



## Joys of Advent

Each Advent turns our minds and hearts to the Mystery of the Word made Flesh—where He came from, how He got here, why He came. This liturgical focus lends a particular Advent coloration to the Joyful Mysteries of the Rosary, especially the first three: the Annunciation, the Visitation, and the Birth of our Lord.

Advent invites me to *personalize* these Joyful Mysteries, to connect the hidden events in the early life of Jesus with the corresponding events in my own. Does what happened to Jesus have anything to do with what happened to me? Can the Joyful “chapters” in Jesus’ story shed light on the unfolding tale that is mine?

The first Joyful Mystery is The Annunciation to Mary. We could just as well call it The Conception of Jesus, for in the moment of Mary’s “Yes” to the Angel she conceives by the Holy Spirit, and the Eternal Son of the Father takes flesh in her womb. One moment He was not there; the next moment He was.

So it was with you and me in the moment of our conception. One second we did not exist; the next second we did. But the statistically unlikely coming together of our parents’ germ cells which brought this change into being was something we had absolutely nothing to do with. It was not we who set this life-forming process in motion

nor did we bring it to completion. From start to finish it was pure gift, this joyful mystery of our conception.

The same is true of the nine months we spent in the womb of our mother—a forgotten “memory” which the second Joyful Mystery, the Visitation, brings to mind. At Mary’s greeting, the child in Elizabeth’s womb leapt for joy at the nearness of the Child in Mary’s womb. No doubt we leapt too, in our mother’s womb. For that first earthly home was waiting to receive us, perfectly designed for our protection, growth, and development. But we were not there to design it, nor can we fathom the mind of its Designer. From the first month to the ninth it was pure gift, this joy-filled mystery of pregnancy.

In the dark and watery recesses of the womb our every need was effortlessly met. Had it been left to our decision, we would be there still; we would never have left. But, like Mary’s Child in the Third Joyful Mystery, we were suddenly cast out in the violent eruption of our birth. And there waiting to receive us were the welcoming hands of our parents, a man and a woman made one by the complementary union of matrimony at the service of life.

We did not assign the time or place for our coming into this world; upon our arrival we found ourselves already placed. The joyful mystery of birth is pure gift. Everything has been prepared in advance for our coming.

Reflecting this Advent on Jesus' conception, gestation, and birth—and on our own—we realize that every human being enters this world equally situated on the receiving end of Mystery. Someone has prepared a place for us at the Banquet of Life. Who are we to deny admission to another like ourselves when the Creator of the world has taken such great and loving care to make room for us?