

*Homily of Michael Fitzgerald,  
archbishop emeritus of Nefta, Tunisia*

BELVÁROSI NAGYBOLDOGASSZONY FŐPLÉBÁNIA-TEMPLOM



It is an honour and a pleasure for me to celebrate this Holy Mass with you in this beautiful church. We are celebrating today the Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. As we shall see, Mary is a true “Source of Life” for us, since as Mother of God, Mother of our Saviour Jesus Christ, she has given us the one who is himself the Way, the Truth and the Life.

This Feast Day of the Birthday of Our Lady is a very special one for me. After retiring from Vatican service, I spent six years in Jerusalem, in a community of the Missionaries of Africa, the Missionary Society to which I belong, to which has been entrusted the Church of St Anne (some of you may have been on pilgrimage to Jerusalem and visited this church). The church has been built over the house of Joachim and Anne, the parents of Mary, so it is on the spot where Mary was conceived immaculately and where she was born.

The Scriptures do not tell us anything about Mary’s origins. Today’s Gospel speaks of the origins of Jesus, not of Mary. It is as a young girl betrothed to Joseph that she enters the scene. To find out more about Mary we have to turn to an Apocryphal Gospel, the Protoevangelium of James.

This tells us that Anne had difficulty in bearing a child. She and Joachim prayed to God. Anne promised that if she were to bear a child, the child would be offered to God. So after Mary was born, when she was three years old, she was offered to God in the Temple where she grew up until the age of puberty when a marriage was arranged for her with Joseph.

During these early years of her life in the Temple Mary must have become familiar with the Scriptures, learning how to pray, in particular to pray the Psalms – we see this echoed in her own prayer, the Magnificat. I think she must have transmitted her love for the Temple to her son, Jesus,

for we see that Jesus feels very much at home in the Temple. So Mary is a true source of life for us too, since following her example we are encouraged to proclaim the greatness of the Lord and to give him thanks for all that he has done for us.

Mary is also an example for us in the way she accepted the call to become the mother of the Saviour, the Mother of God. Her question to the Angel Gabriel “But how can this come about, since I do not know man?” would seem to indicate that she had made a vow of virginity. Gabriel informed her that the child whom she would bear would be the fruit of the Holy Spirit, and with this reassurance Mary pronounces her *fiat*: “let what you have said be done to me.” Mary has this trust of which Paul speaks in his letter to the Romans:

“We know that by turning everything to their good God co-operates with all those who love him.”

We see too that this trust is rewarded, for Joseph, to whom she is betrothed, is also reassured: “Do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because she has conceived what is in her by the Holy Spirit.” We can imagine how relieved Mary must have been by Joseph’s acceptance and how much she must have treasured his love and protection. In this Year of St Joseph we remember his dedication to the child Jesus and to Mary.

We can understand too the bond that grew between Mary and Jesus whom she carried in her womb, a bond that would be lasting. We see her, at the marriage at Cana, telling the servants: “Do whatever he tells you”; we see her at the foot of the Cross, accepting to become the mother of us all: “Woman, this is your son”; we see her together with Apostles her Son had chosen, praying for the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, the day the Church was born.

Mary is therefore a model for us. She encourages each one of us to discern the will of God, to discover our vocation in the Church, and to carry it out with courage and constancy. She turns us towards her Son who is the true source of Life, the Saviour who has given his life for us and who continues to give himself to us through the Eucharist. Let us not be afraid to call upon Mary, the Virgin Most Faithful, who will help us in our turn to be faithful servants of the Lord.

We can repeat with confidence the prayer of this Feast:

Impart to your servants, we pray, O Lord,  
the gift of heavenly grace,  
that the Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin  
may bring deeper peace  
to those for whom the birth of her Son  
was the dawning of salvation.  
This we ask through Christ, Our Lord. Amen.