

Praying with Jesus in the Womb

"Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.
Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son,
and you shall name him Jesus." - Luke 1:30

"he came down from heaven,
and by the Holy Spirit
was incarnate of the Virgin Mary" - Nicene Creed - the New Roman Missal

We know his life on this earth began in the womb, at the moment of his conception. And, so we know that the first part of his journey among us - the first part of the Word of God taking flesh and dwelling among us - was nine months in his mother's womb. But, we rarely reflect on this part of the presence of "God with us." This exercise of our imagination for an Ignatian Contemplation with Jesus during that immersion into our life's journey is aided (except for a professional image of a developing embryo) by ultrasound images of a 5 month old child in the womb, just 10 inches long. This child will help us spend some time letting this profound reality touch our hearts and celebrate Jesus' entry into our world and to welcome Jesus into our hearts now.

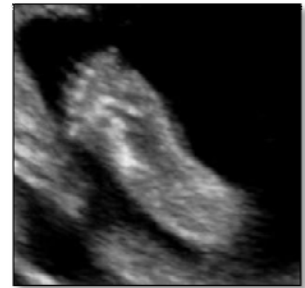
From the moment that - "by the power of the Holy Spirit" - the life of Jesus began in Mary's womb, Jesus became one with us. He didn't magically appear as an adult. He began his life journey as a tiny, bundle of cells. We can imagine those cells multiplying so quickly, day by day and week by week - silently, imperceptibly. But, this human life was already "God, made one of us." No one could imagine God could be human. And, now we can imagine our God coming among us in this developing, new life - so small, so dependant, so powerless. We can feel the gratitude welling up within us as we contemplate the unseen journey of Jesus being "knit" in his mother's womb (Psalm 139).



Though Son of God, he is becoming Son of Mary. We can imagine that already, in this very fine development, he is taking on her flesh, her cells, her shape, her looks, her heart. It is so slow, and yet, so planned. It is a journey which none of us can remember, but which every one of us took, to become who we are. And, now we contemplate that profound solidarity with us which our Savior began - even in the womb, for us. Already, this sense we have of his entry into our experience helps us remember that he shared our human journey and we never need to feel alone, on any part of our journey. He became one of us by taking on the very way we enter this world. This transition to a life born into this world, and the continuing journey of a child, a young person, and finally as an adult, is one Jesus made, for us. And, in these moments, as we contemplate this mystery and its meaning for us, we grow in gratitude for that first coming and we grow in our longing for our relationship with Jesus to develop in intimacy and love.

Our praying is helped by our imagination. In this case, we are imagining something we know happened, but for which we have not usually had a visual image. We begin by naming our desire here. We ask to be blessed with the gift of hope. We long to be renewed in a sense of God's love for us in Jesus - by this coming here and now, where we need him the most. The promises which were fulfilled in this new life stir our hearts to have faith in those promises in the most challenging times of our journey today. This imaginative prayer allows us to pray more deeply, "Come, Lord Jesus. We await your coming. Come, O Lord."

In this contemplation, we want to slow down our reflection and enter into the details and to acknowledge the silence, the slow growth, the precious reality of our Lord and Savior's taking on life as a human being. If we begin by imagining Jesus' foot in the womb, we can begin to savor, with wonder and awe the reality of this gift. We can picture Mary washing this little foot, right after giving birth to Jesus and laying him in the manger, unconcerned about the lowliness of that place. We can imagine that this tiny foot became the foot which walked our earth. With this foot, he learned to walk. Perhaps this foot was sandled most of his life. Perhaps this foot was stubbed on the carpenter's bench in Joseph's workshop. This is the foot which left home and headed to the Jordan to be baptized by John. Of course, the sinful woman taught us about gratitude for his mercy by kissing and crying on this foot, and drying it with her hair. This foot stumbled along the way to his Crucifixion, where this foot was nailed to a cross - all for us.



We can imagine his hands growing in the womb, slowly becoming the hands which first touched Mary's face and Joseph's beard. This little hand developed into the hand that learned to be a carpenter, a person with a trade, for others. With this hand, he embraced children and offered his tender touch to the sick and sinners. We remember this would become the hands with which he washed his disciples' feet as an

example for our life of union with him. We know one day that he took the bread and the wine in this tiny hand and, giving thanks to God, gave it to his disciples, saying "This is my body. This is my blood." And, the next day, the adult, outstretched hand was nailed to a cross - all for us.

As we contemplate Jesus, growing in the womb, becoming our servant Savior, it is touching to imagine his developing face. This profile of a face in the womb is the merest suggestion of the growth of the human face of our God with us. At this point, he would already be taking on his mother's features and developing her eyes. He'd have her nose, her chin, her ears and eventually, her hair. On this face in the womb are the smallest signs of reacting to stimuli, even pain. This face would one day give joy to the shepherds, the first of his people to see it, and the Magi, the first of the gentiles to look upon him. When he was a baby, he must have cried and felt hunger and he must laughed and smiled a lot. We can imagine the developing face of the child of Nazareth, the Jesus who smiled at his friends, even though the



rumors swirled that he was illegitimate. We can give thanks for the face which looked up to heaven at his Baptism and saw the sky opened, with that powerful affirmation from God, his Father, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Listen to him." And the loving face of Jesus, which developed slowly and inevitably, was the face which tenderly interacted with many who had the privilege of seeing it in his lifetime. This is the same face which was spat upon and was covered with blood from the mocking crown of thorns, all for us.

As we conclude this contemplation of Jesus in the womb, we pause for a moment to reflect upon his heart, which developed, just like our hearts did, but which became not only the organ which pumped blood to invigorate the rest of his body, but which became the very image of his self-sacrificing love. In the West, we speak of the heart as the center of our emotions and feelings and the source of our loving. This little heart became a heart big enough to love sinners, the sick, the marginal. This heart was "on fire" with compassion and mercy. The heart of Jesus, which began beating in the womb of Mary, was eventually the sacred heart which was pierced with a lance on the cross and which, in the eyes of faith of John the Apostle and Evangelist, poured out the blood and water of the sacramental life of the Church which sustains us now. Into that wound in his side, the Risen Lord invited Thomas to put his hand and to believe. He told us that we are blessed who have not seen with our eyes, yet believe.



Lord, Jesus, we thank you for these moments of grace in which you have opened our eyes to await your coming to us with expectant hope. Just as Mary was expecting to deliver you into this world, we hope to receive you into our hearts. Through this reflection, we are deeply grateful for the human way you came to us, the deep solidarity with all of humanity you have revealed to us. We give you thanks for these images which help us put together the hidden development of your body, which you so fully gave to us in the love you showed us on earth and in the Eucharist and the Sacraments which continue to nourish us and sustain us. We feel closer to you and we ask for the further graces we need to open our hearts to your healing mercy and love. Come to us, O Lord.

Taken from Creighton University's Online Ministries web site:

onlineministries.creighton.edu/CollaborativeMinistry/Advent/Jesus-in-the-womb.html