



PACEM in TERRIS

HERMITAGE RETREAT CENTER

A MOTHER'S RETREAT

Beside the Still Waters

Three days in the company of Mary — her courage, her surrender, her immeasurable love — as a lantern
for every mother who has known both joy and sorrow.



A Three-Day Self-Directed Silent Retreat



Foundation: Before You Begin

Why Mary · What to expect · How to use this guide

WHY MARY?

A mother for all mothers

Mary is not merely a theological figure. She is a woman who said yes before she understood, who gave birth far from home, who watched her son suffer without being able to stop it, and who stood at the foot of the cross. She has walked every terrain of motherhood: wonder, fear, loss, and resurrection hope.

This retreat uses her story as a mirror. In her we find permission to be overwhelmed, permission to ponder, and permission to trust — even when we cannot see what God is doing.

“And Mary said, ‘Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.’”

— Luke 1:38

THE THEME

Pondering and trusting

Luke tells us twice that Mary ‘pondered these things in her heart.’ She did not have answers — she had presence. This retreat invites the same: not solutions to the complexity of motherhood, but a deeper presence with the God who holds both you and your children.

“But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.”

— Luke 2:19

WHAT TO BRING

Your only essentials

A Bible. A journal. Your honest, tired, love-worn heart. You do not need to arrive composed. Mary herself was troubled when the angel came. Come as you are.

Day One: The Yes

Courage, calling, and the invitation to trust

Every mother's journey begins with a yes — sometimes chosen, sometimes unexpected, always life-altering. Today we sit with Mary in the moment before everything changed, and find in her yes a mirror for our own.

MORNING PRAYER • 30 MIN

The Annunciation

Read Luke 1:26–38 slowly, twice. Picture Mary's face — not the serene icon, but a young woman startled, uncertain, asked for the impossible.

Journal: When did you say your most significant 'yes' in motherhood? Was it fearless or trembling? What did it cost you?

“Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.”

— Luke 1:30

FIRST PRAYER PERIOD • 45 MIN

The Magnificat: A Mother's Praise

Read Luke 1:46–55 — Mary's great song. She sings it while carrying the weight of an impossible calling, while uncertain of the future. This is not polished praise — it is praise from the depths.

Journal: What would your own Magnificat sound like today? Write it — even if it begins with 'I am exhausted.' Start there and see where God takes it.

“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.”

— Luke 1:46–48

MIDDAY EXAMEN • 20 MIN

Five questions at noon

1. Gratitude: Name three specific gifts from this morning — however small.
2. Presence: Where did you feel God most near in prayer today?
3. Resistance: What felt hard to sit with? Don't fix it — just notice.
4. Mary's gift to you: What one thing about her story do you most need to receive?
5. Afternoon intention: Ask God for one grace for the hours ahead.

AFTERNOON PRAYER • 45 MIN

When we carry more than we can hold

Read Isaiah 49:14–16. God says: ‘Can a mother forget the infant at her breast? Even if she does, I will not forget you.’ Sit with this for a long time. You are held by a love greater than your own love.

Journal: What do you fear most about those entrusted to your care? Can you name it, offer it, and receive the promise that God loves them even more than you do?

“See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands.”

— Isaiah 49:16

Evening

Read Psalm 131 — just three verses, one of the most tender in all Scripture. Pray it as a lullaby to your own soul. Journal one word from today to carry into sleep.

“I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its mother.”

— Psalm 131:2

Day Two: The Sword

The places motherhood has broken your heart open

Simeon warned her: ‘A sword will pierce your own soul too.’ Every mother knows something of this sword. Today we do not avoid it. We bring it to the foot of the cross.

MORNING PRAYER · 30 MIN

Mary at the Cross

Read John 19:25–27 slowly. Notice: she did not flee. She stood. She could not fix it. She could only remain. Sit with her in that standing.

What does it feel like to love someone you cannot save?

“Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother... When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, ‘Woman, behold, your son!’”

— John 19:25–26

FIRST PRAYER PERIOD · 45 MIN

The wounds we carry

Read Lamentations 3:19–26. This is holy grief — raw, honest, not yet resolved. The wounds of motherhood are not signs of failure. They are signs of love.

Journal: What is the hardest thing you have ever had to watch your child walk through? Write without editing. Then read it back as a prayer, handing it to God directly.

SECOND PRAYER PERIOD · 45 MIN

You are not alone in it

Read Romans 8:26–28 and Hebrews 4:15–16. Jesus is not a high priest unable to sympathize. Come to the throne of grace — not with composed words, but with whatever is true right now.

“The Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.”

— Romans 8:26

AFTERNOON · 45 MIN

Entrusting what we cannot control

Read Luke 2:41–51 — the boy Jesus lost in Jerusalem. Notice Mary’s fear. Notice her words: ‘Son, why have you treated us so?’ Even she did not always understand.

Journal: What have you been trying to control that needs to be released? Write a prayer of release — even if it begins: ‘God, I can’t do this yet. Help me begin.’

Evening

Read Psalm 34:18. Light a candle and sit in silence for ten minutes. You do not have to be strong tonight. The broken-hearted are the ones God draws near.

“The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.”

— Psalm 34:18

Day Three: The Joy

The resurrection side of motherhood · Sent in love

After the cross comes the empty tomb. Today we live in resurrection light — the good that God brings from what we thought was lost, and the sending of a mother renewed into her calling.

MORNING PRAYER · 30 MIN

Something new is here

Read Isaiah 43:18–19 and Acts 1:14 — Mary in the upper room, still present, still praying, still trusting. This is the quiet heroism of faithful motherhood.

“Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?”

— Isaiah 43:19

THE SUSCIPE — ADAPTED FOR MOTHERS

A prayer of offering

Lord, take my love for these children — all of it, the fierce and the frightened — and use it for your purposes. I cannot hold them tightly enough, but you can. I offer them to you again today. Keep what I cannot keep. Carry what I cannot carry. And give me only your love and your grace. That is enough. (After St. Ignatius of Loyola)

FINAL PRAYER PERIOD · 45 MIN

The grace you have been given to give

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4–8 and Proverbs 31:25–26. Not as a standard you must meet, but as a picture of love lived from the inside out — from a place of being loved.

Journal: What is one thing you have given your children that no one else could have given them? Name it. Receive the gratitude for it.

CLOSING EXAMEN · 30 MIN

Three gifts, one resolution, one blessing

6. Name three things God gave you in these three days.
7. Name one way you will love more freely because of this retreat.
8. Write a blessing for each child or person entrusted to your care.

Go, Beloved Mother

Mary kept all these things and pondered them. Take what you have found here and carry it gently. You are not alone in it.

“She is clothed with strength and dignity, and she laughs at the days to come.”

— Proverbs 31:25

Core Practices & Extra Scripture

How to pray · What to do when it's hard · A treasury of passages

PRACTICE

The breath prayer

Inhale: 'God holds.' Exhale: 'What I love.' Return to it whenever anxiety rises throughout the day.

PRACTICE

Praying with an image or candle

Place a candle or sacred image where you pray. Something to rest your eyes on quiets the restless mind and opens the heart.

EXTRA SCRIPTURE

A treasury for free time

- Zephaniah 3:17 — God rejoices over you with singing
- Psalm 139:13–16 — You formed me; you know those I have formed
- John 11:35 — Jesus wept (God is not unmoved by grief)
- Matthew 11:28–30 — Come to me all who are weary
- Isaiah 66:13 — As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you
- Revelation 21:4 — He will wipe every tear from their eyes