



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) 2026

Generally speaking, the Scriptural readings on festivals follow a pattern. The Gospel reading describes the person or event being celebrated and the Epistle furnishes a theological comment on the subject. Of course, there is no account of the Birth of Mary, so, instead, today, we have Saint Matthew's genealogy of Jesus into which, as it were, Mary marries, as she accepts her role of being His Mother. The passage culminates in the reconciling of Joseph with the part that he must play as Jesus' step-father.

The Epistle - an extract from Saint Paul's Letter to the Church in Rome - speaks of the unfolding Purpose of God and the fact that He prepares individuals for the part that they will play in the unfolding Purpose. Whilst much could be said about Saint Joseph in the context of the Gospel reading, it is to his wife that we turn our attentions this evening; and infer from the Epistle that, in the words of the text, she was predestined for, called to and justified for the role, which we now consider the most exalted of all Christian - human - vocations.

Yet, it is our conviction that for all this divine preparation of Mary, the outcome was not certain: the choice of whether or not to become the Mother of Jesus was hers and it was free - she could have said, "No." God may have known that she would not, but His foreknowledge that she would not did not fetter her freedom when the moment came.

Of the many strands of reflexion, which emerge from, as we might put it, the phenomenon, which is Mary, one is the Church's view that in her we have a revelation of the nature of the Christian vocation - our own call within the divine Purpose.

Without seeking to cast human history as the context in which our own glorious part in God's Purpose plays out, we do believe that each of us has a particular role for which we have been prepared - perhaps in the lineage, which delivered us to our generation - but certainly in the experiences of our lives, which provide us with a set of perspectives and capacities drawing us towards a defined part in God's mission within the society in which He has placed us.

Like Mary, despite the divine initiative in our lives, the choice of action is ours; and we are free to ignore the promptings of our circumstances and refuse the vocation, which is ours - to say, "No."

It follows, first, therefore, that part of the Christian task is to discern what it is that God asks of us: to reflect on our experiences and situation and infer the part that we are called to play in His unfolding Purpose; and then, secondly, to ask for the Grace to enable us to fulfil the role, which is ours.

Moreover, returning to the Epistle, as we contemplate all of this, we might consider another factor. Saint Paul's description of the incremental work of Redemption takes us through the stages of preparation, call, justification and glorification. This, viewed through the prism of Mary's example, might suggest that responding to our particular vocation is an element in the course of our Redemption - in other words, the path to Heaven takes us through the role for which we have been prepared by our Maker. This must be correct, because it is only when our wills converge with God's Will that we shall be ready to take a place in Heaven.

Therefore, although the Epistle passage is applied to our recollection of Mary this evening, our prayer must be that one day it will elucidate also the lives that are ours.