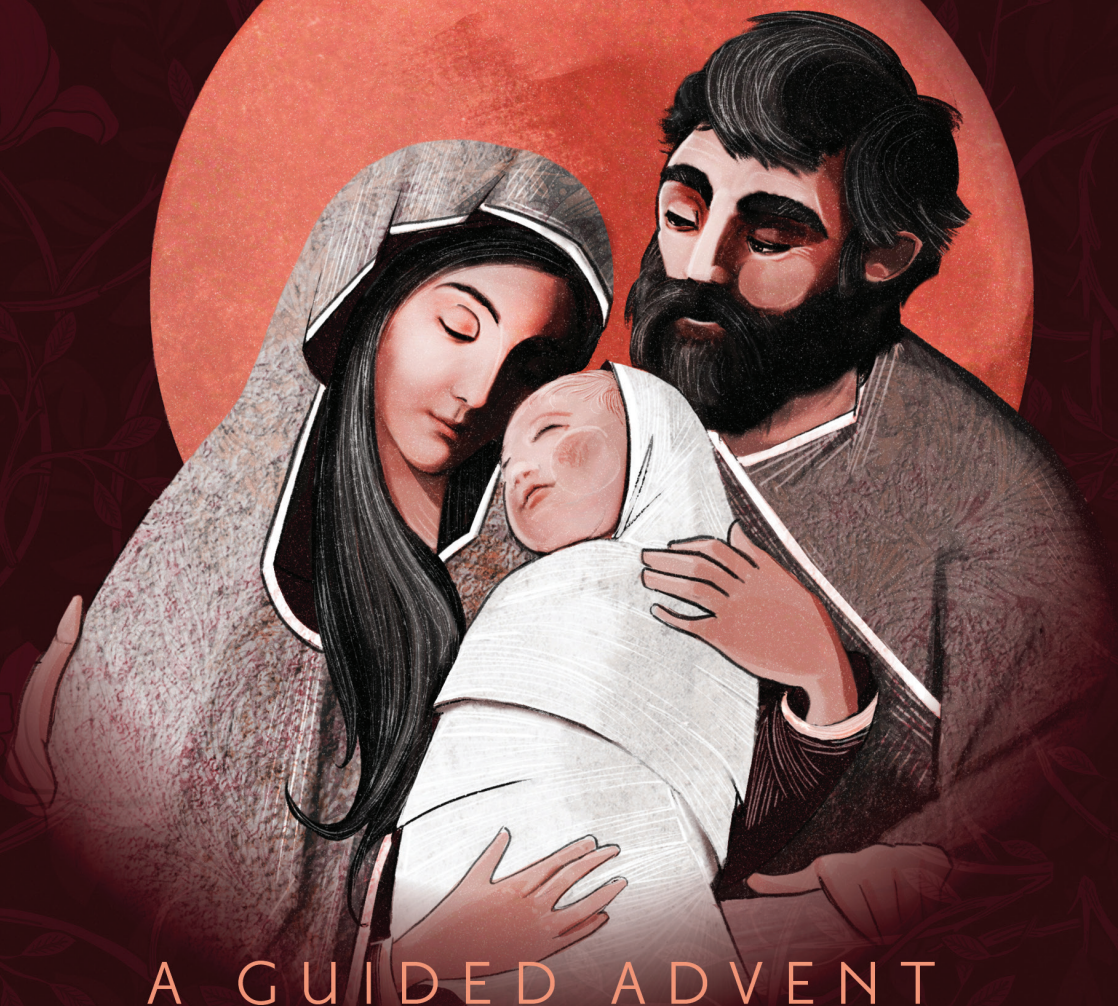


BY
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BEHOLD

LEADER'S GUIDE



A GUIDED ADVENT
JOURNAL FOR PRAYER
AND MEDITATION

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CONTENTS

Getting Started 1

First Meeting: Introduction 2

Second Meeting: First Week of Advent 4

Third Meeting: Second Week of Advent 6

Fourth Meeting: Third Week of Advent 8

Fifth Meeting: Fourth Week of Advent 10

GETTING STARTED

Whether you're using *Behold: A Guided Advent Journal for Prayer and Meditation* by Sr. Miriam James Heidland, SOLT, with a group from your parish, in your regular small group, or in a book club, this guide is designed to help your community get the most out of the time you spend reading and praying through *Behold* this Advent. While *Behold* already includes daily readings, reflection questions, and prayers, this guide will help you and your group have meaningful discussions about the weekly themes in *Behold* as you take this Advent journey together.

This leader's guide is designed to cover five meetings, each running approximately forty-five minutes to one hour. The first meeting is an introductory session. Books should be handed out before starting this meeting, so the attendees can be prepared to discuss this week's material. This introductory meeting should happen either the week before or at the beginning of the first week of Advent. The remaining four meetings correspond to *Behold*'s weekly themes centered around family dynamics—Mary as our model for mothers, Joseph as model for fathers, Jesus as model for children, and the Holy Family as model for families—and should take place either at the end of the corresponding week or at the beginning of the next week.

Each weekly meeting follows a simple pattern: an opening prayer, a scripture reading, questions to help prompt discussion, a closing prayer, and a practical action item for the week. As the leader, you may want to read the prayers and discussion questions verbatim, or you may find that you prefer to use them to inspire your own approach. Either way, the goal is to draw the members of the group into vibrant discussion, in which they share their own insights gained or questions raised during their reading, journaling, and praying with *Behold* that week.

Materials Needed for Leaders:

- *Behold: A Guided Advent Journal for Prayer and Meditation*
- *Behold* Leader's Guide
- Pen or pencil for taking notes
- Bible

Materials Needed for Group Members:

- *Behold: A Guided Advent Journal for Prayer and Meditation*
- Pen or pencil for taking notes
- Optional: Bible

FIRST MEETING: INTRODUCTION

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father, we pray that as we begin this Advent journey together in preparation for your Son's humble and holy birth, you would fill our hearts with healing of our own experiences of family. As we read, reflect, and pray—individually throughout the weeks ahead and together in these meetings—may we be drawn ever closer to your precious Son, with hearts full of thanksgiving for his constant love for us. Thank you for making us part of your family. Bless our conversations, and may we take what we learn here into our daily lives this Advent season. Amen.

Welcome

- After the opening prayer, spend a few minutes introducing yourself and allowing attendees to introduce themselves to the group.
- Check that all attendees have already received their copy of *Behold*.
- Ensure that the attendees know what to expect:
- They will spend time each day throughout Advent with the *Behold* journal, individually or with loved ones. (It may be helpful to describe briefly the journal's format for each day: a short meditation, a reflection question for journaling, and a prayer.)
- At the upcoming meetings, they should bring their copy of *Behold*, a pen or pencil, and (optionally) a Bible.
- They should come to each meeting ready to talk. Attendees should be prepared, with your guidance, to ask questions, share insights, and encourage one another.

Scripture Reading: Revelation 22:1–7

Discussion Questions

1. In the scripture reading, John describes the relationship between the servants of God and the Lord as one of true belonging: “They will look upon his face, and his name will be on their foreheads” (Rv 22:4). How does this sense of belonging and love make you feel as you begin this Advent journey of reflection on your experiences of family? What are your thoughts on God’s desire that you belong to his own family?
2. God’s words are “trustworthy and true” (Rv 22:6), and the Lord is “coming soon” (Rv 22:7). In what ways does this message from Revelation prepare you to enter into this time of Advent prayer and reflection? How does God’s trustworthiness and closeness give you both comfort and a desire to be healed as you begin to look deeply at your experiences of family life?

FIRST MEETING: INTRODUCTION

3. On page viii of *Behold*, a summary of each of the four parts of the book describes what will be the focus of each of the coming weeks. Which of these topics do you most look forward to reflecting on and exploring, or perhaps which are you most nervous about, and why?

4. Do you find it easy or difficult during Advent to focus on prayer and preparation for the celebration of Christ's birth? What are some practices or traditions that you have found helpful? What are some of the challenges that make it difficult?

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father, as we enter into this holy Advent season, send your Holy Spirit to guide our hearts into an encounter with your Son, Jesus, who became one of us, even as a humble child. May our reflections on the example of the Holy Family give us healing in our own experiences of family as well as comfort in the knowledge of your love for us. Transform our hearts through prayer and your Word, and help us love one another like the Holy Family. Amen.

Take Action

Write down three positive memories from childhood and three negative memories from childhood that you would like to take with you into prayer in the coming weeks of reflection.

Notes

SECOND MEETING: FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

MARY AS HEALER

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father, may our thoughts, words, and deeds throughout this meeting serve to draw us into an encounter with your Son, Jesus, who became one of us, even as a humble child. Send your Holy Spirit to guide us as we pray and reflect together. May our reflections on the example of the Holy Family give us healing in our past experiences of family, grace to love our own families more fully today, and comfort in the knowledge of your love for us. Amen.

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 26:1–6

Discussion Questions

1. Compare the scripture reading from Isaiah, which focuses on how the Lord lifts up the needy, with this week's opening quotation (on page I of *Behold*) from Caryll Houselander. Just as God cares for the poorest of the poor, Mary cares for the littlest ones who are in need, each of us, for "Mary is not wearied with our littleness." How does Mary's devotion to you despite your littleness make you feel, and how does it compare or contrast with your experiences of your own mother's interactions with you?
2. In Tuesday's meditation, Sr. Miriam describes how a new baby brings joy, hope, and anticipation. Mary feels this way about each of us: "Mary rejoices in and over the light that you are to this world." In what ways does this bring you comfort, and how might it inspire your life of prayer and relationship with the Blessed Mother?
3. Sr. Miriam says that Mary hears and sees every need of each of her children, in Wednesday's and Thursday's meditations: "She is not fearful, avoidant, or anxious about the places in our hearts that are painful or shame inducing." How does this personal, eager, calm attention to your needs make you feel? What are some needs that you wish to bring before Mary?
4. What are some wounds or struggles you have had or continue to have with your earthly mother? How might Mary help you to shine light on these areas and offer them to God so that he can heal you?
5. For what are you grateful about your earthly mother? In what ways might Mary guide you to extend forgiveness toward your mother?

SECOND MEETING: FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father, as we look within ourselves and reflect on our relationships with our mothers, and our relationship with our Blessed Mother, thank you for the reminder of your love and faithfulness. Thank you for giving us a heavenly mother who cares deeply for us in our littleness and finds joy in our uniqueness. Transform our hearts with humility, gratitude, forgiveness, and hope, so that we can grow ever closer to you and your Son, Jesus. Amen.

Take Action

Write and send a letter of gratitude to your mother or a mother figure in your life, or compose a prayer of thanks to the Blessed Mother.

Notes

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

THIRD MEETING: SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT

JOSEPH AS PROTECTOR

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father, may our thoughts, words, and deeds throughout this meeting serve to draw us into an encounter with your Son, Jesus, who became one of us, even as a humble child. Send your Holy Spirit to guide us as we pray and reflect together. May our reflections on the example of the Holy Family give us healing in our past experiences of family, grace to love our own families more fully today, and comfort in the knowledge of your love for us. Amen.

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 40:1-11

Discussion Questions

1. In this reading from Isaiah, we find an image of God bringing comfort and protection as a shepherd: "Like a shepherd he feeds his flock; in his arms he gathers the lambs, carrying them in his bosom, and leading the ewes with care" (Is 40:11). What does this image tell you about God's fatherhood? What ideals of fatherhood does this passage hint at?
2. In Monday's and Tuesday's meditations, Sr. Miriam describes St. Joseph as a father who shows safety in strength as well as loving faithfulness. How does St. Joseph's example of strength and faithfulness compare to your own earthly father's role in your life? She concludes, "St. Joseph, together with God the Father, watches over you and is faithful to you." How does St. Joseph's fatherhood to you bring you comfort?
3. "Tenderness interrupts the cycle of fear, self-hatred, and shame and gives way for healing and repair," Sr. Miriam states in Wednesday's meditation. What do you think of this statement, and how does it relate to your own emotional connection with your father? How does a father's tenderness and emotional involvement in the lives of his children give them healing and strength?
4. In Thursday's meditation, Sr. Miriam discusses St. Joseph's honor and honesty as a father. Despite many difficulties and challenges, he remained faithful and committed to his roles as husband for Mary and father for Jesus. How is St. Joseph's honor and honesty an example for fathers today?

THIRD MEETING:

SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT

5. What are some wounds or struggles you have had or continue to have with your earthly father? How might St. Joseph help you to shine light on these areas and offer them to God, so that he can heal you?

6. For what are you grateful about your earthly father? In what ways might St. Joseph guide you to extend forgiveness toward your father?

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father, as we look within ourselves and reflect on our relationships with our fathers, thank you for the reminder of your love and faithfulness. Thank you for giving us the love and example of St. Joseph, whose strength, tenderness, and faithfulness bring comfort to us. Transform our hearts with humility, gratitude, forgiveness, and hope, so that we can grow ever closer to you and your Son, Jesus. Amen.

Take Action

Write and send a letter of gratitude to your father or a father figure in your life, or compose a prayer of thanks to St. Joseph.

Notes

FOURTH MEETING: THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

THE CHILD JESUS

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father, may our thoughts, words, and deeds throughout this meeting serve to draw us into an encounter with your Son, Jesus, who became one of us, even as a humble child. Send your Holy Spirit to guide us as we pray and reflect together. May our reflections on the example of the Holy Family give us healing in our past experiences of family, grace to love our own families more fully today, and comfort in the knowledge of your love for us. Amen.

Scripture Readings: Isaiah 54:1-10

Discussion Questions

1. In Sunday's meditation Sr. Miriam speaks of the wonder and awe Mary and Elizabeth felt at being "miraculously pregnant with boys who would change the course of history." We see this same wonder and awe described in Isaiah, where the barren rejoice in their children and in the love of God, who is faithful. This wonder is also a hallmark of childhood, as Mother Mary Francis explains in this week's opening quotation on page 65. In what ways do you experience wonder in your life? What wonder-filled memories from childhood can you recall?
2. Can you imagine Jesus as a little child at play? As Sr. Miriam explains in Monday's meditation, play is how wonder-filled children explore and make sense of the world. In what ways did you use play as a child to enjoy and investigate the world? How do you exhibit playfulness in your life today, as Jesus might encourage you to do?
3. In Tuesday's meditation, Sr. Miriam shares a quotation from St. Thérèse of Lisieux: "I cannot fear a God who made himself so small for me . . . I love him! He is, in fact, nothing but love and mercy." What do you think of this idea of the infinite God choosing to become a helpless child? In what ways does this example of God's humble love bring you comfort? How can you live out a similar childlike humility?
4. A sense of physical and emotional safety is important for children; it frees them to express their thoughts and emotions, knowing they are loved unconditionally. Sr. Miriam discusses this in Wednesday's meditation. What are some wounds or struggles you had as a child, or continue to have, in regard to your ability to safely express yourself without rejection? How might the child Jesus help you to shine light on these areas and offer them to him so that he can heal you?

FOURTH MEETING: THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

5. For what are you grateful about your childhood? In what ways might the child Jesus guide you to extend forgiveness toward yourself as a child? How does the knowledge of God's unconditional love for you then and now make you feel?

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father, as we look within ourselves and reflect on ourselves as children, thank you for the reminder of your unconditional love. Thank you for giving us the love and example of the child Jesus, whose wonder, humility, and playfulness can inspire us even now. Transform our hearts with humility, gratitude, forgiveness, and hope, so that we can grow ever closer to you and your Son, Jesus. Amen.

Take Action

With the guidance of the child Jesus, write a letter to yourself as a child at five, ten, or fifteen, acknowledging your struggles and giving encouragement and love for who you are and who you are becoming.

Notes

FIFTH MEETING: FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT

THE HOLY FAMILY

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father, may our thoughts, words, and deeds throughout this meeting serve to draw us into an encounter with your Son, Jesus, who became one of us, even as a humble child. Send your Holy Spirit to guide us as we pray and reflect together. May our reflections on the example of the Holy Family give us healing in our past experiences of family, grace to love our own families more fully today, and comfort in the knowledge of your love for us. Amen.

Scripture Reading: I Samuel 1:24–28

Discussion Questions

1. In the reading from the First Book of Samuel, we see a family dedicated to God. Hannah and her husband visit the temple of the Lord to make a sacrifice and then offer their son, Samuel, to serve God in the temple. The Holy Family, of course, also served God through their unity and sacrificial love for one another. As Sr. Miriam says in Monday's meditation, "Each person and each family are called to be a particular revelation of God." In what ways does this idea speak to you about your own past family or your family today? How did your past family reveal God, or not? How are you called to serve God and reveal his love to others through your family today?
2. In Tuesday's meditation, Sr. Miriam discusses how we often wish others could change, but "the only person we can directly bring into the realm of transformation with Jesus is ourselves." In what areas of your own life do you need healing and conversion? How might those personal changes allow your family to thrive in God's love?
3. What are your expectations for Christmas? Do these expectations help you and your family to experience God's love and joy, or do they sometimes hinder that? How might you change your expectations so that your family's experience of Christmas is more Christ-centered, humble, holy, and full of joy?
4. What are some wounds or struggles you have had or continue to have with your family? How might the Holy Family help you to shine light on these areas and offer them to God, so that he can heal you?

FIFTH MEETING: FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT

5. For what are you grateful about your family? In what ways might the Holy Family guide you to extend forgiveness, understanding, and love toward each member of your family?

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father, as we look within ourselves and reflect on our experiences of family life, thank you for the reminder of your unconditional love. Thank you for giving us the example of the Holy Family, whose unity, respect, and sacrificial love for one another can inspire us in our own family dynamics. Transform our hearts with humility, gratitude, forgiveness, and hope, so that we can grow ever closer to you and your Son, Jesus. Amen.

Take Action

Gift two or three family members this Christmas with a small note telling them of three ways in which you are grateful for them.

Notes
