

The Nativity of Mary
 September 8th
 Romans 8:28–30
 Psalm 13:6a–c
 Matthew 1:18–23

The Church has celebrated Mary's birth since at least the sixth century. It is celebrated on this date, nine months after the Feast of the Immaculate Conception (December 8th)

As we celebrate her birth our readings invite us to make the connection between Mary's birthday and the immanence of God. The word immanence is related to the word "manor" which comes from the Latin word "manere", meaning "to dwell".

God's immanence therefore speaks to God's closeness to us. God dwelling with us.

Mary's birthday brings into focus the closeness of God in our lives.

In our Gospel reading we heard a list of names culminating in this most important verse:

Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah

This genealogy is of great significance. Matthew's Gospel is the most Jewish of the Gospels. He begins the genealogy by stating "Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the Son of Abraham" and ends by stating Jesus, the son of Mary and Joseph. The Messiah was born as the fulfillment of God's unfolding plan of redemption. That Matthew particularly wants us to see that Jesus birth is to celebrate the immanence of God is clearly expressed by his quotation of Isaiah 7, where we hear:

Look the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and they shall call his name "Emmanuel", which means "God is with us".

Now here is the point I am making. "God with us" affirms that God is close to us. A theme that is stated both in Matthew's first designation of Jesus' character, as Emmanuel, and is a theme that is restated in the very last verse of Matthew's Gospel when Jesus promises:

Behold I am with you always to the close of the age

This most Jewish of the Gospel's celebrates through the genealogy that the intention of God was to come among us, to show us that he is very close to us. So close that Mary, a creature was prepared to become the divine dwelling place for God. So close to us, that at every Mass, the creatures of bread and wine are prepared to become the dwelling place for God. So close to us, that our very souls are prepared to be the dwelling place of God as we receive Jesus sacramentally. Every time we come to Mass we are reliving the story of the incarnation. Jesus

dwelt in Mary physically because she conceived him and his gestation occurred in her womb. Jesus dwells Eucharistically in the bread and wine. Jesus dwells in us sacramentally and so lives in the most immanent place imaginable, our eternal souls.

Such a closeness allows us to say with Paul that all things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to his purposes. However the unfolding of God's good purposes happens in the experiences of our everyday lives in this world. In celebrating the birthday of Mary we affirm that she experienced the fullness of our human condition, including hardship and pain, culminating in the Passion of her Son. Mary knew sorrow because she so deeply knew the imminence of God with us. She was conformed to the image of her Son. Such a conformity happens in the lives of all who allow Jesus into their souls. Those who share God's closeness in this present life and so say to Jesus:

Be born in me this day so that in the ambiguity and complexity of my life work out your good purposes.

Mary's birthday allows us to say that our birthdays have significance because we are discovering the one who is Emmanuel, God with us. Our birthday's, just as Mary's birthday find their true meaning in relation to Jesus' birthday.

Mary pray for us so that we may know ever more fully the immanent presence of Jesus who is with us today and every day to the close of the age.