

THE NINE MONTHS OF THE CHILD JESUS IN THE WOMB OF MARY

Each year on December 25 we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. For centuries the Church has also celebrated his conception on March 25, the feast of the Annunciation. Our parish Respect Life Committee invites you to a special Mass at 7:30 PM on March 25th to begin a nine month commemoration of the gestation of the Child Jesus in Mary's womb.

THE FIRST MONTH - MARCH 25 TO APRIL 25

"Hail Mary, Full of Grace, the Lord is with thee..." With her acceptance of God's will, Mary's body prepares to carry Jesus in her womb. During this first month of pregnancy, the baby's heart is beating, and by the 20th day, the brain, spinal cord and nervous system are developed. He has arms, legs, eyes, ears, kidneys, a liver, a mouth and an umbilical cord. A placenta forms as a barrier to keep his mother's blood separate, while allowing nourishment and oxygen to pass through. The awesome news that a mother is with child can be greeted with great joy or dread-filled sorrow. Each year in the U.S. some 1.6 million mothers and fathers choose to still those beating hearts and reject those budding lives.

Pray for all mothers and fathers that they may choose life for their unborn children.

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THE SECOND MONTH - APRIL 25 TO MAY 25

Surely by now Mary has told her parents, Joachim and Anne, of her pregnancy. What must they think? How will they tell Mary's betrothed, Joseph the Carpenter? The law would have Mary stoned for adultery. They must trust in God! Today's unwed teenage mother may never know the comfort of loving parents or the warmth of understanding support. Without parental guidance or knowledge, the law allows her to terminate an infant before it has begun its journey into life. At two months, the child in the womb has a fully functioning body with fingers, toes, a brain, its tiny heart beating twice as fast as an adult's. His milk-teeth are present at 6 ½ weeks. Though only a little over an inch, it is now apparent that the baby is a boy or girl.

Pray for teens in crisis pregnancies, that God will strengthen them to make the right choice.

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THE THIRD MONTH - MAY 25 TO JUNE 25

Faith-filled Joseph, believing the revelation that he is to be the protector of the Messiah, bravely stands by Mary's side, offering his strength and sense of mission as her body begins to accommodate her child. How many fathers have abandoned the mothers of their children? Indeed, how many fathers who have treasured a child never know of its existence or of its terrible end? Babies are denied life who can at this stage hear, open and close their lips, hiccup and suck their thumbs. At three inches, the baby now begins to kick, curl and fan toes, make a fist, and practice breathing.

Pray for all fathers that they may use the awesome power of life-giving to be a true protector.

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THE FOURTH MONTH - JUNE 25 TO JULY 25

Mary now takes her place in village society as a married woman and expectant mother. Family and friends gather materials to weave the swaddling garments in which her child is to be clothed. At four months, Jesus' organs are functioning and his heart is pumping 6 ½ gallons of blood each day. Approximately 6 inches in length, fine hair covers his body, eyelashes and brows are showing as well as unique fingerprints which will remain the same all his life. He is comforted by listening to his mother's heartbeat. Sadly, 160,000 abortions per year take place after the fourth month.

Pray for expectant mothers that they will find support to make life's realization possible.

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THE FIFTH MONTH - JULY 25 TO AUGUST 25

It is now apparent, even in the shapeless fashions of her time, that Mary is with child. Little can she imagine an innkeeper in Bethlehem who will in the future offer her all that he can in hospitality? At five months there is no mistaking Jesus' presence. Mothers feel baby's reaction when startled by outside noises or even a subtle hiccup. The baby now tastes of what he drinks. Sweet is fine; sour, uh-uh! The baby is now 10 inches long and weighs more than a half pound. Despite these evidence of life, 44 abortions are performed each day in the U.S. on women carrying a child five months or older.

Pray for all who respect and foster life through education, support and peaceful witnessing.

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THE SIXTH MONTH - AUGUST 25 TO SEPTEMBER 25

Mary now feels the quickening of the Child Jesus that proclaims his presence within her womb. She sings to him and feels his response. At six months, a special covering (vernix) forms to protect the baby's skin from the fetal waters. The baby's eyes, closed since the seventh week, are now open to its surroundings. The infant is now 12 inches long and weighs 1 ½ pounds. This baby could survive birth. Despite the fact that a child of six months has a chance at life, women may legally abort their unborn at any time throughout the nine months of their pregnancy.

Pray for all physicians, midwives and nurses that they may recognize the sanctity of life and God as the author of life.

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THE SEVENTH MONTH – SEPTEMBER 25 TO OCTOBER 25

Mary and Joseph knew in advance that their baby would be a boy. And although Jesus was not his biological child, Joseph eagerly anticipated his birth. By the seventh month, the baby's hands grip strongly. His eyelids open and close as he surveys his increasingly cramped surroundings. The baby is now 15 inches long and weighs 2-3 pounds. The infant Jesus listens intently for his mother's recognizable voice. A child of seven months would survive birth. Four to 20 couples wait to adopt each available child. The average abortion takes 5-10 minutes. The average wait for adoption is 2-10 years.

Pray for all adoptive parents who provide the loving care and nourishing environment which every child deserves, and for foster parents who lend their hearts and homes to those whose fates hang in the balance.

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THE EIGHTH MONTH – OCTOBER 25 TO NOVEMBER 25

Mary's pregnancy is nearing its completion. The crib and baby clothing are ready. But the best laid plans are sometimes turned upside down. The village is abuzz with the news that those of the House of David will be called shortly to Bethlehem to be counted among this princely dynasty. In Mary's eight month, the Infant Jesus' skin begins to thicken and layers of fat are stored underneath for insulation and nourishment. Antibodies are building up. Jesus' quarters are getting cramped; chin on chest, his knees, arms and legs are bent. Many twins are born in the eighth month.

Pray for physicians and health care providers to foster the reverence for life.

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This is the last in a series of nine monthly reflections on the development of Jesus in the womb. Our parish Respect life committee began the series on March 25 when we celebrated the Feast of the Annunciation. Soon we will celebrate the wonderful Feast of the Birth of Jesus at Christmas.

THE NINTH MONTH - NOVEMBER 25 TO DECEMBER 25

Bolstered by provisions and buoyed upon a cushion of carpets, Mary perches upon their patient donkey as she and Joseph start their journey. The trip to Bethlehem should take four days, but Mary's pregnancy forces them to travel slowly. Do they perhaps fall behind their fellow travelers? Soon they will be entrusted with the life of God made man. How must they reflect on this awesome responsibility as they journey toward their destiny? At nine months, the baby is posed head down for its descent into the world. At birth, approximately 280 days from conception, a baby normally weighs from 6-9 pounds; it may be 19-21 inches long. Its tiny heart pumps 300 gallons of blood per day. How can this not be a child?

Give prayerful thanks to God for his most precious gift to humanity—Jesus Christ, his only son.