

Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Feastday: September 8

Mary was born to be the mother of the Saviour of the world, the spiritual mother of all men, and the holiest of God's creatures. Because of her Son's infinite merits, she was conceived and born immaculate and full of grace. Through her, Queen of heaven and of earth, all grace is given to men. Through her, by the will of the Trinity, the unbelieving receive the gift of faith; the afflicted are tendered the works of mercy; and the members of Christ grow in likeness of their Head. In Mary all human nature is exalted. We rejoice in her birthday, as the Church has done from the earliest times. This is one of the three birthdays in the Church Calendar — the Birth of Jesus (December 25), the Birth of John the Baptist (June 24) and the Birthday of Mary. All three were born without original sin, although Mary and Jesus were conceived without sin, and St. John was cleansed of original sin while in the womb at the Visitation of Mary.

According to the 1962 Missal of St. John XXIII Extraordinary Form of the Roman Rite, today also commemorates St. Adrian. The liturgy of Our Lady's Birthday in Rome included a procession from the church of St. Adrian in the forum. St. Adrian was a Herculian Guard of the Roman Emperor Galerius Maximian. After becoming a convert to Christianity with his wife Natalia, Adrian was martyred at Nicomedia on March 4, 306.

Historically it is the feast of St. Corbinian, a Frank who spent fourteen years as a hermit and then went to Rome, where Pope Gregory II consecrated him bishop and sent him to evangelize Germany.

The Birth of Mary

On Our Lady's birthday the Church celebrates the first dawning of redemption with the appearance in the world of the Saviour's mother, Mary. The Blessed Virgin occupies a unique place in the history of salvation, and she has the highest mission ever commended to any creature. We rejoice that the Mother of God is our Mother, too. Let us often call upon the Blessed Virgin as "Cause of our joy", one of the most beautiful titles in her litany.

Since September 8 marks the end of summer and beginning of fall, this day has many thanksgiving celebrations and customs attached to it. In the older form of the *Roman Ritual* there is a blessing of the summer harvest and fall planting seeds for this day.

The winegrowers in France called this feast "Our Lady of the Grape Harvest." The best grapes are brought to the local church to be blessed and then some bunches are attached to hands of the statue of Mary. A festive meal which includes the new grapes is part of this day.



In the Alps section of Austria this day is "Drive-Down Day" during which the cattle and sheep are led from their summer pastures in the slopes and brought to their winter quarters in the valleys. This was usually a large caravan, with all the finery, decorations, and festivity. In some parts of Austria, milk from this day and all the leftover food are given to the poor in honour of Our Lady's Nativity.

—Excerpted from *The Holyday Book* by Fr. Francis Weiser, SJ

Patron: All people named Mary, in any form.

Symbols: bruised serpent, sometimes encircling a globe; the lily; fleur de lis; virgin's monogram; pierced heart; crescent moon; sun and moon; starry crown; Mater Dei; rose; flowering almond; gilly flower; snow drop; hawthorn; the star; the balsam; the Ark of the Covenant; the mirror or speculum; apple; myrtle; palm, cypress and olive; closed gate; book of Wisdom; sealed book; rod of Jesse; lily of the valley; house of gold; city of God; vessel of honour; seat of wisdom.