**Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary**

The Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary was celebrated at least by the sixth century, when St. Romanos the Melodist, an Eastern Christian who composed many of the hymns used in the Eastern Catholic and Eastern Orthodox liturgies, composed a hymn for the feast. The feast spread to Rome in the seventh century, but it was a couple more centuries before it was celebrated throughout the West.

The source for the story of the birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary is the Protoevangelium of James, an apocryphal gospel written about A.D. 150. From it, we learn the names of Mary's parents, Joachim and Anna, as well as the tradition that the couple was childless until an angel appeared to Anna and told her that she would conceive. (Many of the same details appear also in the later apocryphal Gospel of the Nativity of Mary.)

The traditional date of the feast, September 8, falls exactly nine months after the feast of the [Immaculate Conception](http://catholicism.about.com/od/holydaysandholidays/p/Imm_Conception.htm) of Mary. Perhaps because of its close proximity to the feast of the [Assumption of Mary](http://education.dublindiocese.ie/od/holydaysandholidays/p/Assumption.htm), the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary is not celebrated today with the same solemnity as the Immaculate Conception. It is, nonetheless, a very important feast, because it prepares the way for the birth of Christ.

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| **BIRTH OF MARY September 8th** |
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| The present Feast forms a link between the New and the Old Testament. It shows that Truth succeeds symbols and figures and that the New Covenant replaces the Old. Hence, all creation sings with joy, exults, and participates in the joy of this day.... This is, in fact, the day on which the Creator of the world constructed His temple; today is the day on which by a stupendous project a creature becomes the preferred dwelling of the Creator" (Saint Andrew of Crete).  "Let us celebrate with joy the birth of the Virgin Mary, of whom was born the Sun of Justice.... Her birth constitutes the hope and the light of salvation for the whole world.... Her image is light for the whole Christian people" (From the Liturgy).  As these texts so clearly indicate, an atmosphere of joy and light pervades the Birth of the Virgin Mary.  **1. Historical Details about the Feast**  The origin of this Feast is sought in Palestine. It goes back to the consecration of a church in Jerusalem, which tradition identifies as that of the present basilica of St. Ann.  At Rome the Feast began to be kept toward the end of the 7th century, brought there by Eastern monks. Gradually and in varied ways it spread to the other parts of the West in the centuries that followed. From the 13th century on, the celebration assumed notable importance, becoming a Solemnity with a major Octave and preceded by a Vigil calling for a fast. The Octave was reduced to a simple one during the reform of St. Pius X and was abolished altogether under the reform of Pius XII in 1955.  The present Calendar characterizes the Birth of Mary as a "Feast," placing it on the same plane as the Visitation.  For some centuries now, the Birth has been assigned to September 8 both in the East and in the West, but in ancient times it was celebrated on different dates from place to place. However, when the Feast of the Immaculate Conception (which has a later origin than that of the Birth) was extended to the whole Church, the Birth little by little became assigned everywhere to September 8: nine months after the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception.  **2. At the Heart of Salvation**  As we know, the Gospels have not transmitted to us anything about the birth of the Virgin Mary. Their attention is completely centered on the mystery of Christ and His salvific mission.  The birth of Mary is recounted by the Protevangelium of James (5:2), an apocryphal writing from the end of the 2nd century. Subsequent tradition is based on this account.  The description - although in the manner of an apocryphal document - obviously presents an important historical event: the birth of the Mother of the Lord.  But the problem that concerns us here is the significance of this event. In the case of all the Saints, the Church commemorates their birthday on the day of their return to the Lord. However, in the cases of St. John the Baptizer and the Blessed Virgin, it also celebrates the day of their earthly birth. This is a singular fact already emphasized in ancient times, for example, by Paschasius Radbertus (d. about 859).  The reason for this fact is not found primarily in the greatness or the privileges of the persons involved but in the singular mission that was theirs in the History of Salvation. In this light, the birth of the Blessed Virgin is considered to be - like that of John the Baptizer - in direct relationship with the coming of the Savior of the world. Thus, the birth and existence of Marysimilar to and even more than those of the Baptizer - take on a significance that transcends her own person. It is explained solely in the context of the History of Salvation, connected with the People of God of the Old Covenant and the New. Mary's birth lies at the confluence of the two Testaments - bringing to an end the stage of expectation and the promises and inaugurating the new times of grace and salvation in Jesus Christ.  Mary, the Daughter of Zion and ideal personification of Israel, is the last and most worthy representative of the People of the Old Covenant but at the same time she is "the hope and the dawn of the whole world." With her, the elevated Daughter of Zion, after a long expectation of the promises, the times are fulfilled and a new economy is established (LG 55).  The birth of Mary is ordained in particular toward her mission as Mother of the Savior. Her existence is indissolubly connected with that of Christ: it partakes of a unique plan of predestination and grace. God's mysterious plan regarding the incarnation of the Word embraces also the Virgin who is His Mother. In this way, the Birth of Mary is inserted at the very heart of the History of Salvation.  **3. Christological Orientations**  The Biblical readings of the Feast have a clear Christological- salvific orientation that forms the backdrop for contemplating the figure of Mary.  Micah 5:1-4a. The Prophet announces the coming of the Lord of Israel who will come forth from Bethlehem of Judah. The Mother of the Messiah, presented as one about to give birth, will give life to the prince and pastor of the house of David who will bring justice and peace. She will work with the Messiah to bring forth a new people.  Romans 8.28-30. This passage does not speak directly about Mary but about the believer justified by the grace of Christ and gifted with the indwelling of the Spirit. He or she has been chosen and called from all eternity to share Christ's life and glory. This is true in a privileged manner for Mary, Spouse and Temple of the Holy Spirit, Mother of God's Son, and intimately united with Him in a Divine plan of predestination and grace.  Matthew 1:1-16, 18-23. The meaning of this seemingly and genealogy is theologically profound: to place Jesus, the MessiahLord, within the dynastic tree of His people. He is a descendant, and in fact "the descendant," of Abraham (cf. Gal 3:16) and the Patriarchs in accord with the promises, and He is the semi-heir of the Prophets. The ring that united Christ with His people is Mary, Daughter of Zion and Mother of the Lord.  The virginity stressed by the Gospel text is the sign of the Divine origin of the Son and of the absolute newness that now breaks forth in the history of human beings.  The Christological-salvific purpose and tone dominate not only the Bible readings but also the Eucharistic Celebration and the Liturgy of the Hours.  It has been observed that, although the texts of this Feast's celebration are less rich than those of other Marian feasts, they do have one outstanding characteristic: "The number of themes is rather restricted, [but] there are extremely numerous invitations to joy" (J. Pascher).  Indeed, joy pervades the whole of this Feast's liturgy. If many "will rejoice" at the birth of the precursor (cf. Lk 1:14), a much greater joy is stirred up by the birth of the Mother of the Savior. Hence, this is a Feast that serves as a prelude to the "joy to all people" brought about by the Birth of the Son of God at Christmas and expressed by the singing of hymns and carols.  Added to this theme of joy on this Marian Feast is that of light because with Mary's birth the darkness is dispersed and there rises in the world the dawn that announces the Sun of Justice, Christ the Lord.  Taken from: *Dictionary of Mary* (NY: Catholic Book, 1985) Catholic Book Publishing Company |