



Praying the Rosary Together

A GUIDE FOR HOME AND CLASSROOM

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The Third Joyful Mystery: The Birth of Jesus

Fruit of the Mystery: Poverty of Spirit

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the whole world should be enrolled. This was the first enrollment, when Quirinius was governor of Syria. So all went to be enrolled, each to his own town. And Joseph too went up from Galilee from the town of Nazareth to Judea, to the city of David that is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. While they were there, the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

(Luke 2:1–7; see also Luke 2:8–21 and Matthew 1:18–25; 2:1–12)

The unfathomable magnitude of divine love made manifest in the infant Son of God has inspired countless paintings, sculptures, stories, poems, and songs across the centuries, and will

undoubtedly continue to do so for all centuries to come. The birth of Jesus is truly the *magnum mysterium*, the wondrous mystery—a mystery whose depths can only be pondered in adoring

gratitude, never plumbed in their entirety. Here at last is the One for whom the world has been waiting, the One whom prophets foretold, the One who will redeem the fractured, fallen world through his power as God, the One who will make all things new.

Yet, the greatest wonder of this mystery is that it is also the *mysterium humile*, the “humble mystery.” The eternal Son of God, the One through whom the entire cosmos was created, comes to earth not as a mighty warrior, but as a defenseless infant. He is wrapped not in royal robes, but in simple swaddling clothes; not placed in a sumptuous crib, but in a food trough; surrounded not by courtiers but by lowly beasts; visited not by dignitaries, but by motley shepherds. A hiddenness, a meanness abides in the circumstances surrounding the birth of God’s only-begotten Son—something so *unseemly* in it all. Why on earth would God, whose power is without limit, choose to come to earth as a helpless, defenseless baby? John’s Gospel provides the answer: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that all who believe in him might not perish, but might have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world

to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him” (John 3:16–17).

Out of love for us wayward children, God desired to come to earth, but not in a terrifying blaze of glory. Instead, God’s divinity was veiled in the sweet softness and disarming vulnerability of a newborn baby. No single painting, no one Christmas carol, indeed no merely human effort could ever fully do justice to describing the divine love that we contemplate in this mystery; our powers of expression are simply too poor. We can only place ourselves alongside the Blessed Mother and her most chaste spouse, alongside even the ox and donkey and sheep, and allow them to teach us the poverty of spirit that only knows how to adore. As we adore with them this humble newborn King, we see that, in the end, it is God’s poverty in Jesus Christ that each Christian is called to imitate—the poverty that empties the heart of concern for self and strives to seek only the good of others, the poverty that knows full well that God is the source of all life and goodness and chooses in light of that knowledge to live in radical dependence on God and God alone. “O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord.”

Questions for Reflection

- Many paintings and Nativity scenes present a clean, idealized vision of Jesus’ birth. What do you imagine it was *really* like? What did it smell like? What did the straw feel like? Was it cold and drafty or warm and cozy? Can you imagine your first cradle as a food trough for barnyard animals? What does this teach us about God’s love for us?
- Christmastime is often a time of buying gifts for others, or of dreaming about the gifts we will receive, but God calls us to make our lives a gift. How can you make this your focus, both in your Christmas celebrations and throughout the year?
- In your relationship with God, how can you practice poverty of *spirit*—the recognition that God is the source of everything you have?

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Sing of Joseph and of Mary
Seeking shelter in a cave;
There, in royal David’s city
Jesus Christ is born to save.
Swaddling clothes for kingly raiment,
For his throne, a cattle stall.
Emptied of his pow’r and glory,
See—the infant Lord of all!

The First Luminous Mystery: The Baptism in the Jordan

Fruit of the Mystery: Openness to the Holy Spirit

Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. John tried to prevent him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and yet you are coming to me?” Jesus said to him in reply, “Allow it now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he allowed him. After Jesus was baptized, he came up from the water and behold, the heavens were opened [for him] and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove [and] coming upon him. And a voice came from the heavens, saying, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

(Matthew 3:13–17, see also Mark 1:9–11 and Luke 3:21–22 [see also John 1:29–34])

In the mystery of Jesus’ baptism, we see the depths to which God will descend in order to lift up fallen humanity, to draw the human family into the self-giving love of Trinitarian life. We see Jesus, the incarnate Son, descend into the waters of the Jordan, throwing in his lot with sinners by embracing John’s baptism for the forgiveness of sins even though he himself was sinless. We hear the voice of the Father descend from the heavens, receiving the obedient love of Jesus and ratifying that love by affirming him as his “beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” We see the Spirit descend and rest upon Jesus, anointing him for his mission of salvation as the Messiah.

Jesus’ baptism marks a new chapter in his life, the beginning of his public ministry. Yet it also anticipates the culmination of that ministry, his death on the cross. Jesus descends into the waters, symbol of death and chaos in the ancient Jewish world, and he rises from those waters to begin the life-giving work of fulfilling his Father’s will. In addition, Jesus’ baptism anticipates the sacrament by which people of every time and place will be united to him as members of his Body, the Church. Like Jesus’ own baptism, the sacrament of Christian baptism encompasses both life and death. Our former life of slavery to sin is put to death as we receive new life in Christ and become children of the Father through the power of the Holy

Spirit. Not only that, but we are also united to Christ in his own death so that we might also rise with him in the resurrection to eternal life (see Romans 6:1–11).

Thus, in the Christian life, there is no moment more significant than the moment when one is washed in the waters of baptism. Indeed, this is the moment when one becomes a Christian, when one is adopted into God’s family as a member of the Body of Christ. All of the other significant sacramental moments in the Christian life—reconciliation, Eucharist, confirmation, marriage, holy orders, anointing of the sick—are only possible after this most pivotal moment has taken place.

Even if we don’t remember our own baptism, contemplating this mystery of Jesus’ baptism can help us grow in our awareness of the sheer mystery of our life in Christ. When we sign ourselves with the baptismal reminder of holy water, we recall that we have been redeemed in the waters of baptism and saved from sin and death by the God who made us, who loves us, and who longs to share life divine with us. We have done nothing to deserve this gift, nor can we ever do anything that would repay God for it. All we can do is be grateful for it, and pray that we might open our hearts to the grace of the Holy Spirit working within us, so that we might imitate the Son in offering the entirety of our lives to the Father in love.



Questions for Reflection

- Nearly everyone celebrates their birthday, but fewer people celebrate their baptismal day, when they were born into new life in Christ. What can you do to celebrate your baptism every year?
- When you were baptized, you became a child of God, God's own beloved son or daughter. How often do you forget to live your baptismal identity? What can you do to remind yourself daily of this precious gift?
- When you were baptized, you also became a brother or sister to all who are members of Christ's Body. How often do you mistreat your brothers or sisters in Christ? How can you learn to see every person as the beloved child of God they are?

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Sing we now of John the Baptist,
Great forerunner of the Christ.
To this holy, humble prophet,
Jesus came to be baptized.
In the myst'ry of the waters
Jesus' mission is begun.
Spirit-filled, Christ hears his Father:
"You are my beloved Son."

The First Sorrowful Mystery: The Agony in the Garden

Fruit of the Mystery: Sorrow for Sin

Then they came to a place named Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." He took with him Peter, James, and John, and began to be troubled and distressed. Then he said to them, "My soul is sorrowful even to death. Remain here and keep watch." He advanced a little and fell to the ground and prayed that if it were possible the hour might pass by him; he said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible to you. Take this cup away from me, but not what I will but what you will." When he returned he found them asleep. He said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour? Watch and pray that you may not undergo the test. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak." Withdrawing again, he prayed, saying the same thing. Then he returned once more and found them asleep, for they could not keep their eyes open and did not know what to answer him. He returned a third time and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? It is enough. The hour has come. Behold, the Son of Man is to be handed over to sinners. Get up, let us go. See, my betrayer is at hand."

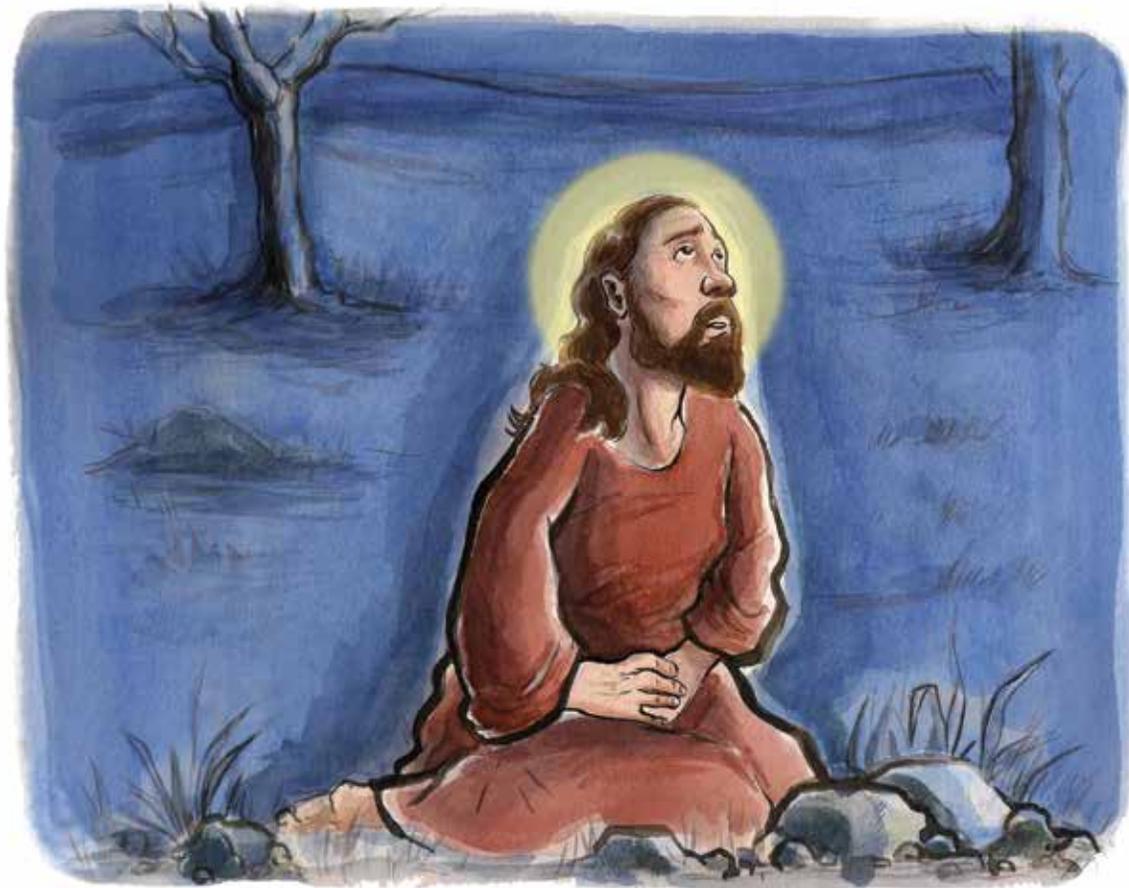
(Mark 14:32–42; see also Matthew 26:36–46 and Luke 22:39–46)

In many significant moments throughout Jesus' public ministry, his divinity shone through his humanity: in his miracles of healing, driving out demons, feeding the multitudes, raising the dead. He even showed Peter, James, and John a glimpse of his divinity in the Transfiguration, but now, as these same three men accompany Jesus further into Gethsemane, his humanity in its fullness comes to the fore. Jesus is "troubled and distressed." The One who walked on water now falls to the ground in agony as he begs his Father to allow the cup of suffering and death to pass him by. Jesus is like all of us in his desire to avoid suffering and escape death, and yet his relationship with his Father—his Abba—is so intimate and so rooted in love that he is able to conform his fully human will to his fully divine will and remain united to his Father by praying, "Not what I will, but what you will."

In this mystery, we see Jesus enact what he taught in the words of the Lord's Prayer: "thy kingdom come, thy will be done . . . lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" (see Matthew 6:10, 13). Jesus confronts all at once the dark forces that confuse and terrify us: the precariousness of life, the awfulness of suffering, the horrors of death. He opens himself up to

temptation in the garden of Gethsemane so that he might undo what took place in the garden of Eden, and succeed where Adam failed by remaining obedient to the Father. Jesus accepts his Father's will and sets out on the path that will lead to his death. But it will also lead to his resurrection, and the definitive inauguration of the kingdom of God. In this climactic moment, Jesus faces temptation one last time and, because of his perfect obedience, he is ultimately delivered from the evil of death in the glory of his resurrection.

And so, even as we see the utter humanity of Jesus' anguished prayer in the garden, his divinity still shines through, both in his perfect communion with the Father and in the depths of his love for us. God so loved the world—so loved each one of us—that he sent his Son to save us (see John 3:16), and this Son saved us by taking on our flesh in all of its weakness by offering his life in reparation for our sins. When we see Jesus in agony, when we see him accept the cup of suffering, we realize how much he loves us. We realize how many times we have failed to love him in return, and in the face of our failure to love as he loves, we are filled with sorrow for our sins. Yet in this sorrow lies the seed of forgiveness, if only we turn back to God



in love and contrition. When we find ourselves in the garden of Gethsemane, let us always remember the prayer that Jesus taught us, and

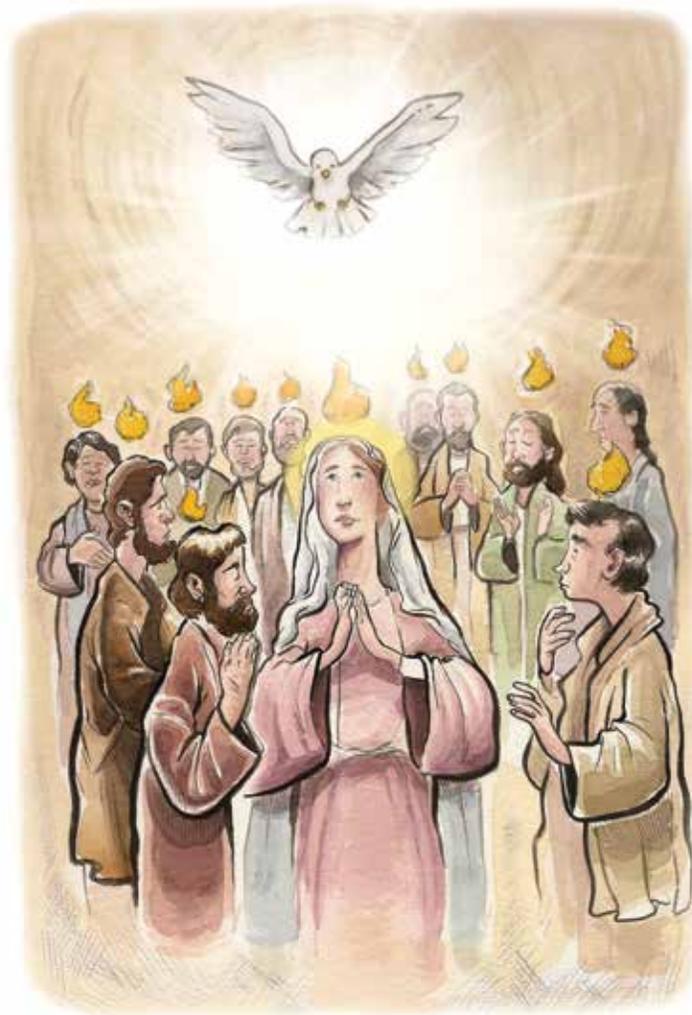
ask the Father to help us follow the example of his Son through the grace of the Holy Spirit so that our prayer may ever be, “thy will be done.”

Questions for Reflection

- When are you most tempted to say “my will be done” instead of “thy will be done”?
- Jesus suffered great fear and anguish in the garden, yet he never doubted his Father’s love for him. Even in life’s darkest moments, how can you continue to trust that God is your “Abba”—your Father who loves you and knows what’s best for you?
- Jesus asked his disciples to “stay awake” (Matthew 24:42), yet they failed to be there for him when he needed them most. Are you “sleeping through” your spiritual life by prioritizing other things over prayer? What can you do to “wake up”—to shake off your spiritual sleepiness and renew your commitment to God?

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Sing we of a darkened garden
Where Christ prays in agony.
Now the hour has come upon him,
Now he faces Calvary.
Though he prays this cup might pass him,
He remains his Father’s Son:
“Abba, not as I would have it;
Not my will, but yours be done!”



The Third Glorious Mystery: The Descent of the Holy Spirit

Fruit of the Mystery: Love of God, Zeal

When the time for Pentecost was fulfilled, they were all in one place together. And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were. Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them. And they were all filled with the holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim.

(Acts 2:1–4)

In the days following Jesus' ascension, his disciples prepared for the coming of the Spirit he had promised to send, as we learn in the Acts of the Apostles:

"When they had entered the city they went to the upper room where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew

and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. All these devoted themselves with one accord to prayer, together with some women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers" (Acts 1:13–14).

Gathered around Mary, Jesus' closest friends spend time together in prayer, the first Christian

community in Jerusalem. Prayer prepares their hearts to receive the gift of the Spirit; it unites them in their love for Christ and one another, so that when the Spirit finally comes, it is to strengthen and seal what was already begun in them by Christ. It empowers them to leave the upper room and share what they have received with everyone in Jerusalem.

In our lives of prayer, we may devote less attention to the Holy Spirit than we give to the other two persons of the Trinity, but to do so is to miss out on a powerful source of grace. Just as we must nurture our relationships with the Father and with the Son in our prayer, we also ought to nurture our relationship with the Holy Spirit lovingly, diligently, and intentionally, for it is through the Spirit that we are drawn into relationship with the Father and the Son in the first place. And indeed, whether we are aware of it or not, the Spirit is always at work in our hearts, filling us with deeper wisdom and understanding of who God is, helping us discern our actions in counsel, fortitude, and knowledge, and inspiring us to express our reverent fear and awe of the Lord in lives of

piety and service. As the Spirit fills us with these holy gifts, in turn the Spirit also lifts our prayers to the Father in Christ, as Saint Paul teaches:

“The Spirit too comes to the aid of our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit itself intercedes with inexpressible groanings. And the one who searches hearts knows what is the intention of the Spirit, because it intercedes for the holy ones according to God’s will.” (Romans 8:26–27)

In every moment of our lives, we can call upon the Holy Spirit, asking for intercession and assistance. Whether we are faced with an unexpected trial or a long-awaited joy, we can breathe forth the simple prayer, “Come, Holy Spirit,” trusting that the Spirit will respond, that the Spirit is already the inspiration behind our prayer. Then, having prepared our hearts in prayer to welcome the Spirit as the first Christian community did at Pentecost, we make a space where the Spirit may come and dwell, and in turn fill us with zeal to share with everyone we meet the love of God that has filled our hearts.

Questions for Reflection

- Do you pray directly to the Holy Spirit? If not, what are some ways you can begin to cultivate your relationship with the Holy Spirit in your prayer life?
- Do you spend time outside of Mass in prayer with family or friends? How might you imitate the first Christians by cultivating a community of prayer?
- How might praying to the Holy Spirit help you live Jesus’ call to share the gospel?

H Y M N

Sing we of the Holy Spirit,
Blazing forth in wind and fire,
Fills the souls of Christ’s apostles,
Fearful hearts with zeal inspired.
Love uniting Son and Father,
Kindle in our hearts your flame.
With your sev’n-fold graces fill us,
Spur our hearts to share Christ’s name.