

## **A Gift for Jesus through Mary**

It is customary on someone's birthday to give them a gift, and we would normally try to find things that a person would want or need. But when I was thinking of Mary's birthday, I was wondering what could I give her that she would possibly want or need? At the moment, of her conception she received the grace of being preserved from the stain of original sin. At the end of her earthly life she was assumed body and soul into heaven and now she is crowned the queen of heaven sharing in that blissful communion of love with the Trinity which is the fullest experience of joy and love that humanity can only dream of this side of heaven. This is not meant to discourage us from giving her gifts but rather to see Mary's birthday from the perspective of the Church. In fact, on the Nativity of Mary, she desires to give us the gift of her Immaculate heart which points us to Jesus so that can respond with love to Jesus through Mary.

It is quite peculiar that on the nativity of Mary, the Church presents us with the nativity of Jesus today in the Gospel. It is as if the Church was making a birthday cake for Mary but on the cake she wrote 'Happy birthday Jesus!' Is there some sort of mistake? On the contrary, the Church has made no mistake but reveals the immaculate heart of Mary who always points us to Jesus. This is illustrated beautifully when Mary comes to visit her cousin Elizabeth who greets her saying "Blessed are you among women!" but Mary would respond "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my savior!" Like the beam of the moon reflecting the rays of the sun, Mary understands that she does not radiate her own light but that of her Son's.

Well if the work of Jesus is so important, why are we celebrating the birthday of Mary at all? We honor/venerate Mary precisely because she is the mother of him who brought salvation to the whole world. In many cultures, there are special titles for each person as a sign of respect e.g. Uncle Billy. However, in Vietnamese culture, if you had a son who was ordained a priest, you were no longer called by your ordinary title anymore of uncle/auntie. In Vietnamese it is 'Ong Co' (Dad) or 'Ba Co' (Mom) which essentially signifies to people that your son is a priest, and this new title of respect is meant to honor the work and sacrifice of the parents in raising a priest. Likewise, with Mary we honor her as the Mother of God because of the role she had in forming the sacred heart of Jesus in his humanity and because of the marvelous work of her Son.

The dignity of Mary in relation to her Son is what the Gospel is trying to highlight for us today. When we hear the first sentence of the Gospel "A genealogy of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham" we may inwardly groan and that is understandable because we don't get the significance of

the genealogy. But if you were a 1<sup>st</sup> century Jew, your eyes would be lighting up because you and your ancestors have been waiting for the promised messiah for over 600 years! King Herod who was appointed as the so-called 'King of the Jews' was not even a legitimate king because he descended from Esau the step-brother of Isaac. So when you hear in the genealogy that Jesus is descended from Abraham and Isaac and Jacob then you start paying attention. You become really interested when you hear that Jesus was a descendent of Judah and David because as the prophet Micah prophesized in today's reading, "the one who is to rule whose origin is from of old" will come from the tribe of Judah and in 2 Samuel 7 God promised that he would establish an everlasting dynasty from David's seed.

This passage may not be in our top 10 bible quotes but for those Jews in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, they would have been overjoyed because Jesus is the fulfilment of the promises that they have been waiting for, for centuries, a true king to reign over the 12 tribes of Israel and to end the tyranny of sin and death. That is why we celebrate the birthday of Mary because with her birth begins the final crescendo of God's saving work. The Church will confidently say in the prayer after communion that with her birth was the "hope and daybreak of salvation."

And since Mary points us to Jesus, she will also point us to the Eucharist because in the Eucharist we truly receive the body, blood soul and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, and at the moment of consecration the sacrifice of the cross is made truly present before our eyes. It is here that we receive that we are fed with the bread of peace and receive the victory over sin and death. So Mary points us to Jesus in the Eucharist saying, do whatever he tells you, and what does he tell us? Take this all of you and eat, take this all of you and drink for those who eat my flesh and drink my blood will not die and I will raise them up on the last day. Although we have the confidence to approach Jesus himself, Jesus also gives us his mother so that we have greater confidence to approach him with devout hearts. What many of the great saints have suggested is that we ask for the virtues and affections of Mary to be present in us as we receive communion. Mother Teresa would pray, Mary lend me your heart, "Immaculate Heart of Mary, keep me in your most pure heart, so that I may please Jesus through you, in you and with you(x2). Mother Mary, help us to receive Jesus with as much love as your heart did when you responded to the angel Gabriel. Help us to respond with full obedience and love to the Word of God so that in receiving him today at the Eucharist we may become what we eat and be Christ in the world for others under your protective mantle.

As we approach the liturgy of the Eucharist on the Nativity of Mary, what gift will you give to Jesus through Mary?