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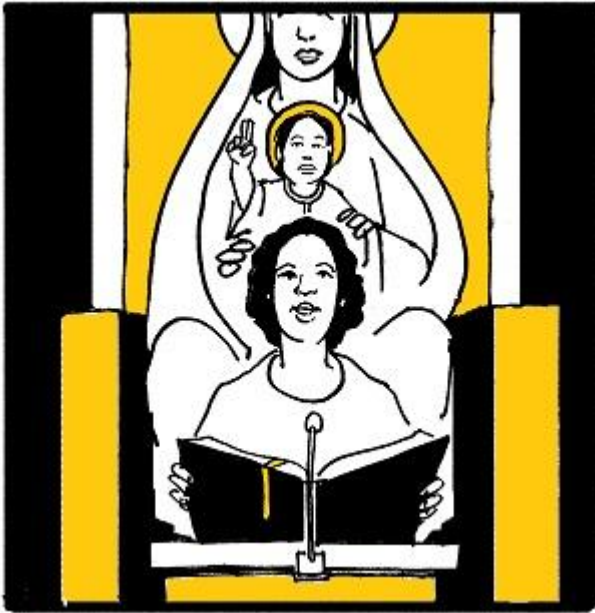
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“All things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose” (Rom 8:28).

The Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Rom 8:28-30; Matt 1:1-16, 18-23

The glory of Jesus lights up his entire family tree. Everyone participates in the mystery of his Incarnation, from Abraham reaching back even to Adam. St. Paul exults in his Letter to the Romans at how God created the world to prepare for his Son, Jesus, who is the firstborn of the New Creation. Mary, the mother of Jesus, holds a place of honor in this genealogy, and today’s feast celebrates her birth as penultimate to his birth, when divinity is united with our humanity, suffusing it with glory and giving us all a divine destiny.

Today’s Gospel completes the long trajectory of the promise made to Abraham with Mary’s betrothal to Joseph of the house of David, but reserves the identity of her Son to his divine conception by the Holy Spirit. Thus, the hand of God is revealed in a series of impossible and improbable conceptions included in his history. Abraham and Sarah are too old, Judah commits incest with Tamar, Ruth is a foreigner, David and Bathsheba are adulterers, yet they are all part of the family of Jesus. Grace overcomes sin from the start.

Joseph, the humble and totally silent linchpin of the genealogy, conceives of Jesus, as it were, in a dream. An angel tells him, “Do not be afraid to take Mary your wife

into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her.” Joseph is granted naming rights to call the child Jesus, *Yeshua Ben Yosef*, son of Joseph, and like his namesake Joshua, a savior. News of his birth gives joy to his maternal grandparents, by tradition Joachim and Anne, and the whole family circle enters Christian popular devotion for good.

All of this helps bring this mystery closer to us, for the Good News is not that God has done something for us from afar, a glorious intervention, but has appeared among us from within our human estate, including our sinfulness. Jesus is one of us, like us in all things except sin, sharing every aspect of the human struggle, embracing our sufferings and temptations, subject even to death. His humble birth among the poor was only the beginning of his downward mobility, a refugee from kings, rejected, pursued, outcast, crucified.

We celebrate Mary because she gave birth to Jesus and then shared his human journey all the way to his death. She was called according to God’s purpose and said “Yes,” because everything works together for good for those who love God. We are called to say “Yes” to that same purpose, which makes us all part of the family.

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