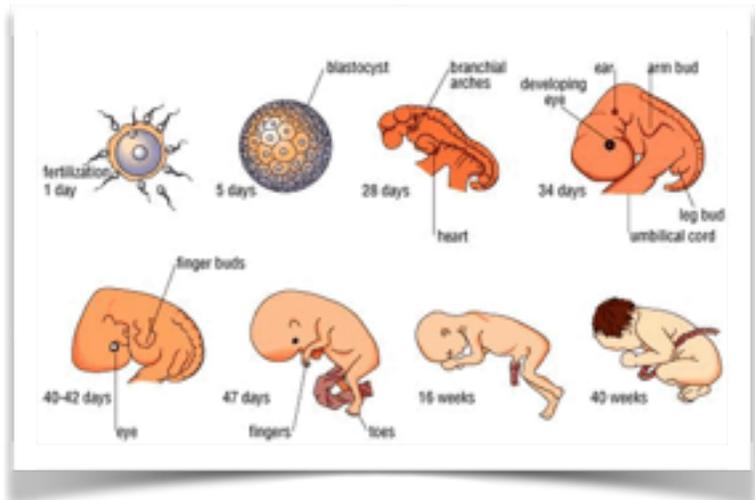


Intriguing Facts about Jesus' First Days in the Womb

A lion is called a *carnivore* because it eats flesh. *Caro* is the Latin for flesh. You see this root word in *incarnation*—something made in the flesh. Jesus Christ in God incarnate or God taking on flesh. So, when did the enfleshment of God take place? At what moment was God incarnate? In Bethlehem, correct? No! He was incarnate nine months before Bethlehem. It took place at the Annunciation in Nazareth. In fact, written on the the altar where Gabriel spoke to Mary it says, “The Word became flesh HERE!” (In Latin, “*verbum caro hic factum est*”)

So the very first cells in Mary’s womb were 100% human and 100% divine. This was so even though at that point you could barely see the cells with the human eye—you’d need a microscope.

“Ah,” says the pro-abortion, “but it was not human yet since there were only indistinct cells. At this stage of development it is not a baby, not even an embryo—he is a blastocyst! Those cells have just begun differentiation; it is certainly not baby, or person, or anything you could call a human being.”



Or really? Let’s look closer. What did Mary do when the angel left her? St. Luke tells us, “In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a city of Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth” (Lu 1:39). So let’s estimate that the fifteen year old pregnant Mary left for Elizabeth’s house within a few days of the announcement. Remember, it says “went with haste.”



How long would it take her to arrive? Most people just assume Mary jumped in a taxi and shot across town but there were no taxis and the journey was one hundred miles from Nazareth to Ein Kerem. It would take at least five to seven days to walk that distance by foot.

When we take our pilgrims to the Holy Land their eyes are opened to many things. How far is this place from that place? Where was the Temple in relationship to Gethsemane? How far did Mary

walk to visit Elizabeth? On the bus from Nazareth to Jerusalem, sometimes when it is very hot, I love to remind my pilgrims, “Don’t forget, Mary is still walking. You are in an air-conditioned bus with drinks and snacks, but Mary is still walking!”

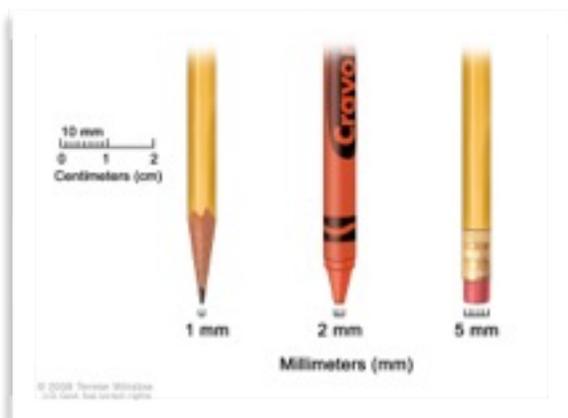
Remember the man bushwhacked by the robbers on the way from Jerusalem to Jericho? You know, the story of the Good Samaritan? It was dangerous to travel alone. Not only thieves and brigands lurked behind the rocks, but I’ve seen hyena’s and vipers and foxes while walking through Israel. In Mary’s day there were still lions and bears (they became extinct in Israel in the 13th century). She would need to arrange her journey to accompany her family, friends, or most likely join a caravan. So, by the time Mary arrived in Ein Kerem she was probably pregnant no more than two weeks.



In this stage of a normal pregnancy, the fertilized egg has just recently implanted itself in the walls of the mother’s uterus. The cells have begun to display some differentiation and the scientific name for the cluster of cells is *blastocyst*. The *blastocyst* is made up of several hundred cells and is about 1 millimeter in size (.039 inches) and burrowing into the wall of the uterus. It is barely perceptible to the human eye.

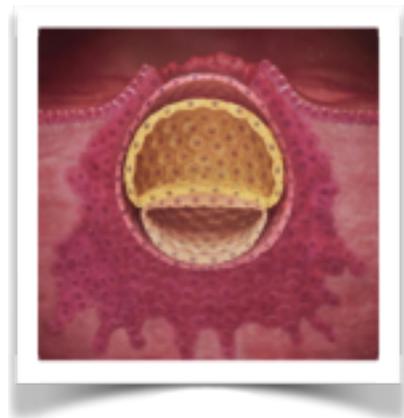
When Mary arrived for the Visitation, as we Catholics refer to the her visit, she was not “showing” yet. Isn’t it funny how we see pictures of a *very* pregnant Mary as though the baby was ready for Bethlehem. But in reality Jesus—100% God and 100% human — was so small he was practically invisible.

Though this *blastocyst* attached to Mary’s uterus had not seen the light of day He had created with his soon-to-develop eyes, nor breathed fresh air He had created with His still-to-develop lungs, yet He was very alive and very human. The cells were replicating at a rapid rate and they were already developing distinct bodily features. It contained the DNA—the genetic code of Mary.



The microscopic cells were not just extraneous tissue in the mother’s body—something to be discarded, a disease or something. It was human life with a soul. From conception Every baby shares in the image of God and true humanity with inestimable value long before it takes its first breath—right from conception.

These replicating cells in Mary's body were truly human life, God himself taking on human flesh. St. John tells us, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt (literally, "pitched his tent" of flesh) among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father" John 1:14).



(Picture: A blastocyst at about 2-3 weeks in the womb just implanted in the walls of the uterus)

One thing many people do not think about—what was Jesus' size and the stage of development in the womb when Mary arrived at the house of Zechariah and Elizabeth? And, how did Elizabeth and the unborn baby John the Baptist react upon pregnant Mary's arrival?

Elizabeth and her unborn son were both moved by the Holy Spirit who sees all and knows all. Elizabeth and "embryo" John respond to these just implanted "minute cells" with amazing insight. They recognized the *blastocyst* as a person. They recognized this as God in the flesh!



"When Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the child leaped in her womb" (Lu 1:41). The Catechism says, "[John] inaugurates the Gospel, already from his mother's womb welcomes the coming of Christ and rejoices..." (CCC 523). From whom did John receive the Holy Spirit—even while only six months in his mother's womb? John received the Holy Spirit *from Jesus himself* even though the Son of God was only a few hundred microscopic cells no bigger than a

millimeter. "John was 'filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb' by Christ himself..." (CCC 717). Through the Holy Spirit pre-born John recognized the humanity and deity of the Son of God in Mary's womb.

And what about Elizabeth? How did she respond to the cells recently implanted in Mary's uterus? Elizabeth shouted for joy (without seeing a bulging belly on Mary). "And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and she exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For behold, when the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the babe in my womb leaped for joy'" (Luke 1:41–44).



Notice Elizabeth proclaims Mary as the “mother of my Lord.” This is a profound statement on Jesus’ divinity, even before birth (CCC 448). The word “Lord” is an Old Testament title for God. Elizabeth acknowledges the “fruit of your womb” as a person, but more than that—God in the flesh.

Amazing isn’t it. The small clump of cells is not only alive and human but God in the flesh who at this stage of development can even give the Holy Spirit to unborn John the Baptist.

And one more thing. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, in the presence of Elizabeth, Mary responded with an exuberant prayer of thanks called the “Magnificat.” In it she says, “For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed” (Lu 1:48). What Church still calls Mary “blessed” today? Hint: “Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women

and blessed is the fruit of your womb.”

Mark Twain once said, “Truth is stranger than fiction.” The truth of the Gospel and the Incarnation of Jesus Christ is beyond amazing. What an argument against abortion. What an argument for the dignity of every human person from conception to natural death. What an amazing thing God has done. I am thrilled and proud to be a Catholic.