



WEEK THREE: The Nativity

Praying with the Joyful Mysteries: Jesuit Communications offers a series of reflections around the five Joyful Mysteries. **This week, we explore the Nativity of Jesus.**



Gospel reading: Luke 2:1-7

Reflection

This week we reflect on the Nativity of Jesus. Following the requirements of the Roman census ordered by the Emperor Augustus, Mary and Joseph make their way to Bethlehem. Mary gives birth to her son Jesus outside the city's walls, finding no room in town. He is born on the margins of the Roman empire, on the outskirts of David's city. From this place as an outsider, Jesus will start a new community that will transform the world.

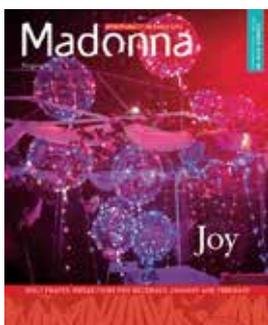
- 1 Jesus is born at a time of government census. How would Jesus' birth been seen by government officials?
- 2 Bethlehem should be a place of welcome for Jesus but instead he is born on its outskirts. Can you imagine the particularities of this place?
- 3 In Luke's account the first visitors on the scene are the shepherds. What would they have noticed?
- 4 Jesus is the Word made flesh. How does his birth as a vulnerable baby challenge your perspective on the Word of God?
- 5 Jesus is totally reliant on his parents for growth and support. Imagine their experience of this moment - how do they feel?

Using these resources

Parishes and prayer groups: Feel free to print out and share these reflections, attach them to parish bulletins, or post them on parish websites or Facebook pages.



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#seasonofjoy



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How did Mary mother?

Kate Moriarty writes a regular column, 'Home truths,' for *Australian Catholics* magazine. As someone who knows what its like to care for a newborn child, she reflects on what life was like for Mary in Jesus' earliest days.

I wonder what it must be like to give birth in a stable. While expecting my first child, I went into overdrive planning my birth experience. Soft lighting. Classical music. Boiled sweets. A card game for between contractions. I didn't know then that I was about to be met with a force of nature that would leave me oblivious of all around me, oblivious to everything save for one thought: I wanted it to be over.

When my squalling, spindly-limbed girl-child was placed in my arms, I met another force of nature, far more powerful than the one before. I fell in love. Carried on an intense wave of endorphins, I lived in a beautiful bubble for three days. Why, this hospital food is delicious! And these flowers are so lovely! And my baby! Why, there has never been such a baby! So beautiful!

So perhaps Mary didn't notice her surroundings when she gave birth. And perhaps afterwards, she, too, was in a happy bubble ('such sweet-smelling hay!', 'such noble oxen!').

Often, Jesus is described as some sort of supernatural baby who never cries and always sleeps when He is supposed to. Mary, also, is portrayed as an ever-patient, ever-capable Supermum. I hope she wasn't like those Instagram mums whose babies are so serene in their vintage bonnet and handmade blanket ('From now on, all generations shall call me #blessed').

When I pray to Mary, I want to know that she knows what it's like to feel overwhelmed at 5:30pm by a cranky baby after a night of no sleep, when she really needs to be cooking Joseph's dinner. I am convinced Baby Jesus cried. I am certain there were nights where he wouldn't settle. Perhaps he got bad wind, or reflux, or became overstimulated by the Heavenly Host and all their singing. Did Joseph pace the stable with Jesus against his shoulder, firmly patting His tiny back? Did Mary rock her wailing baby whilst

running over a checklist ('He's been fed, His nappy is clean, He's warm enough: what is the matter?')

After three days of blissful baby happiness, the endorphins crash. Doctors call this the 'baby blues'. I remember the feeling of utter hopelessness. I didn't know what I was doing! I was a rubbish mother! I couldn't manage this! I cried great racking sobs as my tiny baby gazed steadily up at me. I felt despair.

Did Mary feel this way? Some people say it's sinful to feel despair, but I'm not sure. I don't think it's sinful to *feel* anything. And Mary would have even more reasons to feel overwhelmed. Mary had no brisk midwife to teach her how to work the swaddling clothes, no lactation specialist to inspect whether the tiny King of Kings was latching on properly. Worst of all: Mary had no chocolate!

But I'm certain that Mary would have remembered to pray much sooner than I did. And time spent in prayer brings more peace than two blocks of Lindt 70% Cocoa ever could.

The thing I find most compelling about the mystery of the incarnation is that God chose to enter this world as a fragile human baby. What did Mary think as she gazed into His fathomless newborn eyes? Did she know that He would one day transform all of creation, or did she perhaps think longingly of sleep? Either way, she would have felt that intense force-of-nature love that never goes away as she placed Jesus, finally fast asleep, in a feeding tray: this Bread of Life who would nourish the whole world.

For more weekly prayer and spirituality reflections, go to www.pray.com.au.