

Archbishop Lori's Homily: Dedication of Nativity Church; Feast of the Nativity of Mary

*Dedication of Nativity Church
Feast of the Nativity of Mary
September 8, 2017*

It is a great joy to bless and dedicate this extraordinary structure, set apart for the worship of God, the vital center and core of Church of the Nativity. As we look about and take in the design of this Church, at once contemporary and traditional, let us first give thanks to God, the giver of every good gift.

And his gifts are indeed abundant. This church structure is meant to express not only the size of your parish but also its vitality coupled with hope and vision for the future. Such growth, hope, and vision does not occur without inspired leadership so let us take a moment to recognize the entire parish leadership team as led by your pastor, Father Michael White, together with Tom Corcoran. And warmest thanks to you, the parish family of Nativity for your extraordinary generosity which enabled this church to be built and paid for! Congratulations to one and all!

As it happens, we have gathered to dedicate this new church on the feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. To be sure, this is not your patronal feast - Christmas - but in God's plan of salvation it is unthinkable to celebrate the Savior's Birth without also celebrating the birth of his Mother, Mary. And in fact, Mary's birth sheds light on what you have done in designing and building this church in which to celebrate the mysteries of salvation.

The birth of Mary to Joachim and Anne was no ordinary event, just as the dedication of this church is no ordinary event. By all accounts, Joachim and Anne were good and loving parents. They were among those who lived in hope for the coming of the Messiah and their lives were entirely shaped by the Law and the Prophets. To them was born the child destined to be the Mother of the Savior, prepared from the first moment of her existence to be the sinless temple where the Savior, God's only Son, would take flesh and be born into human history.

As the sinless Virgin Mary meditated on the living Word of God and attuned every facet of her life to God's plan of salvation, in God's grace she made room in her heart for Jesus. Her heart expanded as she prayed and prayed deeply, as she allowed the Law and the Prophets to shape her thoughts and hopes, as she learned to practice the exquisite charity that we would later see in her visit to her cousin Elizabeth and in her kindness to the newly married couple at Cana. In God's providence, Mary's soul was, as Pope Benedict XVI once said, ". . . the space from which God was able to gain access into humanity." She was the tabernacle, the temple who made Jesus present to all the world; it was through her that his saving love was unleashed in human history.

We build churches and adorn them not as monuments to ourselves, not as imposing structures meant to impress and awe our contemporaries. No, we build and adorn churches to be that sacred space where Christ and his saving words and deeds are made present so that, in every age, his redeeming love might be unleashed in the world. Today we dedicate a sacred space modeled on and sharing in Mary's mission to be that space from which God can continue to gain access to us, to our contemporaries, and to our world.

Thus, this space, made sacred by the prayer of the Church, must resemble the pure, loving, humble, and hope-filled heart of Mary, the Mother of God. And it is the Scripture readings chosen for today's celebration that tell us how indeed this

sanctuary is to resemble the sanctuary that is Mary, beginning with the reading from the Book of Nehemiah.

In that reading, you will recall, Ezra read from the Law of Moses from the break of day until noon - (a suggestion that the planners of this liturgy happily rejected!). What Ezra proclaimed, the Virgin Mary internalized and made her own. So too, in this Church of the Nativity the living Word of God will be proclaimed, Sunday after Sunday, in union with the Church throughout the world. For that reason, before the readings were proclaimed I prayed, "May the word of God always be heard in this place as it unfolds the mystery of Christ before you and achieves your salvation within the Church." In this church ample provision has been made for the effective proclamation of God's Word in our midst. Now we pray that there will always be room in our hearts for his Word, that we will receive it not as mere human opinion but as truly the Word of the Lord, and that, like Mary, we will allow it to shape our minds, our hearts, our plans and shed its light on our joys, sorrows, and worries, upon our vocations and upon our calling to serve the needs of others.

The proclamation of the Word leads to the profession of faith. Mary, who meditated on the Word of God in her heart conceived the Word of God in her womb in the power of the Spirit. Blessed is she who trusted, who believed, that God's promises would be fulfilled. This parish church is both a place of proclamation and also place in which we profess our faith in union with the whole Church led by the successor of Peter, the Holy Father, and by me, your bishop. Like Mary, we are to study and reflect upon and apply God's Word to our lives, so that, in turn, we can profess our faith and proclaim him in our daily lives.

The high point of our profession of faith is found in today's Gospel where Peter, inspired by the Holy Spirit, says of Jesus: "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God!" This is the foundation of our faith and the foundation of the Church. It was also the foundation of Mary's faith for she is not only the mother of Jesus but also his

first and best disciple - for in her heart she remembered the mysteries of Christ as no other.

Not only did Mary make room in her heart for Christ, she brought the Lord into the world. So too the Christ whom we proclaim is not merely a distant memory but our true and living Savior made present to us in this church at every Mass when bread and wine truly become the Body and the Blood of Christ. At every Mass, as the host and chalice are elevated for our adoration, let us say with Peter and with the church throughout the world, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." As parishioners are baptized, forgiven their sins, wed in Holy Matrimony, and as they share in the sacrificial banquet that is the Eucharist, may Christ be born in us and, through us, gain access to the world around us. Thus will this sacred space have achieved its noble purpose.

Through the intercession of Mary, the Mother of God, may God bless this parish family and this Church of the Nativity and keep us all in his merciful love.