

The Word Became Flesh

March 25th is the Feast of the Annunciation when the Virgin Mary miraculously conceives the Word of God within her womb. Nine months later, we will celebrate the birth of her Divine Son on December 25th. Taking these dates for our timeline, together we shall follow the stages of prenatal human development, reflecting upon not just the great mystery of Word of God growing within the Blessed Mother's womb, but also in the miracle of *all* life, and on the value of each human person created by the will of God.



The Church sees the Feast of the Annunciation as the beginning of our salvation. On this feast we genuflect (where we normally bow) at the recitation of the Creed (at the words “and the Word became Flesh, and dwelt among us”). This prayerful posture demonstrates solemn reverence before the great mystery of the Incarnation. Most of us know that there are 40 days of Lent, but we may not be aware that there are 40 weeks between the Feast of the Annunciation and the Birthday of Our Lord on Christmas. This is the average gestation of each child who comes to full term, and our prayer during these forty weeks when we reflect upon the development of the Christ child can be for a deepening respect for Life.

The First Week of Life

To run in the bulletin during the Weekend of March 26th and 27th

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By all criteria of modern molecular biology, life is present from the moment of conception. At conception, the baby is a one-cell being smaller than a grain of sand, but the child has his own DNA, separate from his mother's, and the gender of the child has already been determined, as well as what color his eyes will be, whether or not his hair will be wavy or straight, and the complexion of his skin. By the end of the week, modern geneticists can determine if the child is a boy or a girl, and by that time the tiny human has become implanted into his Mother's uterus. As Catholics we honor the Virgin Mary above all women because she gave birth to the Word of God, because she is the greatest woman in all of history, but also because even though she was just but a young teenager, she demonstrated incredible virtue and courage. Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary is something that should be promoted in every generation. Today, more than half of American 17-year olds are not virgins, and a quarter of those are said to have acquired sexually transmitted diseases by the time they are 20. Annually 800,000 teenage girls find themselves pregnant in America (a rate twice as high as England or Canada), and 40% of these will end with abortions (that is over 320,000 abortions every year).

The Second Week of Life

To run in the bulletin during the weekend of April 2nd and 3rd

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Baby's heart begins to beat on day 18, and by day 21 that heart is pumping its own blood through a separate closed circulatory system. The developing baby boy will have his own blood type (type AB), separate from his mother's. While the Blessed Virgin knew she was with child, most of the time all of this happens before a woman suspects she may be pregnant (in week three). Therefore when you drive behind a car with a bumper sticker that says abortion stops a beating heart, you can be assured that bumper sticker is correct. It is a sad fact that abortion is the #1 cause of death annually in the United States: more than heart disease and cancer deaths combined. In general, 48% of all pregnancies in the U.S. are unplanned, and 47% of those unplanned pregnancies will result in abortions. That means that 24.5% of conceived children in our country are aborted. That is essentially one out of four children conceived annually. Looking at it soberly, it is not hard to see why people can say that abortion is a plague on our American society.

The Third Week of Life

To run in the bulletin during the weekend of April 9th and 10th

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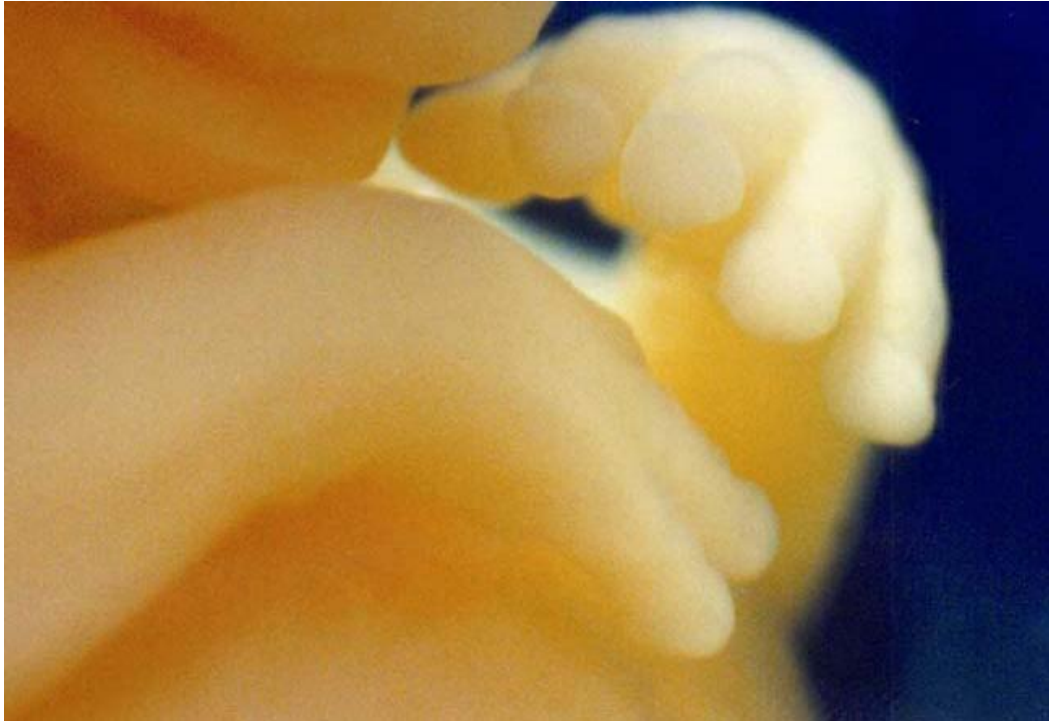
Many women might not even know they were pregnant by now, but by the 28th day, the eyes, ears and respiratory system of their child will have begun to have formed. With eyes, the child will eventually see, and with ears, he will hear, and with his mouth, the Christ child will teach us the truth. Many of us, however, close our eyes and ears to the truth. Planned Parenthood (one of the world's greatest providers of abortions) will sometimes suggest that abortions should be safe, legal and rare, but abortions aren't really as safe for mothers as they would have us believe. A recent 13 year study indicates that mortality rates associated with abortion is 2.95 times higher than that associated with full term pregnancies, and that the annual death rate of women who had abortions in the previous year was some 46% higher than their non-pregnant women neighbors. Researchers suppose that higher levels of depression and anxiety following abortions may explain their results. Abortion is legal (in the United States and other countries) but *legal* does not equal *moral*. Certainly, abortions are not rare, and it is in the interest of abortion providers to make them less and less rare. Abortion is a very profitable industry. Each year there are an estimated 48 million abortions worldwide. In the United States the average amount paid for an abortion is around \$374. That makes it a \$487,320,000-a-year business. Planned Parenthood has also received nearly a billion of taxpayers' dollars over the past eight years. Still, Planned Parenthood is tax-exempt and eligible to receive contributions deductible as charitable donations for federal income tax purposes.

The Fourth Week of Life

To run in the bulletin during the weekend of April 16th and 17th

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In the past, pregnant women were not as aware of what was happening within their wombs, but modern science can be helpful in revealing more, so that we can better observe and understand the development of human life. For example, with modern science, we know that by the end of the fifth week of pregnancy, the skeleton of the child within the womb will already be complete. At this point in human development, brainwaves are detectable, and reflexes have been observed, and modern ultrasounds have shown us the visual image of a heartbeat as early as this fifth week. The more we know about human development, the more difficult it is to deny that life, but sometimes people petition to keep the facts from us. One wonders if women are making choices based on the full picture. What is amazing is how perfect and even miraculous human development is when we can observe it. There may be rare times when science uses these techniques to encourage an abortion (on a sick child, for example), but these days sick unborn children can even be operated on. Still statistics indicated that the overwhelming cases of abortions (93%-98%) are executed for non-medical reasons (*not* because of danger to the mother or because a child is developing improperly). It is a sobering statistic to consider on this great feast when we celebrate the victory of life over death.

Easter is a Feast to celebrate Life

To run in the bulletin during the weekend of April 23rd and 24th

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Did you know that even before an unborn child can hear, he is still *open to* and biochemically *aware of* certain maternal communications, and thus a mother's emotional state can actually affect the unborn. Historically, this meant that the Christ child could actually sense any discord between his Mother and her betrothed, Joseph, and the infant could sense an internal state of his mother's turmoil. The home environment is important (not the "house" ... which is a thing, but the "home" ... which is a relationship), and unborn children can sense this environment, or the lack of it. Statistically, a woman in an unhappy marriage has a 237% greater risk of bearing a child with physical and psychological problems than a woman within a secure relationship. This is why the virtuous model of St. Joseph is so important in the story of the Holy Family. While he was not the biological father of the Christ child, he nevertheless gave the king of heaven a home to grow up in, and to grow in wisdom and stature. All men today need to look to Joseph as an excellent model for manly piety. Joseph was pious and respectful of the great mystery of the Messiah, who would be born of the Virgin Mary.

The Sixth Week of Life

To run in the bulletin during the weekend of April 30th and May 1st

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What we learn from the Bible is that the Lord has us in mind before we are created (Jeremiah 1:5). Scriptures reveal that the prophets and holy ones are sometimes “called” from the womb (Isaiah 49:1; Isaiah 49:5; Galatians 1:5), and that they may even be announced before their conception (Judges 13:6-7; Judges 16:17; Luke 1:15). Our God is the maker of all things, including us (Isaiah 44:24), and He has made all of us in the womb (Job 31:15; Psalm 22:9-10; Isaiah 44:2), making our “inward parts” and “weaving” us together – where we are “fearfully and wonderfully made” in secret (Psalm 139:13-16). Indeed we are fearfully and wonderfully made. As we continue to reflect upon the pregnancy of Our Lady, we see Our Lord is himself already wonderfully made. At the end of just seven weeks of human gestation, his tiny fingers and toes are complete, as well as his wrists, elbows, knees and knuckles. It will be these hands and these feet that will be pierced for love of us upon the Cross. By the seventh week a developing child already has his 20 milk-teeth. Moreover, by this time we know that seven-week old children are already sucking their thumbs. During this Month of May, which is dedicated to Our Lady, we have an opportunity to reflect upon the role of the Virgin Mary in Salvation History, that she so willingly received the honor of motherhood.

Happy Mother's Day

To run in the bulletin during the weekend of May 7th and 8th

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By the end of the eighth week of life, modern scientists will cease to refer to the developing child as “an embryo,” and begin referring to him as “a fetus.” These stages of development do not have to be seen as evidence that someone is not human (anymore so than it would be to call a person an “infant” or “teenager” as an attempt to deny their humanity). The fact is a fetus is an immature human life, and the Catechism teaches us that *all* human life is sacred because from its beginning it involves the creative action of God our creator, and no one can destroy innocent human life, which belongs to him (Catechism 2258). And so we continue to watch the Christ child grow to maturity within the womb of the Blessed Mother during this month dedicated to her. At the end of the second month of a pregnancy, we can observe that all of the body systems of the child are present by now. We're told that the child's brain activity is rapidly growing by 250,000 neurons every minute. By now ultrasonic stethoscopes (commonly used in modern doctor's offices) can easily detect the tiny heartbeat of the child within her as well, and this life is simply undeniable.

The Eighth Week of Life

To run in the bulletin during the weekend of May 14th and 15th

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By the ninth week, the Christ child's basic facial features are formed, complete with eyelids, nostrils, and outer ears. His chin, nose and mouth are apparent. The baby squints, swallows, moves his tongue, and can make a fist. It should be mentioned that we know by now the little one has all the necessary structures for pain sensation. Nine-week-old fetuses have been observed covering their little ears with their hands when they are exposed to loud music, and slowly covering their eyes with their hands whenever a bright light is placed upon their mother's abdomen.

The Ninth Week of Life

To run in the bulletin during the weekend of May 21st and 22nd

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May 31st is the Feast of the Visitation, when our Lady came to the house of Elizabeth her kinswoman, to help Elizabeth with the running the house. Elizabeth was thought barren and was an older woman, and a first time mother who was already eight months pregnant. She needed help. Tradition tells us that Mary's own mother, St. Ann, was herself a mother of older age, and so the family would have known how dangerous pregnancy can be when a woman is older. In the story of the visitation, the child in the womb of Elizabeth reacts (leaps) in the presence of the Virgin Mary and her Divine Son. While this is clearly seen as a miraculous sign in Scripture, we also know that unborn children can be aware of other children. In fact doctors using ultrasounds have actually observed unborn twins fighting within their mother's womb. The oldest shrine to the Virgin Mary in this country is Our Lady of la Leche in St. Augustine, Florida. It continues to be a place where mothers go to pray for a safe childbirth. We're glad the Virgin Mary was there for St. Elizabeth, and we know she can be there for us today if we ask for her prayers.

The Tenth Week of Life

To run in the bulletin during the weekend of May 28th and 29th

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By the eleventh week of life, the Christ child has all his fingernails, and all his body systems are working. He is able to swallow. There is also episodic breathing movements where the little one inhales and exhales amniotic fluid more and more steadily, practicing his respiration and anticipating his birthday when he will begin to breath air. Birthdays are what we are preparing for. Because we tend to measure our age from our birthday, we can forget that the average child is already nine months old at the day of his or her birth. Still, not every child comes to full term, and many pregnancies are terminated. This happens right here at home with sobering frequency. Georgia is one of the states with the ten highest abortion rates in the United States of America.

The Eleventh Week of Life

To run in the bulletin during the weekend of June 4th and 5th

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While the infant within the womb is developing with remarkable complexity and beauty, the Christ child weighs in at only one ounce (about the weight of a single slice of bread). So at the end of the first trimester, many pregnant women will not even appear to be pregnant (or be “showing”). For this reason, more than 89% of all abortions in the US are performed before the end of the first trimester of pregnancy. The good news is that no sin is unforgivable, and there are ways to find healing and forgiveness, but the sad news is that there is a lot of pain and regret out there, as well as confusion. Our former Holy Father, Pope John Paul II declared the Catholic Church's teachings on the issue “unchanged and unchangeable” but many Protestant traditions have long ago changed their positions to accept abortion as a right, and this has clearly led to confusion on the matter. Thus statistics indicate that one in three American women will have had an abortion by the age of 45. The reasons for abortion seem largely cultural or economic. Three quarters of women who abort their children say that having a baby will interfere with their work or other responsibilities. Only 6% of all abortions occur because of potential health problems of either the unborn child or the mother.

The Second Trimester

To run in the bulletin during the weekend of June 11th and 12th

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The taste buds of the Christ child are working by the thirteenth week (and the little one can even taste what his mother has eaten after she digests it). While still tiny, any reasonable individual could see that this infant is a human person, even if the law of the land denies this. Many of us remember the Dr. Seuss book entitled *Horton Hears a Who!* In this book, the elephant Horton is sensitive enough to be able to detect something that everyone around him denies. Despite the ridicule Horton faces, he insists “Believe me, I tell you, sincerely, My ears are keen ... I know there’s a person down there.” Like Horton, as Catholics (indeed as rational people) we must accept that “a person’s a person, no matter how small.”

The Thirteenth Week of Life

To run in the bulletin during the weekend of June 18th and 19th

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The Feast of the Birth of St. John the Baptist is one of the great feasts of the Church, and St. John is one of the greatest saints in heaven. Our Lady, Mary, has remained in the house of Elizabeth, where she assists in welcoming the new born boy into the world, and where she continues to help out in the home while the older Elizabeth recovers. Our Lady was almost certainly there when Zechariah wrote upon the tablet "His Name is John." She, even more so than the villagers, knew there would be something special about this blessed and miraculous child, conceived by a presumed barren woman. Today the name "John" remains one of the most beloved names for boy children, and "Mary" and "Elizabeth" are some of the most revered girl names, kept alive through the generations of Christians. The pregnant Virgin Mary may still not yet be showing, but she knows she will eventually have to go home to Nazareth, to face the community of her peers and neighbors. If the Virgin stayed until the purification of Elizabeth (the normal ritual time of postnatal recovery), that would be 40 days, which may mean Our Lady would have returned home at her midterm.

The Birth of St. John

To run in the bulletin during the weekend of June 25th and 26th

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At this point, the little one is about the size and weight of an apple. His fingerprints are completely established, and his hearing (his auditory sense) is surprisingly well formed. Scientists have been able to determine that a child within the womb can hear not only his mother's beating heart, and the blood rushing through her veins, he can also hear doors opening in the room. He can hear people talking as far as 12 feet away from his mother, and it is believed he can actually distinguish voices. We can imagine those first familiar sounds of Our Lord, his mother singing to the newborn St. John, and the voice of one of the greatest prophets in all of history crying out not in the wilderness, but from the cradle.

The Fifteenth Week of Life

To run in the bulletin during the weekend of July 2nd and 3rd

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While his mother cannot yet feel anything, the child within her womb can, by now, grasp with his hands, swim, kick, turn, and even do somersaults. A child's genitals are clearly differentiated by the sixteenth week of life, and you can also begin to see eyelashes developing thereafter. Regarding his mother, she may still not be showing by now, but she has begun to gain some weight.

The Sixteenth Week of Life

To run in the bulletin during the weekend of July 9th and 10th

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The little one is about eight inches long at week seventeen, and weighs about five ounces, and so by now the mother may actually begin to feel her child within her womb. This was once called the time of the *quicken*ing, because it was the first sign a mother had of life, and yet any doctor or scientist can tell you that life was present long before. It must be said that despite what some have claimed, the Catholic Church has *always* taught against the taking of innocent human life. The *Didache* is the teaching of the twelve apostles, written around 70 A.D., and it specifically forbids abortions without ambiguity. But evidence for this reverence for life is hardly just found in ancient texts restricting abortion. The Church affirms life in her daily prayer and liturgy as well. There are two prayers that priests, monks and sisters pray every day. The Cantic of Zachariah (the *Benedictus*) is prayed every morning around the Catholic world. The *Benedictus* is the prayer uttered by the father of St. John the Baptist praising God at the birth of his child. The Cantic of Mary (or the *Magnificat*) is prayed by popes, bishops, monks, sisters and priests every evening. The *Magnificat* is the hymn of praise by Our Lady, thanking God for her pregnancy. Just imagine, every hour of every day, around the world, these two prayers are constantly being prayed, giving thanks for the providence of the Lord revealed as it is in the coming of these two children.

The Seventeenth Week of Life

To run in the bulletin during the weekend of July 16th and 17th

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By the 18th week, the vocal cords are working, and a child could actually cry if he could get air to his lungs. This is usually the first thing a child will do at his birth, once free of the safe world of amniotic fluid, as he emerges into the world of air. The Pro Life Movement has acquired some remarkable stories over the years. One such case is Sarah Smith, whose mother, Betty, had an abortion in L.A. forty years ago. What she didn't know, and what the abortionist didn't realize, was that Betty was carrying twins at the time, and somehow, after the abortion, Betty felt a child moving within her womb. The little girl, Sarah, had somehow been protected by the hand of God. Betty already had five children, and thought at the time another was too much, but she could not bring herself to have a second abortion, and Sarah was born, not without some handicaps however, and Betty raised Sarah with love. Now Betty regrets her abortion, and loves her daughter Sarah, with whom she travels to share their story and give witness to the beauty of life.

The Eighteenth Week of Life

To run in the bulletin during the weekend of July 23rd and 24th

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We can imagine the Blessed Virgin Mary beginning to prepare for her return to Nazareth by the end of this week. Scriptures tell us she remained with Elizabeth about three months (the Hebrew months of Lyyar, Sivan and part of Tamuz). No doubt she might be shunned by some when she goes home. Nevertheless, we know that her honor will be protected by St. Joseph, who will take her into his home. Scripture tells us that St. Joseph and the Blessed Virgin Mary were betrothed, which is more than being engaged, but not exactly being *completely* married. All that was technically required was for St. Joseph to take her into his house, and so Joseph will do this. It takes a man of remarkable faith to do this, and one who is convinced that the child growing within the womb of his wife is truly the Messiah, the Son of God. Our own society has become very lax when it comes to morals, and today young people are not pressured to virtue, but rather towards licentiousness. And yet, there remains (ironically) a stigma for pregnant women in our society. The Church, on the other hand, acts a bit like St. Joseph, welcoming unwed mothers into our family, and encouraging them, and treating them with kindness, dignity and understanding. This is our way of helping their children come to full term. We must be strong voices for the truth, and we must also continue to show charity, but there is so much darkness out there. Did you know that since 1973, there have been over 52 million abortions in the United States of America, which averages 2.6 babies every minute.

The Nineteenth Week of Life

To run in the bulletin during the weekend of July 30th and 31st

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The Church has always honored the Virgin Mary with the most extraordinary reverence, and this past Friday, August 5th, was the anniversary of the Dedication of the Basilica of the St. Mary Major in Rome, which claims to be the oldest church in the West dedicated to the Blessed Virgin. The Basilica was built in the 4th/5th century, after the Council of Ephesus had affirmed Mary's title as Theotokos (as Mother of God). The child growing within her womb is fully human, but also fully divine (which is to say truly God) and this is the great mystery of our Faith. While this Basilica is called the first church in the West dedicated to Our Lady, it will hardly be the last, for no other saint will have as many church dedications than She who was chosen from all eternity to bring forth the Messiah. One of the recent examples is our own parish: Our Lady of the Mountains.

Midterm

To run in the bulletin on the weekend of August 6th and 7th

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We can imagine Mary having returned to Nazareth by the end of this week. During the hottest months of the year, many villagers in Nazareth would have taken their mats up to the roof for a cooler night's sleep, but just because a pregnant woman is sleeping doesn't mean her child is. If his mother hasn't felt him yet, her child will certainly make himself felt by the 21st week. The inside of the uterus has no feeling, but once the baby is 12 inches long, and weigh about a pound, the Blessed Mother can begin to feel the child kicking. After 20 weeks, the Christ child measures about a foot long, and weighs about one pound. Feeling the child move around within the womb is such a powerful sensation for mothers, and this feeling (uncomfortable though it may be at times) is such a powerful affirmation of life. The joy and the wonder of motherhood, and the miracle of life can never cease to amaze us, and yet even still, on average, there are almost 16,500 abortions annually that occur after the twentieth week of gestation. Still, we should not be overly surprised at this, for abortion is the single most common medical procedure performed in the United States (even more common than root canals).

The Twenty-First Week of Life

To run in the bulletin on the weekend of August 13th and 14th

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By now it is evident that the baby is having a regular rhythm of sleeping a waking. A mother is aware that the child within her will on occasion react to loud sounds, and that her movements can wake her baby. At this point the Blessed Mother's waistline is definitely gone, and her abdomen is enlarging. Still, she is able to bend over and sit comfortably, and walk with ease. But by now there is no hiding her pregnancy, for friends and relatives in the village can certainly tell the Virgin Mary is pregnant, even though she has just moved in with her husband, Joseph. A few may have suspected a miracle. Some probably thought less of Joseph. Others may have reasoned Our Lady was less than virtuous. We don't often think of the interior courage the Blessed Mother had to have, and the strength St. Joseph had to demonstrate while their neighbors talked behind their backs. How does one defend oneself? The only answer was to wait ... for one day the world would see how miraculous this child would be.

The Twenty-Second Week of Life

To run in the bulletin on the weekend of August 20th and 21st

The Word Became Flesh

March 25th is the Feast of the Annunciation when the Virgin Mary miraculously conceives the Word of God within her womb. Nine months later, we will celebrate the birth of her Divine Son on December 25th. Taking these dates for our timeline, together we shall follow the stages of prenatal human development, reflecting upon not just the great mystery of Word of God growing within the Blessed Mother's womb, but also in the miracle of *all* life, and on the value of each human person created by the will of God.



It is the twenty-third week of life for the Christ child who remains safe and nourished within the womb of the Blessed Mother. By now Our Lady would be finding it more and more difficult to achieve comfortable sleeping positions, and at this point the little one has become quite the gymnast. Mothers report that their babies are clearly reacting to outside sounds by now, for example the slamming of a door or the rolling of thunder. The holy infant's bones continue to ossify (or harden) and his veins are still visible through his translucent skin. Remarkably we have evidence by that a 23-week-old fetus may actually dream, as modern ultrasound techniques have observed rapid eye movement (REM). One wonders what dreams might come to *any* unborn child, much less this *particular* unborn child. Would their dreams be joyful, or frightening? It is something for us to reflect upon this week, the dreams of our little Lord. Most adults have something we call childhood amnesia or infantile amnesia, which is to say that we are unlikely to remember anything before our fourth birthday, and yet infants dream and think and express emotions and respond to pain and laugh and have a history long before their fourth birthday, and so it appears, even *before* their first birthday. This is a five-month-old fetus, and with our modern science there is actually a 15% chance of viability for a infant born four months premature.

The Twenty-Third Week of Life

To run in the bulletin on the weekend of August 27th and 28th

The Word Became Flesh

March 25th is the Feast of the Annunciation when the Virgin Mary miraculously conceives the Word of God. Nine months later, we will celebrate the birth of her Divine Son on December 25th. Together we shall reflect upon the development of Our Lord over the forty weeks of gestation, as we also reflect upon the Church's Pro-Life teachings.



In a few days, on September 8th, the Church will celebrate the feast of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary, and so the Woman who is anticipating the birth of her own child will this week also celebrate her own birthday. Tradition holds that Our Lady was born to elderly parents, as their only child. Life is so precious, and the Lord uses every life to bring about his own will, if we simply allow him to work with us. There are only three birthdays that the Church celebrates: the Virgin Mary's, St. John the Baptist's, and the one we are anticipating on December 25th. If the Blessed Mother were to invite St. Joseph to place his hand upon her stomach at this point, he would almost certainly feel the Lord move, as babies will have generally become very active at this point. The Christ child continues to develop. By the 24th week of life, a fetus has a 56% chance of viability (survivability) if born premature. While prematurely born infants might live at this point, they are still not free of the threat of abortion in this country, as there are some abortion providers that offer late term abortions (those at 24 weeks or beyond). Interestingly enough over half of the women seeking abortions were using the pill or a condom (often, but not always inconsistently).

The Twenty-Fourth Week of Life

To run in the bulletin on the weekend of September 3rd and 4th

The Word Became Flesh

March 25th is the Feast of the Annunciation when the Virgin Mary miraculously conceives the Word of God. Nine months later, we will celebrate the birth of her Divine Son on December 25th. Together we shall reflect upon the development of Our Lord over the forty weeks of gestation, as we also reflect upon the Church's Pro-Life teachings.



Unfortunately there is much confusion about the Church's teaching on life – but this is not because of a lack of clarity. In July of 2010 the Catholic Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi, received an award from Planned Parenthood for her role in what they called championing women's health rights. The president of Planned Parenthood, which is the number one advocate for and provider of abortions in this country, praised Speaker Pelosi for gaining passage of the health care reform bill that will subsidize abortions in insurance plans. Months earlier, when asked when human life began, Pelosi herself had tried to imply a certain "flexibility" present in the Church's teaching. The very next day the Archbishop of Washington issued a statement reading: "the current teaching of the Catholic Church on human life and abortion is the same teaching as it was 2,000 years ago." Pelosi claims to be an ardent Catholic but she is also the strongest possible supporter of abortions. This is a scandal to many faithful Catholics, but sadly not to others. Looking at statistics, it is important to realize that despite the clarity of Catholic doctrine, 28% of women who have sought an abortion in this country have identified themselves as Catholics (which is about the same percentage of Catholics in our nation's population). A Gallup analysis finds almost no difference between American Catholics and non-Catholics on the issue of abortion. The question put to Speaker Pelosi was easy enough. When does human life begin? Together we have been watching human life now for six months now in this column. Can we deny it? A week 25, the Christ child continues to mature within the womb of the Virgin Mary. There is now a 79% chance of survival for infants born prematurely at this stage (with modern medicine that is). This is also the week when the Church recalls the feast of the Holy Name of Mary, and we call upon her to pray for our Church, so that we may come to more fully grasp & represent the Church's Pro-Life message.

The Holy Name of Mary

To run in the bulletin on the weekend of September 10th and 11th

The Word Became Flesh

March 25th is the Feast of the Annunciation when the Virgin Mary miraculously conceives the Word of God within her womb. Nine months later, we will celebrate the birth of her Divine Son on December 25th. Taking these dates for our timeline, together we shall follow the stages of prenatal human development, reflecting upon not just the great mystery of Word of God growing within the Blessed Mother's womb, but also in the miracle of *all* life, and on the value of each human person created by the will of God.



The little Lord weighs almost 2 pounds by now, and after a month of having his eyelids shut, the Christ child will this week open his eyes once again – eyes which are now almost completely developed. Within the womb, a baby's eyes (no matter what the race) are always blue, though they may change later in life. Regarding race, the founder of Planned Parenthood, the socialist Margaret Sanger, was a New York atheist and activist for birth control at the turn of the twentieth century. She opened America's first legal birth control clinic, which was quietly funded by grants from J.D. Rockefeller, Jr.'s Bureau of Social Hygiene, which sought to control population and promoted (with Sanger) a eugenics that included sterilization. Sanger and Rockefeller sought to reduce the number of what they thought to be socially undesirable people (non Caucasians). Fast-forward to today and we discover that while minority women constitute only 12% of the female population in the US, they make up approximately 36% of all the abortions, and a black child in the US is five times more likely to be aborted as a white child.

The Twenty-Sixth Week of Life

To run in the bulletin on the weekend of September 17th and 18th

The Word Became Flesh

March 25th is the Feast of the Annunciation when the Virgin Mary miraculously conceives the Word of God within her womb. Nine months later, we will celebrate the birth of her Divine Son on December 25th. Taking these dates for our timeline, together we shall follow the stages of prenatal human development, reflecting upon not just the great mystery of Word of God growing within the Blessed Mother's womb, but also in the miracle of *all* life, and on the value of each human person created by the will of God.



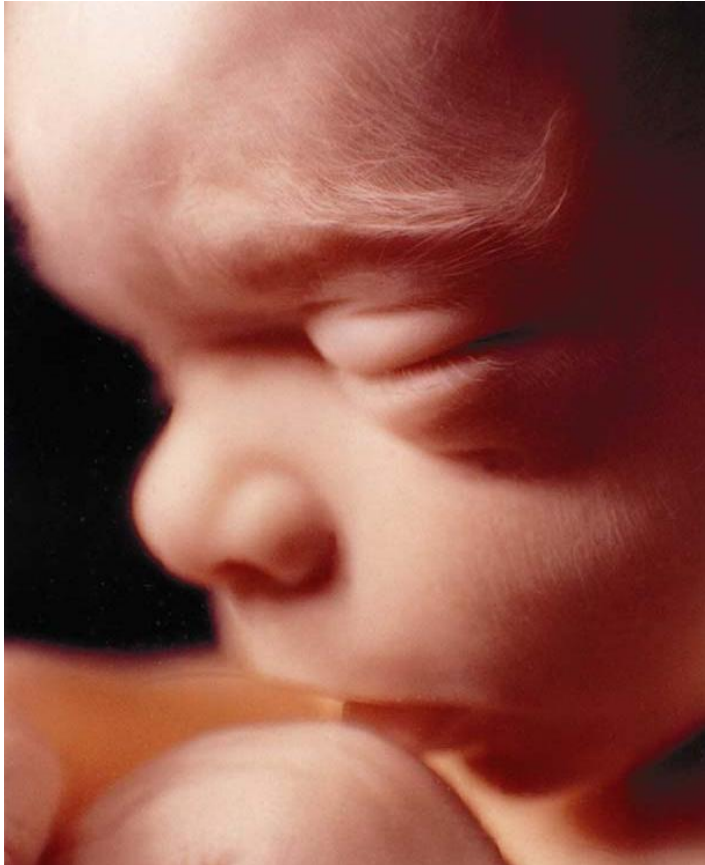
The Lord has made it through the first two trimesters, and is beginning his last trimester. The little one within the womb of the Virgin Mary now opens and closes his eyes whenever he wants to, and blinks spontaneously. His muscles are improving, and he is growing plumper. A child at 27 or 28 weeks will begin to get occasional fits and brief episodes of the hiccups, which will tickle his mother. While it is still too early to be born, most children born prematurely at this age will survive. Around this time of the year, the Holy Family would likely be preparing for Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), which is the holiest day in the calendar of their imperishable faith.

The Third Trimester

To run in the bulletin on the weekend of September 24th and 25th

The Word Became Flesh

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The Virgin isn't too big yet, so she can still get water, and share in the work of her fellow neighbors who surround a common courtyard. The Holy Family lives in a small two-room house, which shares a courtyard with other relatives. No doubt the daily tasks of grinding grain, baking bread, milking the animals and making cheese might have also included the making of small tunic for the coming Christ child, or perhaps a blanket for swaddling. As she works, prays, and sings to her unborn little one who moves within her, our Lady would have likely listened quietly to much talk in the village about a coming Messiah, and how this awaited king would bring liberty and renewal. October is one of the Marian months when we renew our devotion to Our Lady as we call upon her powerful prayers for our own lives.

The Twenty-Eighth Week of Life

To run in the bulletin on the weekend of October 1st and 2nd

The Word Became Flesh

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While abortion is legal in this country, it is not legal in other countries, and even our own law is not necessarily consistent. Consider the case of late term abortions. While experts disagree, the point at which an abortion becomes late-term relates often to viability. Babies are viable certainly by the 27th week, and some are viable as early as their 21st week. Some states ban later term abortions. Still other states require a second physician to be present during later-term abortions in order to treat a fetus who may be born alive. And then there is the case in 2002 when Scott Peterson murdered his wife, Laci Peterson, on Christmas day. Laci was eight months pregnant. Afterwards the husband was charged with *double* homicide, both for the death of his wife and of his unborn son, Conner. Scott Peterson is currently on death row in San Quentin, and this case murder led to the passing of the Laci and Conner Law in 2004 to protect the rights of unborn victims of violence. When do we arbitrarily assign value and life to a child, and who gets to decide that? Is it really a mother's choice, or is there an objective answer?

The Twenty-Ninth Week of Life

To run in the bulletin on the weekend of October 8th and 9th

The Word Became Flesh

March 25th is the Feast of the Annunciation when the Virgin Mary miraculously conceives the Word of God within her womb. Nine months later, we will celebrate the birth of her Divine Son on December 25th. Taking these dates for our timeline, together we shall follow the stages of prenatal human development, reflecting upon not just the great mystery of Word of God growing within the Blessed Mother's womb, but also in the miracle of *all* life, and on the value of each human person created by the will of God.



Modern scientists have proven that children in the 30th week actually have memories, and children born in the 30th week are certainly capable of living outside of the womb. Still, it is legal to abort a child. While there are millions of victims of Abortions, there are also a handful of survivors. Gianna Jessen is one such survivor. She was accidentally born alive in a failed attempt of a saline abortion performed in L.A. in 1977. Her biological mother was a teenager who had sought an abortion in the 30th week of her pregnancy, but Gianna fought for life and was born, though not without some sever injuries and consequences (including cerebral palsy). Remarkably the little baby was adopted and grew up to run marathons. On May 8th, 2006 the Colorado State House of Representatives were gathered to honor a local branch of Planned Parenthood on its 90th anniversary. A Pro-Life senator also invited Gianna Jessen to sing the National Anthem on that same day, though no one knew the whole story of this remarkable woman. She was greeted by applause after the singing of the anthem, but when the chamber learned that she was an abortion survivor, the celebration of Planned Parenthood was stopped cold. October is a Marian month, when we might all pray the rosary with greater devotion. Let our prayer include a deepening respect for human life.

The Thirtieth Week of Life

To run in the bulletin on the weekend of October 15th and 16th

The Word Became Flesh

March 25th is the Feast of the Annunciation when the Virgin Mary miraculously conceives the Word of God within her womb. Nine months later, we will celebrate the birth of her Divine Son on December 25th. Taking these dates for our timeline, together we shall follow the stages of prenatal human development, reflecting upon not just the great mystery of Word of God growing within the Blessed Mother's womb, but also in the miracle of *all* life, and on the value of each human person created by the will of God.



Ancestry meant everything to the first century Jew, and one's ability to trace his heritage back to one of the twelve sons of Israel was essential to prove he belonged to God's chosen and covenantal people. An ancestry that went back to Abraham would increase a person's social status even more, as Abraham was the patriarch of patriarchs. Furthermore being a descendent of King David gave one a blue-blooded heritage par excellence. The Gospels relay for us the genealogies of the Lord, connecting him to Abraham and Jacob and David, and setting him up as the having all the right credentials to be the mediator of the New Covenant. Reflecting upon the genealogies of the Lord is to reflect on how God uses human love and families to bring about his will over generations. Each of us have ancestries that go all the way back to Adam & Eve, and each family has preserved our lives within their own love and life, for without them, we simply would not be here. When we choose life, we choose the future, and we have hope that the Lord's will shall prevail by way of our human love, and the lives he creates by that love.

The Thirty-First Week of Life

To run in the bulletin on the weekend of October 22nd and 23rd

The Word Became Flesh

March 25th is the Feast of the Annunciation when the Virgin Mary miraculously conceives the Word of God within her womb. Nine months later, we will celebrate the birth of her Divine Son on December 25th. Taking these dates for our timeline, together we shall follow the stages of prenatal human development, reflecting upon not just the great mystery of Word of God growing within the Blessed Mother's womb, but also in the miracle of *all* life, and on the value of each human person created by the will of God.



The Virgin Mary is getting larger and larger, and she can watch a wonderful show as her baby moves around within her stomach. She is probably feeling a bit short of breath by now, and has a bit of heartburn as well. Her baby is almost 4 ½ pounds, and 16 inches long. Over 90% of babies born premature in their 32nd week survive, so the little one is just about “done.” We know by now that the little Lord is sensitive to temperature, so if his mother is standing a little too close to the fireplace, she might receive a swift kick from her son.

The Thirty-Second Week of Life

To run in the bulletin on the week of October 29th and 30th

The Word Became Flesh

March 25th is the Feast of the Annunciation when the Virgin Mary miraculously conceives the Word of God within her womb. Nine months later, we will celebrate the birth of her Divine Son on December 25th. Taking these dates for our timeline, together we shall follow the stages of prenatal human development, reflecting upon not just the great mystery of Word of God growing within the Blessed Mother's womb, but also in the miracle of *all* life, and on the value of each human person created by the will of God.



In week 33, the child of Mary weighs a bit over four pounds, and he is gaining fat, and loosing his wrinkles. The Holy child is becoming less red. His little skeleton is hardening, though the bones of the skull aren't going to fuse together until after his birth, to allow the little one to pass through the birth canal. These bones will fuse completely only in early adulthood, once the brain tissues has fully expanded. The Blessed Mother might be experiencing false contractions at this point, which is the body's way of preparing her for the real contractions which will come later.

The Thirty-Third Week of Life

To run in the bulletin on the weekend of November 5th and 6th

The Word Became Flesh

March 25th is the Feast of the Annunciation when the Virgin Mary miraculously conceives the Word of God within her womb. Nine months later, we will celebrate the birth of her Divine Son on December 25th. Taking these dates for our timeline, together we shall follow the stages of prenatal human development, reflecting upon not just the great mystery of Word of God growing within the Blessed Mother's womb, but also in the miracle of *all* life, and on the value of each human person created by the will of God.



By week 34, the little Lord measures around 17 ½ inches long, and weighs a bit over five pounds. His little body has begun to fill out more, and become fatter, which is preparing him for birth, when he will have to begin to regulate his own body temperature in the outside world. This child is the future of all humankind, as he will be the savior of the world, but in a way all children are the future, for without them there can be no future. Take the case of Japan, where abortion was made legal in 1948 with the new “science” of eugenics. Today, Japan is the oldest nation on the earth, and the population pyramid for that nation, which should look like a pyramid, doesn't look like a pyramid at all, because their population is decreasing in an alarming rate. The economy of Japan is declining with its population. Fewer women are having fewer if any children, and fewer young people are working to support the ageing population. Japan is more or less a worse case scenario, but Italy and other European nations are facing similar bleak futures. Without children, we simply have no future whatsoever.

The Thirty-Fourth Week of Life

To run in the bulletin on the weekend of November 12th and 13th

The Word Became Flesh

March 25th is the Feast of the Annunciation when the Virgin Mary miraculously conceives the Word of God within her womb. Nine months later, we will celebrate the birth of her Divine Son on December 25th. Taking these dates for our timeline, together we shall follow the stages of prenatal human development, reflecting upon not just the great mystery of Word of God growing within the Blessed Mother's womb, but also in the miracle of *all* life, and on the value of each human person created by the will of God.



A favorite Icon for many is the Theotokos of the Sign. Few images in the Church's gallery of icons demonstrate the Church's teaching on life more than this image, wherein we get a glimpse into the mystery of the Incarnation. The word Theotokos means Mother of God, and these Byzantine icons of the pregnant Virgin give us a window into the mystery of the little emperor who is developing within her womb. Especially suitable for our contemplation on the feast of Christ the King, as we prepare to enter into Advent, when we anticipate the coming King, who is born in history as a helpless infant, and yet whom we anticipate will return to be our judge. In the young king's hands we see a scroll, reminding us that it will be Christ who will break open the seals of the Book of Life at the final judgment. Christ is our King, and he is the Lord of Life, and he teaches us to respect with awe not just the Life of our Lord, but even the everyday miracle of all human life.

The Thirty-Fifth Week of Life

To run in the bulletin on the weekend of November 19th and 20th

The Word Became Flesh

March 25th is the Feast of the Annunciation when the Virgin Mary miraculously conceives the Word of God within her womb. Nine months later, we will celebrate the birth of her Divine Son on December 25th. Taking these dates for our timeline, together we shall follow the stages of prenatal human development, reflecting upon not just the great mystery of Word of God growing within the Blessed Mother's womb, but also in the miracle of *all* life, and on the value of each human person created by the will of God.



Though some children turn weeks earlier and some weeks later, the average baby turns in his mother's womb around the 35th or 36th week, and so with the coming of Advent, we imagine the little one has rotated to prepare for his last month of prenatal life. During the ninth month of life, a baby gains half a pound per week. There is less and less room for infantile somersaults at this point. Advent is a season when we begin to anticipate the Lord's coming (both his historic birth, but also his coming to be our judge) in an even more intense way. This child, who is born into our own reality, is the same Lord who will one day judge us for how we have supported to the Church's teaching on Pro-Life issues. It is easy to turn our backs on the facts, but as Catholics we are compelled to be a prophetic voice in our world, and speak up for those voices who cannot defend themselves. We give thanks during this season for the great mystery of our faith, the Incarnation, our Lord, a king whose coming will change the world.

The Thirty-Sixth Week of Life

To run in the bulletin on the weekend of November 26th and 27th

The Word Became Flesh

March 25th is the Feast of the Annunciation when the Virgin Mary miraculously conceives the Word of God within her womb. Nine months later, we will celebrate the birth of her Divine Son on December 25th. Taking these dates for our timeline, together we shall follow the stages of prenatal human development, reflecting upon not just the great mystery of Word of God growing within the Blessed Mother's womb, but also in the miracle of *all* life, and on the value of each human person created by the will of God.



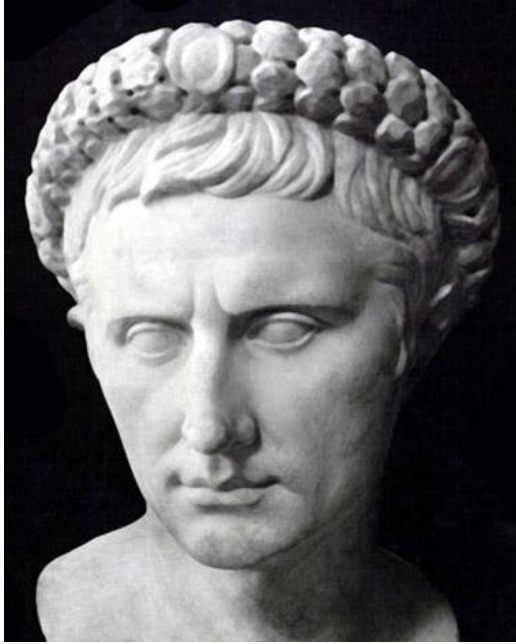
This is the second week of Advent, and the Christ child weighs over six pounds, and is about 19 inches tall. The Lord of Advent is coming into our histories to make right a wrong that affects us all. Each of us has a naval, which reminds each of us of our having been connected with our mothers for nine months within the womb. The naval is that point of connection but it also reminds us that all life is a connection of sorts, a connection of love and a connection of life, and it takes us all the way back to our first parents. When we study the creation stories in Genesis, we are reminded that our first parents were invited to choose fruit from the Tree of Life, which was in the center of the garden, but as we know they chose to pick the forbidden fruit instead, which brought upon humanity a calamity, and embroiled us within a cosmic struggle that was unknown to us prior to the that first bite of “the apple.” What might have happened had Adam and Eve chosen life instead, and what might have been the consequences and the blessings had they chosen life? Choosing Life is something we must all do every day. To choose to remain connected to the miracle of life, and to the Lord of Life, who is the Lord. Freedom means the freedom to choose, this is true, but morally speaking there are objectively good choices and there are choices that are objectively bad. When we choose well, we are always choosing life.

The Thirty-Seventh Week of Life

To run in the bulletin on the weekend of December 3rd and 4th

The Word Became Flesh

March 25th is the Feast of the Annunciation when the Virgin Mary miraculously conceives the Word of God. Nine months later, we will celebrate the birth of her Divine Son on December 25th. Together we shall reflect upon the development of Our Lord over the forty weeks of gestation, as we also reflect upon the Church's Pro-Life teachings.



Luke's Gospel tells us that all the world was to be enrolled. Caesar Augustus (who actually authorize *three* censuses during his 41 year reign) was very interested in the number of citizens in his empire. The emperor was motivated by tax purposes of course, but also because he was concerned about the decline of marriage and birth rates within his empire. He passed laws making promiscuity a crime, he penalized bachelors and gave political advantages to fathers of three or more children. He was bucking a trend, as abortion and infanticide were common in the Greco-Roman world, and few families would raise more than one girl (second girls would usually be exposed). Today the U.N. has begun to watch the same trend. Many in the 20th century were preoccupied with the world's population, and this fueled both science and science fiction, influenced social political doctrine and drove domestic and foreign policy world-wide. The 1968 book "The Population Bomb" predicted shrinking resources leading up to an environmental disaster with mass starvations. With the U.N. promoting birth control and expanding abortions worldwide, we now have significant declines in fertility rates (half of what they were 50 years ago). In Europe and North American the birthrates are well below replacement levels, and the world is becoming increasingly older. Some within the U.N. are *beginning* to see the fruitlessness of their own past philosophies.

The Thirty-Eighth Week of Life

To run in the bulletin on the weekend of December 10th and 11th

The Word Became Flesh

March 25th is the Feast of the Annunciation when the Virgin Mary miraculously conceives the Word of God. Nine months later, we will celebrate the birth of her Divine Son on December 25th. Together we shall reflect upon the development of Our Lord over the forty weeks of gestation, as we also reflect upon the Church's Pro-Life teachings.



The events surrounding the birth of the Lord were dangerous, but with them, Our Lord is born in the same village of his ancestor, King David. This is one of the signs of the Christ being the Messiah. As if being virtually ready to give birth wasn't enough of a challenge, we are told the Virgin was required by law to make a four-day journey between Nazareth and Bethlehem. Highway robbers were prevalent enough that Joseph would have surely gone with a caravan, and the scriptures imply that the Holy Family made it to Bethlehem just in the nick of time. Week 39 is full-term, but some women can go to two or three weeks before giving birth. Still, the Blessed Mother had to know that she *could* have had this child at any time, which might have meant the caravan would have left her and St. Joseph behind. Still pregnant women can feel fine even the day before they give birth. Nevertheless we can imagine there were prayers with every step that they would be able to make it to Bethlehem safely. And then, once they made it, they faced the reality of having no suitable place to bring a baby into the world. Still, how fitting it is that the child who would be called the "Son of David" was born in the same village where Jesse raised the little shepherd boy David over a thousand years earlier.

Approaching the Day

To run in the bulletin of the weekend of December 17th and 18th

The Word Became Flesh

These past forty weeks our parish has been reflecting upon the human development of the prenatal Word of God, which began back at the Feast of the Annunciation or Ladymas (March 25th) when the Virgin Mary said “yes” to the message of the angel, and conceived a child who would be called Immanuel (God with us). Once again, on Christmas, reflect upon this greatest of mysteries of our faith, the Incarnation, when the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us.



Normally whenever we say together the Creed, as Catholics, we bow at the point when we mention the Incarnation, that is at the words “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.” Still, twice in the Church’s calendar, we actually genuflect at this point (and not just bow). One of these dates is the feast of the Annunciation (which we celebrated nine months ago, when we marked the conception of the Lord), and the other date is the great solemnity of Christmas (the Savior’s birthday). Two days that we celebrate in an even more special way those words of the Nicene Creed: *by the power of the Holy Spirit, He was born of the Virgin Mary, and became man.*

Happy Birthday Lord

To run in the bulletin of the weekend of December 24th and 25th

