

GOD UNBORN:

Mary said yes...

Devotional resource

“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



evangelical alliance
together making Jesus known



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.

In our celebration of God's Incarnation, we rejoice in two awesome and connected truths: first, that God the Son is fully human and fully divine, and second, that we and every human being bear God's image and likeness.

When God the Son became flesh, He developed in the womb and was born of a woman, like all babies are. Joining us in the fullness of our humanity from that point was intentional, so it must matter. Yet we don't tend to think about those nine months before Jesus' birth. With this *God Unborn* series, we are led to think about the circumstances and the people at the point at which the Word became flesh, and ask God to reveal to us what He planned that we've forgotten, or perhaps never noticed.

In this devotional resource, let's think together about God unborn through Mary's yes.



When Mary said yes to God the Father, to be the mother of God the Son, it was the fulfilment of a promise from God that reached back to the garden of Eden. In Genesis 3:15, God promised salvation and redemption of the Fall. God's plan was for "the seed of the woman" to conquer evil and that first gospel message (known as the Protoevangelium) came to fulfilment in the conception of Jesus – the seed in Mary's womb – the Incarnation.

Mary wasn't saying yes to lending her womb for a transplanted Jesus. Scripture tells us Mary conceived by the Spirit. Through conception, her son was biologically related to her, sharing her DNA and humanity.

Mother and son shared a sacrificial love, each for the other, from His conception to His death. In her womb, He was safe and provided for. In His dying words, He provided for her. There was a shared dependence and vulnerability. Some women and some pregnancies are particularly vulnerable to social circumstances, and Mary and her pregnancy were among them.

It was unexpected, and for Mary, unplanned. It required an astonishing amount of trust in God's love, constant presence and purpose. This young woman, Luke tells us, was understandably afraid and confused but was still willing to say yes to God's invitation. Mary's trust in God the Father's request to be the mother of His Son strikes a contrast to Eve's lack of trust in God. Two women, a choice of trust, one declines, and one accepts, and what a vast difference there is in the contrasting outcomes.

We know Mary's yes to this pregnancy risked her marriage and her life. We know, too, that the timing of Jesus' conception meant a

less-than-comfortable birth. What started with an arduous journey ended without the comfort of home and family. Then, it became the stuff of nightmares when a despotic king's anger and jealousy forced Jesus and His parents to flee and live as refugees.

Rejoice, Mary, you are favoured, you are chosen – did it feel like it?

But Mary says yes and lives her yes. She trusts that the promise of God's blessing – for her, her people, and the generations to come, would come through the birth of this child.

This intentional and very human journey which God lived, speaks to His heart for both their lives, Mary and Jesus. And through their story, for both lives in every pregnancy.

God is full of compassion and empathises with and understands the messiness and brokenness of life because He lived it, the unplanned and unexpected, in poverty and as a refugee. In the Bible story of the woman caught in adultery, we can appreciate Jesus' reaction even more, in light of His own mother's experience. The unique circumstances of Jesus' conception could have led to accusations of adultery against Mary. Joseph's righteousness protected Mary, and likewise Jesus' mercy protected the woman from being stoned to death. And Jesus' continued and intentional provision for His mother after His own death speaks to His care for us and His charge to care for the widow and orphan.

God's love for and the value given to every human being, as His image-bearers, from before we were born, is rooted in His own unborn experience. The Saviour of all, the Seed of redemption, promised at the beginning of Genesis, as soon as sin entered creation, here on earth in Mary's womb.

LET US PRAY

Father God,

You designed me and know me.

You created me with purpose and for a purpose.

Through your word and in the counsel of your Spirit, help me to know you.

As you lovingly invite me to walk in step with you, and reveal your heart's design for me, help me even in my fear and confusion to trust you enough to say yes.

Like Mary, may my yes bring glory to you.

Amen

“But the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favour with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call Him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David, and He will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; His kingdom will never end.’ ... The angel answered, ‘The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the Holy One to be born will be called the Son of God’ ... ‘I am the Lord’s servant,’ Mary answered. ‘May your Word to me be fulfilled.’ Then the angel left her ... And Mary said: ‘My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for He has been mindful of the humble state of His servant.’”

Luke 1:30–48



THE INCARNATION

“I was asked by Both Lives 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 I.

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

GOD UNBORN LECTIO DIVINA MARCH 2024

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. We invite you to use this Lectio Divina prayer time to sit in the mystery of God unborn, to take time to hear from God and to take your thoughts and prayers to God.

*As Christians, we celebrate God's
Incarnation in the embodiment 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 outline below suggests how to set each of the seven scripture passages out over a week and use them as a way of praying and reflecting on the truth of the Incarnation – that God, the Creator of all, chose to become human, chose to meet us in our humanity and that this mystery of the Incarnation happened not at the birth of Jesus but nine months before, at His conception in His mother Mary's womb.

For each day, take the suggested scripture passage and use the Lectio Divina pattern of read, meditate, pray and contemplate, to spend time reflecting on our unborn God, developing, growing and living in His mother's womb.

We hope and pray that you too will find the joy, hope, faith and blessing that comes from this mystery.

Read (*Lectio*)

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

Meditate (*Meditatio*)

Think about the passage you have just read. What does it say? Is there a meaning to this? 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 and what you have been thinking about or 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 from this moment? What action am I being called to do? You might continue to pray on the message as you sit in this moment.

The following seven scripture passages have been chosen to help reflect on the mystery of the Incarnation of Jesus, promised from the Fall of Adam and Eve, prophesied throughout the Old Testament, and fulfilled at Jesus' conception in the womb of Mary.

DAY 1

“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” Genesis 3:15

Read (Lectio)

Choose a comfortable seat.

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

Meditate (Meditatio)

Think about the passage you have just read.

- Is this a familiar piece of scripture? Is it an important piece of scripture to you?
- What word or group of words feel important to you?
- This passage is referred to as the Protoevangelium (first gospel/first good news) as God promises salvation from the Fall and triumph over the ancient serpent. Can you feel God’s grace and desire for your salvation in these words of scripture?
- Do you see a prophecy of Jesus, born of Mary, in this passage? Jesus is the seed of the woman.
- Think about the Jewish people just before the birth of Jesus and how long they had been waiting for this promise from God to be fulfilled. How does that make you feel?

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 plan of salvation prophesied from the very moment of the Fall and fulfilled in time through the Incarnation of Jesus in Mary's womb.
- Ask Him to give you the grace to hold the wonder of this mystery in your heart.
- Thank God for including women in His plan of salvation. In His mercy, God immediately promised the Seed who would redeem the Fall. Through the trusting yes of Mary, the knot of Eve's distrust was untied.

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 that word ‘Protoevangelium’ (first gospel/first good news), and as you continue your day, remember that God's good news is eternal and has existed for all of time, in the person of Jesus.

DAY 2

“Why, then, was the law given at all? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come.” Galatians 3:19

Read (Lectio)

Choose a comfortable seat.

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

Meditate (*Meditatio*)

Think about the passage you have just read.

- When you think of ‘the law’, do you think of rules and regulations, restrictions and prevention of fun? Or do you think of necessary boundaries, firm but protective?
- God meets us where we are, but He loves us too much to leave us there – did you ever consider that Genesis 3 reveals God’s mercy as He didn’t want to leave Adam and Eve in their transgressions?
- From the moment of the Fall, God had a plan to save us. ‘The law’ is a necessity but not an end in itself. How might this change the way we view our relationship with God?
- Reflect on the word “Seed” – does it make you think of new life, new beginnings, restoration? Jesus is the Seed foretold in Genesis 3:15, and He is life.
- Think about Mary and Joseph – they were the first to witness the fulfilment of the promise of the Seed as the first people to look at the human face 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 His mercy and compassion in wanting to free us from the slavery of sin and death and instead desiring eternal life for us.
- Ask Him to help you follow His law, written on your heart, as you live more fully with Him.
- Thank God for His plan from the beginning, to send the Seed, His Son, hidden and growing in the depths of Mary’s womb at the promised time.

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 how often laws, rules or boundaries have actually helped you to lead a better life.

DAY 3

*“But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah,
who are one of the little clans of Judah,
from you shall come forth for me
one who is to rule in Israel,
whose origin is from of old,
from ancient days.
Therefore he shall give them up until the time
when she who is in labour has brought forth;
then the rest of His kindred shall return
to the people of Israel.” Micah 5:2–3*

Read (Lectio)

Choose a comfortable seat.

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

Meditate (Meditatio)

Think about the passage you have just read.

- This is a prophecy of the coming of the Saviour – look again at how it reveals that the Saviour will come through childbirth, a woman in labour.

- This prophecy also reveals that the Saviour’s “origin is from of old”. Rest with the thought that Jesus has always existed, but His human form began at a particular point in history, in the womb of Mary.
- This verse is often heard during Advent as we prepare for Christmas. Imagine how the people of Israel would have felt, waiting for a Saviour, listening to the prophecies, wondering when the Saviour would come and who the Saviour would be.
- Reflect on the “she” in the passage. How do you think Mary felt, knowing the scriptures and the promise of God long ago in Genesis 3:15, realising that the “she” referred to her?

Pray (Oratio)

Turn your attention to our heavenly Father.

- Talk to God in your own words about what you have read.
- Praise God the Alpha and the Omega for the love that He has shown us for eternity, a love centred on sending us a Saviour to draw us back to Him.
- Ask Him to give you the grace to hold the wonder of this mystery in your heart.
- Thank God for all the plans He has for you, for your life and for those you love.

Contemplate (Contemplatio)

Rest in the presence of God.

- Read the scripture again.
- Ask God – “what should I remember or take away from this moment?”
- Pray for those who struggle to see or feel God’s presence or recognise Jesus as their Saviour.

DAY 4

“But when the fullness of time was come God sent forth His Son made of a woman.” Galatians 4:4

Read (Lectio)

Choose a comfortable seat.

- Take a moment to clear your mind of all 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 means the most to you today?
- Think about God’s patience, how He took His time in sending His Son.
- Is it hard in today’s instantaneous world to find that patience? Do you rush to accomplish things quickly and miss out on that right moment?
- Jesus is fully God, but He is also fully man with a human mother,



who not only gave birth to Him but shared her biology with His humanity from the moment of His human conception. Reflect on the long, slow nine months Jesus spent in the womb, waiting, growing, developing.

- Imagine Mary, the mother of the Messiah, feeling Jesus moving and stretching and turning within her womb. The Creator of all, nurtured inside one of His created.
- Reflect on the reality that in our fallen world, not every woman will experience this God-designed gift of pregnancy and motherhood. Hold in your heart those women who will experience baby loss or who will never be able to conceive as well as those who mother in other ways.

Pray (Oratio)

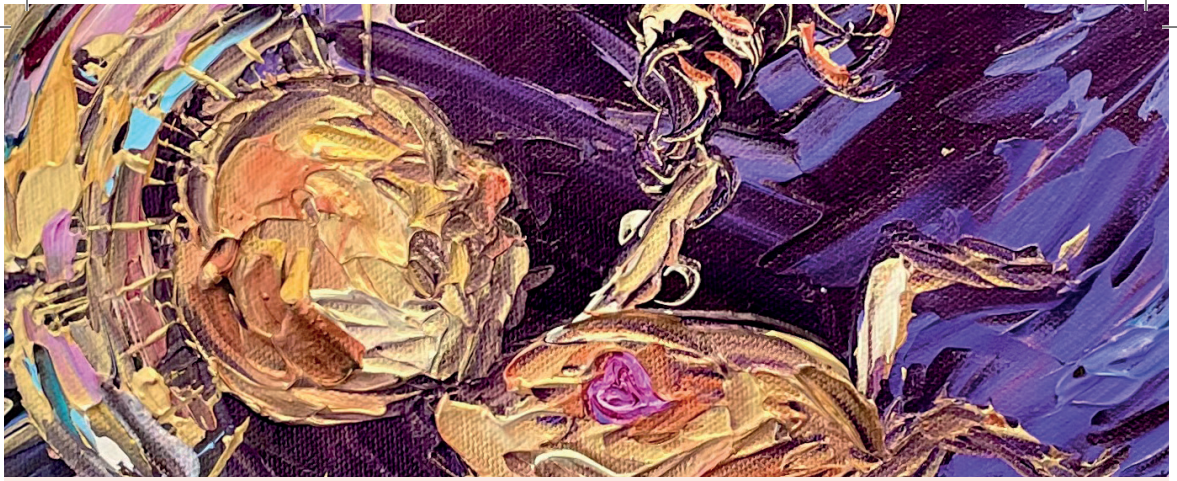
Turn your attention to our heavenly Father.

- Talk to God in your own words about what you have read.
- Praise God for His wisdom in choosing the right time to fulfil the promise He made in Genesis 3:15.
- Ask God to give you patience in life, to be able to wait for the right moment to achieve, to accomplish, to celebrate, to grieve.
- Thank God for the gift of time, for the gift of life, for His perfect design.

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 take some time today to re-read the story of the presentation of Jesus in the temple in Luke 2:22–38, and focus on the words of Simeon, who had been promised by God that he would see the Messiah long-awaited by Israel.



DAY 5

“Yet you brought me out of the womb; you made me trust in you, even at my mother’s breast.

From birth I was cast on you; from my mother’s womb you have been my God.” Psalm 22:10–11

Read (Lectio)

Choose a comfortable seat.

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

Meditate (Meditatio)

Think about the passage you have just read.

- Think about the word “womb” used twice in this short passage of scripture. In Hebrew, the word womb is “rechem” and is connected to the word “racham”, meaning God’s mercy.
- Reflect on how God’s divine protection of humanity against sin (His mercy) is closely linked to the way the womb protects unborn life.

- Trust has become a focal point in this story of the promised Seed – Eve didn't trust God in the garden and went against His commands, but Mary trusts God and gives her yes to His request. Do you trust God and what He asks of you every day?
- God the Father lovingly watches over the new life developing in the womb. He has inscribed His law on that new life's heart, He is each new life's God.
- These words of King David have long been associated with Jesus as the suffering good shepherd. Think of how Jesus quotes from this Psalm on the cross (verse 1) – linking His conception, birth and death to His ultimate trust of the Father.

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 wonderful way He knows each of us intimately, from the moment of our conception in the womb to the moment we meet Him in the heavenly kingdom.
- Ask God to help you trust Him more and more every day. Ask Him for the grace of the Holy Spirit to strengthen your trust.
- Thank God for the opportunity to trust Him, to know Him and to claim Him as your God.

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 these words from St Jerome (who lived from AD342–AD420): “The Son of God, for our salvation, became Son of man. He waits nine months to be born. He endures discomforts. Bloodied He comes forth. He is wrapped in swaddling clothes. He is covered in kisses.” (St Jerome Letter 22 to Eustochium, paragraph 39)

DAY 6

“While He was saying this, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, ‘Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that nursed you.’” Luke 11:27

Read (Lectio)

Choose a comfortable seat.

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

Meditate (Meditatio)

Think about the passage you have just read.

- Think about Mary as the mother of Jesus. We often rush past the nativity without pondering those first moments between mother and son.
- In your mind, visualise the little baby Jesus, stretching, yawning, suckling, and Mary caring for Him, protecting Him, loving Him. Mother, chosen by God, and Son, sent from the Father.
- Jesus is fully divine, but He is also fully human. God chose to send His Son not as a man, or even as a newborn, but as an embryo, a foetus, an unborn child who had to be birthed and cared for and nourished by a mother. How does this help your understanding of God’s plan for family and relationship?
- Mary and Joseph were given a monumental task – to be the earthly parents to the Son of God. God’s heart for family is at the centre of His plan for salvation.

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 humility in entering into every aspect of our humanity.
- Ask God to help those women and men for whom fertility or infertility has involved pain, loss and grief, bringing with it mental and/or physical ill health.
- Thank your heavenly Father that He is present even in the difficulties and the pain and suffering that life on earth brings. Thank Him for His salvation plan and the comfort there is in knowing Jesus has walked that path of sorrow and will walk it with you.

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 know of someone who has struggled in the days and weeks after giving birth; how might you help them and give them support?

DAY 7

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish but may have eternal life.” John 3:16

Read (Lectio)

Choose a comfortable seat.

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

Meditate (Meditatio)

Think about the passage you have just read

- This is one of the most memorable passages of scripture. You may have heard it so often that it is almost too familiar. Rest with it for a minute and consider what word or words you would emphasise in this passage.
- Do you see in this passage the fulfilment of Genesis 3:15 – the promised Seed, born of a woman, sent by a loving God to bring us to eternal life and to undo the damage of the Fall?
- Over the past week, how have you reflected on the fact that God always knew His plan of salvation would include human conception, human birth and a mother?
- Jesus is the Seed. He is the One spoken of in Genesis 3:15, and through His conception He has sanctified the womb and the process of pregnancy.
- Can you imagine the joy of Mary’s motherly devotion to the child within her – Jesus who grew for nine months in her womb and who she birthed and nurtured? God trusted Mary to care for His Son.
- 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 choosing to join us in the fullness of our humanity, from the moment of conception.
- 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 good news with a family member or friend?

We hope this Lectio Divina has enriched your prayer life and has helped you reflect more on the mystery of the Incarnation. We pray it has brought you joy and blessings over the past seven days. We pray that the truth that the God of all planned and chose to become an unborn baby, and that this had been His plan right from the beginning, has strengthened your understanding of the value of all life. We pray that as you have sat in this mystery that Jesus, the Son of God, the second Person of the Trinity, grew and developed in His mother’s womb, waiting to be born, you have felt God’s grace and presence with you in your prayers.

We would love to hear your reflections from the past seven days, as you sat in the wonder of the Incarnation. Our contact details are overleaf. Do get in touch.

Website: bothlives.co.uk and eauk.org

f **X** @bothlives **ig** @bothlivesuk

Email: stand@bothlives.co.uk

Telephone: 028 90 739079

