

## The Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God



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Almighty God, our Creator, loved us right from the beginning of time, desired our salvation, and planned for it. The Blessed Virgin Mary was predestined to be the Mother of Jesus, the only Son of God the Father. “To become the Mother of the Saviour, Mary was enriched by God with gifts appropriate to such a role” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, CCC, 490). Therefore when Mary was born, she was “preserved immune from all stain of original sin. ... The Father blessed Mary more than any other created person in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places and chose her in Christ before the foundation of the world, to be holy and blameless before Him in love (CCC, 491,492).

### **On November 21 our Catholic Church celebrates the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary.**

Mary’s parents were Joachim and Anne, of the House of David, and lived in Nazareth. They were elderly and had been childless for many years when they received a heavenly message that they would bear a child. In thanksgiving for the gift of their daughter, Mary, they brought her to the Temple in Jerusalem to offer her to God in fulfillment of a vow.

“This feast originated ... in Jerusalem in 543. An apocryphal source recounts that Mary’s parents brought their three-year-old daughter to the Temple in Jerusalem to offer her to God, as was the custom. Inspired by a priest’s vision, they left her there to serve God. This custom continued for centuries. The feast entered the Western calendar in 1585” (*Living with Christ*, Novalis, November).

Mary, raised in the Temple, was educated by the priests and doctors of the Temple. Therefore, she was familiar with the scriptures about the coming of the Messiah and the great tortures he would have to endure to save mankind – “He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering, and acquainted with infirmity ... he poured out himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors” (Isaiah 53:3,12). Mary remained in the Temple until puberty, at which time Joseph was appointed to be her future spouse. Then she returned home to Nazareth. Therefore, when the Archangel Gabriel told her that she was chosen to be the mother of the Messiah, she knew the burden of suffering that the mother would have to endure. Her “Fiat” in agreement shows the strength of her character and her great holiness.

**“[F]rom all eternity God chose for the mother of His Son a daughter of Israel, a young Jewish woman of Nazareth in Galilee, a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the House of David; and the virgin’s name was Mary” (CCC, 488).**

The Archangel Gabriel was sent by God to speak to Mary. “And he came to her and said, ‘Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you!’ ” (Luke 1:28). The Blessed Virgin Mary was indeed full of God’s graces because she was humble and open to receiving them. When Gabriel announced that she would be the mother of Jesus, “Mary said to the angel, ‘How can this be, since I have no husband?’ And the 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 called holy, the Son of God’ ” (Luke 1:34,35). Our Church teaches us about Mary’s perpetual virginity, in that Mary remained a virgin her whole life. She is “Mary, Ever-virgin” (CCC, 499).

We have much to learn by studying the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary. She loved God with all her heart and soul. She was willing to accept inconvenient and painful circumstances, and had a firm disposition to do good works for the glory of God. Life was not easy for her. She had to cooperate with God’s will. Like us, she had a choice. She had free will.

Right from the Annunciation things started to get difficult. Joseph and Mary were not married yet, only betrothed; and Joseph had not yet been informed by God that she was pregnant with Jesus. They should get married right away, because society at that time stoned women who were pregnant outside of marriage. But Mary knew that God can do anything and He would help her, so she decided to leave everything in God’s hands. She focused her attention on others. Immediately she hurried to help her cousin Elizabeth whom the Archangel Gabriel said was six months pregnant in her old age.

When Mary arrived, the two women had a very joyful first encounter. How wonderful that God had inspired Elizabeth with the knowledge that Mary was pregnant with the Son of God (see Luke 1:41-45). Mary stayed to help her cousin until after John the Baptist was born. So both women found moral support in each other. That was great. However, Zechariah, Elizabeth’s husband, had a big problem. Zechariah had recently become mute, unable to speak. Several months ago when he was serving in the Temple, the Archangel Gabriel appeared to him and told him that he and his elderly wife were going to give birth to John (the Baptist), who was to be the precursor of the Messiah. Good news. But Zechariah, a priest of the Temple, didn’t believe the angel. As a result the powerful Archangel Gabriel punished him, depriving him of speech (see Luke 1:5-23).

I imagine that Elizabeth was also upset. And Mary, in spite of problems of her own, would have selflessly tried to comfort them both with loving care. Zechariah couldn’t speak until the eighth day after John was born, when the baby was to receive a name. When Zechariah asked for a writing tablet and wrote, “His name is John,” he was immediately able to speak. Filled with the Holy Spirit he prophesied about his child who would be a prophet to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah (see Luke 1:57-80).

After this event, Mary made the long journey back home, about four months pregnant with Jesus, probably riding on a donkey, bouncing along up and down hills for more than 90 miles, and for many days! Then, when she arrived in Nazareth, a serious problem arose. Joseph noticed she was pregnant. Since she was not yet married to Joseph, he thought that Mary had been unfaithful, was very hurt and upset, and decided to repudiate (reject) her privately (see Matthew 1:18-25), probably so that she wouldn’t be stoned to death. Mary would have suffered being aware of how upset Joseph was. Finally after some days, Joseph was informed by God in a dream that Mary was pregnant with Jesus the Son of God, by the power of the Holy Spirit, and was told to marry her. Mary endured all this, forgave and trusted in God.

**Living in humble poverty with Joseph, Mary awaited the birth of the Redeemer.**

She knew that Scripture foretold that the Saviour would be born in Bethlehem in Judea. Meanwhile, she was living in Nazareth, near the end of her ninth month of pregnancy. She waited for God, whom she loved so deeply, to provide the solution. Miraculously Caesar announced the census and they HAD to go to Bethlehem, the place of their ancestors. Joyful and yet with many trials, Mary, nine months pregnant, rode on a donkey, jerked and jostled for more than 80 miles to Bethlehem for many days, and in winter! Mary forgave the bouncy donkey. She forgave Joseph for not arranging a more comfortable trip.

Yes, then it got worse. Arriving in Bethlehem, cold and exhausted, not to mention the discomfort, she discovered that Joseph couldn't get a place for them to stay! The fact that there was no room for them in the inn, demonstrates to us that we must have compassion on the poor, on the needy in our midst, and help those around us. We know that someone *did* come to the aid of the Holy Couple and direct them to shelter. Joseph took her, still on the donkey, to a stable. Mary accepted the poor stable as providential. Would we have? Because after all, Jesus was not born outside by the side of the road—they had the minimum shelter necessary. Mary, pure in heart, accepted God's Providence with love and humility and in peace. There she gave birth to Jesus in the cold of the winter night, in the straw! Did Mary understand God's reason for providing a poor stable? Theologians say that God the Father wanted Jesus to be born in abject poverty to teach all mankind that material wealth isn't important, only spiritual wealth and doing the will of God, no matter what. I don't know if Mary understood all that. But she persevered and trusted in God. He can look after our material needs, no matter how bleak everything appears. We must remember to pray, to ask and trust in Him, accepting His answer, even though it may surprise us. Mary and Joseph didn't ask for the stable specifically, but they accepted it willingly, as God provided it. God will provide what we "need", not necessarily what we "want". They were humble before God. They gave thanks. They had Jesus!!

**God, the Father, announced the birth of Jesus, His Son,  
in ways that were truly magnificent and awe inspiring.**

The heavens burst forth with joy. "And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men of good will' " (Luke 2:13-14). Then the shepherds arrived at the stable, told Mary and Joseph about the wonderful chorus of angels and knelt and adored Baby Jesus. They brought with them their humble gifts which Joseph and Mary appreciated so much. The shepherds then spread the word in Bethlehem, and soon the Holy Family was welcomed into a house.

When Jesus was 40 days old, the Holy Family went to Jerusalem; because all firstborn male babies in Israel had to be presented to the priests in the Temple. While they were there, the elderly Simeon arrived, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and spoke to Mary and Joseph, rejoicing that he received God's blessing to be able to see the Saviour before he died. He told Mary of her future suffering and the suffering of her Son. A sword pierced her heart. At the same time, Anna the prophetess, who lived in the Temple and was 84 years old, came to speak to them praising God.

**On January 6 our Church celebrates the Epiphany Day of the Lord.**

The arrival of the Three Magi to adore the Baby God-King in Bethlehem was the result of a series of miraculous events. God the Father created for His Son a wonderful new Star on the occasion of His birth, which moved across the sky. The Three Wise Men, all from different countries, recognized it as

the Star of the new born Messiah. With no thought of the great expense, time and effort it would cost them, they set out in search of the Messiah, in order to go to worship Him. Today, we see that the Magi represent all people around the world who search for and come to believe in Christ the King.

All Three Magi, followed the same Star, and all miraculously arrived at the same time in Jerusalem to see King Herod. But the Star was not made visible in Jerusalem. They asked, “ ‘Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We observed His star at its rising and have come to pay Him homage.’ ...After the audience with the king, they set out. The Star which they had observed at its rising went ahead of them until it came to a standstill over the place where the Child was. They were overjoyed at seeing the Star, and on entering the house found the Child with Mary, His mother. They prostrated themselves and did Him homage. Then they opened their coffers and presented Him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh” (Matthew 2:2, 9-11). Rejoicing they left. They were warned in a dream to go back to their countries by an unknown route in order to avoid Herod’s men and their evil intent. God looked after the Magi, body and soul.

After the Magi left Bethlehem, Joseph received the warning in a dream, about King Herod’s plans to try to kill Jesus. (December 28 is the Feast of the Holy Innocents.) Mary was not given this information by God. Joseph told her. Mary did not crave knowledge, wanting to be in control. She was determined to accept the limited knowledge given to her and only what material comfort that was provided for her. She had a strong will. She loved and trusted God. When Joseph told her of his dream in the middle of the night, she was obedient, and acted immediately. A sword pierced Mary’s heart. The Holy Family left on donkeys, heading for Egypt, not having much specific information. (December 30 is the Feast of the Holy Family.) They believed that God would guide them, and accepted that God was in control. The precious gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh were providential. Mary and Joseph would need the gifts during their years of exile in Egypt. They would need a home and money, until Joseph could find work in order to support his little family. Not only that, after the death of Herod, some years later, when Joseph was told by God to go back to Israel, he needed the remainder of the money for the trip back home (see Matthew 2:13-23). Our loving God thought of everything! Mary and Joseph prayed, obeyed and hoped in God.

***On January 1st our Catholic Church celebrates the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God.***

Therefore, as we pray the Holy Rosary, let us ask Mary, Queen over all things, Mother of God, Mother of the Church, Advocate, Helper, Benefactress, Mediatrix, our Mother, to pray for us that we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, CCC, 963, 966, 969, 971). Life on earth is short. May Jesus help us to remain faithful as we journey here on earth towards His heavenly Kingdom. We thank our Holy Mother Mary for her examples of holiness and for leading us to her Son by saying, “Do whatever He tells you” (John 2:5).

“By the grace of God, Mary remained free of every personal sin her whole life long” (CCC, 493). She chose to remain faithful to the end. But with great spiritual gifts come great responsibilities. Mary stood beside the Cross to comfort her Son and give Him moral support to do the Father’s will in the work of salvation. Mary forgave, “joining herself with His sacrifice in her mother’s heart, and lovingly consented to the immolation of this Victim, born of her” (CCC, 964).

During this Christmas Season as we celebrate the birth of our Saviour, let us contemplate the mystery of God’s infinite love for us. We can *thoroughly* prepare to receive Jesus at each Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. We consume Him, the Person of Jesus Christ, in the Most Blessed Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. He enters our body and soul. This Christmas, in humility before God, we cry out: “Thank you, Jesus, for the gift of Yourself!”