

Life Is A Miracle



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Families Celebrate March 25
The Feast of the Annunciation
A Day Honoring Babies in the Womb
Diocese of Peoria Respect Life Board

*Surely the womb
must be
a very special place
for God dwelt there*



*The Lord is with thee:
Blessed is the fruit
of thy womb*

*God's magnificent gift of life demands our responsible guardianship.
We plead for the inviolability of the womb.*





March 25

The Annunciation

The Feast of the Annunciation, March 25, is one of the most important in the church calendar. It celebrates the actual Incarnation of Our Savior the Word made flesh in the womb of His mother, Mary.

The biblical account of the Annunciation is in the first chapter of the Gospel of St. Luke. St. Luke describes the annunciation given by the angel Gabriel to Mary that she was to become the mother of the Incarnation of God.

Here is recorded the "angelic salutation" of Gabriel to Mary, "Hail, thou who art highly favored; the Lord is with thee" (v. 28), and Mary's response to God's will, "Let it be done to me according to thy word" (fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum) (v. 38).

Gospel Reading: Luke 1:26-38

In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you!" But

she was greatly troubled at the saying, and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to Him the throne of His father David, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of His kingdom there will be no end." And Mary said to the angel, "How shall this be, since I have no husband?" And the angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God.

And behold, your kinswoman Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible." And Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

"The most radical and elevating affirmation of the value of every human being was made by the Son of God in his becoming man in the womb of a woman ..."

— Pope John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*



Family Observance of the Annunciation

In families with young children, this feast would be a good time to begin teaching youngsters important lessons about the inestimable value God places on human life.

First, that He loved us so much that He chose to become *one of us* to take on our humanity so completely that he “became flesh,” as utterly weak and dependent as any human infant is. Second, God became “like us in all things except sin” *at the moment of His conception in Mary’s womb*, not at some later time. The Feast of the Annunciation is a celebration of the actual Incarnation of Jesus Christ.

Children may, quite naturally, think that the *birth* of Jesus is the time when Our Savior first “became Man,” especially since Christmas has become *the* Christian holiday in our culture. We understand best what we can see, what is visible. The invisible, the hidden is, no less real for our lack of seeing it. (We think of the baby in its mother’s womb, known and felt, though unseen, only to her.)

Even very young children can know the truth about the growth of a baby inside its mother’s body, especially if the mother of the family (or an aunt, perhaps) happens to be pregnant on the holiday. The nine months’ wait from March 25 to Dec. 25 for the Baby to be born would be interesting to most children. (God made no special rules for His own bodily development!) What better way than reading the first chapter of Luke to gently begin teaching children about the beginning of each new human life?

Children should be told how important it is to

every person that “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1), and parents can find this feast a valuable teaching moment.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church on Article 3 of the Creed, “He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, and was born of the Virgin Mary” (436-511), should be read by parents. This will not only give adults a timely review of Catholic doctrine, but it can be a great help to us in transmitting important truths of the faith to our children. The summary at the end can help formulate points we want to emphasize. Excerpts from the catechism could be read aloud to older children.

Some other lessons that can be drawn from this important feast on the church’s calendar are:

- Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit
- Angels as God’s messengers
- The importance of humility, submission and obedience to God’s will
- The value of hiddenness, silence, quiet (baby in womb, Mary at home, etc.)

Family Prayers and Readings:

- St. Luke 1:26-53; Magnificat (Luke 1:46-53); Psalm 139; John 1
- Creed (See also Catechism of the Catholic Church, Creed, Article 3)
- The Angelus
- Rosary (Five Joyful Mysteries: Annunciation, Visitation, Nativity, Presentation of Jesus, Finding Jesus in the Temple)
- Catechism: Section on Angels (328-336)



Activities with Children

Have children draw an Annunciation scene with the Trinity present — Father, Son and Holy Spirit — as well as Mary and the angel Gabriel. Another idea would be to make the figures from clay or playdough, and make a “tableau” using a shallow box to represent Mary’s house.

Mention that Christianity is unique in recognizing the Incarnation of God as Jesus Christ, the Son. God’s taking on a human body, while being truly and fully divine, is the reason why artistic representations of Jesus, Mary, etc., are not “idols” or “graven images” prohibited by the First Commandment. (See catechism 476, 466.) Catholics who properly reverence images of sacred figures are actually reverencing the Person whom the image represents, not the physical object painting or sculpture or medal or whatever.

Make a flower centerpiece for the dinner table using red carnations (symbolize “incarnation”), baby’s breath (innocent, spirit) and Ivy (eternal fidelity). Explain how the symbolism of the flowers reminds us of the Annunciation, and the appropriateness of the gift of real flowers for the occasion. Sprinkle the flowers with holy water (little children love to do this!), and explain that this consecrates or sets apart, our gift to the worship of God.

Make a special Annunciation Candle. Use a fat “pillar candle” of white or blue. Carve a niche in the wax large enough to fit inside it a tiny image (or picture cut from a Christmas card) of the Infant Jesus. Fasten a “curtain,” made from a small piece of white cloth, over the opening with pins pushed into the wax. The candle wax rep-

resents the purity of the Virgin. The Baby is “hidden” within the body of the candle. Light the candle when the Angelus or rosary is said on this feast. The same candle can be saved from year to year. It can also be used on other feast days and solemnities of the Blessed Virgin (Assumption, Immaculate Conception); as well as on pro-life observances (e.g., Jan. 22 in the U.S.). On Christmas the little curtain would be removed from the niche so the Holy Infant can be seen.

Substitute the regular bedtime story with looking at and talking about pictures of the Annunciation in books. There are many beautifully printed art books containing masterworks of Catholic art that can be borrowed from any public library or you may have some in your home library. There you may find reproduced paintings of the Annunciation by Fra Angelico, Roger van der Weyden, and others.

Make a household shrine. A statue or picture of Mary could be placed on a small table in a special place in the house. Or a picture or sculpture of Mary could be hung on the wall over a shelf or cabinet containing the Bible, prayer books and other devotional books, rosaries, etc.

On Marian feasts, especially the Feast of the Annunciation, decorate the “shrine” to “highly favored” Mary with real flowers, if possible. Carnations, roses or lilies in bud would be ideal.

If real flowers are impossible, children could make flowers symbolizing attributes of Mary from tissue or colored paper, etc. These flowers could be made into a wreath



to be hung on the door or placed on a table with a statue or picture of Mary, or to surround the Annunciation Candle.

Plant seeds of marigolds (named in honor of Mary) in little pots on a window sill; wait to see them sprout and grow. While you and the children are planting these, talk about the importance of "hidden" work. As a baby grows unseen within the mother's womb, and as the sprouting seed invisibly grows under the soil, so is much essential and vital work people do not visible to most people, and may never be known except to God.

Transplant the seedlings to the flower bed outside when the weather permits. There's also a lesson here in the need to

grow strong in the faith before we can "flower" as God intends us to do; also the Parable of the Sower (Mark 4:2-20; Matthew 13:3-23; Luke 8:4-15).

Bake a special cake to celebrate the Feast of the Annunciation (perhaps a traditional seed cake?), or make waffles (a Swedish tradition). An angel food cake would also be appropriate. It could be iced in pale blue, the traditional color of Mary's mantle.

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The Angelus

(Morning, Noon and Night)

V. The Angel of the Lord declared unto Mary,

R. And she conceived of the Holy Spirit.
Hail Mary, etc.

V. Mary said: I am the servant of the Lord.

R. Be it done unto me according to Your Word.

Hail Mary, etc.

V. And the Word was made flesh.

R. And dwelt among us.

Hail Mary, etc.

V. Pray for us, O holy Mother of God,

R. That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Let us pray:

Lord, fill our hearts with your love, and as you revealed to us by an angel the coming of your Son as man, so lead us through his suffering and death to the glory of his resurrection, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

—Amen

Annunciation Day Bell Ringing

*A special observance of
Gabriel's announcement to the
Virgin Mary that she would
become the mother of Christ*

Ring church bells is a traditional way to celebrate the conception of Christ on Annunciation Day.

On March 25 in commemoration of the Incarnation of Jesus, church bells are to ring morning, noon and evening, and three Hail Marys recited.

If church bells are not available, devotion is still encouraged by family members at those three moments during the day in observance of Jesus' Incarnation.



Blessing of Flower Seeds and Bulbs on Annunciation Day, March 25

The blessing of flower seeds and bulbs is a way of encouraging reverence for the lives of babies yet in the womb by honoring the conception of Christ on Annunciation Day, March 25, exactly nine months before His birth on Christmas. The tradition of celebrating the conception of Christ on the first day of spring (March 25 in the Julian calendar) antedates the fourth century. The custom of blessing seeds on this day originated in central Europe.

V. Our help is in the name of the Lord.
R. Who made heaven and earth.

V. The Lord be with you.
R. And with your spirit.

Let us pray:

O God, Creator and Sustainer of all life
Who in the first spring at the dawn of creation
Made the flowers of the fields
And the lilies of the valleys,
We ask you on this Annunciation day
And anniversary of the conception of your Son,
To foster and nourish these flower seeds and bulbs
with warm breezes and seasonable showers
So that hidden in the darkness of the earth
They may germinate and come to bloom
As their ancestors once bloomed in paradise
In raiment more glorious than that of Solomon
To be a sign to us, as our Lord Jesus Christ, your
Son,
Taught us,
Of your care for all human life.

Mindful therefore that on this joyful day nine
months before his birth
Unseen by any earthly eye
Your eternal Son began his human life
And his work of redeeming all creation,
We beseech you, O heavenly Father,
To banish from these seeds and bulbs
All influence of the enemy,
Blessing + and sanctifying + them
In the name of your Son
And by the power of your Holy Spirit
For the good use and benefit
Of all who will come into contact with them.
Considering then with wonder the care you lavished
Upon your handiwork the flowers,
Let us consider with even greater wonder
The care you lavished upon us

Whom you knew when we were being intricately
wrought

In the secrecy of the womb.

R. For children are your inheritance,
The fruit of the womb is a reward. (Psalm 127:3)

May our trust in your all-seeing providence
And our memory of the manner
In which your Son our Lord Jesus Christ began his
Incarnate life
In the womb of the blessed Virgin Mary,
Cause us to gladly welcome all new human life in
his name
Just as she welcomed the first coming of her Son at
his conception
With rejoicing and with the praise of your works.
R. For children are your inheritance.
The fruit of the womb is a reward. (Psalm 127:3)

O Keeper of Israel, who neither slumbers nor
sleeps,
Even though the seed slumbers in the earth
And the child sleeps in the womb of its mother,
Turn away from these seeds and bulbs the fury of
the elements,
So that in their blooming they will recall to us
That we are engraved in the palm of your hand.
R. For children are your inheritance,
The fruit of the womb is a reward. (Psalm 127:3)

And in their dying and producing of new life
May these seeds and bulbs recall to us the second
coming of your Son
When he will speak with a voice like a trumpet
And will be seen by every eye.
Forever and ever.
R. Amen.

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A Special Lesson For Home And School

Annunciation of the Lord

March 25

"I have some good news for you!" If someone gave you this message, what would be your response? Would you be cautious? Curious? Excited? You probably would want that person to tell you the news immediately. John's Gospel tells us the good news that "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him . . . may have eternal life" (John 3:16).

At a moment in time that we now call the Annunciation, God revealed this good news to Mary. She was the first to hear the good news and to believe that God would do what he promised. Her faith assured her that nothing is impossible for God. Mary also heard God's invitation calling her to be the virgin mother of his Son. This call meant that her life in the future would be different from what she might have expected. This call meant that Jesus would be formed in her womb, and that she, as his mother, would nourish and care for him. This call meant that she

had a special place in God's plan for salvation. She would be able to bring Christ to everyone she met.

Mary heard this word of God and responded, "I am the handmaid of the Lord. Let what you have said be done to me" (Luke 1:38). In her yes response, Mary agreed to God's plan because she wanted what God wanted. She was willing to accept all the joy and pain, all the unexpected events that would help her and guide her. She was willing to bring Christ to a waiting world.

In our lives let us, like Mary, listen to God's word and believe in God's promises. Like Mary, let us be ready to say yes to God's plan for our lives. Let us try by our words and actions to become so much like her Son, Jesus, that we bring him to everyone we meet.

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ACTIVITIES

Annunciation of the Lord, March 25

Draw on Scripture

Slowly read Luke 1:26-38, the account of the Annunciation. Ask the students to jot down words or phrases that strike them during the reading. After the reading have them draw symbols that capture the meaning of the words or phrases they noted. Let students share their reflections and symbols with the class. Point out that a single Scripture passage can be very rich in meaning.

Talk about Vocations

The call that Mary received from God was a call to a way of life. Have the class list the various calls, or vocations, a person might receive: married life, single life, priesthood, diaconate, consecrated life as a brother or sister. Have the students as a class compose a prayer, asking God to lead each one of them to know his or her vocation in life.

Pray the Angelus

Remind the students that the Angelus is a traditional prayer about the mystery of the Incarnation and is usually prayed each day in the morning, at noon, and in the evening. Have the students pray the Angelus at the end of the class.

Study Art of the Annunciation

Post various artistic representations of the Annunciation. Discuss with the students the way each artist portrays Mary. Have them choose the picture that best matches the way they understand her.

Match Prophecies of Jesus

In the account of the Annunciation, the angel refers to some qualities that Mary's child will have. These qualities were first mentioned in the Old Testament. Have the students match the qualities and the Scripture references.

1. Isaiah 41:14

2. Daniel 6:28
3. Psalm 48:1
4. Exodus 15:18
5. Genesis 14:19029

Son of the Most High
great
Holy One
king
savior (meaning of the name "Jesus")

Answers:

1. Holy One
2. savior
3. great
4. king
5. Son of the Most High

Pray a Scriptural Decade of the Rosary

Divide the Annunciation account of Luke 1:36-38 into 10 sections as follows: verses 26-27, verse 28, verses 29-30, verse 31, verses 32-33, verse 34, verse 35, verse 36, verse 37, verse 38. Then have the class pray the first Joyful Mystery of the Rosary, while volunteers read a section from the Gospel account before the recitation of each Hail Mary.

Bring Christ to Others

Mary brought Christ to others. Have the students plan ways to bring the story of the Annunciation to a younger class through coloring books, a play, or a puppet show.

Relate Feast to Saint Joseph

The feast of the Annunciation is celebrated as a Marian feast. However, in Matthew the angel of the Lord appears to Joseph rather than to Mary. Have the students read Matthew 1:18-25 and explain why the feast is also a feast of St. Joseph.

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Saint Joseph, Husband of Mary

March 19

(first century)

If there were a photo album of Jesus' family, what pictures would be in it? Neither Mary nor Joseph appear much in Scripture, but some beautiful images are found there.

The Gospels of both Matthew and Luke show Joseph as the gentle but strong protector of Mary, the mother of Jesus. When Matthew traces Jesus' human ancestry, Joseph's family is given (Matthew 1:16). Luke identifies Mary as the betrothed of Jesus, of the house and family of David (Luke 1:27). This "righteous man" does not know of the miracle worked in Mary, who is to be the mother of God, and so he faces a terrible dilemma when he realizes that the woman he loves and to whom he is engaged is pregnant (Matthew 1:18-25). Through a dream Joseph is informed of what has occurred, and his loving protection of Mary increases. As the time for Jesus to be born draws near, Mary and Joseph must go to Bethlehem — not only to be enrolled among the members of the house of David, but also so that the Messiah will be born in the city of the great king, as prophecy foretold.

At Jesus' birth, Joseph guards Jesus and Mary (Luke 2:4-20). Joseph is present also, protecting Mary as her legal husband, when the child is circumcised and when he is offered to his Father at the Presentation. With Mary, Joseph hears Simeon's prophecy about Mary's sufferings (Luke 2:21-35). When the child is in danger because of King Herod's hatred, Joseph guards and provides

for his family in Egypt until he can safely take them back to Nazareth (Matthew 2:13-23). During one of her keenest sufferings, Mary has Joseph to rely upon. When Jesus is lost in Jerusalem, Joseph and Mary seek him and take him back to Nazareth (Luke 2:41-52). After this, Joseph slips out of the Scriptures, except for a few references to Jesus as the "carpenter's son." The word for "carpenter" used in Scripture means a worker in stone, metal, or wood. It is thought that Joseph died before Jesus began his public life.

These scriptural pictures of Joseph reveal him as a "just man," an obedient man, a good and loving husband and father.

Little attention was given to Joseph, but then people began to consider his role and his virtues. Public veneration of St. Joseph existed in the Eastern Coptic church in the fourth century. The Western church began to celebrate his feast in the sixth century. Pope Pius IX proclaimed St. Joseph the patron of the universal church in 1870. Since then, St. Joseph has been named patron of different groups and countries. In 1955 Pius XIII made May 1 the feast of St. Joseph the Worker. In 1961 Pope John XXIII proclaimed Joseph the protector of Vatican Council II and in 1962 included his name in Eucharistic Prayer I of the Mass.

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ACTIVITIES

Saint Joseph, Husband of Mary/ March 19

Write Thank-You Notes

Have the students make cards or write thank-you notes to their fathers, grandfathers, uncles, brothers, or other significant father figures in their lives. You may wish to schedule a similar activity later (perhaps in May) for writing to mothers, grandmothers, aunts, sisters, or significant mother figures.

Learn From Art

Have the students examine the statue or picture of Jesus in the parish church. Talk about how he is represented and what characteristics the artist portrays. If possible, display paintings of the Holy Family or of Joseph alone. Discuss how representations of Saint Joseph have changed.

Discuss Age of Joseph

Sometimes Joseph is pictured as an old man. However, the custom of his time was that a man should marry between the ages of 13 and 19 and the girl should be between the ages of 12 and 16. Joseph would most likely have observed the customs of the day. Clarify this fact with the students.

Write About a Just Person

Joseph is described in the Gospel as

“just.” The biblical notion of “just” is very broad and includes such ideas as law-abiding and holy — one transformed by God and open to his will. Have the students read the description of the just man given in Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) 35:1-6. Then ask them to write about any person they know who seems to fit this description. Tell them to explain why they chose the person they did.

Write Prayers to Saint Joseph

By papal documents Joseph has been made patron of prayer and the interior life, the poor, those in authority, priests and religious, travelers, and devotion to Mary. He is the patron of Mexico (1555), Canada (1624), Bohemia (1655), the Chinese missions (1678), Belgium (1689), and the church’s campaign against atheistic communism (1937). Joseph is also known as the patron of the fathers of families, bursars, artisans, manual workers, carpenters, and all those who desire a happy death (a widespread devotion since the 17th century). Acquaint the students with these titles. Have them each choose the title that means the most to them and write a short prayer to Joseph under that title.

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Catechist's Notes:



on the Beginning of the Passion of Christ

The sacrificial early months of the life of the Redeemer

By Helen Dietz
Annunciation Society

The following are excerpts from this work. The complete text is available from the Annunciation Society, PO Box 214, Oak Park, IL 60303-0214. Copies are available at the Family Resources Center, (309) 637-1713.

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.

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.



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.*



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.*



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.



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.



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.



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.



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.



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.



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.



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.



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.*



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.*



Reflections From Redeemer In The Womb

By John Saward

"God the Son became man at the moment of his conception by the Holy Spirit in the Blessed Virgin's womb. Then, for nine months, he whom the heaven of heavens cannot hold was housed, as a real human baby, within his Mother's body."

Page 1

"He accepts the limitations of the long, slow, womb-way to birth. Apart from the virginal manner of his conception and birth, the Christ Child, unborn as well as newborn, is like every baby."

Page 19

"Already in the womb, Christ is Head of the Church. Indeed, according to John, the embryonic Christ is already in a sense carrying his Cross, for at his conception he takes a passible and mortal human nature, the frail flesh in which he will suffer and die."

Page 65

"By becoming man at his conception, the Son of God has united every unborn child to himself and made all womb-life not simply sacred but divine, worthy of God himself. He has consecrated 'our beginnings.'"

Page 159

"Anyone should be able to see that the life of the human being begins at the moment of fertilization and from that moment has the right to be protected from attack. But the Catholic believer, who confesses that the Son of God became man at the moment of his virginal conception, has the greatest of all possible grounds for reverence. Unborn life has been assumed and therefore divinized by the consubstantial Word. To attack the unborn is to declare war against God."

Page 164

"The embryonic Christ, simply by being what he is, proclaims in advance his later teaching: 'Unless you turn and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven' (Mt. 18:3). God took the 'little way' when he became man. He came and lay 'all so still where his Mother was.' Without throwing off his divine grandeur, he took the smallest form of human life; he became a Spirit-fashioned and Spirit-filled 'zygote.'"

Page 160

"On Christmas Day, in the company of Mary and Joseph and the shepherds, the meaning of the Incarnation seizes the mind and heart of the early church: God, the Creator of the universe, has become a tiny baby. As St. Bernard says, the Word was made 'infant flesh, young flesh, helpless flesh.' But the church also remembers, especially during the last week of Advent, that, before being a newborn baby, God Incarnate was an unborn baby — in modern jargon, a fetus, an embryo, a zygote. The first stage of human life that God made his own and thereby divinized was embryonic. The adventure of being human began for the eternal Son at the moment of his conception."

Page 6

"If the womb has for nine months been found worthy of the presence of God, then the attack on the unborn is an act of sacrilege, the abomination of desolation. If Christ is truly the Head of all men, united through the Incarnation to every man conceived, then he truly suffers in every act of abortion, just as he is neglected in the unfed hungry and the naked man without clothes."

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Celebrate The Annunciation With Caroling

By being conceived, Christ reaffirmed the dignity of all human life from the moment of conception. He showed that the lives of all newly conceived babies are valuable for in each one we must see the newly conceived Christ.

Without Christ's conception there would have been no Good Friday, no Easter, no salvation nor hope of heaven. Christ's conception day marks the beginning of our redemption, a special time for remembering our obligations to babies in the womb who are as Christ once was: small and in need of protection.

Centuries ago in England on Spring New Year's or Annunciation Day as it was called, people went caroling. Costumed mummers went from house to house singing songs of Christ's conception to mark the new year.

You may even consider throwing an Annunciation Day caroling party in your neighborhood. A 15th-century carol for use on Annunciation Day appears on the next page. It is furnished by the Annunciation Society, an organization founded in 1981 in Oak Park, Ill., to promote respect for life in the womb by honoring the conception of Christ. For more information contact: Helen Dietz, President, Annunciation Society, PO Box 214, Oak Park, IL 60303.

Excerpts from Respect Life Liturgy Guide
USCCB Respect Life Program

Resources For The Family

Books:

- "Angel in the Waters," Regina Doman
- "Celebrating the Incarnation, A Guide, Catholic Social Services," Lincoln, Neb.
- "Mary, God's Yes to Man," Pope John Paul II
- "Mother's Manual, Help for Mothers and Expectant Mothers," A. Francis Coomes, S.J.
- "Redeemer in the Womb," John Saward
- "Saints and Feast Days," the Sisters of Notre Dame of Chardon, Loyola Press
- "Sanctifying Pregnancy," The Liturgical Press, St. John's Abbey
- "Story of God in the Womb, The Pre-Born Christ," Patrick A. O'Donnell, SFP, John D. McCarthy Jr., Susan Andrews Brindle

Videos:

- "An International Rosary for the Protection of the Unborn, The Joyful Mysteries," by John Riedell, Gregg Clemons

Thousands of other books and films for the family are also available at the Family Resources Center, (309) 637-1713.



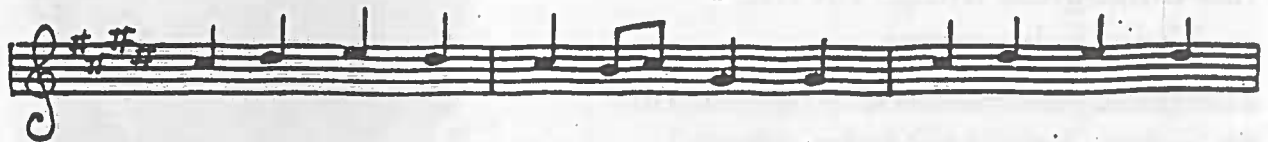
A Maiden Knelt Alone in Prayer

Verses 1, 2, 4 H.M.D.
Verse 3 15th century English

Traditional English tune



1. A maid-en knelt a-lone in prayer When
2. "He shall not quench the smok-ing wick, Nor
3. As sun beam go-eth through the glass The
4. There-at the an-gel left the maid. To



1. came an an-gel un-to- her. "Thou now the King of
2. break the bruised reed eith-er; He comes so gen-tle
3. Son of God passed through-her. And so both God and
4. all a joy-ful New-Year! By his con-cep-tion



- 1 Kings wilt-bear: Thy mer-ci-ful Re-deem-er."
2. and so-quick: Thy mer-ci-ful Re-deem-er."
3. man he-was: Our mer-ci-ful Re-deem-er."
4. we are-saved: Our mer-ci-ful Re-deem-er."

Verses 1, 2 and 4 © copyright, 1997, by H.M. Dietz



The Magnificat— Mary's Song Of Praise

My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior
for he has looked with favor
on the lowliness of his servant.
Surely, from now on all
generations will call me blessed;
for the Mighty One
has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
His mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud
in the thoughts of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful
from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
according to the promise he made
to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.

(Luke 1:46-55)



"In the image of Guadalupe, the sash Mary wears means the physical Christ is in her womb. In our struggle against the forces of evil and the culture of death, let us look to Our Lady of Guadalupe as a child looks to a mother, and let us look to the unborn as our spiritual brethren."

— John Riedell



*A Special
Observance
On The
Feast Of
The
Annunciation

Spiritually
adopt a baby
in the womb
in danger of
abortion*



Sister Jean Darcy

"Jesus, my Lord, through the intercession of Mary, Your mother, who bore You so lovingly, and of Saint Joseph, strong man of faith, who protected You both, I pray to you for the life of the unborn child who is in danger of abortion, the one I have spiritually adopted. Please give to the parents of this particular child the grace and courage to bring it to the life You have destined for him/her."

Abortion is an unspeakable crime against God and innocent human life. Would you spiritually adopt one baby in the womb in danger of abortion? Just pray that the life of the little one whom you spiritually and mentally adopt, may be continued to birth and beyond its birth, so that this child may have its God-given right to life and come to know, love and serve God on earth, and then be happy with Him forever in heaven. This spiritual, mental adoption is simply a personal resolution to pray daily, at least for a year, for a particular child in the womb in danger of deliberate abortion.

During your earthly life this spiritually adopted child will be known to God. But, in eternal life, you will find a surprised happiness in each other's company.



Just as God became man at the miraculous moment of Christ's entry into Mary's womb, every human life began at the moment of fertilization and should be respected from that time forward.

The Family Resources Center, 415 N.E. Monroe St., Peoria, IL 61603

We are dedicated to creating a culture of life, which affirms the miracle and glory of every human life.

