

Today we celebrate the birthday of Mary. The Celebration of the Feast of the Nativity of Mary dates to the 5<sup>th</sup> century when a basilica in Jerusalem was dedicated on the site of Saint Ann's home. Saint Ann of course was the mother of Mary.<sup>i</sup>

The Gospels focus on Jesus so we will not find anything there about the birth of Mary. But the genealogy in the Gospel of Matthew is an interesting choice, nevertheless. Mary was betrothed to Joseph and he could not understand how pregnancy was possible through the Holy Spirit. Although a Godfearing man, Joseph would not have any understanding of the Holy Spirit. Our understanding of the Spirit only came about through the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Joseph must have feared that Mary was unfaithful and became pregnant through an unlawful union. "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.

Earlier this summer I told you about Saint Bridget of Sweden who received private revelations from Jesus, God the Father and the Virgin Mary. Saint Bridget's revelations from the 14<sup>th</sup> century shed light for us on the birth of Mary.

Anne and Joachim, the parents of Mary lived in a very chaste marriage. They chose abstinence over intercourse. Of course, there was sadness in a marriage without children and the couple's prayers reflected a desire to have at least one child. Mary tells 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. Mary explained, it was "not out of concupiscence but against their will and out of love for God. In this way my flesh was put together from their seed through divine love." 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."<sup>ii</sup>

So 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 angel came and presented God's plan, then it was up to them to choose to follow God's plan or not.

Those who are not Catholic, often find it difficult to understand the honor we give to Mary since much comes from the Church's Tradition rather than Sacred Scripture. Saint Bridget learned from Mary that when we praise Jesus, we praise Mary. When we dishonor Jesus, we dishonor Mary. Therefore, you should 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."<sup>iii</sup>

Mary's Canticle, the Magnificat, comes to mind as we hear of this private revelation.

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord;  
my spirit rejoices in God my savior.  
For he has looked upon his handmaid's lowliness;  
behold, from now on will all ages call me blessed.  
The Mighty One has done great things for me,  
and holy is his name. (Luke 1:46-49).

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<sup>i</sup> Ordo. Explanatory Note for the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, September 8<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>ii</sup> St Bridget of Sweden. Revelations of Saint Bridget of Sweden: Book 1 chapter 8, p. 28.

<sup>iii</sup> St Bridget of Sweden. Revelations of Saint Bridget of Sweden: Book 1 chapter 8, p. 27.