

# The Mystery of Mary of Nazareth



**“Deep in the darkness of a silent night  
and quietly in the secret of your soul,  
the mystery of God continues to be born.”**

*(Doris Klein, CSA)*

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## The Mystery of Mary of Nazareth

If you look carefully at Eastern Orthodox icons and many medieval paintings and frescos of the Nativity of Jesus you will find a cross. The birth and death of Jesus are part of the same message. As Mary looked at her son in the manger, being nailed to a cross, hanging on a cross, and then as she held his lifeless body when he was taken down from the cross, she could say, as no other person could say, "This is my body, this is my blood."

The bonding of mother and child is unique and sacred. It is a sacrament of God's desire to be one with us. It is a sharing of flesh and spirit that makes life possible and at the same time gives birth to a relationship in which mother and child are one, and at the same time share a blessed freedom of individuality. They are distinct, yet united. The child can never give birth to or become the mother. The mother can never be the child or live the child's life. And yet they share the same being in a bond of love.

If Mary could behold Jesus and say, "This is my body, this is my blood.", Jesus also could say of Mary, "This is my body, this is my blood." Mary is a mentor for giving birth to God's presence in the world. The same angel that invited Mary invites us, too, to give birth to Jesus. Then Jesus can look at you and me and say, "This is my body, this is my blood." And in the mystery and miracle of the Eucharist, where the divine is present in the ordinary, we can look at each other, as Christ looks at each of us, and say, "This is my body, this is my blood."

This experience is not naïve, pietistic hope. This is the reality of the *real presence*. The Eucharist is not

worship! The Eucharist is thanksgiving for the constant renewal of the transformative presence of Christ in each of us. The good news of the infant born of Mary is that God is not only *with us*, God *is in us*. There is no separation between “me” and God. And if God is in each of us, then we are in each other. Like a mother and her child we are distinct, yet completely bonded.

Mary’s gaze out from ancient icons, paintings, and frescos beckons us to enter into the events of her life. Mary’s life invites us to make space for Christmass in our lives. Each day of our lives offers an annunciation, a call to be a bearer of God’s presence. Each day is a sacred event for the birth of God to take place in our lives in the midst of our complex, wonderful, and often dark world. The transformation of the world will only take place through the same grace that brought the world into being.

The Holy Spirit will “come upon us” and the “power of the most high will overshadow” us, too. At Christmass we are called by Mary and her son to be empty, once again, so that the fullness of God may dwell in our bodily form. As the second Letter of Peter proclaims, the gift of Mary and her son Jesus the Christ fulfills God’s promise that we will “participate in the nature of God.” This is the heart and soul of Christmass and every Eucharist.

I do not know exactly what happened when Mary gave birth to Jesus. All I know is that it changed my life eternally. Living the gift I have been given is more important than defining how it happens, over and over again.

## Four Meditations



## **Day One**

**Mary is the archetype  
of the human journey to manifest  
the presence and energies of God  
in our daily lives...**

## **Day Two**

**The conception of God's life in Mary  
is simultaneously the conception  
of the completion of Mary's human life...**

## **Day Three**

**Mary's life is made perfect  
by the birth in her  
of the Word of God  
who has brought  
all creation into being...**



## **Day Four**

**The Annunciation  
is a mutual invitation from God  
to become manifest in the humanity of  
Mary's flesh and blood.  
It is also an invitation from Mary  
to God to offer her emptiness  
to become the environment  
for the fullness of human life.**

## A Reflection on the Virgin Mary and the Birth of Jesus Christ

by Caryll Houselander

“Christ used the flesh and blood of Mary for his life on earth, the Word of love was uttered in her heartbeat. Christ used his own body to utter his love on earth; his perfectly real body, with bone and sinew and blood and tears; Christ uses our bodies to express his love on earth, our humanity.

“A Christian life is a sacramental life, it is not a life lived only in the mind, only by the soul; through the bodies of men and women Christ toils and endures and rejoices and loves and dies; in them he is increased, set free, imprisoned, restrained. In them he is crucified and buried and rises from the dead.

“Our humanity is the substance of the sacramental life of Christ in us, like the wheat for the host, like the grape for the chalice.

“Christ works his love through material as well as spiritual things. Into his worship, following his own lead, the Church, his Church, brings material things, pure wax, flame, oil, salt, gold, water, linen, the voices of people, the gestures and actions of people, our own souls and bodies—the substance of our flesh and blood. All this is consistent with the Incarnation, when Christ took the human nature of Our Lady to be himself.”<sup>1</sup>

“If the Infant Christ is fostered in us, no life is trivial. No life is impotent before suffering, no suffering is too trifling to heal the world, too little to redeem, to be the point at which the world’s healing begins.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Caryll Houselander. *The Comforting of Christ*. Franklin, WI: 1947. 26-27.

<sup>2</sup> Caryll Houselander. *The Passion of the Infant Christ*. Franklin, WI: 1953. 87.