

Well, Christmas is in nine months! On Holy Christmas we celebrate with great joy that our God is born among us. But today we recall that He already became flesh and dwelt among us for the nine months previous in the womb of His blessed mother, Mary. The bun of life is in the oven. Already, the Lord came to His people. It is fitting that we should pause in our Lenten observance and contemplate the joy of this, our Lord's conception. It is a beautiful comfort in midst of the humbling weariness and grief of our penitence, as we mourn deeply for our sins and fear the thought of facing God's wrath. For those who have been cut down and humbled, here is beautiful consolation by the Word and promise of God whose Son, born of Mary, takes away the sins of the world.

Here on this day we rejoice not just in the excitement and expectation that comes to any expectant mother, but in the fulfillment of ancient prophecy, that given seven hundred years previous through Isaiah, that the virgin would conceive and bear a Son. Also the promise given much earlier, the sentence spoken upon Satan, heard by Adam and Eve, that the Savior for all men, the Seed of the Woman, would deliver from sin, death, and the devil.

That He comes not as a grown man, nor as an infant, but in the earliest moment of human existence, is a demonstration of what David confesses, of what we are told of Adam's son, Seth, that we are in the image of our first father, fallen from the glory of God, conceived and born in sin. And so it is that God enters into human life, takes up our nature, joins Himself to the very beginning of every life and experience.

This is especially comforting today as we consider how abused and attacked all things related to holy marriage are. The estate of marriage itself, what it is, who it is for, how long it is to endure. Matrimony's most intimate embrace and the life it is designed to produce. How that life is received and lost in this life, sometimes soon after that life is created. And all the sorrows that come with not only the birth pains, but the arrows that pierce a mother's heart. Few things are as hated, attacked, derided, and sinned against as marriage, particularly by those who are married. This is because there are few things we have in this life that are older than sin. And there is no thing other than this that is taken up as the chief image of what our Lord Jesus has done for us, how He relates to us.

Mary herself, betrothed to Joseph, must shortly after these events find some way to tell Joseph. Do you think she was not at all fearful? We are told something of this by St. Matthew's Gospel. Even the godliest of men, Joseph, whom we are told was a righteous man, justified by faith, thought the worst of Mary, wanted to put an end to their marriage because he suspected her of sin. And though Joseph is reconciled to Mary's condition, convinced of what God is accomplishing in these events, they both must bear the aspersions and judgments, the smirks and glares, the nasty labels, at the hands of neighbors, friends, and no doubt even family. Do you think they were never hurt, never angry?

And this is how it was for Joseph and Mary who did no sin in this regard. These were not young people who lost self-control. That conceived in Mary was from the Holy Spirit. And if these holy ones suffered so, how do you think it will be, how do you think it so unusual for you, that your spouse sins against you, that you sin against your spouse? That it is hard to confess one's sin, that we find ourselves unwilling to forgive, literally, "to let go" to not store up and save in the back pocket for the ultimate win in the argument? That the arrival and raising of children is not smooth sailing, not without its challenges, but remains a good and precious gift of God?

It is not only our childhood's pattern, growing day by day from the earliest moments that our Lord knows. From the very beginning He knows our experience. The pain and weariness of sin and all the havoc it wreaks is not strange to Him, but quite familiar. He is born into the Holy Family. Holy not simply because Mary is unique in that she of all people is the Mother of God, the only person who imparts humanity to God, nor that Joseph is the one man charged to look over and raise incarnate God. In this sense, yes, Mary and Joseph are set apart in a unique way for which we give thanks and praise to God.

Our Lord's conception and birth into this family show us another and a comforting way this family is holy. These three together show that God declares, despite all the sin and sorrow that crops up within the family, in the face of all the attacks by Satan, the world, and our own sinful flesh against holy marriage and the family, in Christ Jesus, His pure, divine Son born into a human family, He claims it as His own just as much as it was in the Garden before sin existed.

God has placed Himself into one of the chief objects of Satan's ire, the world's scorn, and what your own flesh is so weak to uphold and honor. This tells you first that He loves it. It's His creation and institution, it remains a good and honorable estate. It also comforts you, reassures you even these many centuries later that He has not abandoned it. He will let neither devil, world, nor flesh, have their way, but reclaims, upholds, honors, and blesses it.

Mary could well imagine the difficulties, the sorrow and hurt that was to come. Again, things we are not strangers to. She is that blessed example to us, whether you are single, married, or widowed, to hear the Word of God and keep it, to hold onto and treasure what God promises. He has given His own dear Son to join us in our weakness, to redeem us, to save us, His people, from our sins, to reign over us forever not because we are so good or put together, because we know how to always manage our relational conflicts, because we stop sinning and need no help.

No. Because we need a Savior. We need One given us as a gift, to do for us as a gift, what we cannot do. To take us freely, selflessly, in sacrificial love, to lay down His life for us, washing every spot and stain away with His own blood. And that has been done, accomplished, and given. Believe this! Stake all your life and confidence in this! Let blessed Mary's blessed words be your own: **“Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.”**