**Birth of Holy Theotokos**

The Nativity of Our Most Holy Lady Theotokos and Ever Virgin Mary is celebrated by the Church as a day of universal joy. Within the context of the Old and the New Testaments, the Most Blessed Virgin Mary was born on this radiant day, having been chosen before the ages by Divine Providence to bring about the Mystery of the Incarnation of the Word of God. She is revealed as the Mother of the Savior of the World, Our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Most Holy Virgin Mary was born in the small city of Galilee, Nazareth. Her parents were Righteous Joachim of the tribe of the Prophet-King David, and Anna from the tribe of the First Priest Aaron.

Joachim and Anna were an ordinary family, as ordinary as any of ours: which means, of course, that like the rest of us, their family was warm and loving, … but it wasn’t perfect.  Upon them was the pain of childlessness.  In their culture and in that place and time, this problem was more than a heartache;.

The tradition of the Church tells the story of the great faithfulness and love of Joachim and Anna.  In many ways, they were considered blessed: for by God’s mercy and providence, they had material abundance; and from their abundance they offered one third of their material blessing to the work of the Temple and its priests; one third to the needs of the poor; and they cared for themselves with the remaining third.  One might say that they had everything – except the joy of children.

We know these people, We know this family.  For, beloved, what family among us is untouched by hurt, by loss, by weakness, by strife?  Which of our families is not affected by some condition that breaks our hearts and challenges our hope, whether because of unemployment or underemployment or financial stress or medical issues ?  What family has not been tested by the presence of moral failure and loss of hope?  When we see the family of Joachim and Anna, we see people just like ourselves, just like everyone else.  We see people who ache for a sense of God’s presence, a sense of God’s purpose in their life.

And just as both were in deep despair, God sent his angel to tell them of His mercy and love, and that after waiting with faith and hope, their prayers would be blessed:  they would have a child.

And a wonderful thing did happen for Joachim and Anna, a wonderful thing for all humanity.  A child was born, a little girl.

Joachim and Anna were well along in years when they became parents—in their late sixties at the least.  Their child was a miracle.  But even in this, Joachim and Anna are akin to all of us.  Each and every time a child is born, what parent does not look upon their infant as an absolute miracle, a gift directly from God?  Made as we are in God’s own image and according to His likeness. That is how the Church sees this marvelous gift of reproduction.

When you see the fruit of the union of Joachim and Anna—when you behold an icon of the Virgin Mary—you see a most profound spiritual statement.  Theologians struggle to put into words what every father and mother, every godfather and godmother, every grandparent, every aunt and uncle knows to be true:  When human prayers come together with God’s grace, miracles happen. We creatures of dust cannot will it to be so.  But when we humans do our human things and live our human lives in cooperation with God, miracles happen, even though the eyes of the world see nothing new under the sun.  God speaks to His people every day!

The infant Mary was a miracle.  But she was not magical.  She did not enter the world ready-made for her role as the Virgin Mother.  The work of Joachim and Anna in God’s plan of salvation did not end after a conception and nine months of pregnancy.  They were called not merely to be progenitors, but even more, to be parents.  The Latin word is so fitting, sharing as it does a root with the word “prepare.”  A parent is not simply the one who sires a child, but the one who prepares a child to become an adult—through instruction, through patience, by word and example.

This, too, is part of the greatest story .  That the mother of our God had parents who were role models of love and self-sacrifice, of perseverance and prayer.

And this is perhaps the greatest message for this day.  God has opened the gates of Heaven to us as a community of faith – as a family.  It is not realistic for us to grow and be nurtured in the faith as Christians without the caring love and concern of others — and firstly, of our families.  Yes, as we add the life and contribution of St. Anne to the story of God’s love for us, we remember that we are never alone … we are always part of a community … of a family.

So this day above all days tells us how important the strong and faithful example of our parents, our first models of faith,  is for us so that we might see past the distractions of this age and come to know the love, and mercy, and grace of God.

Amen.