
Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary 2020

Philippians 2:5-11 & Luke 10:38-42; 11:27-28

In our Byzantine Catholic Churches, the Church Year begins on September 1. The first feast in the Church cycle begins with the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary and ends with her blessed repose/Dormition. Her birthday falls on the eighth day of the Liturgical Year. The feast begins the story of how God became man through the faithful and most pure Virgin Mary.

Nothing about Mary's birth is mentioned anywhere in the Holy Scriptures. Did you ever wonder if they celebrated birthdays back in those days? It's easy to imagine that the whole nation or empire celebrated the emperor and his family's anniversaries. But, for someone like Mary of Nazareth, the celebration of her birthday probably did not take place. She was an unknown born in a remote village. Her birth was exciting for the immediate family, but it's doubtful that anyone else celebrated it.

The Most Holy Virgin Mary was born when people had reached such moral decay, and it seemed almost impossible to restore them. People often said that God must come into the world to restore faith and not permit humanity's ruin.

So, the Son of God took on human nature for humankind's salvation and chose as His Mother, the All-Pure Virgin Mary. She alone was worthy of giving birth to the Source of purity and holiness.

That is why Her birth brings joy to all humanity because it's a solemn testament that our God has not forgotten us. He continually cares for our salvation, and that through Her has reconciled our humanity to Himself. Mary's entire life differed from the lives of others. She was faithful to God and obedient to her parents. When the time came for Mary to leave their house, her parents kept the promise they made to God. Her parents took Mary to the Temple in Jerusalem where she grew and matured along with all the other virgins, as the purest gift to God. As she developed, her trust and devotion to the Lord, God grew stronger and brighter in her soul.

After giving birth to Jesus, the Mother of God lived her life in the service of others. She didn't stay in her comfortable environment. Instead, she lived her life as an act of faith and trust and continuously listened to the Holy Spirit's prompting. It was a constant journey into the unknown for her, but always in obedience to the will of God. She persevered the struggles of life in her flight into Egypt, the years of living in exile, constant uprooting, and replanting. She endured the journey to Jerusalem and the agony at the foot of the cross. Mary knew the difficulties of motherhood and more.

The Magnificat is Mary's song of praise to God. The Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55) is the Virgin Mary's response to Elizabeth's greeting, glorifying God and thanking Him for choosing her to bear His Son. The song is done during the Vespers service, and the Evening Prayer of the Liturgy of the Hours. It is also a window into her life of faithful and courageous

discipleship. Mary loved everyone and cared for them, as did Jesus. The God she served filled the poor with good things. Mary committed herself to justice, compassion, raising the fallen, caring for the uncared for, and loving the unloved.

Mary acted in solidarity with the afflicted. She displayed a sensitivity and interest in the plight of the needy, the poor and the troubled. For example, at the wedding of Cana, Mary refused to be the neutral bystander. She could have chosen not to be involved. But Mary showed us by example by speaking on behalf of others. Her attitude of deep empathy and compassion contrasted the fearful reaction of the disciples. We recall the story of Jesus feeding the multitude in the desert. There the disciples wanted to send the people away. They acted in fear and showed a lack of faith. At the wedding in Cana, Mary, by contrast, engaged the people and pleaded with Jesus on their behalf.

As we gather to honour Mary today, we give thanks for her maternal care and protection. Mary has cared for and protected us in our journeys of life, through all changes and upheavals. Therefore, we cannot merely honour her without following her example of care and protection for others. May Mary then help us to care and protect those entrusted to us. May she also guide us in our Christian discipleship as we seek to be salt to the earth and light for the world. May Mary, who is the perfect example of faith, hope and love, intercede for us and make us instruments of grace. "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinner now and at the hour of our death."

Amen.