

131// HERE FOLLOWETH THE NATIVITY OF OUR BLESSED LADY

THE GENEALOGY OF MARY

The nativity of the blessed and glorious Virgin Mary, of the lineage of Judah and of the royal kindred of David took her original beginning. Matthew and Luke describe not the generation of Mary but of Joseph, which was far from the conception of Christ.¹ But the custom of writing was of such ordinance that the generation of women is not showed but of the men. And verily the blessed Virgin descended of the lineage of David, and it is certain that Jesu Christ was born of this only Virgin.

It is certain that he came of the lineage of David and of Nathan, for David had two sons, Nathan and Solomon among all his other sons. And as John Damascene witnesseth that of Nathan descended Levy, and Levy engendered Melchion and Panthar, Panthar engendered Barpanthar, Barpanthar engendered Joachim, Joachim engendered the Virgin Mary, which was of the lineage of Solomon. For Nathan had a wife, of whom he engendered Jacob, and when Nathan was dead Melchion, which was son of Levy and brother of Panthar, wedded the wife of Nathan, mother of Jacob, and on her he engendered Eli, and so Jacob and Eli were brethren of one mother but not of one father. For Jacob was of the line of Solomon and Eli of the line of Nathan, and then Eli of the line of Nathan died without children, and Jacob his brother, which was of the line of Solomon, took a wife and engendered and raised the seed of his brother and engendered Joseph.

Joseph then by nature is son of Jacob by descent of Solomon. That is to wit, Joseph is the son of Jacob, and after the law he is son of Eli which descended of Nathan. For the son that was born, was by nature his that engendered him, and by the law he was son of him that was dead, like as it is said in the *History Scholastic*.

And Bede witnesseth in his chronicle that, when all the generations of the Hebrews and other strangers were kept in the most secret chests of the temple, Herod commanded them to be burnt, weening [hoping] thereby to make himself noble among the others. If the proofs of the lineages were failed [missing], he should make them believe that his lineage appertained [belonged] to them of Israel. And there were some that were called dominics, for because they were so nigh to Jesu Christ and were of Nazareth, and they had learned the order of generation of our Lord, a part of their grandsires' fathers, and a part by some books that they had in their houses and taught them forth as much as they might.

¹ Matthew 1:1-17, Luke 3:23-37.

THE CHILDREN AND GRANDCHILDREN OF ST. ANNE

Joachim spoused Anne, which had a sister named Hismeria, and Hismeria had two daughters, named Elizabeth, and Elind. Elizabeth was mother to John Baptist, and Eliud engendered Eminen. And of Eminen came St. Servatius, whose body lieth in Maestricht, upon the river of the Meuse, in the bishopric of Liège. And Anne had three husbands, Joachim, Cleophas, and Salome; and of the first she had a daughter named Mary, the Mother of God, the which was given to Joseph in marriage, and she childed our Lord Jesu Christ.

And when Joachim was dead, she took Cleophas, the brother of Joseph, and had by him another daughter named Mary also, and she was married to Alpheus.

And Alpheus her husband had by her four sons, that was James the Less, Joseph the Just, otherwise named Barsabee, Simon, and Jude.

Then the second husband being dead, Anne married the third named Salome, and had by him another daughter which yet also was called Mary, and she was married to Zebedee. And this Mary had of Zebedee two sons, that is to wit, James the More [Greater], and John the Evangelist. And hereof be made these verses:

*Anna solet dici tres concepisse Marias,
Quas genuere viri Joachim, Cleophas, Salomeque.
Has duxere viri Joseph, Alpheus, Zebedeus.
Prima parit Christum, Jacobum secunda minorem,
Et Joseph justum peperit cum Simone Judam,
Tertia majorem Jacobum volucremque Johannem.*

[Anna is commonly said to have conceived three Marys,
Whom she conceived by the men Joachim, Cleophas, and Salome.
These three had for husbands Joseph, Alpheus, and Zebedee.
The first gave birth to Christ. The second gave birth to James the Less,
And Joseph the Just, and Simon and Jude.
The third gave birth to James the Greater and the winged John.]

But it is marvellous for to see how the blessed Virgin Mary might be cousin of Elizabeth as it is tofore said. It is certain that Elizabeth was Zachary's wife, which was of the lineage of Levi, and after the law each ought to wed a wife of his own lineage. And she was of the daughters of Aaron, as St. Luke witnesseth, and Anne was of Bethlehem, as St. Jerome saith, and was of the tribe of Judah. And then they of the line of Levi wedded wives of the line of Judah, so that the line royal and the line of the priests were always joined together by cousinage. So that as Bede saith: This cousinage might be made sith [after] the first time, and thus to be nourished from lineage to lineage, and thus should it be certain that the blessed Virgin Mary descended of the royal line, and had cousinage of the priests. And our blessed Lady was of both lineages, and so our Lord would that these two lineages should entresemble together for great mystery. For it appertaineth [is appropriate] that he should be born and offered for us, very God, and very king, and very priest, and should govern his true Christian men fighting in chivalry of this life, and to

crown them after their victory, the which thing appeareth of the name of Christ, for Christ is as much to say as anointed. For in the old law there was none anointed but priests and kings, and we be said Christian men of Christ, and be called the lineage chosen of kings and priests.

But because it is said that the men took wives of their lineage only, that was because the distribution of the sorts [i.e., the distribution of land by lot] should not be confounded. For the tribe of Levy had not his sort with the other, and therefore might they well marry them with the women of that tribe or where they would, like as St. Jerome rehearseth in his prologue.

HOW ANNE AND JOACHIM BECAME MARY'S PARENTS

When he was a child he had a little book of the history of the nativity of the Virgin Mary, but as he remembered a long time after, he translated it by the prayer [request] of some persons, and found that Joachim, which was of Galilee of the city of Nazareth, espoused St. Anne of Bethlehem, and they were both just and without reproach or reprehension in the commandments of our Lord, and divided all their substance in three parts: that one part was for the temple, that other they gave to the poor and pilgrims, and the third was for themselves and their meiny [household] to live with.

Joachim is Expelled from the Temple

And thus lived twenty years in marriage without having any lineage. And then they avowed to our Lord that if he sent to them any lineage they should give it to him, for to serve him. For which thing they went every year into Jerusalem in three principal feasts, so that in the feast of Encenia, that was the dedication of the temple, then Joachim went unto Jerusalem with his kindred, and came to the altar with the others and would have offered his offering. And when the priest saw him, he put him apart by great despite, and reprov'd him because he came to the altar of God, and said to him that it was convenable that a man cursed in the faith should not offer to our Lord, ne he that was barren should be among them that had fruit, as he that had none to the increase of the people of God.

He Stays with his Shepherds

And then Joachim, all confused for this thing, durst not go home for shame, because they of his lineage and his neighbours which had heard it should not reprove him. And then he went to his herdmen, and was there long

The Annunciation to Joachim

And then the angel appeared to him only, and comforted him with great clearness, and said to him that he should not doubt [fear] ne be afraid of his vision, and said:

“I am the angel of our Lord sent to thee for to denounce [announce] to thee that thy prayers have availed thee and been heard, and thy alms be mounted tofore our Lord. I have seen thy shame and heard the reproach. That thou art barren is to thee no reproach by right, and God is venger of sin and not of nature. And when he closeth the belly or womb, he worketh so that he

openeth it after, more marvellously. And the fruit that shall be born shall not be seen to come forth by lechery, but that it be known that it is of the gift of God.

“The first mother of your people was Sara, and she was barren unto the ninetieth year, and had only Isaac, to whom the benediction of all people was promised. And was not Rachel long barren? And yet had she not after [afterwards] Joseph, that held all the seigniory [lordship] of Egypt? Which was more strong than Samson, and more holy than Samuel? And yet were their mothers barren. Thus mayst thou believe by reason and by ensample that the childings long abiden [births long awaited] be wont to be more marvellous.

“And therefore Anne thy wife shall have a daughter, and thou shalt call her Mary, and she, as ye have avowed [promised], shall be from her infancy sacred unto our Lord, and shall be full of the Holy Ghost sith [after] the time that she shall depart from the womb of her mother, and she shall dwell in the temple of our Lord, and not without, among the other people, because that none evil thing shall be had in suspicion of her, and right as she shall be born of a barren mother, so shall be born of her marvellously the son of a right high Lord. Of whom the name shall be Jesus, and by him shall health be given to all the people.

“And I give to thee the sign, that when thou shalt come to the golden gate at Jerusalem, thou shalt meet there Anne thy wife, which is much amoved of thy long tarrying, and shall have joy of thy coming.”

The Annunciation to Anne

And then the angel, when he had said this, he departed from him. And as when Anne wept bitterly and wist not whither her husband was gone, the same angel appeared to her, and said all that he had said to her husband, and gave to her for a sign that she should go into Jerusalem, to the golden gate, and there she should meet with her husband which was returned. And thus by the commandment of the angel they met, and were firm of the lineage promised, and glad for to see each other, and honoured our Lord and returned home, abiding joyously the promise divine.

MARY’S BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD

AND Anne conceived and brought forth a daughter, and named her Mary.

And then when she had accomplished the time of three years, and had left sucking, they brought her to the temple with offerings. And there was about the temple, after the fifteen psalms of degrees, fifteen steps or grees [steps] to ascend up to the temple, because the temple was high set. And no body might go to the altar of sacrifices that was without, but by the degrees. And then our Lady was set on the lowest step, and mounted up without any help as she had been of perfect age, and when they had performed their offering, they left their daughter in the temple with the other virgins, and they returned into their place.

And the Virgin Mary profited every day in all holiness, and was visited daily of angels, and had every day divine visions.

Jerome saith in an epistle to Chromatius and to Heliodorus that the blessed Virgin Mary had ordained this custom to herself that, from the morning unto the hour of tierce [from 9 a.m. till noon], she was in orison and prayer, and from tierce unto nones [noon to 3 p.m.] she entended to her work, and from nones she ceased not to pray, till that the angel came and gave to her meat [food].

THE MIRACLE OF JOSEPH'S ROD

And in the fourteenth year of her age, the bishop commanded in common that the virgins that were instituted in the temple, and had accomplished the time of age, should return to their houses and should after the law be married. All the others obeyed his commandment, but Mary answered that she might not do so because her father and mother had given her all to the service of our Lord. And then the bishop was much angry because he durst not make her to break her avow against the scripture, that saith: Avow ye vows and yield them to God.² And he durst not break the custom of the people.

And then came a feast of the Jews, and he called all the ancient Jews to council, and showed to them this thing. And this was all their sentence: That in a thing so doubtable, that counsel shall be asked of our Lord. And then went they all to prayer, and the bishop, that was gone to ask counsel of our Lord.

Anon came a voice out of the oracle and said that, all they that were of the house of David that were convenable [eligible] to be married and had no wife, that each of them should bring a rod to the altar, and his rod that flourished, and, after the saying of Isaiah,³ the Holy Ghost sit in the form of a dove on it, he should be the man that should be desponsate [espoused] and married to the Virgin Mary.

And Joseph, of the house of David, was there among the others, and him seemed to be a thing unconvenable [inappropriate], a man of so old age as he was to have so tender a maid, and whereas others brought forth their rods he hid his. And when nothing appeared according to the voice of God, the bishop ordained for to ask counsel again of our Lord. And he answered that, he only that should espouse the virgin had not brought forth his rod.

And then Joseph by the commandment of the bishop brought forth his rod, and anon it flowered, and a dove descended from heaven thereupon, so that it was clearly the advice of every man that he should have the virgin. And then he espoused the Virgin Mary, and returned into his city of Bethlehem for to ordain his meiny and his house, and for to fetch such things as were necessary. And the Virgin Mary returned unto the house of her father with seven virgins, her fellows of her age, which had seen the demonstrance of the miracle.

And in those days the angel of our Lord appeared to the Virgin praying, and showed to her how the Son of God should be born of her.

² Psalm 76:11, "Vow, and pay unto the Lord your God. . . ." (Vulgate 75:12).

³ Isaiah 11:1-2, "And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him. . . ."

THE DATE OF MARY'S NATIVITY

And the day of the nativity was not known in long time of good Christian men, and as master John Belet saith that, it happed that a man of good contemplation every year in the sixth ides of September [September 8] was in prayer, and he heard a company of angels that made great solemnity. And then he required [asked] devoutly that he might have knowledge wherefore every year only on that day he heard such solemnity and not on other days. And then he had a divine answer that, on that day the blessed Virgin Mary was born into this world, and that he should do it to be known to the men of holy church, so that they should be concordable to the heavenly court in hallowing this solemnity. And when he had told this to the sovereign bishop the pope, and to the others, and had been in fastings, in prayers, and sought in scriptures and witnesses of old writings, they established this day of the nativity of the glorious Virgin to be hallowed generally of all Christian men.

THE OCTAVE OF MARY'S NATIVITY

But the utas [the octave]⁴ sometime was not hallowed ne kept. But Innocent the fourth, of the nation of Genoa, ordained and instituted the said utas to be observed. And the cause was this:

After the death of Pope Gregory, anon the citizens of Rome enclosed all the cardinals in the conclave because they should purvey lightly for the church, but they might not accord in many days, but suffered of the Romans much sorrow. Then avowed they to the Queen of Heaven that if they might go quiet from thence they should establish to hallow the octaves of the nativity which they had long negligently left. And they then by one accord chose Celestin, and were delivered, and accomplished then their avow by Innocent, for Celestin lived but a little time, and therefore it might not be accomplished by him.

THE THREE NATIVITY FEASTS

And it is to wit that the church halloweth three nativities, the nativity of our Lord, the nativity of the blessed Virgin Mary, and the nativity of St. John Baptist. And these three signify three nativities spiritual, for we be born again with St. John Baptist in the water of baptism, and with Mary in penance, and with our Lord Jesu Christ in glory. And it behoveth that nativity of baptism go tofore contrition, and that of joy also. For the two by reason have vigils,⁵ but because that penance is accounted for vigil, therefore that of our Lady behoveth no vigil, but they have all utas, for all haste them unto the eighth resurrection.

MIRACLES OF THE VIRGIN

Our Lady's Knight

There was a knight much noble and devout unto our Lady which went to a tourneying, and he found a monastery in his way which was of the Virgin Mary, and entered into it for to hear

⁴ The octave of a feast is the celebration of the eighth day following it.

⁵ The vigil of a feast is the evening that precedes it, usually marked by fasting and penitential prayer.

mass, and there were masses one after another, and for the honour of our Lady he would leave none but that he heard them all. And when he issued out of the monastery he hastened him appertly [out in public]. And they that returned from the tourney met him, and said to him that he had ridden right nobly. And they that hated him affirmed the same, and all they together cried that he had ridden right nobly, and some went to him and said that he had taken them [captured them in the course of the tournament]. Then he, that was wise, advised him [Then he, being wise, realized] that the courteous Virgin and Queen had so courteously honoured him, and recounted all that was happened, and then returned he to the monastery, and ever after abode in the service of our Lord, the son of the blessed Virgin.

The Devout Bishop

There was a bishop which had [held] the blessed Virgin Mary in sovereign honour and devotion, and there he saw the virgin of all virgins, which came to meet him, and began to lead him by sovereign honour to the church that he went to, and two maidens of the company went tofore singing and saying these verses:

*Cantemus domino, sociæ, cantemus honorem,
Dulcis amor Christi resonet ore pio.*

That is to say, “Sing we fellows to our Lord, sing we honour. Sing we with a voice debonair [mild] that sweet love which ought to please him.” And that other company of virgins sang and rehearsed again the same. Then the two first singers began to sing this that followeth:

*Primus ad ima ruit magna de luce superbus,
Sic homo cum tumult, primus ad ima ruit.*

That is to say, “The first pride fell low from great light. So the first man, for his eating of the apple, fell low also.” And so brought they to the church with procession the said bishop, and the two tofore began alway, and the others followed.

The Widow Who Took Jesus Hostage

There was a widow whose husband was dead, and had a son whom she loved tenderly, and that son was taken with [by] enemies and put in prison fast bound. And when she heard thereof, she wept without comfort, and prayed unto our blessed Lady with right devout prayers that she would deliver her son, and at the last she saw that her prayers availed her not, and entered then into the church whereas the image of our Lady was carved, and stood tofore the image and reasoned it in this manner, saying: O blessed Virgin, I have prayed oft thee for my son that thou shouldst deliver him, and thou hast not helped me, his wretched mother; and I pray also thy son to help me and yet I feel no fruit. And therefore like as my son is taken from me so shall I take away thine, and set him in prison in hostage for mine.

And in this saying she approached near and took away from the image the child that she held in her lap, and wrapped it in clean clothes and shut it in her chest, and locked it fast right

diligently, and was right joyful that she had so good hostage for her son, and kept it much diligently.

And the night following, the blessed Virgin Mary came to the son of the same widow, and opened to him the door of the prison, and commanded him to go thence, and said to him: Son, say to thy mother that she yield to me again my son sith [since] I have delivered her son.

And he issued [went out] and came to his mother, and told to her how our blessed Lady had delivered him, and she was joyful, and took the child and came to the church and delivered him to our Lady, saying: Lady I thank you, for ye have delivered to me my son, and here I deliver to you yours again, for I confess that I have mine.

The Virgin Mary Saves a Thief

There was a thief that often stole, but he had always great devotion to the Virgin Mary, and saluted her oft. It was so that on a time he was taken and judged to be hanged. And when he was hanged the blessed Virgin sustained and hanged him up with her hands three days that he died not ne had no hurt, and they that hanged him passed by adventure thereby, and found him living and of glad cheer. And then they supposed that the cord had not been well strained, and would have slain him with a sword, and have cut his throat, but our blessed Lady set on her hand tofore the strokes so that they might not slay him ne grieve him.

And then knew they, by that he told to them, that the blessed Mother of God helped him, and then they marvelled, and took him off and let him go, in the honour of the Virgin Mary, and then he went and entered into a monastery, and was in the service of the Mother of God as long as he lived.

A Marriage is Prevented

There was a clerk that loved much the blessed Nativity Virgin, and said his hours [prayers] every day ententively. And when his father and mother were dead, they had none other heir so that he had all the heritage, and then he was constrained of his friends that he should take a wife and govern his own heritage.

And on a day it happed that they entended to hold the feast of his marriage, and as he was going to the wedding he came to a church, and he remembered of the service of our blessed Lady, and entered in and began to say his hours. And the blessed Virgin Mary appeared to him and spake to him a little cruelly: O fool and unhappy [unfortunate], why hast thou left me that am thy spouse and thy friend, and lovest another woman tofore me?

Then he, being moved, returned to his fellows and feigned all, and left to accomplish the sacrament of marriage. And when midnight came he left all and fled out of the house, and entered into a monastery and there served the Mother of God.

The Priest Who Said Mary's Mass Only

There was a priest of a parish, which was of honest and good life, and could say no mass but mass of our Lady, the which he sang devoutly in the honour of her, wherefore he was accused tofore the bishop, and was anon called tofore him. And the priest confessed that he could say none other mass, wherefore the bishop reproved him sore as unconning [ignorant] and an idiot, and suspended him of his mass, that he should no more sing none from then forthon.

And then our blessed Lady appeared to the bishop and blamed him much because he had so entreated her chaplain, and said to him that he should die within thirty days if he re-established him not again to his office accustomed. Then the bishop was afeard, and sent for the priest and prayed him of forgiveness, and bade him that he should not sing but of our Lady.

The Vain and Riotous Student

There was a clerk which was vain and riotous, but always he loved much our Lady, the Mother of God, and said every day his hours. And he saw on a night a vision that, he was in judgment tofore our Lord, and our Lord said to them that were there: What judgment shall we do of this clerk? devise ye it for I have long suffered him, and see no sign yet of amendment. Then our Lord gave upon him sentence of damnation, and all they approved it.

Then arose the blessed Virgin and said to her son: I pray thee, debonair son, of thy mercy for this man, so that thou assuage [soften] upon him the sentence of damnation, and that he may live yet, by the grace of me, which is condemned to death by his merits.

And our Lord said to her: I deliver him at thy request for to know if I shall see his correction.

Then our Lady turned her toward him and said: Go, and sin no more lest it happen worse to thee. Then he awoke, and changed his life, and entered into religion, and finished his life in good works.

The Vicar Who Sold Himself to the Devil

In the year of our Lord five hundred and thirty-seven, there was a man named Theophilus which was vicar of a bishop, as Fulbert saith, that was bishop of Chartres. And this Theophilus dispended all wisely the goods of the church under the bishop; and when the bishop was dead, all the people said that this vicar should be bishop. But he said the office of vicar sufficed him, and had liefer that than to be made bishop.

So there was there another bishop made, and Theophilus was against his will put out of his office. Then he fell in despair, in such wise that he counselled with a Jew how he should have his office again. Which Jew was a magician, and called the devil, and he came anon. Then Theophilus, by commandment of the devil, renied God and his Mother, and renounced his Christian profession, and wrote an obligation with his blood and sealed it with his ring, and delivered it to the devil, and thus he was brought into his office again.

And on the morn Theophilus was received into the grace of the bishop by the procuration of the devil, and was re-established in the dignity of his office. And afterwards, when he advised himself [thought it over], he repented and sorrowed sore of this that he had done, and ran with great devotion unto the Virgin Mary, with all devotion of his thought, praying her to be his aid and help.

And then on a time our blessed Lady appeared to him in vision, and rebuked him of his felony, and commanded him to forsake the devil, and made him to confess Jesu Christ to be son of God, and to knowledge himself to be in purpose to be a Christian man. And thus he recovered the grace of her and of her son. And in sign of pardon that she had gotten him, she delivered to him again his obligation that he had given to the devil, and laid it upon his breast so that he should never doubt [fear] to be servant of the devil, but he enjoyed that he was so delivered by our blessed Lady.

And when Theophilus had heard all this he was much joyful, and told it to the bishop and tofore all the people that was befallen him, and all marvelled greatly, and gave laud and praising unto the glorious Virgin, our Lady, St. Mary. And three days after he rested in peace.

There be many other miracles which our blessed Lady hath showed for them that call upon her, which were over long to write here, but as touching her nativity this sufficeth.

ST. JEROME'S RESPONSORY

Then let us continually give laud and praising to her as much as we may, and let us say with St. Jerome this response [responsory]:⁶ *Sancta et immaculate virginitas* [Holy and Immaculate Virginity]. And how this holy response was made, I purpose, under correction, to write here.

It is so that I was at Cologne, and heard rehearsed there by a noble doctor that, the holy and devout St. Jerome had a custom to visit the churches at Rome. And so he came into a church where an image of our blessed Lady stood in a chapel by the door as he entered, and passed forthby without any salutation to our Lady, and went forth to every altar and made his prayers to all the saints in the church, each after other, and returned again by the same image without any saluting to her.

Then our blessed Lady called him and spake to him by the said image, and demanded of him the cause why he made no salutation to her, seeing that he had done honour and worship to all the other saints of whom the images were in that church. And then St. Jerome kneeled down and said thus: *Sancta et immaculate virginitas, quibus te laudibus referam nescio. Quia quem celi capere non poterant, tuo gremio contulisti.* Which is to say: Holy and undefiled virginity, I wot [know] never what laud [praise] and praisings I shall give to thee. For him that all the heavens might not take ne contain, thou hast borne in thy womb.

So sith [since] this holy man thought himself insufficient to give to her laud, then what shall we sinful wretches do but put us wholly in her mercy, acknowledging us insufficient to give

⁶ A responsory is “an anthem said or sung after a lesson by a soloist and choir alternately” (O.E.D.)

to her due laud and praising? But let us meekly beseech her to accept our good intent and will, and that by her merits we may attain after this life to come to her in everlasting life in heaven. Amen.

The [iconography of the Virgin Mary](#) is available at the [Christian iconography website](#).

For other saints, see the [index to this Golden Legend website](#).

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