

Commentary on the Gospel for Mon, Sep 8th 2014

The Nativity of Mary

The gospels being basically a catechesis, we should not be surprised if they do not mention Mary's birth. Instead, today the gospel of Matthew talks about Mary's own experience of carrying Jesus in her womb and the problems it presented both for her and for Joseph. Sometimes God enters our lives in rather unsettling ways.

Reading Matthew's narrative, we have to try to put ourselves in Joseph's place, as he realizes that Mary is pregnant and he knows that he is not the father. What happened? He knew Mary well enough to trust her, so what happened? Did someone abuse her during her months away from Nazareth? He may not have known what to do, but, because he truly loved Mary, he knew what not to do. He would not expose her to the charge of infidelity that carried with it as a penalty death by stoning. He would go away and be the one at fault, be the fall guy, be a "deadbeat father". And then God intervenes to calm him and put him at peace. And Joseph simply trusts.

We also have to try to put ourselves in Mary's place. She could certainly sense how uneasy, indeed how anxious, Joseph was about the whole thing. Her parents too had noticed her bulging tummy and perhaps suspected Joseph, even if they may have chosen not to confront either Mary or Joseph. And Mary could not explain... who would believe her? What could she do? She did what the gospel tells us later that she did: she pondered in her heart. It was this trusting pondering that led her from not understanding to not needing to understand. It was this that carried her through the moments of darkness in her life, especially at Calvary – how can a mother understand the cruel execution of her innocent Son? But she no longer needed to understand and she held her ground at the foot of the cross.

A very good moment to pray for this trusting pondering in our life's difficulties, when we find ourselves not understanding what is happening in us and around us, when we wonder how God's entering our lives can be so unsettling.

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