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Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Date: Monday, September 8, 2025 | **Season:** Ordinary Time after Easter | **Year:** C
First Reading: Micah 5:1–4a
Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 13:6a–c | **Response:** Psalm 61:10
Gospel Acclamation: Blessed are you, holy Virgin Mary and most worthy of all praise for the sun of justice, Christ our God was born of you.
Gospel Reading: Matthew 1:1–16, 18–23 or Matthew 1:18–23
Preached at: the Chapel of Emmaus House **in the** Archdiocese of Harare, Zimbabwe**.**

In our lives, big things often start small. A baby's first breath. A word of forgiveness. A hand held in grief. These don't make headlines, but they change everything. The same is true with God. He begins in quiet places — and the birth of Mary was just such a beginning. We can imagine it as a planting of a seed.

For centuries, God's promise waited beneath the surface. The prophets spoke of it. The faithful prayed through long, silent years. Kings and shepherds walked over the land, unaware of the treasure hidden in its soil. And then, in a quiet house in Nazareth, the earth stirred. A child was born. The seed broke through.

The Church has remembered Mary's birth for many centuries — at least since the 500s. The celebration began in the Eastern churches, where Christians kept it as a quiet feast, full of hope. They weren't just marking the day a child was born, but the day God's plan moved one step closer to fulfilment.

We don't find the story of Mary's birth in the Bible. But early Christians shared stories that her parents were named Joachim and Anne. For many years they had no children. They prayed. They waited. They carried their sadness quietly. Then, in their old age, God gave them a daughter. Not just any child — but the one who would one day say "yes" to the angel, and carry God's Son in her womb.

So this feast is not only about something that happened long ago. It also reminds us how God works: quietly, patiently, and often in ways we don't understand at first. Mary's birth is like the sky just before sunrise.

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For many years, it was also the tradition for Jesuits - especially those in Europe - to begin their novitiate on 7th September, and to take their first vows on 8th September. Even our beginnings were placed under Mary's gentle light. There's not much to see yet — but everything is about to change.

The prophet Micah points us to Bethlehem — not a big city, not a place of wealth or power. Just a dusty village on the edge of the map. But its name means "House of Bread," and from it would come the One who would feed the world. God's kingdom does not begin in palaces. It starts in fields and backyards, in villages people forget, in places too small to impress. That's His way: greatness hidden in the ordinary, eternal things planted in time.

Isaiah sings a song of joy: "I exult in the Lord." This is not a shallow or passing feeling. It's the deep joy of someone who has seen the first green shoot after a dry season and knows that the harvest will come. In Zimbabwe, we understand this kind of hope — planting with one eye on the sky and waiting for signs of rain. We know that life often starts before we can see it.

Matthew's Gospel gives us a family tree — name after name, generation after generation. Some of those names are strong and honoured. Others carry pain and scandal. Tamar. Rahab. Ruth. Women from the edges of Israel's story, brought into the heart of it. Kings and carpenters all on the same line. And at the end: Mary. Her Hebrew name, Miryam, like her life, holds sorrow and love together. Hers is a soil made rich by both tears and trust. In her, the Word of God will take root.

St Ignatius invites us to step into that house in Nazareth. To see St Anne, tired from labour, holding her newborn close. Hear the baby's first cry — ordinary to human ears, but a trumpet in heaven. Step outside with Joseph into the cool morning air. Look to the east. The sky is beginning to glow. The light has begun.

The seed planted in Mary will become the tree of the Cross. The light that began at her birth will shine fully when Christ rises from the tomb. And once God has begun, no darkness can stop His work.

Catholic Social Teaching reminds us that God continues to plant seeds — justice, mercy, peace — in every generation. In Zimbabwe today, those seeds grow in a child learning to read. In a family that stays together through hardship. In a

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parish that feeds the hungry with what little it has. These beginnings may seem too small to matter — but so did Mary's birth in the shadow of the Roman Empire. And still, the seed grew. Still, the light spread.

The Nativity of Mary calls us to be patient gardeners, and people who rise early to watch for dawn. To care for the small signs of grace that God has entrusted to us. To keep our eyes open for light. And to trust that what God has begun, He will bring to harvest.

The seed will grow.
The light will spread.
And the world will be changed.

Let us reflect this week:

- What seed of God's grace has been planted in me — and how am I looking after it?
- Where do I see signs that God's light is rising — in my family, my community, or my country?
- If I were standing beside St Anne when Mary was born, what blessing would I speak — and how can I live that blessing today?

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In preparing this homily, I consulted various resources to deepen my understanding of today's readings, including using Magisterium AI for assistance. The final content remains the responsibility of the author.