

---

8<sup>TH</sup> SEPT

THE NATIVITY OF THE  
BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

In both eastern and western Churches, Mary has always been held as pre-eminent among all the saints. The unique, extraordinary privilege of being the mother of the One who was both God and Man, makes her worthy of special honour. Thomas Aquinas believed she was due *hyperdulia*, or a veneration that exceeds that of other saints, but is at the same time infinitely below the adoration, or *latria*, due to God alone.

The gospels of Matthew and Luke give Mary most mention. Luke even tells the story of Jesus' infancy from Mary's point of view. Her Song, or

*Magnificat* appears in Luke 1:46-55.

The virginal conception of Christ is clearly stated in the gospels. After Jesus' birth, Mary remains with her Son. During Jesus' public life, she is mentioned only occasionally, as at the wedding at Cana. She reappears at the foot of the Cross (John's Gospel), and is given into John's care. In the early chapters of Acts, Mary is with the Apostles, and received the Holy Spirit along with them on Whitsunday. But her role was not the active one of teaching and preaching.

Mary's significance grew with the centuries. By the fifth century she was called *Theotokos*, The Mother of God, and from the seventh century

onwards, she was given four festivals: the Presentation in the Temple (2<sup>nd</sup> February), the Annunciation (25<sup>th</sup> March), the Assumption (15<sup>th</sup> August) and her Nativity (8<sup>th</sup> September).

Marian devotion has played an enormous role in the church down the years. Mary has been the object of countless prayers, accredited with performing many miracles, and the subject of thousands of artistic endeavours. She has had hundreds of chapels or parish churches named after her. During the Reformation many images of Mary were wantonly destroyed. The Second Vatican Council 1962 made an extended statement on her, stressing her complete dependence on her Son,

and regarding her as a model of the Church.

Principal Marian shrines of today include Lourdes (France), Fatima (Portugal), Walsingham (England), Loreto (Italy), Czesochowa (Poland) and Guadalupe (Mexico).

