

**THE NATIVITY STORY**  
**SESSION 11**

**Prayer:** Magnificat (Mary's prayer from the Gospel of Luke)

**Image:** Movie *The Nativity Story*

**Homework:** CCC 385-421

Bring Nativity to have Blessed

**THE NATIVITY STORY**

One of the foundational realities of our faith is that it is founded on the life of Jesus Christ. Giving witness and testimony to his life was the central mission and goal of the Apostles. Luke account of the Gospel begins:

*“Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us, just as they were delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the truth concerning the things which you have been informed.”*

It is also this same Gospel, which begins with the most well known and extensive historical account of the Christmas story (Matthew begins with the genealogy of Joseph; Mark with the preaching of John the Baptist; John with an elloquent on the Word present in the beginning, present with God). To simply know the story of the Nativity (birth) of Christ is in fact, not a simple thing. Yet it is an often overlooked thing when we think about learning the trove of teachings and theology of the Church. The humble, real birth of Jesus and the incarnation of God through the family of Mary and Joseph is the reality of God working and revealing Himself through historical events. It is a worthy and noble practice to read an account of the birth of our Lord with your family on Christmas Eve (you may even rotate each year through Matthew, Luke and John).

Among movie adaptations, *The Nativity Story* does a respectable job of retelling the Nativity of our Lord. For the most part, it stays in line with what has been written in scripture. There are, however a few places where it deviates from long standing Catholic Tradition, that part of the faith that while not recorded in Sacred Scripture, was handed down through many generations as truth passed on verbally or through other reliable sources. While not infallible to the extent of Scripture, these Traditions have been long considered as divinely inspired truth and carry the weight of centuries of witness and testimony. The following are some notes to keep in mind while watching and in response to *The Nativity Story*.

**NOTES ON THE NATIVITY STORY**

*MARY AND JOSEPH*

The last 30-40 years (during my lifetime) has seen a trend of depicting Mary and Joseph as of similar age, a young and typical couple married under very normal circumstances. Without going into the entire history of the Church's understanding of St. Joseph, it's worth noting that this depiction is very recent and contradicts what we know and the long Traditions that the

Church has held true regarding both Mary and Joseph. This is a brief and concise summary of these teachings:

Mary was long considered to be a Temple Virgin, that is, a young woman who lived at the Temple a life of prayer and promised to perpetual virginity. One of the reasons that the Church Fathers cite for this is her response to the Angel Gabrielle. Note that she responded by asking “How can this be, since I have no husband.” The consideration is that the angel did not tell Mary that she was with child, but clearly foretold a future event. If Mary had intended to become betrothed and have a husband, there would be no reason to wonder at how it would come to pass. (There are many other reasons they give for believing that Mary was a Temple Virgin)

Joseph was considered to be an older man chosen to be the spouse of Mary. While there is no definitive record of Joseph’s age at the time of his betrothal to Mary, the Church Fathers and centuries of artwork depict him as either older or middle-aged. One of the most widely accepted accounts of Joseph is with regard to how he was selected to be the spouse of Mary. All of the men who sought to be Mary’s husband, recalling that she was to remain a virgin, laid down their rod to be selected. Among the rods that were laid, one sprouted lilies as a sign of the one who was to become Mary’s husband. This was Joseph’s rod and is the reason he is often depicted holding lilies.

Ultimately, it is significant that we do not have a definitive record of the age of St. Joseph at the time of his marriage to Mary or the birth of Jesus, this is also an indication that his particular age is not essential to our understanding of Jesus or our salvation. However, what remains consistent and clear is that Mary and Joseph was not a normal relationship, they each were set aside to be the Mother and Foster Father of the Son of God. They each were chosen for this purpose and accepted their role whole heartedly and without reservation. One of the things that I greatly appreciate about this movie is the holy love depicted between Mary and Joseph and the fatherly love depicted of St. Joseph.

#### *JOACHIM AND ANNA, MARY’S PARENTS*

What we know of Mary’s parents, and much of her life comes from the *Protoevangelium of James*. This is not a book that is included in the Bible because it primarily explains the life of Mary, not Jesus. We recall that one of the primary factors in establishing the Canon of scripture was that it was revelatory of the life of Jesus Christ. This book, however, was widely accepted and used by the Church Fathers. We celebrate the feast of Sts. Joachim and Anna on July 26th

#### *BETROTHAL*

This is not a point of contradiction, but of interest. If you notice in the betrothal scene of Joseph and Mary, the act is marked by the sharing of a cup, first by Joseph and then by Mary. This is not something attested to in scripture, however does reflect Jewish custom. The point of interest comes when we consider the last supper, when Christ took the cup/chalice, drank from it, then gave it to his disciples. This is an active sign an act of his betrothal to his church. As with human betrothal, it marks the first promise of unity of husband and wife, until the coming of the wedding feast and full union, which is the second coming and the promised event of Revelation that will mark the full union of God and His people. The Church is betrothed to Christ as Mary was betrothed to Joseph.

### *STAR OF BETHLEHEM*

The convergence of Jupiter, Venus and the King Star (which is located in the constellation Leo, drawing another connection to the Lion of Judah) depicted in the movie has been affirmed as a real astronomical and historical event that coincided with the time of Jesus' birth.

### *BIRTH OF THE SAVIOR*

The birth of Christ, and immediate events is where the movie takes a turn from what has long been taught and known in the Catholic Faith. Note that some of these are matters of Tradition not Doctrine. It does not mean that we believe them as less important, but while Doctrine carries the weight of infallibility, Tradition could be inaccurate. There are places at the end of the movie that do, however, diverge from scriptural accounts.

### **Painless Birth**

Christ was not only born without Mary experiencing pain, but from the very beginning, the Fathers of the Church taught that it was a truly virginal birth. The infant did not pass through as natural childbirth. Is this so hard to believe, that a child conceived by the Holy Spirit would be delivered from the womb in order to preserve the virginity of his virgin mother. It is also remembered that the pain of childbirth was part of the consequence and curse received as a result of original sin. Mary however, was preserved from the effects of original sin--this is the purpose for the celebration of the feast of the Immaculate Conception. Therefore, without original sin, it would have been unjust and unnatural for Mary to experience any pain.

### **Chronology of Events after Jesus' Birth**

Here is a brief timeline of the major events of Jesus' childhood which were also depicted in the movie. Note that in the movie, all of these appear to happen on night of his birth:

Presentation in the Temple: 8 days old (According to Jewish custom, when Jesus was 8 days old they presented him in the temple. This is when they met the Simeon and the prophetess Anna and also means that they had not left for Egypt)

Visit of the Magi: Approximately 12 days after his birth or the anniversary of his birth. This is when we celebrate the Epiphany.

Flight to Egypt: Around two years old

Murder of the Holy Innocents: Approximately 2 years old (Herod determined from the Magi when the star appeared and then ordered that all infants under the age of 2 would be killed. Reason follows then that he determined the date to be 2 years earlier)