

Holy Spirit, come on you and your child, and remain with you forever.

**All:** Amen.

## 2

## BLESSING OF A MOTHER AFTER CHILDBIRTH

This blessing is often referred to as the churching of women, but the Roman Ritual more appropriately calls it simply the blessing of a woman after childbirth. The practice of "churching a woman" developed out of a related practice in the Old Testament (cf. Lev 12.1-8). According to the Mosaic Law a woman incurred legal uncleanness in childbirth and remained unclean until her legal purification. This view, that a woman incurs some kind of defilement in childbirth, persisted even in Christian times, especially in the East, but in the West too, despite the opposition of Pope Gregory the Great (d. 604). The sufferings of childbirth were looked upon as part of the penalty imposed on Eve and on all her daughters. Yet it must be understood clearly that the Jews did not say there was actually any stain of sin on the mother in consequence of giving birth to a child, but merely a restriction imposed by law. With Christ's coming womankind was elevated and ennobled, and motherhood too was more clearly seen as something honorable, deserving a blessing rather than a purification. The exact time of origin of this sacramental is not known, except that it is very ancient, and dates possibly from the first half of the fourth century.

1. After giving birth to a child a mother may wish to give thanks to God in church for a safe delivery, and to obtain the Church's blessing. This has long been a devout and praiseworthy practice. The priest, vested in surplice and white stole (assisted by a server who carries the aspersory), goes to the threshold of the church. The woman kneels there, holding a lighted candle.

The very fact that the priest goes to meet her and escort her into the church is in itself a mark of respect for the mother, and puts one in mind of a bishop who meets a royal personage or anyone of high rank when the latter comes to a cathedral to attend a solemn function. The rest of the rite speaks for itself; but it may be pointed out that psalm 23, which the priest recites over the woman, is a psalm of majesty, praise, and gratitude.

The priest sprinkles her with holy water, saying:

**P:** Our help is in the name of the Lord.

**All:** Who made heaven and earth.

He then says the following antiphon and psalm 23:

**Antiphon:** This woman shall receive a blessing from the Lord and mercy from God, her Savior; for she is one of the people who seek the Lord.

**Psalm 23**

(for this psalm see p. 366)

After psalm 23 the above antiphon is repeated.

In the *Collectio Rituum*, both for Germany and the U. S. A., the antiphon and the psalm are omitted; and according to the same ritual the priest says first "Peace be with you"; then "Come into the temple of God"; and then the *Magnificat*. If the priest wishes to substitute the *Magnificat* for psalm 23, he will find the former on p. 411.

2. Then the priest places the end of the stole hanging from his left shoulder in the hand of the woman and leads her into the church, saying:

Come into God's house. Adore the Son of the blessed Virgin Mary, and thank God who has given you the grace of motherhood.

3. The woman kneels before the altar, giving thanks to God for the benefits He has bestowed on her. The priest continues:

Lord, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Lord, have mercy. Our Father **the rest inaudibly until**

**P:** And lead us not into temptation.

**All:** But deliver us from evil.

**P:** Save your servant.

**All:** Who trusts in you, my God.

**P:** Lord, send her aid from your holy place.

**All:** And watch over her from Sion.

**P:** Let the enemy have no power over her.

**All:** And the son of iniquity be powerless to harm her.



Let us pray.

Almighty everlasting God, who enable us, your servants, in our profession of the true faith, to acknowledge the glory of the three Persons in the eternal Godhead, and to adore their oneness of nature, their co-equal majesty; grant, we pray, that by steadfastness in that faith this servant of yours, **N.**, may ever be guarded against all adversity; through Christ our Lord.

**All:** Amen.

Let us pray.

Lord God, Creator of all things, mighty and awesome, just and forgiving, you alone are good and kind. You saved Israel from all manner of plagues, making our forefathers your chosen people, and hallowing them by the touch of your Spirit. You, by the co-operation of the Holy Spirit, prepared the body and soul of the glorious Virgin Mary to be a worthy dwelling for your Son. You filled John the Baptist with the Holy Spirit, causing him to leap with joy in his mother's womb. Accept the offering of a humble spirit, and grant the heartfelt desire of your servant, **N.**, who pleads for the safety of the child you allowed her to conceive. Guard the life that is yours; defend it from all the craft and spite of the pitiless foe. Let your gentle hand, like that of a skilled physician, aid her delivery, bringing her offspring safe and sound to the light of day. May her child live to be reborn in holy baptism, and continuing always in your service, be found worthy of attaining everlasting life; through Christ our Lord.

**All:** Amen.

The priest sprinkles the woman with holy water and then adds the following:

### Psalm 66

**P:** May God have pity on us and bless us; \* may He let His face shine upon us.

**All:** So may His way be known upon earth; \* among all nations, His salvation.

**P:** May the peoples praise you, O God; \* may all the peoples praise you.

**All:** May all the nations be glad and exult because you rule the peoples in equity; \* you guide the nations on earth.

**P:** May the peoples praise you, O God; \* may all the peoples praise you.

**All:** The earth has yielded its fruits; \* God, our God, has blessed us.

**P:** May God bless us, \* and may all the ends of the earth fear him.

**All:** Glory be to the Father.

**P:** As it was in the beginning.

**P:** Let us bless the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

**All:** Let us praise and glorify Him forever.

**P:** God has given His angels charge over you.

**All:** To guard you in all your paths.

**P:** Lord, heed my prayer.

**All:** And let my cry be heard by you.

**P:** The Lord be with you.

**All:** May He also be with you.

Let us pray.

Lord, we beg you to visit this dwelling, and to drive away from it and from this servant of yours, **N.**, all the enemy's wiles. Let your holy angels be appointed here to keep her and her offspring in peace; and let your blessing ✠ ever rest upon her. Save them, almighty God, and grant them your everlasting light; through Christ our Lord.

**All:** Amen.

May the blessing of almighty God, Father, Son, ✠ and