

AN
ADVENT JOURNEY
WITH
Mary

Presented by the *JUST Love* Ministry





AN ADVENT JOURNEY WITH MARY

This is an Advent resource that focuses on the experiences of Latin Americans in the Florida-Bahamas Synod. Each week's materials include a taped conversation with Margarita Romo, scripture readings, a few paragraphs of instructional material, discussion questions, and suggested music from Lutheran hymnals and other resources.

Congregations and individuals can decide for themselves how to use the resources for each week—whether in a worship service, a Bible study, or some combination of the two. Some people may wish to join together online to engage with the resources.

Week One: Mother of Jesus; Mother of God

We look at how the few biblical references to Mary have developed into a variety of beliefs and expressions of belief in the Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Orthodox churches. We will be introduced to Margarita Romo, another ordinary woman called by God to do extraordinary things.

Week Two: Visions and Wonders

We look at biblical stories of visions and divine intervention as we consider the belief that the Virgin Mary has made miraculous appearances in various places and reflect on our own experiences of sacred places and miracles. Margarita Romo describes how this impacts her work.

Week Three: Our Lady of Guadalupe & Our Call to Work for Justice

We look at the Bible's call for justice as we learn about a Mexican peasant's experiences and how they have become important to the people of Latin America and to advocates for justice throughout the world. Margarita Romo will share her work to secure justice for farmworkers.

Week Four: Las Posadas and Our Call to Hospitality

We look at the Bible's commands to offer hospitality as we learn about traditional Latin American practices in the days leading up to Christmas. Margarita will share her work to secure justice for immigrants.

WEEK ONE:

Mother of Jesus; Mother of God

We look at how the few biblical references to Mary have developed into a variety of beliefs and expressions of belief in the Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Orthodox churches. We are introduced to Margarita Romo, another ordinary woman called by God to do extraordinary things.

SCRIPTURE READING: LUKE 1:26-38

²⁶In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." ²⁹But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³²He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." ³⁴Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" ³⁵The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. ³⁶And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. ³⁷For nothing will be impossible with God." ³⁸Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."



SCRIPTURE READING: JOHN 19:23-27



²³When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. ²⁴So they said to one another, “Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it.” This was to fulfill what the scripture says, “They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots.” ²⁵And that is what the soldiers did. Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, “Woman, here is your son.” ²⁷Then he said to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

SCRIPTURE READING: REVELATION 12:1-6

¹A great portent appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. ²She was pregnant and was crying out in birthpangs, in the agony of giving birth. ³Then another portent appeared in heaven: a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. ⁴His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. Then the dragon stood before the woman who was about to bear a child, so that he might devour her child as soon as it was born. ⁵And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron. But her child was snatched away and taken to God and to his throne; ⁶and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, so that there she can be nourished for one thousand two hundred sixty days.



WEEK ONE: REFLECTION

The earliest biblical account of Mary is in the epistle to the Galatians, which was written before the four gospels. There, she is referred to as “a woman” and is not named: “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law” (Galatians 4:4).

The gospels of Matthew and Luke recognize her as being named “Mariam,” translated into English as “Mary,” a woman chosen by God to conceive Jesus through the Holy Spirit when she was formally engaged to a man named Joseph, who married her and raised Jesus as his son. The Gospel of John refers to the mother of Jesus twice, but never mentions her by name. The Gospel of Mark names her once and mentions her one other time without naming her.

The Gospels say that, after giving birth to Jesus in Bethlehem, Mary raised him in the city of Nazareth in Galilee; she was in Jerusalem at his crucifixion and, according to the book of Acts, she remained with the apostles after his ascension. Many people say that the description in the book of Revelation of a “woman clothed with the sun” is an allegorical presentation of Mary.

Mary has a prominent place in Roman Catholic teachings and beliefs. There are theological doctrines and teachings that relate to Mary; church festivals, churches, and shrines dedicated to her, many of which attract large numbers of pilgrims.

Most Protestant Christians think the term “immaculate conception” refers to the birth of Jesus; in fact, it refers to the Roman Catholic doctrine that Mary was born without the burden of “original sin.” Orthodox and Catholic Christians also believe that she remained a virgin even after Jesus was born. Her death is not recorded in the Bible, but Orthodox and Catholic traditions hold that, after dying a natural death, her physical body was taken to heaven, an event known as her “assumption.”

Martin Luther, who in trying to reform the Roman Catholic Church caused and inspired the Protestant Reformation, had opinions about Mary that changed over time. Although he held the belief that she was “devoid of all evil,” he came to reject the practice of offering prayers to Mary and other saints as “idolatry.”

While most Protestants would say that Mary should only be honored as an outstanding example of a life dedicated to God, some within the Church of England and the Episcopal Church hold onto Roman Catholic practices and beliefs.



Recommended Hymns:

ELW 251: [My Soul Proclaims Your Greatness](#)

ELW 263: [Savior of the Nations, Come](#)

ELW 265: [The Angel Gabriel from Heaven Came](#)

ELW 573: [My Soul Now Magnifies the Lord](#)

ELW 882: [My Soul Does Magnify the Lord](#)

ACS 906: [No Wind at the Window](#)

ACS 907: [Filled with Hope and Gratitude](#)

ACS 1096: [Joyful is the Dark](#)

Other Hymns and Songs:

[“The Annunciation”](#) and [“The Magnificat”](#) from Holden Evening Prayer

[“Breath of Heaven”](#) by Amy Grant and Chris Eaton

WEEK ONE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- Does Mary’s example inspire you or intimidate you?
- Do you think it was easy for Mary to say “Yes” to God?
- Have you ever felt God calling you to do something difficult?

INTERVIEW WITH MARGARITA ROMO



Margarita Romo is an activist for immigrant farmworkers in Florida. She was inducted into the Florida Civil Rights Hall of Fame in 2013. [Learn more about her here.](#)

WEEK TWO:

Visions and Wonders

We look at biblical stories of visions and divine intervention as we consider the belief that the Virgin Mary has made miraculous appearances in various places and reflect on our own experiences of sacred places and miracles. Margarita Romo describes how this impacts her work.

SCRIPTURE READING: GENESIS 28:10-13A, 15-19

¹⁰Jacob left Beer-sheba and went toward Haran. ¹¹He came to a certain place and stayed there for the night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place. ¹²And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. ¹³And the Lord stood beside him and said, "I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac..." ¹⁵Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." ¹⁶Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, "Surely the Lord is in this place—and I did not know it!" ¹⁷And he was afraid, and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." ¹⁸So Jacob rose early in the morning, and he took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. ¹⁹He called that place Bethel; but the name of the city was Luz at the first



SCRIPTURE READING: JUDGES 13:2-3,5B, 15-16, 19-20



²There was a certain man of Zorah, of the tribe of the Danites, whose name was Manoah. His wife was barren, having borne no children. ³And the angel of the Lord appeared to the woman and said to her, “Although you are barren, having borne no children, you shall conceive and bear a son...It is he who shall begin to deliver Israel from the hand of the Philistines.” ¹⁵Manoah said to the angel of the Lord, “Allow us to detain you, and prepare a kid for you.” ¹⁶The angel of the Lord said to Manoah, “If you detain me, I will not eat your food; but if you want to prepare a burnt offering, then offer it to the Lord.” ¹⁹So Manoah took the kid with the grain offering, and offered it on the rock to the Lord, to him who works wonders. ²⁰When the flame went up toward heaven from the altar, the angel of the Lord ascended in the flame of the altar while Manoah and his wife looked on; and they fell on their faces to the ground.

SCRIPTURE READING: REVELATION 1:10-19

¹⁰I was in the spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet ¹¹saying, “Write in a book what you see and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamum, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea.” ¹²Then I turned to see whose voice it was that spoke to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³and in the midst of the lampstands I saw one like the Son of Man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash across his chest. ¹⁴His head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, ¹⁵his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters. ¹⁶In his right hand he held seven stars, and from his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining with full force. ¹⁷When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he placed his right hand on me, saying, “Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, ¹⁸and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever; and I have the keys of Death and of Hades. ¹⁹Now write what you have seen, what is, and what is to take place after this.”



WEEK TWO: REFLECTION

The Bible contains many stories of people seeing visions of heavenly beings or of being visited by them. In the book of Genesis, Jacob names and sets up markers to identify each of the places where he has a miraculous encounter with God. The author of Revelation has a very symbolic vision of Jesus in heavenly glory.

Since the third century, the Roman Catholic Church has recorded miraculous appearances of Mary that have occurred in specific places. Some are only witnessed by a single person; others have been witnessed by a group of people. The church has criteria for establishing the authenticity of such events. Appearances judged “worthy of belief” have occurred in India, Mexico, Ireland, Portugal, and in a number of locations in France.

What is perhaps the most well-known of these events occurred in France in 1848, when a 14-year-old girl named Bernadette Soubirous reported seeing Mary as many as eighteen times. The Virgin showed her a spring, the water of which could provide healing, and said that a church to which pilgrims could come should be built. As many as six million pilgrims visit the shrine each year; the church has documented 69 miraculous healings taking place there.

Since 1981, the appearances of Mary to six children in the village of Medjugorje in what was at the time Yugoslavia, now Bosnia-Herzegovina, have received a lot of attention, both positive and negative. In 2019, Pope Francis authorized making pilgrimage visits to the town, without giving any official approval of the events that have occurred there.

Martin Luther expressed skepticism about miracles unless they supported and did not distract from faith in Jesus Christ. In 1524, he wrote:

“What can be said that is more marvelous than this, that the Son of God assumes the flesh of man and is born of a virgin? What is more astounding than this, that the Son of God, battling with death and the devil, allows Himself to be overcome, offers His life to His enemies, and overcomes while being overcome? And the miracle supreme is this, that the man Christ, who died on the cross, rises from death and from the sealed grave on the third day, ascends to heaven and sits at the right hand of God with His flesh. What can possibly be said, nay, even conceived, that is equal to these miracles?”



Recommended Hymns:

ELW 241: [O Lord, How Shall I Meet You](#)

ELW 245: [Creator of the Stars of Night](#)

ELW 254: [Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus](#)

ELW 258: [Unexpected and Mysterious](#)

ELW 256: [Comfort, Comfort Now My People](#)

ACS 901: [Now the Heavens Start to Whisper](#)

ACS 902: [Come Now, O God](#)

ACS 1084: [God Be the Love to Search & Keep Me](#)

Other Hymns and Songs:

[“Song of Bernadette”](#) by Leonard Cohen

[“Ave Maria”](#) by Franz Schubert

WEEK TWO DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- Have you ever experienced a miracle?
- If you experienced a vision of Jesus, of an angel, or of Mary, would you tell anyone?
- Do you have specific places that you identify as being especially holy? What is it about them that inspires that feeling?

INTERVIEW WITH MARGARITA ROMO



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WEEK THREE:

Our Lady of Guadalupe and Our Call to Work for Justice

We look at the Bible's call for justice as we learn about a Mexican peasant's experiences and how they have become important to the people of Latin America and to advocates for justice throughout the world. Margita Romo will share her work to secure justice for farmworkers.

SCRIPTURE READING: Amos 5:7-11, 18-24

⁷Ah, you that turn justice to wormwood, and bring righteousness to the ground! ⁸The one who made the Pleiades and Orion, and turns deep darkness into the morning, and darkens the day into night, who calls for the waters of the sea, and pours them out on the surface of the earth, the Lord is his name, ⁹who makes destruction flash out against the strong, so that destruction comes upon the fortress. ¹⁰They hate the one who reproves in the gate, and they abhor the one who speaks the truth. ¹¹Therefore because you trample on the poor and take from them levies of grain, you have built houses of hewn stone, but you shall not live in them; you have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink their wine. ¹⁸Alas for you who desire the day of the Lord! Why do you want the day of the Lord? It is darkness, not light; ¹⁹as if someone fled from a lion, and was met by a bear; or went into the house and rested a hand against the wall, and was bitten by a snake. ²⁰Is not the day of the Lord darkness, not light, and gloom with no brightness in it? ²¹I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. ²²Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon. ²³Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. ²⁴But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream.



SCRIPTURE READING: LUKE 1:39-55



³⁹In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, ⁴⁰where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit ⁴²and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. ⁴³And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? ⁴⁴For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord." ⁴⁶And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, ⁴⁷and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, ⁴⁸for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; ⁴⁹for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. ⁵⁰His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. ⁵¹He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. ⁵²He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; ⁵³he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. ⁵⁴He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, ⁵⁵according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

WEEK THREE: REFLECTION

On December 9, 1531, soon after the Spanish conquest of the Aztec Empire, Juan Diego, a peasant who had only recently converted to the Catholic faith, saw a vision of Mary on a hill outside of Mexico City. Mary spoke to him in the language of the Aztec people and asked that a church be built in her honor, so that she could “exhibit her compassion” for them. When Juan Diego reported this event, the archbishop of Mexico City did not believe him and instructed him to ask the woman for a miraculous sign to prove her identity.

Diego had more encounters with Mary, who then, on December 12, placed an image of herself on the lining of his cloak. His archbishop was convinced by this miracle and a chapel was quickly built where the Virgin had asked. The site now contains a number of chapels and shrines, including a large basilica in which the miraculous image of Mary is displayed. The shrine is visited by twenty million pilgrims a year; nine million do so on or around December 12.

In the 19th century, Our Lady of Guadalupe became a symbol of the Mexican people in their struggles for independence from Spain. The Mexican novelist, Carlos Fuentes, once said that “you cannot truly be considered a Mexican unless you believe in the Virgin of Guadalupe.” In 1999, Pope John Paul II proclaimed her the “patroness of the Americas.” Latin American immigrants and refugees in the United States have great devotion for her. Images of Our Lady of Guadalupe can be found in Episcopal, Methodist, and Lutheran churches that minister to Hispanic communities.

This devotion to her, along with the words of the “Magnificat” and its promises of justice for the poor, inspired Cesar Chavez in his work to secure better wages for California farm workers in the 1960s. An image of the Virgin of Guadalupe was carried in a 300-mile march to the state capital. Artists have incorporated her image into works that demand justice for the poor, for women, and for immigrants.



Recommended Hymns:

ELW 239: [Hark, the Glad Sound!](#)

ELW 243: [Lost in the Night](#)

ELW 255: [There's a Voice in the Wilderness](#)

ELW 706: [The People Walk](#)

ELW 710: [Let Streams of Living Justice](#)

ACS 904: [Come to Be Our Hope, O Jesus](#)

ACS 1053: [A River Flows Through Babylon](#)

ACS 1078: [There is a Longing in Our Hearts](#)

Other Hymns and Songs:

[“Justicia”](#) by The Porter’s Gate

[“Un pueblo unido jamás será vencido”](#) by Sergio Ortega Alvarado

WEEK THREE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What is the significance of Mary communicating in the language of a conquered and oppressed people?
- The ELCA’s rite of baptism calls for us to “proclaim Christ through word and deed, care for others and the world God made, and work for justice and peace.” How well are we incorporating justice into the work of the church?
- Can we do the work of justice without getting embroiled in politics?

INTERVIEW WITH MARGARITA ROMO



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WEEK FOUR:

Las Posadas and Our Call to Hospitality

We look at the Bible's commands to offer hospitality as we learn about traditional Latin American practices in the days leading up to Christmas. Margarita shares her work to secure justice for immigrants.

SCRIPTURE READING: GENESIS 18:1-5, 20-22 19:1-3

¹The Lord appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. ²He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground. ³He said, "My lord, if I find favor with you, do not pass by your servant. ⁴Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. ⁵Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant." So they said, "Do as you have said."

²⁰Then the Lord said, "How great is the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah and how very grave their sin! ²¹I must go down and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me; and if not, I will know." ²²So the men turned from there, and went toward Sodom, while Abraham remained standing before the Lord.

The two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them, and bowed down with his face to the ground. ²He said, "Please, my lords, turn aside to your servant's house and spend the night, and wash your feet; then you can rise early and go on your way." They said, "No; we will spend the night in the square." ³But he urged them strongly; so they turned aside to him and entered his house; and he made them a feast, and baked unleavened bread, and they ate.



SCRIPTURE READING: LUKE 2:1-7



¹In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. ²This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³All went to their own towns to be registered. ⁴Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. ⁵He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. ⁶While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

SCRIPTURE READING: HEBREWS 12:28-13:3

²⁸Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us give thanks, by which we offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe; ²⁹for indeed our God is a consuming fire.

^{13:1}Let mutual love continue. ²Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. ³Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured.



WEEK FOUR: REFLECTION

The “sin of Sodom” is no longer understood to have as much to do with human sexuality as with the biblical imperative to offer hospitality to strangers. The story of the city’s destruction begins with Abraham offering hospitality to God; his nephew Lot offers hospitality to the angels who have come to investigate the reported iniquity of the city.

Some scholars believe that Jesus’ command to “Love your neighbor as yourself” is based upon a commandment in the Old Testament book of Leviticus: “When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt” (19:33-34a).

The Latin American celebration of Las Posadas is a commentary on Mary and Joseph’s need for hospitality when they traveled to Bethlehem; it has been a Mexican tradition for over 400 years. Las Posadas, which translates as “the inns,” takes place over nine evenings; some communities celebrate a particular virtue, such as humility or generosity, on each of the evenings. Two participants might be dressed as Mary and Joseph: sometimes Mary rides on a donkey. They are part of a procession of carolers going door to door. On each night of the celebration, a different home has been selected as the inn that will be welcoming; other homes tell the couple they must move on. Even at the designated “inn,” the objections of the innkeeper must be overcome with persistence. Each evening ends with the sharing of food and drink.

Many Christians believe that the Bible’s commandments to offer hospitality to strangers should impact the plight of refugees and asylum seekers. People come to this nation seeking a safe haven from the violence, poverty, corruption, and oppression of their home countries. They fear that there will be “no room at the inn.”



Recommended Hymns:

ELW 242: [Awake! Awake, and Greet the New Morn](#)

ELW 247: [Come Now, O Prince of Peace](#)

ELW 248: [People, Look East](#)

ELW 715: [Christ, Be Our Light](#)

ELW 723: [Canticle of the Turning](#)

ACS 908: [In a Far-Off Place, Jesus Comes](#)

ACS 1042: [May This Church Be Like a Tree](#)

ACS 1062: [Build a Longer Table](#)

Other Hymns and Songs:

[“¡Miren Cuántas Luces!”](#)

[La Canción Para Pedir Posada](#)

WEEK FOUR DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- Why do so many people seek asylum in the United States?
- What is your reaction when the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah is understood as a refusal to welcome strangers in need of shelter?
- How would you feel about welcoming a stranger into your home?

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