

Remember that the Blessed Virgin Mary was conceived without original sin in the womb of Her mother, St. Anne. From the first moment of Her life, She was devoted to God. Her intellect was not darkened from the effects of original sin, so She loved and adored the Creator from Her first moments. She grew up praying for the coming of the promised Messiah. Her love for God was greater than that of all the world together, Her humility a shining beacon reaching the throne of the Almighty. When the Angel Gabriel came to visit Her, he addressed Her with the Angelic salutation – “Hail Full of Grace, the Lord is with Thee.”

She was startled by the Angel's greeting, but, when reassured that it was a Divine request, and Her promise of virginity would be intact, She responded with Her *fiat*. “Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me according to thy word.” And the Holy Ghost descended upon Her and She conceived in Her womb, **JESUS**, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. It was the Incarnation. God became man. She was the living tabernacle of the Most High – the new Ark of the Covenant.

But rather than pay attention to Herself, Our Lady, still a young girl of no more than 16, set out to visit Her elderly cousin Elizabeth, who was thought to be barren. St. Gabriel, during the Annunciation, informed Mary that Elizabeth was pregnant and in her third month. So, Mary, bearing the Christ Child in Her womb, traveled to the hill country of Judea to visit Elizabeth.

When she heard Mary's greeting, Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost and, despite being Mary's superior by age, she recognized in her young cousin, the *Theotokos* – the God-bearer – and said, “Who am I, that the Mother of my Lord should come to me?”

Elizabeth testified to Mary that the child in her womb leapt at the sound of Mary's greeting. The as-yet-unborn St. John the Baptist recognized the presence of the unborn Christ, present in the living tabernacle – his Aunt, the Blessed Virgin Mary. Mary responded with Her *Magnificat*, saying, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour; for He has regarded the humility of His handmaid. For behold from henceforth, all generations shall call me Blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things to me, and Holy is His Name.”

Mary remained there to help Her cousin until the birth of the Baptist, after which She went home. There, Joseph was confronted with the knowledge of Mary's pregnancy. He suffered, thinking at first to call off their marriage but, after being reassured by the angel of the Lord, took Her as his wife knowing that the Child to be born of Her was of the Holy Ghost, and that She was to remain a virgin forever. He became the foster father of Our Lord and the head of the Holy Family.

Soon they were required by the emperor's decree to go to the city of Bethlehem for the census. They made the journey despite Our Lady's advanced pregnancy. When they arrived, they could find no place at the inn for the birth of the Messiah. They were grateful even to be allowed to make use of the stable wherein the King of Kings would be born. Joseph cleaned that stable to prepare for His coming.

Meanwhile, shepherds in fields nearby were told by Angels of the birth of the Saviour and went to find Him. They had been given the sign that He was to be found lying in a manger – a feeding trough. They adored Him, faces to the ground, in an act of adoration. They recognized in the tiny Baby, God Almighty, the Messiah, the Holy One of Israel.

When Jesus was taken by Mary and Joseph to the Temple to be presented to the Lord, according to the custom of the law, there Simeon, who was ancient, would recognize the Child as the promised Messiah. He uttered the promise of the Lord that he would not die before seeing the Messiah. He acknowledged that that promise had come to pass and that the Lord could now dismiss His servant in peace, since his eyes had beheld his salvation. Simeon would also prophecy that the Child would be for the rise and fall of many in Israel; and that a sword would pierce the heart of Mary, His mother. Anna the prophetess also recognized Christ and spread news of His being the Messiah.

From there, the Holy Family returned to Nazareth. What glory and joy must have filled those days for Joseph and Mary as they held in their arms the baby King of the Universe. And even gentiles, the Wise Men from the east, came to visit with gifts. But the joy of Mary and Joseph was to be mingled with pain. The Angel warned St. Joseph to flee with the Mother and Child to Egypt because of King Herod's attempt to kill Him. And so the Holy Family lived in exile in Egypt, knowing of the massacre of the Holy Innocents.

When Jesus was twelve, His parents took Him again to the Temple, but having reached the age where He would be able to travel with the men rather than with the women, as did young children, Jesus was left behind accidentally. The sorrow of Joseph and Mary in searching for Him for three days was alleviated at their finding Him in the Temple where He was asking the learned men of the Temple questions which astounded them and taught them.

After this, Jesus went home with them to Nazareth and was a good, holy, and obedient Child. O, the joy of that household. A joy, though tinged with suffering, because St. Joseph would die – a happy and holy death to be sure – but definitely for Jesus and Mary tinged with suffering.

At thirty years old, Jesus began His public ministry by first going to be baptized by His cousin John. From there, He fasted in the desert for forty days. Then He selected His Apostles and began preaching, teaching, and performing miracles, slowly revealing Himself to Israel. After three years, He had the Last Supper with His Apostles, establishing the Blessed Sacrament and, directly after that, entered into the Garden of Gethsemane, where He commenced His agony.

He begged His Apostles to pray with Him, but they fell asleep. Let us at least now keep Him company as He sweats blood in the Garden alone before one of His own beloved Apostles comes to betray Him with a kiss. Judas then comes with temple guards and Jesus asks them whom they are seeking. They reply, “Jesus of Nazareth.” He responds, “**I AM He**,” and they all fall down. Jesus performs this miracle even in the midst of His capture,

demonstrating His power so that we might know that He surrendered Himself of His own free will.

When Peter draws his sword and strikes at Malchus, the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear, Jesus heals his ear, and is taken away by the guards as all His Apostles run away. One of them is in such fright that he runs away leaving his clothing behind as a guard grabbed his outer garment.

Jesus is brought, bound, before the governor, Pontius Pilate, who questions Him but finds no fault in Him whatsoever. But the Jews demand His death. Pilate thinks to have Him scourged so as to set Him free without having to kill Him. And He is scourged brutally. "By His stripes we are healed," as Isaiah prophesied. After this savage scourging, He is mocked and crowned with thorns by the soldiers who spit in His face and beat Him on His thorn-crowned head with a reed, driving the thorns into His skull.

The Man of Sorrows is brought back to Pontius Pilate and Pilate resolves to release Him, but the Jews threaten to denounce the Governor to Caesar. Pilate then washes his hands of the matter before them all and hands Jesus over to be crucified.

Jesus takes up His cross Himself despite His mortal injuries, but is nonetheless beaten as He makes His way to the top of Calvary, shouldering the heavy burden of our sins. His meeting with His Holy Mother on the way of the cross reminds us that She will be there for us as we carry our crosses, too.

So that He would not die on the way, the soldiers ask Simon of Cyrene to carry the cross for Christ. May we, like Simon, grow to love to take up our crosses and follow Him. In the midst of His unspeakable suffering, Christ comforts the women who are bewailing Him, telling them not to cry for Him but to cry for themselves and for their children.

Arriving at the top of Calvary, called "Golgotha," Jesus is nailed to the cross. Heavy nails are driven into His hands and feet. The cross is mounted, where He is to hang for three hours as He gives His last drop of blood, for love of us and to open the gates of heaven that had been closed to us sinners.

He shows us the example of forgiveness as He begs the Father for the salvation of His very tormentors. He offers salvation to Dismas, one of the two thieves crucified beside Him. As Dismas begs Him, "Remember me when You come into your kingdom," our Lord replies, "This day you will be with Me in paradise."

And before giving up His spirit to the Father, Jesus gives us one last great gift, giving us His Mother to be ours. "Woman, behold your son. Son, behold your mother." With St. John, let us from this hour take Mary into the home of our hearts.

Then Jesus dies. "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit."

There is an immense earthquake. The veil of the Temple is torn in two. Bodies rise from the graves and pandemonium strikes. Later, Jesus's body is taken down from the cross and laid in a tomb. It is sealed tight, and the Jews demand a retinue of soldiers guard it, assuming His followers may steal away His body.

As Easter Sunday dawns, the Christ rises from the dead. The angels roll back the stone protecting the tomb and the soldiers lie there like dead men. He appears to His mother; to Mary Magdalen; but the Apostles do not believe it even when they see the empty tomb.

But Jesus finally appears to them, chiding them for their unbelief. Since Thomas was not there on that first appearance in the upper room, he remained incredulous. Jesus appears again telling Thomas to put his fingers into His wounds. Thomas falls to his knees exclaiming, "My Lord and my God," just as we do when we see Our Lord elevated in the Holy Eucharist.

Jesus gives the Apostles the power of forgiving sins in confession. He eats with them to prove His reality. He appears even to five hundred at one time. He consoles, and strengthens, and teaches them to get them ready to continue His Church.

Forty days after His resurrection, Jesus tells the Apostles to meet Him on the mount of Olives. He gives them the great commission telling them to "go into all the world and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." And while He is still speaking, He ascends into heaven and they look up until a cloud obscures Him from sight. He now sits at the right hand of God, from whence He will come to judge the living and the dead.

Meanwhile, the Apostles remain afraid. They gather with Our Lady in the upper room. They pray fervently for nine days with Our Lady—it is the first novena. And then comes the Holy Ghost, Who descends with a great noise, and tongues of fire come down on each of them. They are filled with the Holy Ghost, fear is cast out, and they begin to proclaim the wondrous works of God. They go out to the assembled people who had heard the great noise.

Peter proclaims the truth of Christ crucified and His Resurrection. His proclamation is supported by the miracle of his speaking so that all the men from different lands could understand Him in their own languages, simultaneously. And that day three thousand are baptized. This launch of the Church continues, but even here in this glorious time there is the sting of hardship and even martyrdom as the Church faces persecution. The first martyrdom was of Stephen, with more and more to come.

Years later, the Mother of God is to go to Her eternal rest, to Her true home, to the everlasting, loving embrace of Her Son. She is assumed into heaven by angels. Since the home of St. John is without Her physical presence, I'm sure his heart is broken. But the truth is that She was then able to be for all of us the advocate with Her Son. "Show thyself a mother. May the Word Divine, born for us Thine Infant, hear our prayers through Thine."

And finally, we see in Her Assumption and Coronation our own final destiny. Should we stay true to the love of Jesus, our bodies too, on the last day, will rise from the dead and join our souls in everlasting glory. The King of Kings crowns His Holy Mother the Queen of Heaven and earth, of men and of angels, of patriarchs and prophets, of Apostles and martyrs. "I am all Thine, my dear Mistress, with all that I have. I take Thee for my all. Please give me Thy Heart, O Mary."