September 8: Birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary

**JOY FOR THE WORLD**

The Gospels record only a few incidents from the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary. They say nothing about her parents, her birth, or her childhood.

All such information comes to us from the early tradition of the Church , which was recorded in the middle of the second century (about 175 A.D.) in an apocryphal book, called the Protoevangelium of St. James. Here we find the Byzantine Catholic tradition that describes the *mystery* that we celebrate today, not the historical *occasion*.

The Eastern Church chose a September birth because its liturgical year begins with September. The 8 September date helped determine the date of the feast of the Immaculate Conception nine months earlier, on 8 December, a touch of liturgical realism!

The apocryphal books are those early Christian writings that tell us about certain events in the lives of Jesus and Mary that are not included in the Gospels. Although the apocryphal writings are not recognized by the Church as authentic inspired works like the four Gospels, still, some of what they relate belongs to the tradition of the primitive Church.

The Protoevangelium of St. James tells us that the parents of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Joachim and Anne, were righteous and greatly devoted to God. Mary’s father was a descendant from the royal house of David, while her mother came from the priestly line of Aaron. Their one great sorrow was that they had no children.

In the Old Testament, when God blessed His chosen people, He always promised to bless them with children. So, among the Israelites, childlessness was considered as a sign of God’s rejection, a "public disgrace" (Lk. 1 :25).

But God, in His divine providence, was preparing Joachim and Anne for "great things" (Lk. 1 :49). He was to show them a unique favour, for the child to be born to them was to become the Mother of the Messiah, the promised Saviour of the world.

So, God blessed Joachim and Anne in their old age with a providential daughter, destined to become Mother of God. The birth of Mary took away not only the "public disgrace" from her parents, but also became a source of great joy for them, according to the words of the Angel to Joachim:

"Joachim, rejoice! God has heard your prayer. Your wife Anne shall conceive and give birth to a daughter; whose birth will become joy for the entire world." Consequently, Mary’s birth is celebrated in the spirit of rejoicing.

St Augustine connects Mary's birth with Jesus' saving work. He tells the earth to rejoice and shine forth in the light of her birth. "She is the flower of the field from whom bloomed the precious lily of the valley. Through her birth, the nature inherited from our first parents is changed." The opening prayer at Mass speaks of the birth of Mary's Son as the dawn of our salvation and prays for an increase of peace.

We can see every human birth as a call for new hope in the world. The love of two human beings has cooperated with God in his creative work. The loving parents have shown hope in a world filled with strife. The new child has the potential to be a channel of God's love and peace to the world.

This is all true in a magnificent way in Mary. If Jesus is the perfect expression of God's love, Mary is the foreshadowing of that love. If Jesus has brought the fullness of salvation, Mary is its dawning. Birthday celebrations bring happiness to the person as well as to family and friends. Next to the birth of Jesus, Mary's birth offers the greatest possible happiness to the world. Each time we celebrate the mystery of her birth, let us confidently hope for an increase of peace in our hearts and in the world at large.