

The Celebration of the Feast of the Nativity of Mary is timed so that it is 9 months after the Immaculate Conception of Mary celebrated on the 8th of December.

The Gospels focus on Jesus so we will not find anything there about the birth of Mary. We first learn of Mary in the Gospel of Matthew through the genealogy of Joseph, a descendant in the line of King David. “The virginal conception of Jesus is the work of the Spirit of God. Joseph’s decision to divorce Mary is overcome by the heavenly command that he take her into his home and accept the child as his own. The natural genealogical line is broken but the promises to David are fulfilled; through Joseph’s adoption the child belongs to the family of David” (Note to Mt 1:18-25). This fulfills what the Prophet Isaiah had foretold: “The Lord himself will give you a sign; the young woman, pregnant and about to bear a son, shall name him Emmanuel” (7:14). For Matthew and for Christians, this text from Isaiah refers to the birth of Christ. The incarnation is the ultimate expression of God’s willingness to “be with us” (Note to Isa 7:14).

We know that Joseph was confused at the pregnancy of Mary. Legally they were betrothed, they were married although, they had not come to live together in the same home. Mary was confused when the Angel Gabriel told her of her special role in the salvation of mankind. “Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus” (Lk 1:31). Mary’s choice not to tell Joseph of this, as we learn from a source outside the bible, was so that an Angel of the Lord would speak to Joseph. “The angel of the Lord appeared to [Joseph] in a dream and said, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her’” (Mt 1:20). Joseph awoke from the dream and, out of love for God, did as he was commanded. And we are ever so thankful for the chaste example of fatherhood he offered in his marriage allowing Mary to remain ever a Virgin.

Just as Joseph needed an Angel of the Lord to understand God’s plan for Mary and his own marriage, so to with Anne and Joachim, the parents of Mary. The angel came and presented God’s plan, then it was up to them to choose to follow God’s plan or not. Saint Bridget of Sweden received private revelations from the Virgin Mary that help us to understand about the conception of Mary. Saint Bridget’s revelations from the 14th century also help us to understand as we celebrate the Nativity of Mary.

Anne and Joachim, the parents of Mary, chose abstinence in their marriage. Of course, there was sadness without children and the couple’s prayers reflected a desire to have at least one child. In a vision, Mary explained to Bridget: “They never desired to come together except in accordance with the Law, solely for the sake of procreation. When an angel announced to them that they would give birth to the Virgin from whom the salvation of the world would come, they would rather have died than come together in carnal love; lust had died in them.” But, just as Joseph was obedient to the Angel of the Lord, Anne and Joachim were obedient as well. God gives every human life an immortal soul, but in the case of Mary and her Immaculate Conception, “the soul was immediately sanctified along with the body, and the angels watched over and ministered to it day and night. It is impossible to tell you what a great joy came over my mother when my soul had been sanctified and joined to its body.”ⁱ

Saint Bridget learned from Mary that when we praise Jesus, we praise Mary. When we dishonor Jesus, we dishonor Mary. Therefore, praise Mary like this: “Blessed are you, God, Creator of all things, who deigned to descend into the womb of the Virgin Mary. Blessed are you, God, who willed to be in the Virgin Mary without being a burden to her and deigned to receive immaculate flesh from her without sin.”ⁱⁱ Happy Birthday Mary! Thank you for saying yes to Jesus. And thank you Anne and Joachim for trusting in God and bringing Mary into this world in cooperation with God’s loving plan.

ⁱ St Bridget of Sweden. Revelations of Saint Bridget of Sweden: Book 1 chapter 8, p. 28.

ⁱⁱ St Bridget of Sweden. Revelations of Saint Bridget of Sweden: Book 1 chapter 8, p. 27.