

COURIER-JOURNAL

• June 1984 •

A supplement to Catholic newspapers, published by the National Catholic News Service, 1312 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20005. All contents copyright © 1984 by NC News Service.

Faith Today

Baseball is sort of like life itself

By Joe Michael Feist
NC News Service

On the second day of April, Baltimore's Memorial Stadium was filled to capacity. The weather was cool, some might even say cold, but the crowd knew beyond a doubt that the rites of spring were about to commence. The city's beloved Orioles took to the field to open another baseball season.

Television reporters roamed the stadium asking fans why they were there and what they liked about the game. One woman pondered the questions momentarily.

"Baseball," she said, "is generally a slow-moving, plodding, sometimes boring game. But it's punctuated with short bursts of intense excitement. Baseball is sort of like life itself."

I thought of her comment as I prepared to write about Mary. I know that Nazareth didn't have a version of the Orioles, but I'm pretty sure that, even for Mary, life was much as the woman in the stadium described it.

□ □ □

In baseball, long before the first pitch the manager comes up with a game plan. He tries to match the strength of his team against the weakness of his opponent. He tries to foresee any problem and map out some sort of strategy.

But sooner or later in every game, the unexpected happens. The pitcher loses control. The shortstop drops a fly ball.

Managers have to deal with these sudden turns.

□ □ □

Imagine for a moment the calm and predictable life of a young Jewish girl 2,000 years ago. Her plans are forever altered by an angelic visitor with stunning news. Mary, an unwed girl, is to give birth to the Son of God.

It is easy to forget that Mary was troubled by the angel's appearance. She had a choice in the matter, after all, and could have

said no. But she didn't. In what must have been one of those exhilarating moments, a home-run feeling if you will, she said yes.

And no sooner had the baby been born than another completely unexpected event took place — the flight into Egypt to escape the wrath of Herod. What fear Mary must have felt as she fled with Joseph and the child.

In fact, most episodes involving Mary with which we are familiar can be compared to the high points of life mentioned by the woman in the stadium. There is the drama of Jesus being lost in the temple for three days, the excitement of the beginning of Jesus' ministry and the wonder of the first miracle at Cana.

On the other hand, we don't know very much about the years Jesus spent living at home with Joseph and Mary. But it is safe to say that, as in any family — or baseball game — there were long periods that could be described as routine. Mary washed the clothes, cooked the meals and cleaned the house. She no doubt played children's games with her son and taught him the ways of the world.

It's hard to imagine what went through Mary's mind as she watched Jesus growing up. We do know that she didn't fully understand all that was happening and probably just hoped for the best.

The pain Mary felt as she watched her son die on the cross must have been overwhelming. To her, this was the end. It was over. All the intensity and emotion, the predictability and surprises and joy, had vanished.

But we know what happened next. Jesus rose from the dead. Again Mary's life was punctuated by the unexpected. At this point she must have felt something far more glorious than even a perfect spring day at the ballpark.

(Feist is associate editor of Faith Today.)

The life of Jesus' mother contained moments of high drama and excitement. But there were also many ordinary days filled with ordinary tasks. In a curious sense, Mary's life — and ours — resembles that all-American game of baseball.

