

**A
Quiet
Christmas**

Keeping Silence with the Word

Lindsey Gallant

Introduction

Dear friend and reader,

Welcome to *A Quiet Christmas: Keeping Silence with the Word*. This devotional is your invitation to experience the *quiet* of a holy season.

I wrote this for the ones craving moments of quiet amidst the relentless noise and bustle of the holidays. This is your chance to come into a hushed and holy place, an opportunity to meditate on the deeper reality that gives birth to the joyous racket of Christmas. Hear the call to pause and embrace the peace of Christ's presence for a few minutes each day.

I also wrote this for the ones who find themselves facing a quiet Christmas this year. This is for the person whose world has shifted into unexpected silence—perhaps without the familiar voice of a loved one for the first time, or without the bubbling, humming comforts of home. This is for the dear one who can't bring themselves to sing this year.

Whether you are embracing or resisting the quiet this season, I pray you will discover the gift of a *holy silence*.

In this guide, we will explore the ancient Advent hymn "Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence." Each week of Advent we will consider a new stanza of the song, peeling back the curtain on the cosmic realities of the Incarnation, and exploring our own need for silence. Each day we will dwell deeply with Scripture, slowing our minds and opening our hearts to hear and receive the Word given. We will experience both the *awe* and *intimacy* Advent offers.

May Jesus the Word meet you in these pages and whisper his stillness into your soul. Be blessed as you keep a loving silence with Him.

A note about silence: What if literal silence is impossible in your life? What if you are in a season of sound you can't escape from? Does that mean "keeping silence" is not an option for you? Be assured, silence has far more to do with a listening heart than an absence of noise. This peace is for you, too.

Lindsey Gallant
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An Introduction to Christian Meditation

Meditation has always been the practice of God’s people—a loving attentiveness to the holy Word He has given. It is a biblical practice, found in both Old and New Testaments. Christian meditation is centred on the Christ of Scripture, not ourselves. The purpose is to engage freely and fully with the Living Word, who continues to speak grace and truth to us today. In meditating on God’s Word, we abide deeply in the presence of Jesus, drawing life from the One who is our Source.

The guided meditation in this devotional is based on the principles of *lectio divina* (Latin for “divine reading”), a historic form of Christian meditation. In it, I lead you through a simple process of REST in the Word.

Receive

We begin by preparing ourselves to *receive* the living and active Word of God, opening our spiritual ears and eyes, and inviting Him to speak.

Engage

We *engage* with Scripture by reading (or writing) it several times, letting the words lead us into a conversation with the Word Himself. This is a time for both listening and speaking

Stillness

We *still* ourselves in the presence of God, simply resting and delighting ourselves in Him.

Trust

We move into our day with *trust* that the Word given will begin to transform us as we walk in obedience, remembering Jesus walks with us.

Breath Prayer

This is a holistic approach to prayer, engaging both body and spirit. Breath prayers are simple, short prayers you can use as you breathe. Pray silently through the first phrase as you inhale slowly, then exhale slowly through the second phrase. This is also a practical way to pray and meditate “on the go.” You can pause anytime for a quick breath prayer. These short moments can help you remain anchored in God’s presence throughout the day.

The Hymn

“Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence” is based on a Greek text likely dating back to the fifth century, believed to have been composed by St. James the Less, the first Bishop of Jerusalem. It has been used as both an Advent or Christmas hymn and as part of the Communion service. The English version we have now was translated and paraphrased by Gerard Moultrie, first appearing in 1864. It is in the public domain. (Source: hymnary.org)

WEEK ONE

The Homage of Silence



Day 1: Sunday

*Let all mortal flesh keep silence,
and with fear and trembling stand;
ponder nothing earthly minded,
for, with blessing in His hand,
Christ our God to earth descendeth,
our full homage to demand.*

One late November afternoon, I am drawn out into the bending light. Away from the clamour of the house and its flurry of concerns, past the withered garden and scratching chickens, down a set of mossy stone steps, and toward the hollow where our patch of woods stands by the river. In the distance, trucks roar over the narrow bridge, but as I walk away from the crossroads, the rumbling recedes.

Soon, all I can hear is the shuffle of damp leaves underfoot, where the horse chestnuts gleam out from their spiny pods and wild apples soften into the earth. Stooping under a branch of dangling mountain ash berries, I enter the path that descends to the river. There is a Linden tree in the heart of this tiny forest, and it is under these leafless limbs that I stop.

It is perhaps the first time all day I have stopped moving. The river is glass this afternoon. There is not so much as a rustle or creak in the trees above. For a moment, all is perfectly still. Exquisitely silent. The only thing I hear is the heaving air in my lungs. Gradually, my breathing slows, and the jangling noise of my own mind begins to fade.

What does it mean to *keep silence*? The line of this old Advent hymn rises like the vapour of breath on a cold day, a whisper against the pulsing sound wave of the festive season. Everywhere

I go, the Christmas soundtrack is on repeat already. Celebration is good. But the jingle can become overwhelming. I need quiet.

A forest slows when winter falls. Rhythms of respiration shift, and much of the forest's activity moves to hidden places. I look around the faded woods, and I'm aware of my body in a different way. Aware of my weight on a root sticking out of the soil, of my fingers on the cold bark of the trunk. Aware of my smallness beneath the grey and pink sky.

Is silence more than a mental break for my brain? What if it is just as much command as invitation? I resist it skilfully when it feels uncomfortable. Noise can be its own solace, a distraction from the bare humanity that reveals itself in the absence of sound. I am not always able to bear the truth that silence brings.

The light has changed in just these few minutes by the river. There is a glimmer of gold on the water, the parting gift of a setting sun. I begin to taste the fragrance of the forest, chilled and sweet. A bird calls overhead—a chickadee. My eyes fly up to find the flash of black and white. It calls once more, then plummets to a branch a foot or two away. I do not move. I do not speak. Here in the hollow of silence, we are eye to eye. My whole being hushed—*revealed*—I am softened to this mystery of shared presence.

Shared presence—this is the fearful grace of God with us. This is the Word about to speak in a new way. *Still me long enough to notice the surprising path of Your descent, the merciful sweep of blessing.*

Silence is an invitation to experience my unadorned humanity. And it is my first homage to the mystery of Incarnation, for in it I present my whole, trembling self to the open hand of Christ.

Chickadees do not stay in one place for long. A glint, three hops, and it is gone. I think I held my breath the whole time. I know I must go back up to the house, to the full-blown busyness of a day yet unfinished. But like the Linden, I try to draw something of this moment down to my roots. To pull the slowing sap of silence deep, where it will weather the bluster of another day. I turn, exhale, and begin my ascent. My ears are tingling now. Cold, yet open to the Whisper that walks with me.

Day 2: Monday

Who is this God who descends? He is the holy Lord of heaven and earth, whose command for silence stills our ears to hear His living, breathing word. Listen for His whisper...

◆ RECEIVE

Begin with a moment of silence and stillness, recognizing the Lord's presence with you. Choose a posture that is comfortable, yet attentive. Bring your whole self—body, mind, and heart—before Him.

Breath Prayer

This week's prayer can be offered in the rhythm of your breathing. Pray and breathe through these phrases a few times, until you are settled.

Inhale: *In silence I offer the fullness of myself.*

Exhale: *Give me ears to hear Your Word.*

◆ ENGAGE

Sit with Habakkuk the prophet, and hear the word of the Lord.

Read: Habakkuk 2:18-20

Read the passage slowly, aloud if you can, allowing the words and images to come alive in your mind. Be attentive to the *fullness* of the Word. Is there a word, phrase, or image that stands out to you? Hold this in your mind for a moment.

Read the passage aloud again. Linger with its words and images. Ask God to speak to you about what you noticed and why it may be important. Picture your spiritual ears opening to listen. Consider how noise has kept you from listening to God. Then let His word lead you into a conversation with Him.

◆ STILLNESS

Finally, take a few moments to still your thoughts and keep an open silence with the Word Himself.

◆ TRUST

As you move from this quiet space, keep your spiritual ears open. Listen for the breath of God whispering into your life today.

A practice of silence: Make room in your day for one more moment of silence. Take time to pause, breathe, and posture your soul toward stillness. Remember, silence is more about a listening heart than an absence of noise. Use this week's Breath Prayer to re-anchor yourself in the presence of God.

Day 3: Tuesday

Scripture contrasts the living Lord of the temple with mute and breathless idols. In the silence of holiness, the futility of their hollow gold is revealed. Only the breath of God can fill broken places.

◆ RECEIVE

Begin with a moment of silence and stillness, recognizing the Lord's presence with you. Choose a posture that is comfortable, yet attentive. Bring your whole self—body, mind, and heart—before Him.

Breath Prayer

This week's prayer can be offered in the rhythm of your breathing. Pray and breathe through these phrases a few times, until you are settled.

Inhale: *In silence I offer the fullness of myself.*

Exhale: *Give me ears to hear Your Word.*

◆ ENGAGE

Sit once more with Habakkuk the prophet, and hear the word of the Lord.

Read: Habakkuk 2:18-20

Return to yesterday's Scripture. If you are able, write the passage out by hand. Be attentive to the *fullness* of the Word. As you write, notice the words that seem to leap off the page. Is there anything *different* or *deeper* than yesterday? How does silence reveal your own idols and breathless places? Let the words on the page lead you into an honest conversation with God.

◆ STILLNESS

Finally, take a few moments to still your thoughts and keep an open silence with the Word Himself.

◆ TRUST

As you move from this quiet space, listen for God's words of blessing that breathe into broken places.

A practice of silence: Make room in your day for one more moment of silence. Take time to pause, breathe, and posture your soul toward stillness. Remember, silence is more about a listening heart than an absence of noise. Use this week's Breath Prayer to re-anchor yourself in the presence of God.