

First Joyful Mystery

SCRIPTURE: Announcement of the Birth of Jesus. (Luke 1:26-38) In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming to her, he said, "Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was greatly troubled at what was said and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." But Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?" And the angel said to her in reply, "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, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing will be impossible for God." Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

REFLECTION: In this first joyful mystery, we think of every young girl experiencing puberty - the flower of womanhood and deeply pondering its meaning; we consider how they are taught – whether this is a “curse” to be endured – an ancient scourge to be purified or as should be - a privilege to be cherished. It is the first of many surrenderings – entrance into the mystery of oneness with God – of who they are in God. It is a spiritual preparation for their physical reality – to be treated with the dignity and respect of divinity in humanity. “Full of grace,” Mary was full of the gifts of the Holy Spirit – modesty and chastity among them – manifest in her virginal conception of Christ.

PRAYER: We pray that every young girl, teen, young adult single woman, every woman of whatever age and state in life recognize her profound dignity in the role and gift God has bestowed upon her – that she manifest the gifts of modesty and chastity in thought, word, action – a woman of grace.

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The Second Joyful Mystery

SCRIPTURE: Mary Visits Elizabeth. (Luke 1: 39 – 56) During those days Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste to a town of Judah, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the infant leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth, filled with the holy Spirit, cried out in a loud voice and said, "Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled."

The Canticle of Mary. And Mary said:

"My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord;
 my spirit rejoices in God my savior.
 For he has looked upon his handmaid's lowliness;
 behold, from now on will all ages call me blessed.
 The Mighty One has done great things for me,
 and holy is his name.
 His mercy is from age to age
 to those who fear him.
 He has shown might with his arm,
 dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart.
 He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones
 but lifted up the lowly.
 The hungry he has filled with good things;
 the rich he has sent away empty.
 He has helped Israel his servant,
 remembering his mercy,
 according to his promise to our fathers,
 to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.

REFLECTION: In this mystery, we see Mary, called to serve depart immediately to serve her cousin Elizabeth – also miraculously pregnant - in old age. And it is in responding to that call that Elizabeth affirms just who Mary is – "the Mother of my Lord." In the very action of responding to the call to serve, Mary's vocation and dignity are expressed. And so we consider all of the many roles in which a woman serves –daughter, wife, mother – birth, stepmother, foster mother, adoptive mother - aunt and niece, as cousins and friends – women go to women with understanding and compassion in their common call. And one must also reflect on the call of both women to serve the child conceived within – giving their lives, their very selves that the child should live.

PRAYER: We pray that every woman sees her intrinsic dignity in service and responds to the call to serve with immediacy and generosity.

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The Third Joyful Mystery

SCRIPTURE: The Birth of Jesus.(Luke 2: 1- 14) In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the whole world should be enrolled. This was the first enrollment, when Quirinius was governor of Syria. So all went to be enrolled, each to his own town. And Joseph too went up from Galilee from the town of Nazareth to Judea, to the city of David that is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. While they were there, the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

Now there were shepherds in that region living in the fields and keeping the night watch over their flock. The angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were struck with great fear. The angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Messiah and Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host with the angel, praising God and saying:

"Glory to God in the highest
and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

REFLECTION: The birth of Our Lord calls us to meditate upon all births, upon the anguish a woman experiences as she labors, at her joy when the child is born. Just as the womb cannot hold back the birth, the tomb could not contain the resurrection. So too, spiritual motherhood nourishes, cares for and gives birth to the Christ within each and all.

PRAYER: We pray for all women who as mothers, mentors, friends have given of themselves that we might become. We pray for each and all of us that in our daily relationships and activities, we too may graciously bring Christ into our world.

The Fourth Joyful Mystery

SCRIPTURE: The Presentation in the Temple. (Luke 2: 22 – 38) When the days were completed for their purification according to the law of Moses, they took him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord, just as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every male that opens the womb shall be consecrated to the Lord," and to offer the sacrifice of "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons," in accordance with the dictate in the law of the Lord.

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Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. This man was righteous and devout, awaiting the consolation of Israel, and the holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Messiah of the Lord. He came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to perform the custom of the law in regard to him, he took him into his arms and blessed God, saying:

“Now, Master, you may let your servant go
in peace, according to your word,
for my eyes have seen your salvation,
which you prepared in sight of all the peoples,
a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and glory for your people Israel.”

The child’s father and mother were amazed at what was said about him; and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted (and you yourself a sword will pierce) so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.” There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived seven years with her husband after her marriage, and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple, but worshiped night and day with fasting and prayer. And coming forward at that very time, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were awaiting the redemption of Jerusalem.

REFLECTION: The mystery of the presentation includes the purification of both Joseph and Mary after the birth of Jesus – reaffirming their spousal relationship - especially for the good of the child. We consider the dignity the Church bestows upon spouses in their marriage and upon their children – the fruit of their union. As wife and mother Mary is dignified. In Simeon’s prophesy to Mary, “and a sword will pierce your heart,” we also recall the lance that pierced Our Lord’s side on the cross. Mary suffered as her son suffered. There can be no greater dignity.

PRAYER: We pray for all women who as wives sanctify their marriages in Christ-given dignity for the good of their spouses, their children and all the world. We pray for mothers who in their very call as mothers – suffer the sorrows of their children. We pray for all women who suffer in compassion for all.

The Fifth Joyful Mystery

SCRIPTURE: The Boy Jesus in the Temple. (Luke 2: 41-52) Each year his parents went to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover, and when he was twelve years old, they went up according to festival custom. After they had completed its days, as they were returning, the boy Jesus remained behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. Thinking that he was in the caravan, they journeyed for a day and looked for him among their relatives and acquaintances, but not finding

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him, they returned to Jerusalem to look for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions, and all who heard him were astounded at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him, they were astonished, and his mother said to him, “Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety.” And he said to them, “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” But they did not understand what he said to them. He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus advanced [in] wisdom and age and favor before God and man.

REFLECTION: Once again, Mary’s anguish – the loss of and seeking for Jesus for three days – prefigures the passion, death and resurrection of her son. Every mother experiences in some way the loss of the child she carried as she gives birth; of the child borne of body or child adopted in heart as he/she grows into maturity, into becoming who God created him/her to be. There are the positive separations of temporarily entrusting the child to another’s care, of sending the child off to school, teaching the child courage and self-confidence in exploring an ever-widening circle of the world. Jesus was clearly pursuing his call, but inherent in this mystery are the losses of a mother whose child - no matter what the age - makes bad or destructive choices; the anguish of a woman who can only watch and wait patiently as someone she has nurtured and cared for – endures the suffering of those bad decisions – but then comes through to the resurrection which always awaits.

PRAYER: We pray for all women who in their patient abiding through suffering – who with dignity ponder and pray and wait - teach us the power of grace to transform.

THE SORROWFUL MYSTERIES



On June 13, 2014, Youth DREAMer, Evelyn Rivera was reunited with her mother who had been deported to Columbia six years before after a traffic stop revealed they were undocumented. Mother and daughter were allowed to embrace through the border fence dividing Nogales - a town on the Mexican - Arizona border. Rivera graduated from college and was married, fulfilling her mother's dreams for her - without her mother's presence. Photo courtesy of Evelyn Rivera.

THE SORROWFUL MYSTERIES (Tuesday and Friday)

RESOURCE: *Rosarium Virginis Mariae on the Most Holy Rosary (October 16, 2002) John Paul II The Sorrowful Mysteries*

22. The Gospels give great prominence to the sorrowful mysteries of Christ. From the beginning Christian piety, especially during the Lenten devotion of the *Way of the Cross*, has focused on the individual moments of the Passion, realizing that here is found *the culmination of the revelation of God's love* and the source of our salvation. The Rosary selects certain moments from the Passion, inviting the faithful to contemplate them in their hearts and to relive them. The sequence of meditations begins with Gethsemane, where Christ experiences a moment of great anguish before the will of the Father, against which the weakness of the flesh would be tempted to rebel. There Jesus encounters all the temptations and confronts all the sins of humanity, in order to say to the Father: "Not my will but yours be done" (*Lk 22:42* and parallels). This "Yes" of Christ reverses the "No" of our first parents in the Garden of Eden. And the cost of this faithfulness to the Father's will is made clear in the following mysteries; by his scourging, his crowning with thorns, his carrying the Cross and his death on the Cross, the Lord is cast into the most abject suffering: *Ecce homo!*

This abject suffering reveals not only the love of God but also the meaning of man himself.

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Ecce homo: the meaning, origin and fulfilment of man is to be found in Christ, the God who humbles himself out of love "even unto death, death on a cross" (*Phil 2:8*). The sorrowful mysteries help the believer to relive the death of Jesus, to stand at the foot of the Cross beside Mary, to enter with her into the depths of God's love for man and to experience all its life-giving power.

Mulieris Dignitatem (August 15, 1988) John Paul II ***Guardians of the Gospel message***

15. *Christ's way of acting, the Gospel of his words and deeds*, is a consistent *protest* against whatever offends the dignity of women. Consequently, the women who are close to Christ discover themselves in the truth which he "teaches" and "does", even when this truth concerns their "sinfulness". They feel "*liberated*" by this truth, restored to themselves: they feel loved with "eternal love", with a love which finds direct expression in Christ himself.

In Christ's sphere of action their position is transformed. They feel that Jesus is speaking to them about matters which in those times one did not discuss with a woman. Perhaps the most significant example of this is the *Samaritan woman* at the well of Sychar. *Jesus* - who knows that she is a sinner and speaks to her about this - *discusses the most profound mysteries of God with her*. He speaks to her of God's infinite gift of love, which is like a "spring of water welling up to eternal life" (*Jn 4:14*). He speaks to her about God who is Spirit, and about the true adoration which the Father has a right to receive in spirit and truth (cf. *Jn 4:24*). Finally he reveals to her that he is the Messiah promised to Israel (cf. *Jn 4:26*).

This is an event without precedent: that a *woman*, and what is more a "sinful woman", becomes a "disciple" of Christ. Indeed, once taught, she proclaims Christ to the inhabitants of Samaria, so that they too receive him with faith (cf. *Jn 4: 39-42*). This is an unprecedented event, if one remembers the usual way women were treated by those who were teachers in Israel; whereas in Jesus of Nazareth's way of acting such an event becomes normal. In this regard, the sisters of Lazarus also deserve special mention: "Jesus loved Martha and her sister (Mary) and Lazarus" (cf. *Jn 11:5*). Mary "listened to the teaching" of Jesus: when he pays them a visit, he calls Mary's behaviour "the good portion" in contrast to Martha's preoccupation with domestic matters (cf. *Lk 10: 38-42*). On another occasion - *after the death of Lazarus* - Martha is the one who talks to Christ, and the conversation concerns the most profound truths of revelation and faith: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died". "Your brother will rise again". "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day". Jesus said to her: "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, he who is coming into the world" (*Jn 11:21-27*). After this profession of faith Jesus raises Lazarus. *This conversation with Martha is one of the most important in the Gospel.*

Christ speaks to women about the things of God, and they understand them; there is a true resonance of mind and heart, a response of faith. Jesus expresses appreciation and admiration for this distinctly "feminine" response, as in the case of the Canaanite woman (cf. *Mt 15:28*).

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Sometimes he presents this lively faith, filled with love, as an example. *He teaches*, therefore, taking as his starting-point this feminine response of mind and heart. This is the case with the "sinful" woman in the Pharisee's house, whose way of acting is taken by Jesus as the starting-point for explaining the truth about the forgiveness of sins: "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little" (Lk 7:47). On the occasion of another anointing, Jesus defends the woman and her action before the disciples, Judas in particular: "Why do you trouble this woman? *For she has done a beautiful thing to me...* In pouring this ointment on my body she has done it to prepare me for burial. Truly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her" (Mt 26: 6-13).

Indeed, the Gospels not only describe what that woman did at Bethany in the house of Simon the Leper; they also highlight the fact that *women were in the forefront at the foot of the Cross*, at the decisive moment in Jesus of Nazareth's whole messianic mission. John was the only Apostle who remained faithful, but there were many faithful women. Not only the Mother of Christ and "his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas and Mary Magdalene" (Jn 19:25) were present, but "there were also many women there, looking on from afar, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him" (Mt 27: 55). As we see, in this most arduous test of faith and fidelity the women proved stronger than the Apostles. In this moment of danger, those who love much succeed in overcoming their fear. Before this there were the *women on the Via Dolorosa*, "who bewailed and lamented him" (Lk 23:27). Earlier still, there was *Pilate's wife*, who had warned her husband: "Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much over him today in a dream" (Mt 27:19).

The First Sorrowful Mystery

SCRIPTURE: The Agony in the Garden (Mark 14: 32- 38) Then they came to a place named Gethsemane, and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." He took with him Peter, James, and John, and began to be troubled and distressed. Then he said to them, "My soul is sorrowful even to death. Remain here and keep watch." He advanced a little and fell to the ground and prayed that if it were possible the hour might pass by him; he said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible to you. Take this cup away from me, but not what I will but what you will." When he returned he found them asleep. He said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray that you may not undergo the test. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak."

REFLECTION: Every woman who has kept watch knows the despair of powerlessness when prayer is all that she can give – at the side of a dying, sick or handicapped person of whatever age; at the side of a person caught in the grips of mental illness, addiction; in awareness of someone enduring bullying, abuse, domestic violence; visiting those in prison, waiting with the unemployed, waiting for inclement weather to abate – or for needed rain and good weather to come. There is infinite dignity in surrendering to human powerlessness.

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PRAYER: May we surrender with grace to our powerlessness simultaneously acknowledging and comforted by the power of God to transform all to good.

The Second Sorrowful Mystery

SCRIPTURE: The Scourging at the Pillar (Mark 15: 15) So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas to them and, after he had Jesus scourged, handed him over to be crucified.

REFLECTION: Images of women being scourged proliferate: starving mothers in third world countries desperately trying to feed their starving children; young girls, teens, women rescued from human trafficking; refugees fleeing persecution; the caregiver, house cleaner, field worker stooped in exhaustion but persevering in labor – all images of dignity despite the circumstances of their victimization.

PRAYER: May we, like St. Josephine Bakhita who was scourged and brutalized and enslaved – in justice work to eradicate all forms of scourging; in charity assist those who are scourged and with grace and dignity like Christ, like St. Bakhita pray for and forgive those who torture.

The Third Sorrowful Mystery

SCRIPTURE: The Crowning with Thorns (Mark 15: 16-19) The soldiers led him away inside the palace, that is, the praetorium, and assembled the whole cohort. They clothed him in purple and, weaving a crown of thorns, placed it on him. They began to salute him with, “Hail, King of the Jews!” and kept striking his head with a reed and spitting upon him. They knelt before him in homage.

REFLECTION: There are many crowns – of social status, of success, of worldly power, of money, of privilege, of fame, of beauty – all of them earned or won or achieved through sacrifice – and yet each one worthless unless coupled with humility and a response in service – only then do they convey God-given dignity. One thinks of St. Gianna Beretta Molla, a physician who gave her life for her unborn child; of Saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta who despite success and fame continued to live with and love the poorest of the poor; of St. Theresa Benedicta of the Cross, who relinquished academic honors and success to devote her gifts to the Church; of St. Katherine Drexel who committed her inherited fortune to the welfare and education of blacks and Native Americans.

PRAYER: May we always recognize and utilize our God-given gifts to seek the crowns of heaven.

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The Fourth Sorrowful Mystery

SCRIPTURE: The Way of the Cross. (Luke 23: 26-28) As they led him away they took hold of a certain Simon, a Cyrenian, who was coming in from the country; and after laying the cross on him, they made him carry it behind Jesus. A large crowd of people followed Jesus, including many women who mourned and lamented him. Jesus turned to them and said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep instead for yourselves and for your children,”

REFLECTION: Women carry immense and heavy crosses with a courage and dignity modeled in Christ and his Blessed Mother. This mystery calls to mind those women who carry the cross of wanting but not being able to conceive a child and weep; those who have lost a child of any age through illness or accident or tragedy; those who silently watch and mourn as husbands, sons and daughters in military or first responders are injured and die – or give of themselves in disaster relief, in ministry to the poor and disadvantaged - in countless sacrificial ways.

There are women who have made the tragic decision to abort a child or who may have participated in another’s decision to abort and repent of that irreversible decision; others may have chosen to give a child life by giving them up for adoption and may be mourning that loss; still others may have inadvertently hurt a child or another through abusive words and/or actions. In God’s mercy, Christ suffered and died to forgive all sin - it is in the humble acceptance of that pure unmerited gift of mercy that women can find consolation and dignity. Women wear their dignity in wrinkled faces, stooped shoulders, silent tears coursing their cheeks and in the privacy of broken hearts.

PRAYER: May we always acknowledge the dignity of those who mourn and comfort them in humility and love and may we gracefully mourn our own losses – comforted in prayer, the love of others and God’s mercy.

The Fifth Sorrowful Mystery

SCRIPTURE: The Crucifixion (Mark 15: 22-25) They brought him to the place of Golgotha (which is translated Place of the Skull). They gave him wine drugged with myrrh, but he did not take it. Then they crucified him and divided his garments by casting lots for them to see what each should take. It was nine o’clock in the morning when they crucified him.

REFLECTION: Women know in their minds and bodies and hearts – the foolishness – the poverty of those who would wreak violence. Women stand with courage and ultimate dignity in the face of fear; with commitment in the face of doubt and with veracity in the face of evil untruth.

PRAYER: In unity with the Holy Spirit, may we always recognize and gracefully accept that the very vulnerability of women is the power of their dignity.



March for Life 2017, Washington, D.C. Photo courtesy of Laraine Bennett.

The Luminous Mysteries (Thursday)

RESOURCE: ROSARIUM VIRGINIS MARIAE, October 16, 2002, John Paul II

The Mysteries of Light

21. Moving on from the infancy and the hidden life in Nazareth to the public life of Jesus, our contemplation brings us to those mysteries which may be called in a special way “mysteries of light”. Certainly the whole mystery of Christ is a mystery of light. He is the “light of the world” (*Jn 8:12*). Yet this truth emerges in a special way during the years of his public life, when he proclaims the Gospel of the Kingdom. In proposing to the Christian community five significant moments – “luminous” mysteries – during this phase of Christ's life, I think that the following can be fittingly singled out: (1) his Baptism in the Jordan, (2) his self-manifestation at the wedding of Cana, (3) his proclamation of the Kingdom of God, with his call to conversion, (4) his Transfiguration, and finally, (5) his institution of the Eucharist, as the sacramental expression of the Paschal Mystery.

Each of these mysteries is *a revelation of the Kingdom now present in the very person of Jesus*. The Baptism in the Jordan is first of all a mystery of light. Here, as Christ descends into the waters, the innocent one who became “sin” for our sake (cf. *2Cor 5:21*), the heavens open wide and the voice of the Father declares him the beloved Son (cf. *Mt 3:17* and parallels), while the Spirit descends on him to invest him with the mission which he is to carry out. Another mystery of light is the first of the signs, given at Cana (cf. *Jn 2:1-12*), when Christ changes water into wine and opens the hearts of the disciples to faith, thanks to the intervention of Mary, the first among believers. Another mystery of light is the preaching by which Jesus proclaims the coming