

# The Birth of Jesus

Brian T. Kershnik, 2006  
Oil on Canvas, 213 x 518 cm  
Museum of Art, Brigham Young University, Provo UT



Luke 2, 1-7 | Midnight Mass Christmas

The object of our meditation this evening is an oversized painting by the contemporary artist, Brian Kershnik, on the Nativity of the Lord.

You will be guided through some questions during the meditation, and you are invited to jot down your thoughts as you go along. We begin by entering into a movement of interior silence. I invite you to close your eyes and sit with your back straight, feet flat on the floor, hands placed gently in your lap, if you can. This is a posture of attentiveness, of waiting in expectation, of responding to God's invitation to intimacy.

I now invite you to take three deep breaths, to find the rhythm of your breathing. As we begin, I invite you to focus on your in-breath and on your out-breath, becoming aware of your breathing in and breathing out. This is a practice that brings us into the present moment, where God dwells. We will take 60 seconds to practice becoming aware of our breathing. [Set a timer for 60 seconds]

As your awareness of your in-breath and out-breath begins to come into focus, we invite the Holy Spirit to be our guide:

*Holy Spirit, we invite you to be present to us, to open the eyes and ears of our heart, as we listen attentively to what the Lord wants to reveal to us during this time of prayer.*

## VISIO

Observe: A "reading" of the painting and scripture. Read each comment or question slowly, allowing at least 10-20 seconds between each one. Follow the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

I now invite you to open your eyes and gaze at the image before you. Allow your eyes to gaze gently on the image. Let them sweep the whole of the picture... Notice the shapes and the colors... Notice the figures... Look for symbols... Notice if there is a place on the image where your eye is invited to linger... Are you called back again and again to a certain detail or color? Try not to think about it too much... Simply notice where your energy is drawn.

Let us now close our eyes to listen to the Gospel story as if hearing it for the first time. The account of the birth of Jesus illustrated by the artist corresponds to the text of the Christmas Eve Mass. Let us listen to the proclamation of this story.

Read the scripture passage reverently, or ask one or more of the participants to proclaim the text very slowly (to promote internalization).

Now I invite you to open your eyes and look at the image again.  
[Allow a moment 60 seconds of silence before continuing.]

What do you see? Notice the characters... Notice their expressions... What thoughts, words, or questions come to mind when you see this image? What colors stand out to you? What feelings or emotions are evoked in you looking at this image?

## MEDITATIO

Meditate: Pondering its meaning. We will listen a second time to the proclamation of the story, but this time we will keep our eyes open as we look at the artist's representation of the story.

Ask a second person to proclaim the text. After a moment of silence, return to the guided questions. Read each comment or question slowly, allowing at least 10-20 seconds between each one. Follow the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

Notice Mary... What is she doing? Notice Joseph... What is he doing? How are they portrayed? Notice the large crowd... who are they? Notice the eyes of the characters... Where are they looking? What comes to mind as you reflect on them? Who are the two women sitting next to Mary? What about the dog... and her pups... How does this scene speak to you of the Incarnation... God becoming a human being... Emmanuel God with us?

## ORATIO

Pray responding with commitment and fidelity. Read each comment or question slowly, allowing at least 10-20 seconds between each one. Follow the prompting of the Holy Spirit.

Take a second longer look. Imagine you are there in the scene... where would you be... can you identify with any of the characters? How would you describe the scene to someone who has never seen it? Does the scene offer you a new perspective on the birth of Jesus? Does it offer you a new perspective on the Feast of the Nativity?

## CONTEMPLATIO

We will spend the next 3 minutes in silence resting in the presence of God, allowing us to gather the fruits of this seeing, you will be invited to share any insights, images, thoughts or words that have arisen in you during this experience of listening and seeing with the ears and eyes of our heart.

Time of sharing: the time of sharing is a very important part of the process, it allows participants to deepen their experience by listening to the experience of others, and by sharing their own experience. This part should be given a good amount of time. Most participants lament that the time allotted for sharing is often too short. Invite participants to share in small groups of not more than four people. Depending on the time allotted for sharing, instruct each participant to share the time equally. Sharing a word or thought in the whole group (if time permits).

## Final prayer

*From generation to generation, men and women have brought to the Good News of your presence in our midst. Teach us Lord, like Mary and Joseph, to take our unique and irreplaceable place in the mission of the Church, so that we too may bring Christ into our world today. We make this prayer in the name of Jesus our Lord and Saviour. Amen.*

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