



The Parish Churches of S Philip and S Augustine and S Matthew with S Mary the Virgin Newcastle

Homily for the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary (8th September) 2025

As we gather to mark Our Lady's Birthday, it is the fact of the birth rather than the day itself, which we celebrate. Even if we possessed a contemporary document detailing the day of her birth, translating that through the various calendrical changes over the centuries would make identifying the exact day more of an art than a science. On the other hand, we can be certain that Mary was born.

However, to offer you a glimpse of the obvious, we only celebrate Mary's birthday, because she is the Mother of Jesus; and when she was born, the Birth of her Son was yet to come. So, at the time, except for her parents, Anne and Joachim, and their family and friends, her birth was an unremarkable event; and had history not unfolded as it did, would likely have slipped below the waves of history's advancing tide of forgetfulness.

Yet, in course, Mary did give birth to Jesus - the Christ, the Son of God - and so posterity shone a new light on her own birthday, giving it a significance, which was not apparent to human beings at the time. Here, we come across an important point for Christians.

The birth of Mary did not become significant, because random subsequent events interacted with it, but because she was the pre-ordained Mother of Jesus; her birth was significant at the time, but that significance was not yet discernible; in other words, the event was intrinsically significant. This points to a phenomenon, which is interwoven into the long centuries of Judeo-Christianity: Providence: the interaction of God with human history to influence how it unfolds.

Discerning the presence of Providence in human affairs is always a delicate undertaking. On the one hand, of course, the occurrence of Providence is from the Christian perspective indubitably part of the passing of the years: it is written into the history, which brings us here this evening. On the other hand, however, there is a constant risk that we shall wilfully detect the hand of God in the events and outcomes of which we approve at the time - from a trivial piece of luck to the momentous results of great struggles.

Discerning the influence of Providence can never be a momentary judgement. Like Mary, we need to ponder the events of our lives and reflect on how what we discover and experience today sheds a different light on the events of the past: to try and understand whether the mere randomness of serendipity has given greater significance to things in our past or whether we can, indeed, see the fingerprints of our God working His Purpose in the world.

Undertaking this task is important for our Christian discipleship, because it will guide our future choices and actions. Providence is a revelation of God and His Will: an indication, so to speak, of His direction of travel. If we can accurately grasp this so far as it relates to our lives, then we shall be able more faithfully to serve Him as the years pass.

An essential part of our Christian discipleship is to think back over our lives and ask ourselves whether, for one reason or another, we have missed the significance of events at the time in which they transpired: whether the subsequent accumulation of experiences and insights sheds a light on them, which we did not or could not see at the time. In turn, we must wonder what this suggests for the choices we will make in the future.

Contemplation not just of her birth, but Mary's whole life has served to broaden and also refine our understanding of the Christian Faith. It was a process, which had begun by the time that the later Gospels were written; and one that continues to this day. Amongst many other things, commemorating her birth reminds us that the divine Purpose has been weaving its way through history, as Saint Paul suggests in his letter to the Romans, towards the day when Christ was born and continues as we progress towards the consummation of the age.