

Honoring Mary's Birth, Her Name, Her Sorrows and Her Mercy

We celebrate the birth of Our Lady on September 8th, the feast of her Most Holy Name on September 12th, Our Lady of Sorrows on September 15th, and Our Lady of Ransom and Mercy on September 24th.

Many believe Mary's name originated from the Hebrew "miryam", though the name is not found anywhere in the Hebrew Scriptures except for the name of Moses' sister, Miriam. Was it more Egyptian than Hebrew, since Moses, Aaron and Miriam grew up in Egypt? One translation is "rebellion," which might allude to Miriam and Aaron's rebellion against God in building the golden calf in Moses' absence. That meaning is a contradiction to the humility and obedience of Mary, the handmaid of the Lord. A common view holds that "Miriam" comes from the Hebrew word "mar" meaning "sea" and "yam" meaning "bitter", a meaning well suited to the bitter sea of sorrow that would be Mary's as Co-redeemer with Christ in His bitter Passion and Death, a meaning that speaks also to Mary's role as our refuge on the sea of our own bitter tears. St. Jerome associated the name with the Latin phrase Stella Maris, "Star of the Sea." Mary is indeed a light to us on the sea of life's storms, the star that guides us to heaven's shore. Others suggest a Hebrew meaning--"wished for child"—to reflect the Chosen People's long expectation of the birth of the virgin who would bring forth the Messiah. Others trace the name Maria to the Egyptian "mer" or "mar", meaning to "love" and the Hebrew "Yam" or "Yahweh", meaning "one loving Yahweh" or "one loved by Yahweh", the beautiful or perfect one. Mary is certainly the most privileged and holy one who perfectly mirrors God's own beloved Son.

But why did Anna and Joachim give Mary **that name at her birth**? Edward Healy Thompson in **The Life and Glories of St. Joseph**, page 105, says: **"Her name, we cannot doubt, came from heaven, and was revealed to Joachim, who gave it to her on the eighth day after her birth."** Thompson's view coincides with God's action recorded in Scripture when He gives the name or a new name to those chosen for some special purpose. Surely Mary's name, then, should have come directly from God for her mission as Theotokos was greater than any other creature's mission on earth, save that of the Sacred Humanity. The New Testament writers generally used Mariam, the Aramaic or archaic form, possibly to distinguish the Virgin Mary from others who bore the same name. **Reference:** <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15464a.htm>

As seen in the meaning of Mary's name, the idea of sorrow and bitterness is significant. It was in 1244 A.D. that the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows was first celebrated by the founders of the Servite Order to focus attention on the deep anguish of Mary's life. While seven sorrows are picked for emphasis, Mary endured sorrows too numerous to mention. The seven we honor are Simeon's prophecy at the Presentation of Jesus; the flight into

Egypt; the loss of Jesus in the temple; meeting Jesus on the Way of the Cross; the crucifixion; holding Jesus' dead body in her arms; and the burial of Jesus.

The Mexican people build small Altars of Compassion and Grief in their homes and their churches which they carry through the streets to honor Mary's sorrows. Her statue is accompanied by a cross, as her sorrow is inseparable from Christ's sorrowful Passion and Death; hence, the Church celebrates the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows the day after that of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. While processing with their Altars, the people sing the traditional hymn written by Giacomone da Todi in 1306, the Stabat Mater.

*At the Cross her station keeping,
Stood the mournful Mother weeping,
Close to Jesus to the last. ...
Is there one who would not weep
Whelmed in miseries so deep
Christ's dear Mother to behold?*

Reference: <http://www.mexconnect.com/our-lady-of-the-sorrows>

In **The Glories of Mary**, St. Alphonsus Maria de Liguori speaks extensively on Mary's compassion and mercy for us poor sinners and ponders, phrase by phrase, the Salve Regina prayer, "Hail Holy Queen, Mother of Mercy!". He says no sinner should ever fear rejection from **this** Mother. He speaks of an old woman who had lived a life of sin and was banished to a cave where she died in a state of corruption and was buried in a field like a beast. A nun who had the habit of commending to God the souls of those who died didn't bother to commend this poor woman, believing she was damned. After four years a soul from purgatory appeared to the nun and asked why she had no pity on her and did not commend her soul to God. When the nun asked who she was, she said she was that old woman who died alone in the cave. When the nun asked how she was saved, the woman answered, "**By the mercy of the Virgin Mary,**" for when she knew she had no one else, she begged Our Lady for help as her only hope. The woman then told the nun she needed to have Masses offered for her in order to be finally released from purgatory. She again appeared to thank the nun when she was released.

Our Lady also declared her mercy for poor sinners to St. Bridget in these words:

No matter how numerous a person's sins may be, if he turns to me with a sincere purpose of amendment, I am prepared forthwith to receive him graciously, for I do not regard the number of sins he has committed, but look only upon the dispositions with which he comes to me; for I feel no aversion in healing his wounds, because I am called and am in truth the Mother of Mercy.

Our Lady of America® addressed her sorrows to Sister Mildred Mary Neuzil.

Beloved daughter, you wonder at the sword and the deep wound it has made in my Heart. It is the sword of grief plunged therein by my children who refuse to let me teach them the true way. ... See, I weep, but my children show

me no compassion. They behold the sword in my heart but will make no move to withdraw it. I give them love; they give me only ingratitude. Weep then, dear child, weep with your Mother over the sins of men.

(Sr. Mildred Mary Neuzil, The Diary, OUR LADY OF AMERICA©, Fostoria, OH, Pg. 34.)

With respect to the name Maris Stella, Our Lady was truly a Star of Hope for so many of her children kidnapped and enslaved in the 13th century when Barbary pirates from North Africa raided the coasts of Spain, Italy, England and Ireland, taking many of the local people captive. Often the villages were burned to the ground. Being captured by the Saracens became the fear of every coastal land. Religious orders sprang up to help these imprisoned Christians. Members would beg for funds to buy the release, the ransom of prisoners, from their captors. The Mercedarians, established in 1218 and dedicated to Our Lady of Mercy, known as Our Lady of Ransom in England, was founded by St. Peter Nolasco who devoted his life to ransoming Christians from the Moors, a society that depended on slaves. The money paid for the release of slaves was called *ransom money*. Again, Our Lady was that merciful Mother who brought hope to so many kidnapped on the stormy seas. Maris Stella! Star of the sea! Reference: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11770b.htm>

Mary again pledges to Sister Mildred her desire to deliver us from all evil and expresses her need for our help in ransoming so many trapped in slavery to sin.

Have confidence, dear one, I am your Mother and will never leave you.
(Diary, Pg. 46.) **Help me save those who will not save themselves. Help me bring once again the sunshine of God's peace upon the world.** (Diary, Pg. 15.)

In a letter dated May of 1957 Sister Mildred describes Our Lady's appearance as the Mother of Mercy. With her arms extended and her blue mantle affording a safe refuge for the sinner, she said:

I am the Mother of Mercy. Under my mantle I will hide my children. The justice of God will not reach them if they seek refuge beneath the protection of my mercy. My Son gives to me all those souls who come to me with confidence, calling upon my aid. Their salvation is in my hands. I will obtain for them the necessary graces to save their souls.

Come to me, poor, suffering and frightened ones. I am your Mother. Never will I forsake you. Only come to me with a wholehearted and loving trust. Place your souls into my keeping. I am that faithful Mother who never forsakes her children. Honor me by your confidence and love. This I desire and ask of you my poor children. Do not deny the wishes of your Mother.



Maria deMercede, fresco by Domenico Ghirlandaio, ca1472

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