

*A Lenten Reflection  
On the Beginning  
of the Passion of Christ*



*The Annunciation by Fra Angelico, 1400-1455*

*Said Christ as He came into the world,  
“I come to do thy will, O God.”*

**Hebrews 10: 5-7**



— Carl Bloch

### The Visitation

When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leapt in her womb.

*Luke: 1:41*

# A Lenten Reflection on the Beginning of the Passion of Christ



Angel Weeping — [Art.com](http://Art.com)

The saints and theologians of the Church have long recognized that the whole life of Jesus Christ beginning with His earliest infancy was a Passion. Saint Jerome, Saint Bernard, the monk John of Ford, Saint Thomas Aquinas, Saint Bridget of Sweden, and Brother Gabriel Biel are among those who have shared with the world their insight that the Passion of Christ consists not just in His death on Calvary but in everything leading up to that death, in short His whole life.

Our popular devotions today sometimes tend to obscure this important, long-recognized truth that the whole life of Jesus was a Passion. Our mental habit of dividing the life of Christ into the “joyful” early days and the “sorrowful” final days, while a convenient and useful device to aid one in remembering the events of the life of Christ, no doubt causes us often to lose sight of the deeper truth that Christ’s entire life was a continual Passion offered up for the salvation of His beloved people.

Both at the beginning of life and at the end of life the human organism is more vulnerable to distress. Although lacking the detailed knowledge of the baby in the womb which is available today, the saints and theologians of times gone by nevertheless possessed a keen sense of the distress normally experienced by babies in the womb. It should cause us to wonder, then, that in our culture today, possessed as we are with considerably more knowledge of life in the womb, so many of us are thoughtlessly accustomed to think of the time in the womb as an untroubled paradisaical state for the baby, a blissful prelude to life after birth. But nothing could be more untrue.



It has been discovered in recent years, for example, that the baby in the womb at twenty to thirty-two weeks has many more pain receptors than an older infant or an adult, while at the same time it as yet lacks the neurological mechanism which modulates the sensation of pain in an older infant or adult. This multiplicity of unmodulated pain receptors has a survival value in the womb in that it ensures that the child of this age keeps moving its body even while asleep to ensure an adequate blood circulation to the extremities and also to ensure that the child pulls itself away when its delicate fingers and toes come into awkward contact with the umbilical cord or the wall of the womb.

This multiplicity of pain receptors is necessary to the survival of the child in the womb. Consider an analogy: when one is swimming in a swimming pool one is cushioned by the water, but one must still avoid too forceful a contact with the floor and the sides of the pool. While the walls of the womb are not as hard as the walls of a swimming pool, the body of a child in the womb, on the other hand, is much more fragile than the body of an adult. When one thumps on the belly of an expectant mother, the child within her womb invariably thrashes its limbs and shows other signs of agitation as it attempts to escape the disturbance of its environment.

A physician who was a pioneer in the field of fetology discovered some decades ago that just as babies after birth weep when they feel distress, so too do babies yet in the womb weep when they feel distress and for many of the same reasons. They may weep in reaction to a frighteningly loud noise or to fatigue accompanied by an inability to fall asleep. What is distressing to an adult such as muscle cramps, hiccups, colic, or insomnia is many more times distressing to a baby in the womb because of the multiplicity of unmodulated pain receptors necessary for its survival.

As has often been observed by those who study babies in the womb, these very young human beings suck their thumbs to comfort themselves. It is because they feel discomfort that they comfort themselves. Those who closely observe babies in the days and weeks after birth, too, notice that after an interval of intense activity on the part of a baby a whimpering spell or a crying jag soon follows. Babies both before and after birth as yet lack the impulse to stop an activity before it causes them to become over tired.

In addition to fatigue, babies in the womb experience the discomfort of thirst, sipping the amniotic fluid at different rates related to the amount and timing of their physical activity. But since as of yet they have little or no sense of time it may seem like an eternity to them from the time they experience thirst till the time they relieve it by sipping the amniotic fluid a mere moment later.

We sometimes speak of Jesus as “entering this world” at the moment of His birth. But in actuality Jesus did not enter this world at the moment of His birth. Rather He entered this



world at the moment of His conception. He was, says the apostle, "like us in all things except sin." Therefore "He did not abhor the Virgin's womb," as the great hymn of the Church phrases it. He did not avoid the pain of the human condition even in the womb.

Although an apparent reference to the onset of Mary's birth pangs is to be found in the Byzantine liturgy, many theologians followed Saint Augustine of Hippo in the pious opinion that the Mother of God was spared the birth pangs which other women experience at the end of pregnancy. In their wish to better understand the Church doctrine that Mary's virginity was miraculously preserved during childbirth these theologians proposed that Jesus at His birth passed through Mary's body in the same way that after His Resurrection He passed through the closed tomb and then later through the closed door of the Cenacle where the apostles had secluded themselves.

But the analogy of these theologians is inexact: it was with His risen body that Jesus passed through the closed tomb and the closed door of the Cenacle, whereas His body at birth was not a risen body but an earthly body. Belief in the virgin birth does not require belief that Mary experienced no birth pangs. There are a variety of ways in which God could have brought about such a miracle.

Some theologians who followed this Augustinian opinion argued moreover that having been preserved from original sin by the Passion of her Son applied in advance and therefore being, as Luke relates, "full of grace," Mary was necessarily exempt from the punishment given to Eve in Genesis: "In sorrow thou shalt bring forth children." This was another reason these theologians held that Mary suffered no birth pangs. But there is a problem with this reasoning too.

Although, as many theologians came eventually to agree, both Jesus and Mary were free of original sin, they were not free from the effects of original sin. Like Jesus, Mary was like us in all things but sin. But although preserved from sin by the Passion of her Son applied in advance, Mary was not exempt any more than was her Son from the usual physical pains and distresses of the fallen human condition. One should note that theologians do not claim that because He was free of original sin Jesus was exempt from earning His bread by the sweat of His brow. In fact for much of His life it would seem that He did earn His bread by the sweat of His brow.

If Mary, like Jesus, was "like us in all things but sin" it is inconsistent to suppose that she was exempt from the pangs of birth anymore than Jesus was exempt from working for His bread. The pious belief that she was spared the pangs of birth does Mary little honor. Had she been exempt from such pangs she could not have participated in the Passion of her Son's life so fully.



By reflecting on the words of Scripture and on the ponderings of the saints and theologians of the past one may arrive at a restored sense of the Passion which underlies the events of the conception and womb-life of the Redeemer. Two remarks of the Apostle Paul make it clear that the conception of Christ involved a sacrificial abasement on His part. "Said Christ as He came into the world, 'I come to do Thy will, O God,' " writes Paul. He adds somberly that Christ "emptied Himself and took the form of a slave." The conception and gestation of Christ as well as His subsequent life were a kind of enslavement in which He sacrificed His divine prerogatives by subjecting Himself to the restrictions of human nature.

On the foundation of such scriptural passages the saints and theologians based their own musings. As early as the fourth century, we find Saint Jerome commenting in his blunt fashion on the abasement suffered by Christ in the womb and during the birth process: "The Son of God, for our salvation, became the Son of Man. He waits nine months to be born; He endures discomforts. Bloodied He comes forth." How different this picture is from the saccharine images of the Infant Christ to be found on so many of our Christmas cards.

Many centuries later we find that Saint Bernard of Clairvaux likewise alludes to the abasement suffered by Christ during the birth process. Says Bernard: "The infirmities to which He submitted for our sakes, such as to be born, to be suckled, to die, to be buried, belong to the humanity which he borrowed from us." Bernard appears to recognize the anguish which is suffered by a baby during the birth contractions that are so powerful they compress its skull and squeeze the amniotic fluid from its small lungs in preparation for its breathing air for the first time. In his recognition of this birth-anguish of the baby Bernard draws a clear parallel between the suffering endured by Christ as an Infant and that endured by Christ at the end of His earthly life. "Mine is the mortality of the Infant, mine the helplessness of the Child, mine also the death upon the cross, and mine the sleep of the tomb," proclaims Bernard. The beginning and the end of Christ's earthly life are in this fashion singled out by Bernard for special comment.

An obscure English Cistercian monk John of Ford drew the parallel between the womb and the cross even more explicitly than had Bernard. John asserts that, "From the moment the Word was made flesh, the Lord Jesus carried His cross." John then goes on to reinforce this vivid image by explaining that, "Yes, in His mother's womb, the Lamb of God was already taking away the sins of the world, doing penance for our crimes, enduring the weariness of nine months and constantly interceding for us to the Father."

But meanwhile in Western theology a momentous development had taken place which unhappily deflected attention away from these trenchant insights of Bernard of Clairvaux and John of Ford. Subsequent Western theology came to be dominated by the exclusive emphasis



the brilliant and intellectually provocative Saint Anselm of Canterbury placed upon the crucifixion and the death of Christ. In his influential and attention-attracting formulation the crucifixion came to be seen in virtual isolation as the single act of atonement which reconciled God and His people.

It was not until the thirteenth century that Saint Thomas Aquinas with his gift for circumspection and his ability to reconcile apparent contradictions challenged the pervasive death-oriented theology of Anselm and steered Western culture once again towards a more humane and life-oriented theology in which the crucifixion of the Savior was to be viewed as the culmination of an entire life time of salvific activity. "From the beginning of His conception Christ merited our eternal salvation," declares Saint Thomas with forceful clarity, restoring to the Incarnation its deserved emphasis while adding the qualifying explanation: "but on our side there were some obstacles, whereby we were hindered from securing the effects of His preceding merits, thus making the crucifixion necessary."

His incarnational understanding of salvation may have been Thomas's most culture-changing achievement. In one stroke he re-affirmed the value of the whole human life span. The influence on Western culture of his doctrine of the salvific conception of Christ was incalculable as, with the spread of Thomistic ideas through sermons preached in pulpits across Europe, Christians became, in the centuries that followed, increasingly appreciative of the value of the human journey through life as well as of its final end. As a result of these Thomistic ideas, scholars came to see the worthwhileness of studying the natural sciences, whether anatomy and medicine at the University of Padua or botany in the monasteries of central Europe. And in painting there was a new attention given to accurately depicting the innumerable species of plants to be seen in the world. In literature the pilgrimage of life was deemed worthy of attention by Geoffrey Chaucer. In the moral universe of that late medieval poet the cockles are allowed to grow along with the wheat until the harvest. His slyly understated portrait of the Physician who is in collusion with the Apothecary still rings with contemporaneity today.

Even the fifteenth-century Nominalist theologians who took issue with key aspects of Saint Thomas's thought stuck with him in his doctrine of the salvific life of Christ in the womb. Writes the Nominalist Brother Gabriel Biel, "In all the sufferings of His life, the suffering of the Lord was maximal...consider the stretch of time spent as a baby within the cramped confines of the womb." And as late as the seventeenth century one finds the eclectic Anglican theologian and preacher John Donne declaiming from his London pulpit: "The whole life of Christ was a continual Passion; others die martyrs, but Christ was born a martyr. He found a *Golgotha* ...even in Bethlem." The London congregation which heard Donne preach that day left Saint Paul's Church with Saint Thomas's incarnational vision still intact. Christ was still seen as already the Redeemer even in His earliest infancy.

In the intervening centuries between John Donne and the present, however, several



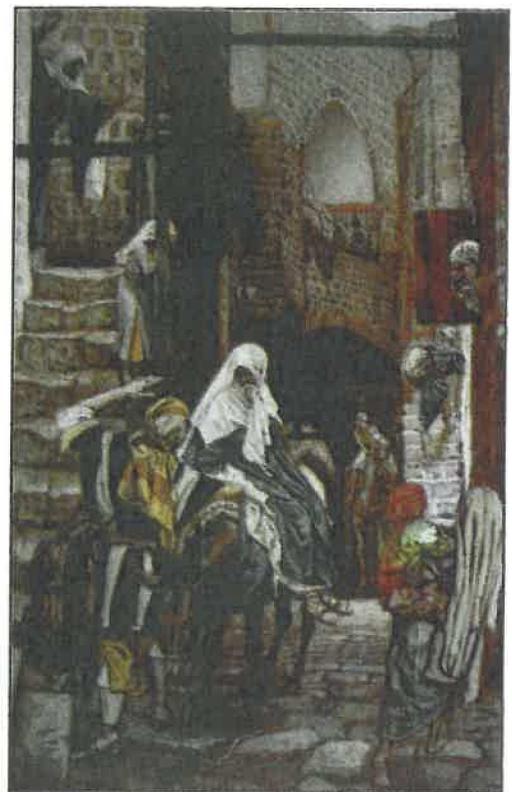
strands of thought have contributed to the contemporary dehumanization and reification of the child in the womb. A mechanistic physical theory inherited from the eighteenth century undoubtedly laid the groundwork for the prevalent modern misconception that the child in the womb is a minimally sensate being more acted upon than acting. At the same time a Rousseauistic sentimentality has idealized the child in the womb as an innocent, blissful sprite whose troubles begin only after birth when it encounters the deleterious social constructs which supposedly are the source of all human woes. So entrenched in our culture are these views that no matter how much they have been disproven by recent scientific discoveries their validity is rarely questioned.

The words of the saints and theologians of the past, however, can happily supply what is lacking in our usual modern perspective and provide an added dimension appropriate to our particular times. Through such a fuller and more humane appreciation of how the Passion encompasses the whole span of Christ's human life from His conception in Nazareth to His death on Calvary, we are better enabled to see how Christ walks with us not only through our last days as death approaches but also throughout our whole earthly journey. By supplementing the conventional devotional focus on the last hours of the Passion with a broader focus in the manner of the great saints and theologians of the past, we allow ourselves to understand the redemptive meaning of the Passion in the deeper, fuller way envisioned by Vatican II as affecting and potentially consecrating the whole of life even in its most mundane aspects.



# Journey to Bethlehem

*In those days Caesar Augustus published a decree ordering a census of the whole world . . . Everyone went to register, each to his own town. And so Joseph went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to David's town of Bethlehem — because he was of the house and lineage of David to register with Mary, his espoused wife, who was with child. Luke: 2:1-5*



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## A Lenten Reflection on the Beginning of the Passion of Christ

### The sacrificial early months of the life of the Redeemer

Let us reflect on the beginning of Christ's human life given for our redemption:

*Looking down with pity upon His people, the one God in His immortal simplicity condescends in one of His three eternal Persons to take on created human flesh in its mortal complexity. Thus at His conception in the womb of a betrothed virgin, His human body as yet only a single intricate cell, the Infant Christ prays to the Father as He begins the Passion of His human life. For the first time He experiences the humiliation of holding in check His divine omnipotence. This humiliation He undergoes for His beloved people.*

From the moment the Word was made flesh, the Lord Jesus carried His cross.  
(John of Ford)

V. *Said Christ as He came into the world, "I come to do Thy will, O God."*  
R. *He emptied Himself and took the form of a servant.*

Said Christ as He came into the world, "I come to do Thy will, O God."  
(Hebrews 10. 5-7)

V. *We bless Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee.*  
R. *Because by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world.*

He emptied Himself and took the form of a servant.  
(Philippians 2.7)

V. *We bless Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee.*  
R. *Because by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world.*

I too was formed from a piece of clay;  
Behold, no fear of Me need terrify thee.  
(Job 33, 6-7)

V: *We bless Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee.*  
R.: *Because by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world.*



Let us reflect on the beginning of the second month of Christ's human life given for our redemption:

*As rapidly as an unfolding flower bud the Infant Christ grows in all His intricate parts. His pulsating heart sends His precious blood coursing through the filament-like veins of His miniscule body. Like a servant obeying a master, the complex cells of His body follow in their growth the pattern ordained at His conception. For He has sacrificially emptied Himself of the freedom of His divinity, muffled it, suppressed it so that for the sake of His beloved people He might conform Himself to the restrictions of human nature.*

From the beginning of His conception Christ merited our eternal salvation, but on our side there were some obstacles, whereby we were hindered from securing the effects of His preceding merits, thus making the crucifixion necessary. (St. Thomas Aquinas)

*V. Said Christ as He came into the world, "I come to do Thy will, O God."  
R. He emptied Himself and took the form of a servant.*

Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God and your sins have hid His face from you.  
(Isaiah 59.2)

*V. We bless Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee.  
R. Because by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world.*

What is man that Thou art mindful of him,  
And the Son of Man that Thou dost care for Him?  
(Psalm 8.4)

*V. We bless Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee.  
R. Because by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world.*

The Lord called Me from the womb,  
From the body of My mother He named My name.  
(Isaiah 49.1)

*V. We bless Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee.  
R. Because by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world*



Let us reflect on the beginning of the third month of Christ's human life given for our redemption:

*When he hears her greet the mother of the Lord, St. John the Baptist leaps within the womb of his mother Elizabeth. Like King David, St. John dances before the Lord. And when He awakes, the Lord Infant Christ, too, dances in the waters of the womb of His mother, diving and somersaulting, turning and twirling in praise of the Father until the exertion exhausts His tiny body and with weary muscles He collapses in fatigue. This fatigue He endures for His beloved people who do not yet know Him, though He knows them each by name.*

Yes, in His mother's womb, the Lamb of God was already taking away the sins of the world, doing penance for our crimes, enduring the weariness of nine months and constantly interceding for us to the Father. (*John of Ford*)

*V. Said Christ as He came into the world, "I come to do Thy will, O God."  
R. He emptied Himself and took the form of a servant.*

In my distress I called upon the Lord,  
to my God I cried for help.  
(*Psalms 18.6*)

*V. We bless Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee.  
R. Because by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world.*

My soul melts away for sorrow;  
Strengthen Me according to Thy word.  
(*Psalms 119.28*)

*V. We bless Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee.  
R. Because by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world.*

O Lord, I am Thy Servant;  
I am Thy Servant, the Son of Thy handmaid.  
(*Psalms 116.16*)

*V. We bless Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee.  
R. Because by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world.*



Let us reflect on the beginning of the fourth month of Christ's human life given for our redemption:

*When the time for the birth of His cousin John the Baptist arrives, the Infant Christ has been living for three months in the womb of His virgin mother. When He sleeps the long sleep of the very young the beat of His heart slows, but when He awakes to begin His customary frolicking the beat of His heart quickens. As do all babies of this age, He pushes Himself with His feet away from the wall of the womb so that His head bounces against the opposite side of the womb sending Him back for another push. Over and over He pushes and bounces building up the muscles He needs to maneuver in the watery womb. But at last in fatigue He bends His foot awkwardly against the wall of the womb. He cries out in smarting anguish to the Father and asks mercy for His beloved people that cannot see or know His pain.*

O Jesus Christ! . . . recall all the sufferings which Thou hast endured from the first moment of Thy conception . . . (St. Bridget of Sweden)

V. *Said Christ as He came into the world, "I come to do Thy will, O God."*  
R. *He emptied Himself and took the form of a servant.*

Cast Me not off, forsake Me not,  
O God of My salvation.  
(Psalm 27.9)

V. *We bless Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee.*  
R. *Because by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world.*

For Thou didst form My inward parts;  
Thou didst knit Me together in My mother's womb.  
(Psalm 139.13)

V. *We bless Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee.*  
R. *Because by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world.*

He will hide Me in His shelter in the day of trouble;  
He will conceal Me under the cover of His tent.  
(Psalm 27.5)

V. *We bless Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee.*  
R. *Because by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world.*



Let us reflect on the beginning of the fifth month of Christ's human life given for our redemption:

*Like any son of Adam at so many months, the Infant Christ breathes the waters of the womb in and out of His lungs which each day grow stronger with such constant exercise. His rhythmic breathing is a prayer of intercession to the Father. But the Infant Christ catches his breath in terror at the resounding crash of a carpenter's tool when it hits the floor. He cries out to the Father for protection. This terror is the terror of any mortal man, woman, or child who thinks their life is about to be destroyed. It is the terror of the soldier on the field. It is the terror of the flood victim. It is the terror of His beloved people which the Infant Christ has taken on.*

Behold, Thou hast made My days a few handbreadths, And My lifetime is nothing in Thy sight. (*Psalm 39:5*)

V. *Said Christ as He came into the world, "I come to do Thy will, O God."*  
R. *He emptied Himself and took the form of a servant.*

Before I formed Thee in the womb I knew Thee  
And before Thou wert born I consecrated Thee.  
(*Jeremiah 1.5*)

V. *We bless Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee.*  
R. *Because by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world.*

And I said: "Ah, ah, ah, Lord God, behold I cannot speak for I am a child."  
(*Jeremiah 1.6*)

V. *We bless Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee.*  
R. *Because by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world.*

And the Lord said to Me: "Say not: 'I am a child': for Thou shalt go to all to whom I shall send Thee and whatsoever I shall command Thee, Thou shalt speak."  
(*Jeremiah 1. 7*)

V. *We bless Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee.*  
R. *Because by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world.*



Let us reflect on the beginning of the sixth month of Christ's human life given for our salvation:

*After frolicking for a time in the waters of the womb the Infant Christ, like any child of so many months, suffers the discomfort of thirst. He cries out to the Father in His anxiety. What would be only a moderate discomfort of thirst to an adult is an overwhelming discomfort to so small an infant. What is only a few seconds to an adult is like an eternity to one so young. Then like any other child of so many months, the Infant Christ sips and swallows the tranquil waters of the womb, gratified, overjoyed with what He tastes from the provident hand of the Father. But when He sleeps He dreams of His distressing thirst and re-lives His anxiety. It is the anxiety of the hiker lost in the desert without water. It is the anxiety of the traveler stranded in the snow storm without liquid. It is the anxiety of His beloved people which the Infant Christ has taken on.*

*How long, O Lord? Wilt Thou forget Me forever? How long wilt Thou hide Thy face from Me? (Psalm 13:1)*

*V. Said Christ as He came into the world, "I come to do Thy will, O God."  
R. He emptied Himself and took the form of a servant.*

*Be gracious to Me, O Lord, for I am languishing.  
(Psalm 6.2)*

*V. We bless Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee.  
R. Because by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world.*

*Do not hide Thy face from Me in the day of My distress.  
(Psalm 102.2)*

*V. We bless Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee.  
R. Because by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world.*

*Let me see Thy face.  
Let me hear Thy voice.  
(Song of Solomon 2.14)*

*V. We bless Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee.  
R. Because by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world.*



Let us reflect on the beginning of the seventh month of Christ's human life given for our redemption:

*Like any child of so many months, the Infant Christ gambols and tumbles in the hidden waters of the womb. As with any child of His age, His gamboling and tumbling are interrupted now and then by the smarts and stings of the human condition: a wrenching cramp in a muscle, the sharp spasm of a hiccup, the dull ache of an over-stretched sinew. Then, like any child in the womb, He ceases His gamboling to thrash His limbs and to weep human tears which, unseen, join the silent waters of the womb. These tears of His infancy become part of the priestly sacrifice of His life which He offers to the Father for His beloved people.*

The womb of the Virgin is a sacristy; there Christ the High Priest vests Himself in His robes of humanity. (After William of Durandus)

V. *Said Christ as He came into the world, "I come to do Thy will, O God."*  
R. *He emptied Himself and took the form of a servant.*

Thou art a priest forever  
According to the order of Melchisedech.  
(Psalm 110.4)

V. *We bless Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee.*  
R. *Because by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world.*

I know that the Lord will help His Anointed One.  
(Psalm 20.6)

V. *We bless Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee.*  
R. *Because by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world.*

Woe to him who says to a father, "What art thou begetting?"  
Or to a woman, "With what art thou in travail?"  
(Isaiah 45.10)

V. *We bless Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee.*  
R. *Because by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world.*



Let us reflect on the beginning of the eighth month of Christ's human life given for our redemption:

*Each morning, before drifting back to sleep, the Infant Christ welcomes the Nazarene sunlight which penetrates both the wall of the womb and the lids of His young eyes and without which His human eyesight could not develop. But no longer can the Infant Christ cavort so freely as He did. No longer can He somersault and tumble at will within the waters of the womb. The muscles in His legs, arms and shoulders, once taut from exercise, grow weaker with lack of use. The walls of the womb have become closer. He kicks against them and uses them for leverage when, awakened by the noon-time clatter of cookware in the outside world, He turns Himself in the womb. Frustrated, sleepless, He pleads with the Father for Himself and for all His beloved people whose peace is disrupted by the noisy turmoil of the fallen world.*

In all the sufferings of His life, the suffering of the Lord was maximal ... consider the stretch of time spent as a baby within the cramped confines of the womb. (Brother Gabriel Biel)

*V. Said Christ as He came into the world, "I come to do Thy will, O God."  
R. He emptied Himself and took the form of a servant.*

My God, My God,  
Why hast Thou forsaken Me? O my God, I cry by day,  
But Thou dost not answer, and by night, but find no rest.  
(Psalm 22.1-2)

*V. We bless Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee.  
R. Because by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world.*

I am a worm and no man;  
Scorned by men and despised by the people.  
(Psalm 22.6)

*V. We bless Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee.  
R. Because by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world.*

O God, be not far from Me;  
O my God, make haste to help Me.  
(Psalm 71.12)

*V. We bless Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee.  
R. Because by the holy Passion Thou hast redeemed the world.*



Let us reflect on the beginning of the ninth month of Christ's human life given for our redemption:

*With effort and contortions does the Infant Christ move and turn in the now constricted womb. His body encounters the walls of the womb on every side, and, like any child of so many months, He weeps noiselessly when His sleep is disrupted by the weary turning of His mother in bed from her side to her back. Her turning tosses Him against the spiky ridge of her backbone. Now in the quiet and dark of the night the weeping Infant hears His mother's thumping heartbeat just as during the day He also heard her voice and felt the occasional caresses of her hands through the walls of the womb. She, however, can neither hear His silent, airless wailing nor see His tears which mingle invisibly with the waters of the womb. He begs the Father's mercy for Himself and for all those who, like His mother, can neither see nor hear Him.*

The whole life of Christ was a continual Passion; others die martyrs, but Christ was born a martyr. (John Donne)

*V. Said Christ as He came into the world, "I come to do Thy will, O God."  
R. He emptied Himself and took the form of a servant.*

He will not cry out or lift up His voice or make it heard in the street.  
(Isaiah 42.2)

*V. We bless Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee.  
R. Because by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world.*

I was ready to be sought by those who did not ask for Me;  
I was ready to be found by those who did not seek Me.  
(Isaiah 65.1)

*V. We bless Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee.  
R. Because by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world.*

Behold, I come quickly!  
(Rev. 22,6)

*V. We bless Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee.  
R. Because by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world..*



Let us reflect on the beginning of the tenth month of Christ's human life given for our redemption:

*The Infant Christ leaves the womb, but not without first undergoing a repeated pressure which closes in on His head from all directions and encompasses His whole body with a force so painfully intense that it squeezes the liquid from His lungs. Not without apprehension does He, at the same moment the pressure ceases, enter the surprising world of air and stare at the face which goes with the familiar voice of His mother. He prays that even as He at last has seen the face of His ever-virgin mother, all His beloved people will come at last to see the face of their heavenly Father.*

The Son of God, for our salvation, became the Son of Man. He waits nine months to be born, He endures discomforts. Bloodied he comes forth. (St. Jerome)

*V. Said Christ as He came into the world, "I come to do Thy will, O God."  
R. He emptied Himself and took the form of a servant.*

*(At the Circumcision the Infant Christ sheds His blood.)  
I suffered distress and anguish.  
(Psalms 116.3)*

*V. We bless Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee.  
R. Because by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world.*

*(Herod plots to kill the Infant Christ.)  
Yea, I hear the whispering of many—  
Terror on every side—  
As they scheme together against Me,  
As they plot to take My life.  
(Psalm 31.13)*

*V. We bless Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee.  
R. Because by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world.*

Why came I out of the womb to see labor and sorrow, and that My days should be spent in confusion?  
(Jeremiah 20, 18)

*V. We bless Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee  
R. Because by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world*



Let us reflect on the beginning of the eleventh month of Christ's human life given for our redemption:

*When she presents Him in the Jerusalem Temple according to the Law of Moses, the mother of the Infant Christ is warned by the aged priest Simeon: "Thine own heart a sword shall pierce." The Infant Christ feels the tenseness of His mother's tightening clutch, feels the tremor that passes through her, and He, too, grows apprehensive. He turns His puckered face from the strange smell of the priest to the familiar smell of His mother. The fear of future grief which He offers to the Father is that of His beloved people. It is the fear of tomorrow, the fear of want, the fear of bodily dissolution.*

The sense of pain could not be lacking in One who had come to experience pain from His very beginning and who was as full of grace as He was full of knowledge and truth. (*John of Ford*)

*V. Said Christ as He came into the world, "I come to do Thy will, O God."  
R. He emptied Himself and took the form of a servant.*

Why did I not die at birth,  
Come forth from the womb and expire?...  
Or why was I not as a hidden untimely birth?  
As infants who never see the light?  
(*Job 3.11-16*)

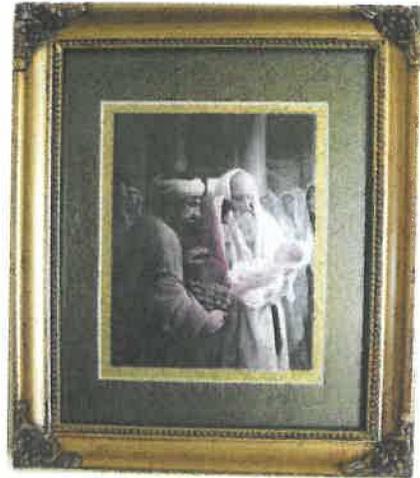
*V. We bless Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee.  
R. Because by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world.*

The Lord swore to David a sure oath  
From which He will not turn back:  
One of the sons of thy body  
I will set upon thy throne.  
(*Psalms 132.11*)

*V. We bless Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee.  
R. Because by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world.*

It is He who remembered us in our low estate  
For His steadfast love endures forever.  
(*Psalms 136.23*)

*V. We bless Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee  
R. Because by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world.*



## *The Presentation In the Temple*

*Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother: "This child is destined to be the downfall and the rise of many in Israel, a sign that will be opposed and you yourself will be pierced with a sword — so that the thoughts of many hearts may be laid bare." Luke: 2:34*



Let us reflect on the beginning of the twelfth month of Christ's human life given for our redemption:

*As he journeys in the arms of His mother on a strange Egyptian road, the Infant Christ feels the sharp pangs of hunger. For an infant such hunger is less endurable than for an adult. For what is a small discomfort to an adult is an overwhelming discomfort to an infant. But on the other hand what is only a small pleasure to an adult is an unsurpassable pleasure to an infant. When the virgin mother of the Infant Christ stops to nurse Him at her breast with her own milk she gives Him boundless joy. He praises the Father for His bounty in providing such earthly joy and asks for His beloved people an earthly foretaste of eternal joy.*

For no less wisdom did Jesus possess, or rather no less was He Wisdom, at His conception, than at His birth, when little than when big. Whether when hidden in the womb or uttering cries in the manger, or when increased in stature and questioning the doctors in the Temple, or when at length at a mature age and teaching among the people, He was in truth equally full of the Holy Ghost. (St. Bernard of Clairvaux)

V. Said Christ as He came into the world, "I come to do Thy will, O God."  
R. He emptied Himself and took the form of a servant.

I thirst.  
(John 19. 28)

V. We bless Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee.  
R. Because by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world.

Thou shalt suck, Thou shalt be carried upon her hip,  
And dandled upon her knees.  
(Isaiah 66, 12)

V. We bless Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee.  
R. Because by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world.

Thou hast ravished My heart, My sister, My bride.  
(Song of Solomon 4. 9)

V. We bless Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee.  
R. Because by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world.



Let us reflect on the beginning of the thirteenth month of Christ's human life given for our redemption:

*As a dark storm swirls around them and the sky is rent by lightening, the Infant Christ sleeps by the side of his wakeful mother just as many years later He will sleep on the storm-tossed boat on the Sea of Galilee in the company of the wakeful fishermen. Through His sleep the Infant Christ hears the crashing thunder. On behalf of His beloved people who travail in a world roiled by sin, the dreaming Infant offers His human dread of the thunder to His heavenly Father.*

By means of the Beatific Vision, which He enjoyed from the time He was received into the womb of the mother of God, the Divine Redeemer has forever and continuously had present to Him all the members of His Mystical Body and embraced them with His saving love. (*Pope Pius XII*)

*V. Said Christ as He came into the world, "I come to do Thy will, O God."  
R. He emptied Himself and took the form of a servant.*

Through Him was made all that was made;  
And without Him was made nothing that was made.  
(*John 1.3*)

*V. We bless Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee.  
R. Because by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world.*

In peace I will both lie down and sleep;  
For Thou alone, O Lord, makest Me dwell in safety.  
(*Psalms 4.8*)

*V. We bless Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee.  
R. Because by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world.*

I sleep, but My heart waketh.  
(*Song of Solomon 5.2*)

*V. We bless Thee, O Christ, and we praise Thee.  
R. Because by Thy holy cross Thou hast redeemed the world.*



Let us reflect on the completion of the first year of the Passion of the earthly life of Christ with all its joys and sorrows.

*Even in these His earliest months, Christ encounters the fleeting nature of human joys and the recurring nature of human sorrows as He carries His cross through life toward Calvary.*

For the infirmities to which He submitted for our sakes, such as to be born, to be suckled, to die, to be buried, belong to the humanity which he borrowed from us. Mine is the mortality of the Infant, mine the helplessness of the Child, mine also the death upon the cross, and mine the sleep of the tomb. (St. Bernard of Clairvaux)

*V. Said Christ as He came into the world, "I come to do Thy will, O God."  
R. He emptied Himself and took the form of a servant.*

*V. Let us carry our cross with the Lord.  
R. Who suffers in His saints still.*

*V. Whose humanity is hidden in the Sacrament of the Altar.  
R. Even as His divinity was once hidden by His infancy.*

*V. Whose coming in glory we look for.  
R. Whose justice and mercy we expect.*

*V. When He shall reign on the throne of David.  
R. Forever and ever. Amen.*

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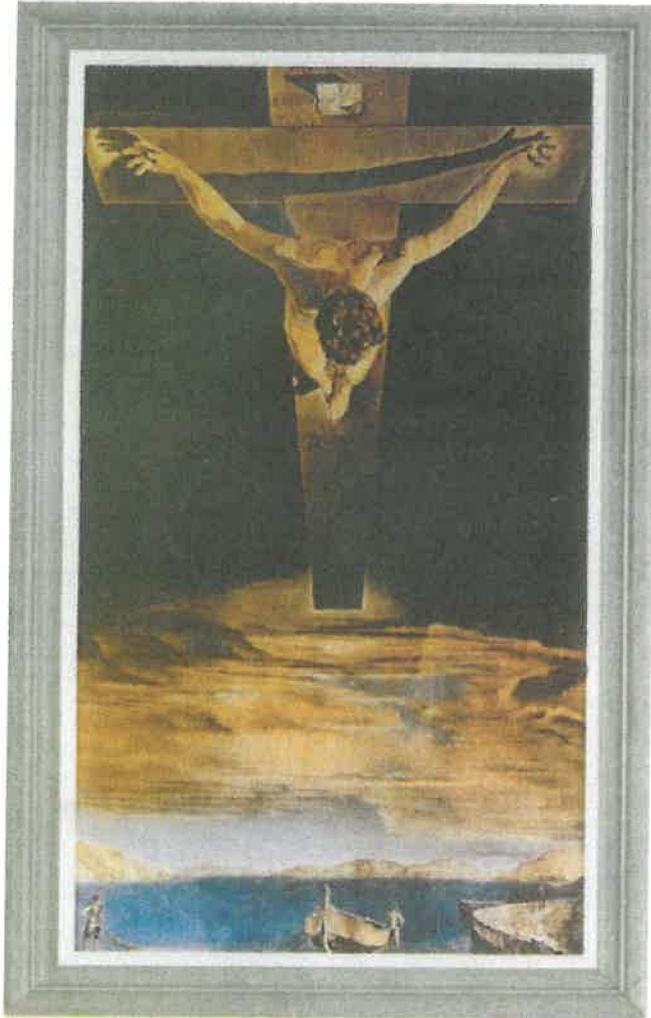
*Giotto, c. 1266-1337*

## **The Flight to Egypt**

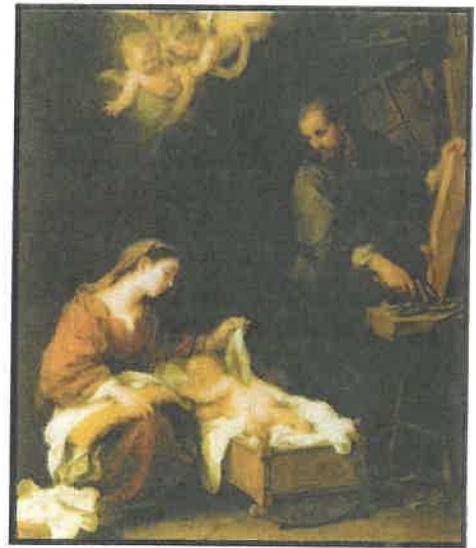
“... The angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph with the command: ‘Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt.’”

*Matthew 3:13*

# A Lenten Reflection



*Christ/St. John of the Cross, Salvador Dali, 1904-1989*



*Murillo, 1618-1682*



*Fra Angelico, 1400-1455*

*The Whole  
Life Of  
Jesus  
From The  
Beginning  
Was A  
Passion.*