

The feast of the Nativity of Mary September 08, 2016

The readings: Rom. 8:28-30 or Mic. 5:2-5; Mt. 1:16, 18-23

There are many Marian feast days celebrated in the Catholic Church, but the principal ones are the Solemnity of Mary the Mother of God, the Presentation of Our Lord in the Temple, the Annunciation, the Assumption, the Immaculate Conception and the Nativity of our Lady. The Feasts of our Lady are dear to us. Before we are born, our mothers are our entire world; they enfold, nourish, and protect us. When we are born they continue to care for us, by comforting, nursing, and teaching us as we grow. Mothers do not stop being mothers just because we are grown. Our mother will always be our mother. So it is with our Blessed Mother, the Virgin Mary. She will always be Jesus' Mother, and she will always be our Mother with Jesus our brother. And if, for whatever reason, our own birth mother is not quite all we would like her to be, our Blessed Mother stands ready, arms open to take us in. As our Mother, she will continue to nourish, protect, comfort, and teach us as we grow. Daily prayers that greet and thank her for her love and care, and intercessory prayers that ask for her aid, ensure her place in our families, our homes, and our hearts. She is the Mother of God, the Queen of the Saints, the humble spouse of the Church, and attentive patron of hundreds. It is not surprising that there are So many feast days dedicated, to Mary.

The feast of the Nativity of Mary celebrated on the 8th of September is closely connected with the Immaculate Conception of Mary. Mary who is prepared by divine providence to be the Mother of Jesus the son of God, is conceived in the womb of her mother Anna, her father being Joachim, without the stain of sin and her birth is considered by the Church as a Solemn event. Our Lady's birthday has been described as "the hope of the entire world and the dawn of salvation". That is why the Liturgy of the day says: "Let us celebrate with joy the birth of the Virgin Mary, of who was born the Sun of Justice.... Her birth constitutes the hope and the light of salvation for the whole world.... Her image is light for the whole Christian people". St. Augustine connects Mary's birth with Jesus' saving work. He tells the earth to rejoice and shine forth in the light of her birth. "She is the flower of the field from whom bloomed the precious lily of the valley. Through her birth the nature inherited from our first parents is changed." The opening prayer at Mass speaks of the birth of Mary's Son as the dawn of our salvation and asks for an increase of peace.

The Church's calendar observes the birthdays of only three persons: St. John the Baptist and Mary, Mother of Jesus, and Jesus, Son of God. John the Baptist was sanctified even before his birth. Luke tells us that Elizabeth felt the infant John "leap in her womb" when Mary approached her soon after the Annunciation. Mary was preserved sinless in anticipation with the privilege of being the Mother of God from the moment of her conception. The origin of this Feast is sought in Syria or Palestine at the beginning of the 6th century. It goes back to the consecration of a church in Jerusalem, which tradition identifies as that of the present basilica of St. Ann. At Rome the Feast began to be kept toward the end of the 7th century, brought there by Eastern monks. Gradually and in varied ways it spread to the other parts of the West in the centuries that followed. From the 13th century on, the celebration assumed notable importance, becoming a Solemnity with a major Octave and preceded by a Vigil calling for a fast. The Octave was reduced to a simple one during the reform of St. Pius X and was abolished altogether under the reform of Pius XII in 1955. The present Calendar characterizes the Birth of Mary as an important "Feast,"

In the first reading Prophet Micah announces the coming of the Lord of Israel who will come forth from Bethlehem of Judah. The Mother of the Messiah, presented as one about to give birth, will give life to the prince and pastor of the house of David who will bring justice and peace. She will work with the Messiah to bring forth a new people. The alternate reading from the Letter to the Romans does not speak directly about Mary but about the believer justified by the grace of Christ and gifted with the indwelling of the Spirit. He or she has been chosen and called from all eternity to share Christ's life and glory. This is true in a privileged manner for Mary, Spouse and Temple of the Holy Spirit, Mother of God's Son, and intimately united with Him in a Divine plan of predestination and grace.

Today we are celebrating the Feast of the Birth of Mary. This Feast provides us with an occasion for praise and thanksgiving in honour of the personal sanctity and vocation of the Blessed Virgin Mary as the mother of the Lord Jesus. There is nothing contained in Scripture about the birth of Mary or her parentage, though Joseph's lineage is given in the first chapter of the Gospel of Matthew. The names of Mary's parents, Joachim and Anna, appear in the apocryphal "Gospel of James", a book dating from the 2nd Century AD, not part of the authentic canon of Scripture. According to this account, Joachim and Anna were also beyond the years of child-

bearing, but prayed and fasted that God would grant their desire for a child. God listened to their prayers and granted them the child. According to tradition, the house in which Mary was born in Nazareth is the same one in which the Annunciation took place. Then she was offered in God's holy temple and remained there, showing to all a great example of zeal and holiness, withdrawn from frivolous society. When, however, she reached full age and the law required that she should leave the temple, she was entrusted by the priests to Joseph, her bridegroom, as the guardian of her virginity, a steadfast observer of the law from his youth.

In celebrating the nativity of Mary, Christians anticipate the Incarnation and the birth of her Divine Son, and give honour to the mother of Our Lord and Saviour. This Feast provides us with an occasion for praise and thanksgiving in honour of the personal sanctity and vocation of the Blessed Virgin Mary as the mother of Jesus. This Feast of the Nativity of Mary has two aspects: first, the Heaven's view that enables us to enter into God's plan for the salvation of the world; and the second, what happens on earth has the freshness of dawn and of a first morning. As seen from Heaven it is a Trinitarian Feast. On the other hand the Feast of the Nativity of Mary affects our Christian life and family. Her Birth is an event which belongs at the very heart of the History of Salvation. She is the symbol of the hope and expectation of God's faithful people and at the same time she is the beginning of a new hope, the beginning of the dawn of that newness which her Son would bring for all creation. With Mary's birth, sorrow and darkness begin to be dispersed. Each of us comes here with our hopes and aspirations, with our problems, concerns and anxieties which trouble our hearts. As we begin our pilgrimage we must allow Mary to change our hearts. We ask Mary for the gift of that freedom which she would show in her willingness to accept the word of the Angel.

Mary's birth is the fulfillment of the faith of the Church. Faith is the gift that comes from God. One of the favourite stories in the Gospels is the story told in the Gospel of Saint Mark chapter 5, is the visit of Jesus to his home town and his own people do not accept him. They knew him too well and could not expect great things from so familiar a person. Jesus "was amazed at their lack of faith" and that therefore "he could work no miracle there". But we have the response of Jesus when Mary and his cousins visit him and he says his family is the one which hears the word of God and keeps it. This applies to Mary who always listened to the word and

meditated in her heart and is reflected in her nativity. Her total faith fulfils the faith of the Church.

The Gospel of today presents us with the genealogy of Jesus and genealogies are very important. They give us our roots and help us to understand our heritage. Matthew's genealogy of Jesus traces his lineage from Abraham, the father of God's chosen people, through the line of David, King of Israel. Jesus the Messiah is the direct descent of Abraham and David, and the rightful heir to David's throne. God in his mercy fulfilled his promises to Abraham and to David that he would send a Saviour and a King to rule over the house of Israel and to deliver them from their enemies. When Jacob blessed his sons he foretold that Judah would receive the promise of royalty which we see fulfilled in David. We can also see in this blessing a foreshadowing of God's fulfilment in raising up his anointed King, Jesus the Messiah. Jesus is the fulfilment of all God's promises. He is the hope not only for the people of the Old Covenant but for all nations as well. He is the Saviour of the world. One is that God is doing something unusual. Matthew's genealogy breaks from convention and on four occasions traces Jesus' descent through women. And not just any women: Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba, and Tamar. All had a whiff of scandal about them, but all had something in common: each was an instrument of God in the life of the Jewish people. Matthew's inclusion of them here signals that God is again going to do something significant through the fifth woman mentioned – Mary.

Generally, Genealogies traced lineage via the male line. Matthew may well have been using a genealogy which someone had already constructed. The genealogy proves Jesus is of the lineage of David, qualified to be the Messiah. Matthew preserves this interest by signaling it in his opening verse. Here he emphasizes that Jesus is Son of David and Son of Abraham. Mark had spoken of "the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God". Matthew will certainly go on to speak of Jesus as Son of God, but the primary concern here is to underline the link between Jesus and David, as Messiah, Son of David, and the link with Abraham, a descendant of Abraham. Jesus belongs to Israel, to God's dealing with Israel. This connection is important. It both lays claim to representing Israel and its tradition and to being connected with God's dealings in the past. The genealogy secures the emphasis on divine involvement not only by the direct links through the family. The genealogy also has some unusual features. Breaking the rule that males only appear in the lists, it lists four

women, all of whom were figures of some controversy and were Gentiles. The fifth one is Mary specially chosen by God. This appears to be Matthew's way of making a point about the kind of thing which would happen through Jesus: people normally marginalised because of their gender, are included and have become part of the divine action. If originally the genealogy was proving Jesus' lineage, the story told in 1:18-25 goes further, so far in fact that it breaks the genealogical line, because Jesus is no longer strictly the descendant of David. Instead he is the miraculous creation of God at his conception through Mary. This is Matthew's Christology of Jesus, the Son of God. It was not that he was with God in the beginning as the Word, as in John, or that he was the Son whom God sent into the world, as in Paul. Rather Jesus, the Son of God, was miraculously created at his conception.

St Paul speaking to the Romans tells us that Jesus descended from David according to the flesh that is he became a human person, and was declared to be Son of God by the Spirit. This summarizes the Feast of the Birth of Mary as predestined by the Lord God who called her to be the Mother of Jesus, God incarnated. Created as a new creation, the Second Eve, Mary was immaculate in nature from the moment of her conception. Mary was created holy, gave birth to the Son of God in holiness, lived a holy life in the Presence of the Lord God and was taken to Heaven in the fullness of her holiness. Truly, she shall be blessed every generation. That message of faith given to us on the nativity of Mary challenges all of us. There are times when our self-sufficient society would willingly banish the sight of suffering. In Lourdes Mary has created a city where the sick and the weak are the privileged partners of our care and concern. That is a sign from Mary also of the type of society we should be building. May we experience the presence and the faith of Mary in our lives in these days.

The present feast forms a link between the New and the Old Testament. It shows that Truth succeeds symbols and figures and that the New Covenant replaces the Old. Hence, all creation sings with joy, exalts, and participates in the joy of this day. ... This is, in fact, the day on which the Creator of the world constructed His temple; today is the day on which, by a stupendous project, a creature becomes the preferred dwelling of the Creator. The birth of Mary is ordained in particular toward her mission as Mother of the Saviour. Her existence is indissolubly connected with that of Christ: it partakes of a unique plan of predestination and grace. God's mysterious plan regarding the Incarnation of the Word embraces also the

Virgin who is His Mother. In this way, the Birth of Mary is inserted at the very heart of the History of Salvation.

September 8 is specially remembered for social celebrations. It marks the end of summer and beginning of fall, this day has many thanksgiving celebrations and customs attached to it. In the Old Roman Ritual there is a blessing of the summer harvest and fall planting seeds for this day. The winegrowers in France called this feast "Our Lady of the Grape Harvest". The best grapes are brought to the local church to be blessed and then some bunches are attached to hands of the statue of Mary. A festive meal which includes the new grapes is part of this day. In the Alps section of Austria this day is "Drive-Down Day" during which the cattle and sheep are led from their summer pastures in the slopes and brought to their winter quarters in the valleys. This was usually a large caravan, with all the finery, decorations, and festivity. In some parts of Austria, milk from this day and all the leftover food are given to the poor in honour of Our Lady's Nativity. A boy who was a witness to a crime was on the witness stand in court. He was approached by the defense attorney who asked, "Did anyone tell you what to say in court?" "Yes, sir," answered the boy. "I thought so," said the attorney. "Who was it?" "My father, sir." "And what did he tell you?" the attorney asked accusingly. "He said that the lawyers would try to get me all tangled up, but if I stuck to the truth, everything would be all right."

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