

Wednesday 8 September 2021

Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary



This festival in honour of the birth of the mother of our Lord is celebrated on this day in both the eastern and the western Churches. Falling just nine months after the feast of the Conception of Mary, this feast acknowledges the preparation by God of his people to receive their Saviour and Lord, putting 'heaven in ordinary' and showing that mortal flesh can be the bearer of Christ to the world.

Sermon © Nicola Williams.

Liturgy and prayers of intercession © 2000 The Archbishops' Council.

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The liturgy assumes the service is Eucharistic. The prayers of consecration appear at the end.

The hymns are YouTube links. To hear the hymns please hover the mouse over each link, press Ctrl and then return.

To see service transcripts from previous weeks, please visit the page,
<http://www.medlockhead.co.uk/resources/index.htm>

Introduction and welcome

HYMN 1 Jesus, good above all other (please click on this link to hear the hymn)

The Welcome

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit

All Amen.

The Lord be with you

All And also with you.

The Preparation

**All Almighty God,
to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name;
through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Our Lord Jesus Christ said:

The first commandment is this:

‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,
with all your soul, with all your mind,
and with all your strength.’

And the second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’

There is no other commandment greater than these.

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

All Amen. Lord, have mercy.

Christ calls us to share the heavenly banquet of his love with all the saints in earth and heaven. Therefore, knowing our unworthiness and sin, let us confess our sins in penitence and faith, firmly resolved to keep God’s commandments and to live in love and peace with all.

All Almighty God, our heavenly Father,
we have sinned against you
and against our neighbour
in thought and word and deed,
through negligence, through weakness,
through our own deliberate fault.
We are truly sorry
and repent of all our sins.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
who died for us,
forgive us all that is past
and grant that we may serve you in newness of life
to the glory of your name.
Amen.

Almighty God,
who forgives all who truly repent, have mercy upon you,
pardon and deliver you from all your sins,
confirm and strengthen you in all goodness,
and keep you in life eternal;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All Amen.

The Gloria

This Gloria is sung to the tune of 'Cwm Rhondda'. Click [here](#) for the tune.

All Glory be to God in Heaven,
Songs of joy and peace we bring,
Thankful hearts and voices raising,
To creation's Lord we sing.
Lord we thank you, Lord we praise you,
Glory be to God our King:
Glory be to God our King.

Lamb of God, who on our shoulders,
Bore the load of this world's sin;
Only Son of God the Father,
You have brought us peace within.
Lord, have mercy, Christ have mercy,

**Now your glorious reign begin:
Now your glorious reign begin.**

**You O Son of God are Holy,
You we praise with one accord.
None in heav'n or earth is like you,
Only you are Christ the Lord.
With the Father and the Spirit,
Ever worshipped and adored:
Ever worshipped and adored.**

The Collect for Birth of the Blessèd Virgin Mary

Almighty and everlasting God,
who stooped to raise fallen humanity
through the child-bearing of blessèd Mary:
grant that we, who have seen your glory
revealed in our human nature
and your love made perfect in our weakness,
may daily be renewed in your image
and conformed to the pattern of your Son,
Jesus Christ our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever..

All Amen.

First reading

A reading from the book of the Prophet Micah

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. And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. *Micah 5:2-4*

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

Second reading

A reading from St Paul's Letter to the Romans

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

Romans 8:28-30

This is the Word of the Lord

All Thanks be to God.

HYMN 2 Ave Maria

[\(click on this link to hear the hymn\)](#)

Gospel reading

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew

All Glory to you O Lord.

Matthew.

[An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham: Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Aram, and Aram the father of Aminadab, and Aminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of King David. And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph, and Asaph the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah, and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos, and Amos the father of Josiah, and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon. And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Salathiel, and Salathiel the father of Zerubbabel, and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud, and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, and Jacob the

father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah.]

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.' All this took place to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,' which means, 'God is with us.'

When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus. *Matthew 1:1-16, 18-23*

This is the Gospel of the Lord

All Praise to you O Christ.

Sermon

Saint Mary is one of those characters in the Bible that we all immediately 'know'. Like the other Saints, she was remarkable and deserves to be celebrated, but the things we think we know about Mary tend to be linked, naturally, to the event of the birth of Jesus. If that was all there was to her story then we would probably celebrate the day that she died, like we do with nearly all of the other saints (except John the Baptist).

Today, we celebrate the day that Mary was born and if we are to do so we must start at the end of the story—with the birth of Jesus—and work backwards all the way to Mary's conception to understand why, for so many around the world, her birth deserves special recognition.

The Jews have had a promise from God, that a Messiah will come, and the Kingdom of Heaven will begin. The Jews have been looking for the Messiah for a very long time. Micah states that he will be '*one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days*'. The Messiah is not just going to be any old person from any old place, He is going to be Holy. He is going to be, somehow, 'of God'. The Jews were not certain how this would happen, but they believed the promise that it would happen. It was going to be an exciting, supernatural event and the start of something amazing!

Because the Messiah was to be God's viceregent on earth, people were looking for another adult male, a warrior perhaps, someone who would take on the evil of this world and reign forever after. The Messiah might even be like Goliath the giant in stature, strong and muscular and a born leader. Whatever, and whoever, He was going to be, His coming was going to be spectacular!

But we know that God had other plans. He was going to come to earth to live as a human, to know the pains of human life, to live with hunger, guilt, anger, and fear. God could choose to stay remote in the spiritual realm, but He humbled Himself by being born a human baby. All that Holiness was to be present on earth in the form of a tiny baby. Not a conquering warrior and definitely not a wealthy and fully formed young man, born to a prominent family as expected.

No, as we know, Jesus was born in the dark of night, in the dirt and filth of an animal pen, wrapped in whatever cloth Mary and Joseph had to hand; He was vulnerable, and His birth was humble. Very humble. And that was the plan. God chose to be humble. He chose to come to earth fully dependent upon his parents to keep Him alive, helpless to the Herod's and others of the human world that wanted Him dead. There was to be no family celebration of this birth. The only people in attendance were later called to be there by Angels and through the Holy Spirit. Magi and Shepherds led by supernatural events to worship a tiny, new-born baby.

But the problem remained that He had to *be* born. If God was going to be contained in the body of Jesus, within human flesh, that human flesh must be sin free. Jesus was completely free from sin, and so would his mother have to be. God could not be formed within a sinful human womb. And *this* is where Mary's story begins ...

Mary's parents are said to have been Saint Anne, and Saint Joachim. The 'First Gospel of James' and the 'Gospel of the Nativity of Mary' are Apocryphal books that describe these two people as living devout and wealthy lives in Nazareth who were childless. Both of them were distraught about this fact and as Joachim retreated into the countryside to pray, Anne solemnly promised God that if she should be blessed with a child, she would dedicate it to the Lord's service. Soon both saw the vision of an Angel who announced that not only would Anne have a child, but that she would bear the most wondrous child.

And Anne did indeed become pregnant. In the Catholic tradition, Mary had what is known as an *Immaculate Conception*; that is, from the moment she was conceived, Mary was free from Original Sin. This is important. If the Messiah was to be holy, He couldn't have been birthed by sinful flesh, His Mother needed to be both a Virgin, and pure of heart. She had to be capable of living without sin, starting from her conception. And so, what is important about Mary is not just that she gives birth to a son, but that *her own birth* triggers the fulfillment of a long-awaited promise.

But Anne had also made a solemn promise and so when Mary was three years old, Anne and Joachim are said to have taken her to the temple in Jerusalem where they left her to be raised into adulthood. (This event is very similar to the story of Hannah who had promised to give her child, Samuel, to the Temple to be raised.)

Whatever happened to Mary after that we do not know, but we catch up with her again when she is asked by God to be faithful and, through the power of the Holy Spirit, she conceives Jesus, the longed for, much talked about Messiah.

Importantly, we are expected to understand that saying 'yes' to God was going to be very risky for Mary. Mary was engaged to be married to Joseph and saying yes would mean that the whole world would know that she was pregnant. Being a pregnant, unmarried young woman would be dangerous and she would be disgraced. She and her family could risk expulsion from the Synagogue, and she would bring shame on her family and on her ancestors too. But despite all of this, Mary still simply said 'Yes!'

St Paul in today's reading, explains in simple but powerful term why she did this. He explains what faith looks like—real faith—Mary's kind of faith. *'We know that all things work together for good for those who love God.'*

Mary trusted God with her life. When she said 'Yes' she knew that things would work out. She probably didn't fully understand that this one small word was going to change the world forever, or that her Son was going to bring her much joy but also much pain and anguish, as He lived, and died, and rose again for every one of us. The only thing that Mary did know was that God loved her and would work things out for good.

Mary's Immaculate Conception was supernatural, her life was extraordinary, but it was her faith that was powerful. Mary chose God just as God chose Mary. Mary could have said 'no', which would have been the easy thing to do. She could have run from God as so many others before had done but she stood firm ... and she trusted in Him.

Mary's challenge to us all is not necessarily to live a sin-free life, but to do something dangerous with our lives. We need to say 'yes' to God. Even when it looks like doing so will be a very bad idea. We need to trust God as Mary trusted God, in the knowledge that He will work everything out for us.

And so, today we *can* celebrate Mary's life as many people do; some countries celebrate Mary's miraculous healing power, but this is a day to celebrate Mary's birth. An act of God promised so long ago, brought to fruition in an Immaculate Conception, bringing life not only to Mary, but through Jesus, to the whole world and forever.

Mary's story doesn't start with the birth of Jesus, it starts with the end of a wait. We so often celebrate the birth of Jesus, and rightly so, but today we need to think about Mary. Her birth was prophesied throughout the Old Testament and her conception was the spark that really did set the world on fire, but it was her 'yes' that must surely be the smallest, most powerful word ever spoken.

The Creed

Do you believe and trust in God the Father,
the source of all being and life,
the one for whom we exist?

All We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Son,
who took our human nature,
died for us and rose again?

All We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit,
who gives life to the people of God
and makes Christ known in the world?

All We believe and trust in him.

This is the faith of the Church.

**All This is our faith.
We believe and trust in one God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Amen.**

Prayers of intercession

Let us proclaim the greatness of the Lord and rejoice together in the God who saves us.
Lord, you do great things for us:
holy is your name.

You have mercy on those who fear you in every generation. We pray for your Church ... Lord, you do great things for us:
holy is your name.

You show the strength of your arm and cast down the mighty from their thrones.
We pray for the nations of the world and their leaders ...
Lord, you do great things for us:
holy is your name.

You lift up the lowly and fill the hungry with good things. We pray for all those in any kind of need ...

Lord, you do great things for us:

holy is your name.

You come to the aid of your servants and remember your promises with mercy. We remember ... and all who have died in the faith of Christ. Bring us with them to share the joy of heaven with Mary and all the saints.

Lord, you do great things for us:

holy is your name.

Father most holy, so guide us in the way of humility and obedience like Mary, that our lives may be a constant hymn of praise to you from whom all good things come. We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All Amen.

Merciful Father,

**All accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.**

The peace

Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and his name shall be called the Prince of Peace.

The peace of the Lord be always with you,

All And also with you.

HYMN 3 The angel Gabriel from Heaven came (click on the link to hear the hymn)

The liturgy of the Communion Service appears below

The Dismissal

Christ the Son of God, born of Mary,
fill you with his grace to trust his promises and obey his will;
and the blessing of God the Almighty:
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
be with you now and remain with you always.

All Amen.

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Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary

HYMN 4 Lord Jesus Christ, you have come to us ([click on this link to hear the hymn](#))

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

All In the name of Christ. Amen.

The Liturgy of the Sacrament

Eucharistic Prayer (prayer E)

The Lord be with you

All and also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

All We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

All It is right to give thanks and praise.

It is indeed right, our duty and our joy,
always and everywhere to give you thanks,
holy Father, almighty and eternal God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

And now we give thanks, most gracious God,
surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses
and glorified in the assembly of your saints.

The glorious company of apostles praise you.

The noble fellowship of prophets praise you.

The white-robed army of martyrs praise you.

We, your holy Church, acclaim you.

In communion with angels and archangels,
and with all who served you on earth and worship you now in heaven,
we raise our voice to proclaim your glory,
for ever praising you and saying:

**All Holy, holy, holy Lord,
God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.**

We praise and bless you, loving Father,
through Jesus Christ, our Lord;
and as we obey his command,
send your Holy Spirit,
that broken bread and wine outpoured
may be for us the body and blood of your dear Son.

On the night before he died he had supper with his friends
and, taking bread, he praised you.

He broke the bread, gave it to them and said:
Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you;
do this in remembrance of me.

When supper was ended he took the cup of wine.
Again he praised you, gave it to them and said:
Drink this, all of you;
this is my blood of the new covenant,
which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.

So, Father, we remember all that Jesus did,
in him we plead with confidence his sacrifice made once for all upon the cross.

Bringing before you the bread of life and cup of salvation,
we proclaim his death and resurrection
until he comes in glory.

Great is the mystery of faith:

All Christ has died.
Christ is risen.
Christ will come again.

Lord of all life,
help us to work together for that day
when your kingdom comes
and justice and mercy will be seen in all the earth.

Look with favour on your people,
gather us in your loving arms
and bring us with Mary and all the saints
to feast at your table in heaven.

Through Christ, and with Christ, and in Christ,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
all honour and glory are yours, O loving Father,
for ever and ever.

All Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

**All Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.**

Breaking of the Bread

We break this bread to share in the body of Christ.

**All Though we are many, we are one body,
because we all share in one bread.**

**All Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world,
grant us peace.**

Draw near with faith.

Receive the body of our Lord Jesus Christ
which he gave for you,
and his blood which he shed for you.

Eat and drink in remembrance that he died for you,
and feed on him in your hearts
by faith with thanksgiving.

All We do not presume
to come to this your table, merciful Lord,
trusting in our own righteousness,
but in your manifold and great mercies.
We are not worthy
so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table.
But you are the same Lord
whose nature is always to have mercy.
Grant us therefore, gracious Lord,
so to eat the flesh of your dear Son Jesus Christ
and to drink his blood,
that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body
and our souls washed through his most precious blood,
and that we may evermore dwell in him,
and he in us.
Amen.

Communion is distributed.

Prayer after Communion

God most high,
whose handmaid bore the Word made flesh:
we thank you that in this sacrament of our redemption
you visit us with your Holy Spirit
and overshadow us by your power;
strengthen us to walk with Mary the joyful path of obedience
and so to bring forth the fruits of holiness;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All Amen

All Almighty God,
we thank you for feeding us
with the body and blood of your Son Jesus Christ.
Through him we offer you our souls and bodies
to be a living sacrifice.
Send us out in the power of your Spirit
to live and work
to your praise and glory.
Amen.