



Where Did Our Lady's Birthday Come From?

Scripture never records Mary's birth — not the day, not the place, not even her parents' names. So why has the Church kept her birthday for fifteen hundred years, and how do we know what we know? Two ancient documents, sixteen centuries of witnesses, and one throne at the right hand of the King.

THE TWO SOURCES BEHIND THIS SHEET

SOURCE ONE — THE STORY

The Protoevangelium of James

WRITTEN	c. A.D. 145–200 (most often 150–180)
BY WHOM	Anonymous, published under the name of James, “the Lord’s brother”
WHERE	Probably Syria ; Egypt also argued (de Strycker)
LANGUAGE	Greek
OLDEST COPY	Papyrus Bodmer V, Egypt, late 3rd–early 4th c.
FIRST NAMED	Origen, <i>Comm. on Matthew</i> X.17, c. A.D. 248 (Clement alludes earlier)
STATUS	Not Scripture. Apocryphal; refused by the West

SOURCE TWO — THE MEANING

St. Andrew of Crete, Discourse on the Nativity

PREACHED	c. A.D. 700–730
BY WHOM	Archbishop of Gortyna, Crete; born Damascus c. 650–660, died July 4 (712–740; usually 740)
WHERE	Crete / Constantinople; formed at Mar Saba, Jerusalem
LANGUAGE	Greek — <i>Oratio I</i> , PG 97, 805–812
ALSO KNOWN	Author of the Great Canon of Repentance
STATUS	Read in the Roman Office of Readings today — and on Orthodox parish websites this morning

AN HONEST WORD ABOUT THE OLDER SOURCE

One of these is a story the Church sifted. The other is a sermon the Church still prays.

The *Protoevangelium* is not inspired and never was. It gets Palestinian geography wrong, it was written a century after the events, and the name on it is not the author's. What it is — and this is the whole point — is the **earliest surviving written evidence of what Christians already believed about Mary**. The Church did with it exactly what she should have: kept the names and the shape of the story, canonized none of the text, and threw out the rest. St. Jerome defended the very doctrine the book was defending while calling its details “the ravings of the apocryphal accounts.” That is discernment, not invention.

WHY THIS MATTERS ON SEPTEMBER 8

The Church keeps only three birthdays.

Every other saint is celebrated on his *dies natalis* — the day he died, his birthday into heaven. Only three earthly birthdays appear on the Roman calendar: **Jesus Christ** (Dec. 25), **St. John the Baptist** (June 24), and **the Blessed Virgin Mary** (Sept. 8). The reason given by tradition is simple: these three were already holy when they were born. Christ is sinless by nature; John was sanctified in the womb at the Visitation; Mary was preserved from all stain from the first moment of her conception. Everyone else had to be washed first — so we keep the day they finished the race, not the day they started it.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Mary's birthday was being celebrated *very early* in the life of the Church. In the second century there is already a pious retelling of it, and by the eighth century the feast is kept right across the Church. September 8 was honored as the birthday of the Blessed Virgin Mary — daughter of Joachim and Anne, mother of Jesus — *at least as early as the early eighth century*.



The Book That Gave Us Joachim and Anne

A short Greek narrative about Mary — her conception, her birth, her childhood in the Temple. Not Scripture. But every statue of St. Anne, every July 26 memorial, and today's feast itself traces back through it.

THE NATIVITY ACCOUNT — CHAPTERS 1–5, IN BRIEF

Joachim, a rich and righteous Israelite, brings his offering to the Temple and is turned away by Rubim (Reuben) because he has fathered no child in Israel. Humiliated, he withdraws into the wilderness to fast forty days and forty nights. At home his wife Anna puts on mourning; her maidservant taunts her; Anna goes down to her garden, sits beneath a laurel tree, and laments that the birds, the beasts, the waters and the earth are all fruitful before God, and she alone is not. An angel comes to her; an angel comes to him. Anna meets Joachim at the gate of the city and runs to him. In the ninth month she bears a daughter and calls her name **Mary**. At six months the child walks seven steps; her mother makes a sanctuary of her bedchamber; and at three years old she is carried up to the Temple and set upon the step of the altar — *“and she danced with her feet, and all the house of Israel loved her.”*

THE QUOTES WORTH READING ALOUD — VERBATIM, NEW ADVENT TRANSLATION

“It is not meet for you first to bring your offerings, because you have not made seed in Israel.”

CH. 1 — RUBIM TURNS JOACHIM AWAY

“I will not go down either for food or for drink until the Lord my God shall look upon me, and prayer shall be my food and drink.”

CH. 1 — JOACHIM IN THE WILDERNESS

“Alas! To what have I been likened? I am not like the fowls of the heaven... I am not like the beasts of the earth... I am not like these waters... I am not like this earth...”

CH. 3 — ANNA'S FOURFOLD LAMENT UNDER THE LAUREL

“Anna, Anna, the Lord has heard your prayer, and you shall conceive, and shall bring forth.”

CH. 4 — THE ANGEL TO ANNA

“And Anna stood by the gate, and saw Joachim coming, and she ran and hung upon his neck, saying: Now I know that the Lord God has blessed me exceedingly.”

CH. 4 — THE MEETING AT THE GATE

“And said Anna: My soul has been magnified this day... and she called her name Mary.”

CH. 5 — THE BIRTH AND THE NAMING

What the Church **kept**

- The names **Joachim and Anne** — nowhere in Scripture, nowhere earlier than here.
- Her birth to an aged, barren, righteous couple after an angel's promise.
- Her presentation and upbringing in the Temple (Nov. 21).
- Her **perpetual virginity** — this is its earliest written defense.
- Her **Davidic descent** (ch. 10): *“of the family of David, and undefiled before God.”*

What the Church **threw out**

- Its canonical claim — an early Western list of rejected books, traditionally called the *Gelasian Decree*, names it among the *libri apocryphi*.
- Its “brethren of the Lord” as Joseph's sons by a first marriage. Jerome kept the doctrine and substituted cousins.
- The midwife and Salome's withered hand. **Jerome**: *“No midwife assisted at His birth; no women's officiousness intervened.”*
- Its history. It proves what people **believed**, not what happened in Nazareth.

THE BOTTOM LINE

The Church never called this book Scripture — and never stopped honoring what it remembered. In the **second century**, Christians were already telling the story of Our Lady's birth.



SOURCE TWO — C. A.D. 700–730

“The Present Feastday Is for Us the Beginning of Feastdays”

St. Andrew of Crete on the Nativity of the Theotokos — a bishop born in Damascus, formed in Jerusalem, ordained in Constantinople, buried on a Greek island — and in the ear of both Latin and Byzantine Christians this morning.

Who he was

Born in Damascus c. 650–660; tonsured as a boy at the Lavra of St. Sabbas near Jerusalem; archdeacon of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople; then Metropolitan of Gortyna in Crete from roughly 692–711 until his death on July 4 — the one date every source agrees on — between 712 and 740.

He was not a plaster saint. Under imperial pressure at the synod of 712 he subscribed to the Monothelite heresy; in 713 he repented and returned to orthodoxy. The man who gave Christendom its greatest penitential hymn — the Great Canon still sung every Lent — had something of his own to repent of.

Why this sermon dates the feast

You *argue* for a new feast. You *expound* an old one. Andrew never defends Sept. 8; he assumes it, calls it “the beginning of feastdays” — a claim about rank within an existing calendar — and preached **several** sermons for the day.

The outside evidence lines up: a hymn for the feast at Constantinople c. 536–556, traditionally ascribed to **St.**

Romanos, and **Pope St. Sergius I** (687–701) prescribing a procession for it in Rome. By the time Andrew opened his mouth, Sept. 8 was already old news in two patriarchates.

THE QUOTES — VERBATIM

“The present feastday is for us the beginning of feastdays. Serving as boundary limit to the law and to foretypes, it at the same time serves as a doorway to grace and truth.”

ORATIO I — ENGLISH TRANSLATION CIRCULATING IN ORTHODOX SOURCES

“This radiant and manifest coming of God to men most certainly needed a joyful prelude to introduce the great gift of salvation to us. The present festival, the birth of the Mother of God, is the prelude, while the final act is the fore-ordained union of the Word with flesh.”

OFFICE OF READINGS, SEPT. 8 — ORATIO I: PG 97, 806–810

“Therefore, let all creation sing and dance and unite to make worthy contribution to the celebration of this day. Let there be one common festival for saints in heaven and men on earth.”

OFFICE OF READINGS, SEPT. 8

THE END OF BARRENNESS

“The constraints of infertility were destroyed — prayer, upright manner of life, these rendered them fruitful; the childless begat a Child, and the childless woman was made an happy mother.”

ORATIO I

“...From sterile and barren parents, as it were from irrigated trees, was borne for us a most glorious fruition.”

ORATIO I

THE NEW ADAM AND THE NEW EVE

“Woman’s nature suddenly is freed from the first curse, and just as the first did bring in sin, so also doth the first initiate salvation also.”

ORATIO I

“The Creator of Adam is made the New Adam, in order to save the old.”

ORATIO I

THE BOTTOM LINE

East and West both put Andrew of Crete in your ear today:
Rome *reads his homily*, and Byzantium *sings his canon*.



HOW OLD IS DEVOTION TO MARY?

The Earliest Witnesses to the Mother of God

Dated, located, and tracked on one question: how early were Christians naming, honoring, and praying to the Blessed Virgin Mary?

● NAMES OR HONORS MARY ● A LANDMARK — PRAYER, TITLE, OR DEFINITION

THE AGE OF PERSECUTION — BEFORE A.D. 313

Christianity is illegal and bishops cannot meet in open council. Every witness here is one man writing under threat of death — which makes what he takes for granted about Mary all the more telling.

c. 107 ● St. Ignatius of Antioch EN ROUTE TO ROME

Names Mary repeatedly, about a decade after St. John died. *"The virginity of Mary was hidden from the prince of this world, as was also her offspring, and the death of the Lord; three mysteries of renown"* (Ephesians 19).

c. 125-140 ● Aristides of Athens, *Apology* ATHENS

The virgin birth stands in the basic public summary of Christianity handed to a Roman emperor: *"God came down from heaven, and from a Hebrew virgin took and clad Himself with flesh."*

c. 155-160 ● St. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 100 ROME

The first explicit Eve-Mary parallel in Christian literature. *"Eve... conceived the word of the serpent, brought forth disobedience and death. But the Virgin Mary received faith and joy."*

c. 150-200 ● The Protoevangelium of James PROBABLY SYRIA

Joachim and Anna, the barren womb, the Temple childhood, the perpetual virginity. *Apocryphal* — never received as Scripture. Mary's birthday is not in the Bible; it is here.

c. 180-189 ● St. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* III.22.4 LYONS, GAUL

"The knot of Eve's disobedience was loosed by the obedience of Mary." In V.19.1 he calls Mary the *advocata* of Eve. Irenaeus heard Polycarp, who heard the Apostle John.

c. 206-212 ● Tertullian, *On the Flesh of Christ* 17 CARTHAGE

"Eve had believed the serpent: Mary believed Gabriel" (trans. Evans). The parallel crosses into Latin — and he is **the honest exception**: Tertullian denied her perpetual virginity, and ended among the Montanists.

c. 200-235 ● St. Hippolytus ROME

"He took upon Himself the holy flesh by the Holy Virgin" (On Christ and Antichrist 4).

3rd-7th c. ● "Sub Tuum Praesidium" papyrus EGYPT · P. RYL. III 470

The oldest surviving prayer addressed to Mary — and it already calls her *Theotokos*. It is attested in Jerusalem's liturgy by the fifth century, and the Church still prays it today: *"We fly to thy patronage, O holy Mother of God."*

c. 226-229 ● Origen, *Commentary on John* I.6 ALEXANDRIA

Assumes Mary had no other son, and reads Christ's word from the Cross as giving her as mother to every disciple: *"received from Jesus Mary to be his mother also."*

WHAT THIS PAGE SHOWS — AND WHAT IT DOESN'T

It does not prove the *Protoevangelium* is history — it proves what Christians already **believed**, and how early. Nor were the Fathers unanimous: Tertullian denied Mary's perpetual virginity, and Epiphanius said plainly that no one knew how her life ended. **A tradition that preserves its own dissenters is a tradition telling the truth.**

WHAT THIS HALF OF THE TIMELINE PROVES

Before Christianity was even legal, Christians were calling Mary the New Eve, defending her virginity, and *asking her to pray for them*.



When the Church Could Finally Say It Out Loud

After 313 the bishops can gather in the open — and what they had been saying quietly for two hundred years, they now say in council, in hymns, and in stone.

A.D. 313 — THE EDICT OF MILAN

Constantine legalizes Christianity. For the first time in 250 years bishops can meet openly — and Christians can build.

c. 319–324 ● **St. Alexander of Alexandria** ALEXANDRIA

The earliest securely datable use of **Theotokos** — “God-bearer” — by a named author, more than a century before Ephesus.

c. 340s ● **St. Athanasius** ALEXANDRIA

Uses *Theotokos* casually and repeatedly — the mark of standard vocabulary, not a novelty. St. Cyril would later appeal to exactly this precedent.

c. 350–373 ● **St. Ephrem the Syrian** NISIBIS / EDESSA, SYRIA

A hymn sung in Syriac a century before Ephesus: “*Thou and thy Mother are the only ones who are totally beautiful in every respect; for in thee, O Lord, there is no spot, and in thy Mother no stain*” (*Carmina Nisibena* 27).

c. 374–377 ● **St. Epiphanius, Panarion 78–79** SALAMIS, CYPRUS

Defends her perpetual virginity and condemns a sect that offered cakes to her. On her death: “*No one knows her end.*” The Church was still working.

c. 380s ● **St. Ambrose** MILAN

Father of Latin Marian doctrine: Mary as the *type of the Church* and the model of virgins. He is the bishop who catechized Augustine.

383 ● **St. Jerome, Against Helvidius** ROME

The first full-dress defense of Mary ever-virgin: “*That Mary was married after she brought forth, we do not believe, because we do not read it.*”

415 ● **St. Augustine, On Nature and Grace 42** HIPPO, NORTH AFRICA

“*We must except the holy Virgin Mary, concerning whom I wish to raise no question when it touches the subject of sins, out of honour to the Lord.*”

431 ● **THE COUNCIL OF EPHESUS** EPHESUS, ASIA MINOR

Theotokos defined — and note the logic: the council is defending who *Jesus* is. St. Cyril's First Anathema, read at Ephesus: “*If anyone will not confess that the Emmanuel is very God, and that therefore the Holy Virgin is the Mother of God... let him be anathema.*”

432–440 ● **Santa Maria Maggiore** ROME

Pope St. Sixtus III raises the **first great Marian basilica of the West** — immediately after Ephesus. Rome answered a doctrinal definition by building the Mother of God a house.

c. 434 ● **The “Memory of Mary”** JERUSALEM · ARMENIAN LECTIONARY

The earliest known Marian feast anywhere — kept on **August 15** at the second mile from Bethlehem, celebrating her divine maternity.

456 ● **The Kathisma Church** JERUSALEM–BETHLEHEM ROAD

The earliest church strictly dedicated to Mary in the Holy Land, built by the widow Ikelia — and her candle procession there is an ancestor of Candlemas.

WHAT THIS TIMELINE PROVES

Marian devotion is not medieval, not Counter-Reformation, and not borrowed from paganism.
It is *second-century* — and the Fathers who record it also record their own dissenters.



How September 8 Became a Feast

From a story with no chapter in the Bible, to a church in Jerusalem, to a procession through the Roman Forum, to the calendar on your wall.

c. 150–200 ● The story is written down PROTOEVANGELIUM OF JAMES

Mary's birth to Joachim and Anna enters Christian memory in writing. This is also exactly why the West was slower than the East to adopt the feast — the story is known only from an apocryphal source.

5th–6th c. ● A church by the Sheep Pool JERUSALEM

The likeliest origin of the date itself. A Byzantine basilica called “*St. Mary where she was born*,” by the Probatica, over the grotto venerated as the home of Joachim and Anne — the site of today's Church of St. Anne. **September 8 is very probably its dedication anniversary.**

c. 536–556 ● St. Romanos the Melodist CONSTANTINOPLE

A hymn composed *for the feast*, traditionally ascribed to St. Romanos — the earliest datable liturgical evidence that Sept. 8 is being kept.

687–701 ● POPE ST. SERGIUS I ROME

Sicilian-born of a Syrian family, at home in both liturgies, Sergius prescribes a litany and procession from St. Adrian in the Forum to St. Mary Major on **four** Marian feasts: the Annunciation, the Dormition, the Purification, and **the Nativity of the Virgin**. The moment the feast becomes a public, city-wide reality in Rome.

c. 700–730 ● St. Andrew of Crete preaches on it CRETE

Several full festal sermons — and he calls it “the beginning of feastsdays,” a claim about *rank within an existing calendar*. (See page 3.)

7th–9th c. ● The Sacramentaries ROME / FRANCIA

The feast appears in the Gelasian and Gregorian Sacramentaries — the working liturgical books of the Latin Church.

799 ● The Carolingian synods NORTH OF THE ALPS

Four feasts of the Mother of God are prescribed for the north — Purification, Annunciation, Assumption, and **the Nativity, September 8**. Fully naturalized by A.D. 800.

1243 ● Pope Innocent IV adds the octave ROME

In fulfillment of a vow made by the cardinals during the miserable, deadlocked conclave of autumn 1241: if Our Lady got them out of it, they would give her birthday an octave. She did. They did.

Why December 8 is exactly nine months later

September came first. The Immaculate Conception was calculated *backward* from Our Lady's birthday, not the other way around.

The proof is in the East, where the Conception of St. Anne is kept on **December 9** — one day off, not a tidy nine months. The West regularized it to December 8 so it would land exactly nine months before September 8 — just what you would expect from a feast that grew out of a church dedication rather than a decree.

Council of London, 1129; established for the whole Latin Church by Sixtus IV, 1476; defined as dogma by Pius IX, Dec. 8, 1854.

Four feasts grew from one story

Everything the Church keeps about Mary's own beginnings traces back through that same second-century narrative — and Rome carried all four in procession under Pope Sergius I.

- **The Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary** — September 8 (today).
- **The Immaculate Conception** — December 8, nine months before today.
- **The Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary** — November 21, her Temple childhood.
- **Sts. Joachim and Anne** — July 26; their names reach us from this story alone.

THE BOTTOM LINE

December 8 exists because September 8 exists.

The Church counted *backward* nine months from Our Lady's birthday. Today is the older feast.



Queen Mother and Intercessor in the Kingdom of Her Son

Why a child born on this day would one day sit at the right hand of the Son of David — and why the King cannot refuse her.

1. The pattern written in blood

Run it through Scripture and it declares itself: when a key figure in salvation history commits grave sin, he lets that sin into his house and it devastates his family. Adam loses the Garden. Cain kills Abel and is driven out — and God Himself steps into the gap to protect the murderer, because the excommunication was **mercy, issued in hope that the sinner would return**. The family of God keeps tearing itself apart — and again and again, the one who steps into the breach is a **woman**.

2. The wise woman of Tekoa

David's son Amnon violates his half-sister Tamar. Absalom waits two years for a justice his father never delivers, kills Amnon, and flees. One son kills the other; the survivor is cast out and hunted — Genesis 4 again. But this time the mediator is not God. It is a woman who calls herself **"your handmaid."**

"Help, O king... your handmaid had two sons, and they quarreled with one another in the field... and so they would destroy the heir also."

2 SAMUEL 14:4-7 (RSVCE)

Hold that word: *handmaid* signifies a total gift of self — and it takes courage to intercede for a killer when the whole family wants his blood.

3. Bathsheba and the throne of the Gebirah

"And the king rose to meet her, and bowed down to her... and had a seat brought for the king's mother; and she sat on his right... 'Make your request, my mother; for I will not refuse you.'"

1 KINGS 2:19-20 (RSVCE)

Solomon does not seat a wife beside him, or a general, or a priest. **His mother** — the Gebirah, "the great lady." Scripture names the queen mother for king after king of Judah down to the exile (cf. Jer. 13:18, 20), and she is always the *mother*, never the wife. The office is not merely ceremonial: **she is the advocate of the people in the court of her son.**

Note what it is not. Adonijah knew the King would receive his mother's petition — that is why he sent it through Bathsheba. His mistake was not *whom* he asked but *what*: David's last concubine, a claim on the throne. It became his death warrant.

4. THE HANDMAID OF THE LORD

"Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord."

Gabriel greets her *kecharitomene* — "full of grace" — a perfect passive participle in a form found nowhere else in the New Testament: completed action, abiding result. She **has been graced, and stands in that grace**. And she answers, *"Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord"* (Lk. 1:38). **The Gebirah has arrived.**

At Cana, John counts the days like Genesis and arrives at a wedding where only two figures matter. In John's Gospel Mary is never named — and here Jesus calls her **"Woman,"** Adam's word at the first wedding. The new Eve does what the first Eve would not: she **intercedes**. *"They have no wine."* He answers, *"My hour has not yet come"* — and **His hour, in John, is the hour of His glorification: the Cross**. She is asking her Son to start the clock, knowing a sword will pierce her own soul too. Then: *"Do whatever he tells you."*

And in Revelation 12 the dragon cannot catch her, defile her, or claim her — total enmity, exactly as Genesis 3:15 promised. So he turns his rage on **the rest of her offspring, "those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus"** (Rev. 12:17). **That is you.** And from the Cross Christ said not "John, remember My mother," but **"Behold, your mother"** (Jn. 19:27).

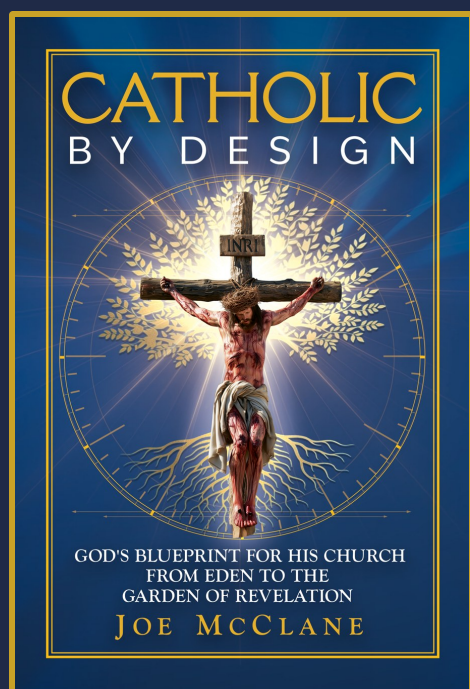
THE BOTTOM LINE

Solomon rose for his mother, bowed to her, and enthroned her at his right hand.
The Kingdom is built that way. The Gebirah intercedes; the King honors her.



FROM THE AUTHOR OF THIS CHEAT SHEET

**She is the New Eve. She is the Gebirah.
She is your mother —
and she is praying for you right now.**



★★★★★

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VERIFIED AMAZON REVIEW — CATHOLIC BY DESIGN

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