

# THE BIRTH OF JESUS

Can you see  
signs of God's  
love in the faces  
of babies?



© moodboard/Corbis

Every baby is a miracle. A baby is the result of the love between a man and a woman. A baby is the result of God's love. God has created the physical laws that form the baby's body. God has directly given the baby a spiritual soul.

We would expect Jesus' birth to be even more miraculous. As the eternal Son of God, the second Person of the Trinity, he has always existed. But he wants to be like us, which means having a human birth.

An angel appeared  
to Mary to announce  
that she would be  
Jesus' mother.  
Her yes has made  
all the difference  
in the world.



© Brooklyn Museum/Corbis

In the Bible, God sends the angel Gabriel to ask Mary to become Jesus' mother. Gabriel explains the wonderful way it will happen. "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and God's power will rest upon you . . . For there is nothing that God cannot do" (Luke 1:35,37). According to the Nicene Creed, Jesus is "conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary" (see appendix A, "Catholic Prayers"). We call Gabriel's message to Mary the **Annunciation**.

Every Christmas we remember the story of Jesus' birth. It is good to look at the Gospels closely and think about them prayerfully. The Gospels of Matthew and Luke have stories about Jesus' birth. (John starts with a hymn about the Son of God.) Only the Son of God has ever been able to choose how he will be born as a human. He seems to make his birth as humble and hard as possible.

Mothers about to give birth usually try to prepare everything perfectly for the babies. But in Luke's Gospel, Mary and Joseph have to be away from home among strangers. They cannot even get housing or a proper bed. So the Son of God is born in some kind of stable. His cradle is a manger,



## **PRAY IT!**

### **Liturgy Connection**

The Church's liturgy has a yearly rotation of seasons. Each stresses a different stage in the history of salvation. The liturgical year starts with Advent. For four weeks, we prepare for the Lord's coming into the world and into our hearts.

The Christmas season begins with celebrating the Lord's birth on Christmas Day. It ends with the feast of his Baptism on the second Sunday in January. It includes the feasts of the Holy Family, Mary's motherhood, and the Epiphany. In this season we relive the early history of the Holy Family. We rejoice in Christ's coming.

## FUN FACT

People have developed many ways to celebrate the coming of Christ during the Christmas season. Saint Francis of Assisi built the first Nativity scene in AD 1223. He wanted people to see how poor the baby Jesus was. The first Christmas carols come from the fourteenth century. They were songs for dances. Carols show our joy and unity at Christ's birth.

one of those open boxes that hold food for animals. "She gave birth to her first son, wrapped him in cloths and laid him in a manger—there was no room for them to stay in the inn" (Luke 2:7). The Gospel of Luke shows us that God is one with even those who seem to be the poorest of people. It warns us from the start not to judge the true worth of others by what they have or how they appear.

"This very day in David's town your Savior was born—Christ the Lord!" (Luke 2:11)

God does reveal Jesus' true nature to some people. Angels suddenly cover the sky where shepherds are tending their flocks. "Don't be afraid! I am here with good news for you, which will bring great joy to all the people" (Luke 2:10). In the Gospel of Matthew, a strange star guides **Magi**, wise men who studied the skies, over a long trip to greet the King of the Jews. "Where is the baby born to be the king of the Jews?

We saw his star when it came up in the east, and we have come to worship him" (Matthew 2:2).

Both the simple Jewish shepherds and the

Kings and shepherds come to worship Jesus. How do you worship Jesus?



© Pascal Deloche/Godong/Corbis

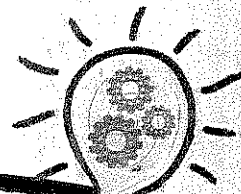
educated foreigners respond with faith to these heavenly signs. They adore the child who appears poor and helpless, without any important friends. Through the shepherds and Magi, God reminds us that Christ has come to all people. He shows we need faith to believe in and follow Jesus.

In the Gospel of Matthew, King Herod is not happy to get the news of Jesus' birth (see Matthew 2:1-3). Herod fears the baby will take over as king. Like the Pharaoh in the Book of Exodus, Herod doesn't care what it takes to destroy the threat to his kingdom.

"He gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its neighborhood who were two years old and younger" (Matthew 2:16). Jesus escapes from Herod just as the infant Moses escaped from the Pharaoh. In this way Matthew shows us that Jesus is like the great leaders of the Old Testament. He is the Savior promised by God. His coming proves that God loves us and wants us to be happy.

## Mary, the Mother of Jesus

God chose Mary to be the Son's mother. She is a human being like us. She is also truly the Mother of God. She gives



### THINK & ABOUT IT!

Sometimes we lose the true spirit of the Christmas season. How can we keep Christ's spirit of self-giving? Maybe we can help with cleaning or cooking without being asked. We may visit a shelter or nursing home, where people might feel lonely, especially at Christmas. What else can you and your family do to truly remember that Christmas is about the coming of Christ into the world?

## KEY WORDS

Annunciation

Magi

Immaculate  
Conception

## PRAY IT!

Dear Jesus,  
Thank you for  
coming as a small  
child who is easy to  
love. Teach me to be  
simple and humble  
too. Help me rely on  
God more than on  
human strength. Show  
me how to serve God  
and others in little ways  
each day. Amen.

birth to the second Person of the Trinity when he becomes man. In this way, she is the Mother of God, because Jesus is God. She also becomes the Mother of the Church, which is the Body of Christ. She is our spiritual mother, and she leads us to her son, Jesus.

But when the right time finally came, God sent his own Son. He came as the son of a human mother and lived under the Jewish Law, to redeem those who were under the Law, so that we might become God's children.

(Galatians 4:4-5)

In the Hail Mary, we echo the angel Gabriel by calling Mary "full of grace." She is the first and best fruit of Jesus' coming to redeem us. God keeps her from the stain of Original Sin. We call this fact her **Immaculate Conception**. From the first moment she comes into being (her conception), she is immaculate, without a spot of sin. God also gives her the strength to remain pure from all personal sin.

Mary makes it clear to Gabriel that she is wholly the servant, or handmaid, of the Lord. (See Luke 1:38.) Jesus needs a human mother to become fully human himself. Mary cooperates by giving herself completely to God's plan, body and soul. Saint Augustine says she "remained a virgin in conceiving her Son, a virgin in giving birth to him, a virgin in carrying him, a virgin in nursing him at her breast, always a virgin" (St. Augustine, Sermon 186, 1: J. P. Migne, ed., Patrologia Latina [Paris: 1841-1855] 38,999)" (CCC, number 510).

## Mary's Example

Because Mary is both a married person and a virgin, she is an example for all the ways God calls people to follow him. She inspires those whose calling is to marriage and those whose calling is to follow God along other paths. She is a model for the Church, which has children and yet remains wholly God's. She is especially an example to us of faith and charity.

Mary is the one most closely united with her son's redeeming act. She freely obeys God's desire. "May it happen to me as you have said" (Luke 1:38). We do not hear her complain about the difficulties she must face. Following God's plan, she helps reverse the effects of the first

## Did You Know?

### Jesus' Birth and the Old Testament

The Old Testament foretells some details of the Messiah's birth. Matthew's Gospel refers to some of them. For example, the Gospel begins with "the list of the ancestors of Jesus Christ" to show that he is "a descendant of David," as Isaiah had said (see Matthew 1:1, Isaiah 11:1). Matthew says the Lord also spoke of the Incarnation through Isaiah: "A virgin will become pregnant and have a son, and he will be called 'God is with us'" (Matthew 1:22–23, Isaiah 7:14). The priests quote the prophet Micah to Herod to prove that the Messiah will be born in "Bethlehem in the land of Judah" (Matthew 2:4–6, Micah 5:2).

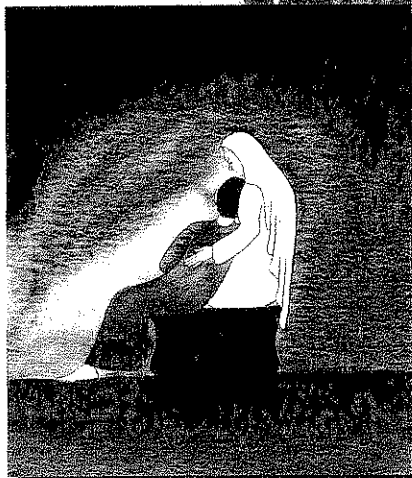


Illustration by Elizabeth Wang. "The Virgin Mary is a tender mother to all who love her Son: we can turn to her and rest in her love at any time". copyright © Radiant Light 2008, [www.radiantlight.org.uk](http://www.radiantlight.org.uk)

Imagine taking your troubles to Mary, the Mother of God. Do you think Jesus ever did that when he was your age? If so, how do you think she responded?



sin and disobedience to God. If Jesus is the new Adam, Mary is the new Eve. She teaches us to freely and faithfully bring Jesus' Spirit to others and into the world.

Mary teaches us humility, which is to admit the whole truth about ourselves. She knows that many people over the years will call her blessed. But she insists that she is great only because of God's love and gifts (see Luke 1:46-49). She serves others humbly. She

## PEOPLE OF FAITH

### Saint Nicholas of Myra



© 2009 Saint Mary's Press/illustration by Vicki Shuck

Sometimes Santa Claus is called Saint Nick. Why? Saint Nicholas, sometimes known as Saint Nick, was a fourth-century bishop of Myra, in Asia Minor. He was holy and lived simply. He used his family's wealth for the needs of others. When invaders captured Myra in the eleventh century, his remains were moved to Bari, which today is located in southern Italy. These are the facts we know for sure about his life.

Many stories of his generosity have come down to us. One story tells of the daughters of a poor

