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“Mary marks a new beginning”

In his 18 December general audience, Pope Francis began a new catechetical cycle on Jesus Christ, our hope, for the Jubilee of 2025, speaking about the Son of God's entry into human history.

12/18/2024

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Today we begin a series of catecheses that will unfold throughout the

Jubilee Year. The theme is *Jesus Christ, our hope*. He is the destination of our pilgrimage, and He is the way, the path to follow.

The first part will focus on the *infancy of Jesus*, as narrated by the evangelists Matthew and Luke (cf. *Mt* 1–2; *Lk* 1–2). The Gospels of the Infancy recount Jesus' virginal conception and his birth from Mary's womb. They recall the messianic prophecies fulfilled in Him and speak of Joseph's legal fatherhood, which grafted the Son of God into the "line" of the Davidic dynasty. We see Jesus as a newborn, a child, and an adolescent: obedient to his parents and, at the same time, fully aware of his complete dedication to the Father and the Father's Kingdom. The distinction between the two evangelists is that while Luke recounts events through Mary's eyes, Matthew does so through Joseph's,

showing us a fatherhood like no other.

Matthew opens his Gospel, and indeed the entire canon of the New Testament, with the “genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham” (*Mt* 1:1). It is a list of names already present in Hebrew Scriptures, meant to reveal both the truth of history and the truth of human life. In fact, “the genealogy of the Lord is the true history, where certain names, so to speak, stand out as problematic, and the sin of King David is highlighted (cf. *Mt* 1:6). Yet everything concludes and blossoms in Mary and in Christ” (Letter on the Renewal of the Study of Church History, 21-XI-2024). This reveals the truth of human life transmitted from generation to generation, bearing three elements: a name encapsulating a unique identity and mission; belonging to a family and

people; and, finally, adherence in faith to the God of Israel.

A genealogy is a literary genre; a narrative form intended to convey an important message. No one gives life to themselves; it is always received as a gift from others. In this case, the genealogy reflects the chosen people, who inherit the deposit of faith from their ancestors. When parents pass on life to their children, they also pass on their faith in God.

Unlike Old Testament genealogies, which include only male names (because in Israel it was the father who gave a child their name), Matthew's genealogy of Jesus includes women. There are five of them, to be exact: Tamar, Judah's daughter-in-law, who, after becoming a widow, disguised herself as a prostitute to secure offspring for her late husband (cf. *Gn* 38); Rahab,

the prostitute of Jericho who helped the Jewish scouts enter and conquer the Promised Land (cf. *Jas* 2); Ruth, the Moabite who, as recounted in the book bearing her name, remained faithful to her mother-in-law, cared for her, and became the great-grandmother of King David; Bathsheba, with whom David committed adultery, later marrying her after orchestrating the death of her husband, and together they bore Solomon (cf. *2 Sam* 11); and lastly, Mary of Nazareth, the wife of Joseph from the house of David, from whom was born the Messiah, Jesus.

The first four women are not mentioned simply because of their sinfulness, as is sometimes claimed, but rather because they were outsiders to Israel's people. As Benedict XVI wrote: "Through them... the world of the Gentiles entered into the genealogy of Jesus: His mission to both Jews and Gentiles is revealed"

(The Infancy Narratives, Vatican City: 2012, pg. 15).

While the previous four women are mentioned alongside the man from whom their child was born or who fathered that child, Mary stands apart. She marks a new beginning, a beginning in which human agency in generation gives way to God Himself. This is made clear by the use of the verb “*was born:*” “Jacob fathered Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Christ” (*Mt 1:16*). Jesus is the Son of David, grafted into that dynasty through Joseph, and destined to be the Messiah of Israel. Yet He is also the Son of Abraham and of foreign women, destined to be a “light to enlighten the Gentiles” (*Lk 2:32*) and the “Savior of the world” (*Jn 4:42*).

The Son of God, consecrated to the Father with the mission of revealing his face (cf. *Jn 1:18; 14:9*), entered the

world as all human beings do, so much so that in Nazareth, He was called the “son of Joseph” (*Jn* 6:42) or the “carpenter’s son” (*Mt* 13:55), truly God and truly man.

Brothers and sisters, let us awaken within ourselves a sense of grateful remembrance for our ancestors. Above all, let us give thanks to God, who, through our Mother the Church, has brought us into eternal life, the life of Jesus, our hope.

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