

On the Revised Translation of the Mass
Bulletin Insert 13
“The Creed 4”

Instead of saying that Jesus Christ was “*born* of the Virgin Mary,” we will say the He was “*incarnate* of the Virgin Mary” in the revised translation of the Creed. “Incarnate” will more precisely express the Mystery of God’s entrance into humanity and affirm the sacred nature of all human life from its beginning.

In John 1:14 it says that the “Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” “Word” is John’s way of saying that Jesus Christ is the fullest and ultimate revelation of God among us. The Latin text reads “*verbum caro factum est.*” The word *caro*, which means “flesh,” is evident in “incarnate.” “Nate” comes from the Latin *natus*, which means “produced by nature.”

The natural way a human is produced is through the sexual act. Of course this was not the true in the case of Jesus, but historically, when a woman discovered that she had conceived, it was believed that the child was already dwelling within her. This is why Saint John says Jesus “dwelt among us” from the moment Jesus was miraculously conceived.

Natus, rather than “born,” has more a connection to the moment of conception. “Born” gives the modern mind more a sense of the actual delivery at the conclusion of pregnancy. This is important because it means that saying “incarnate” affirms that Jesus Christ took on the flesh of humanity at the moment He was conceived, not simply when He was born on Christmas day. If Jesus Christ became human at His miraculous conception, then it means that every child produced by nature is a human being at conception.

Using “incarnate” in the Mass will remind us of the precious gift of all human life from its first moment of natural conception and of the Mystery of the Son assuming it. Christ first dwelt among us in the womb of the Blessed Mother and then He was born. Incarnate affirms our Catholic conviction that all human life begins when it is naturally conceived, like Jesus’ humanity began when He took on flesh through the Blessed Virgin Mary at His miraculous conception.