



Who
Is This
Woman?

SOLEMNITY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY THE MOTHER OF GOD

Year B

Numbers 6:22 - 27

Psalm 67:2-3, 5, 6, 8

Galatians 4:4 - 7

Luke 2:16 -21

Gathering

(An unlit candle and an arrangement of nativity figures surrounded by seasonal greens rest on a table in the gathering place.)

Steeped in the spirit of Christmas, we celebrate Mary, the Mother of Jesus, a woman of faith, as our model for seeking the will of God and fulfilling it. Last week we celebrated Christ as God's gift of love for all humankind. How were you a gift of love for others this past week?

Prayer

(The candle is lit. The leader invites the members to some time of silent attention to the Lord dwelling with them. After a time of quiet, the leader takes up the figure of the Christ Child, holds it for a moment and then passes it to the person nearest. When the figure has been passed to all, it is returned to the table and the prayer continues as follows.)

Leader: What shall we present to you, O Christ,
For your coming to earth for us?

Each of your creatures brings you a thank-offering:
The angels – singing; the heavens – a star;
The wise men – treasures; the shepherds – devotion;
The earth – a cave; the desert – a manger;
But, we offer you the virgin-mother.
O eternal God, have mercy upon us.

All: Amen.

Orthodox Hymns of Christmas, Holy Week and Easter.
Alexander Bogolepov, 1965. St. Vladimir's Seminary Press,
75 Scarsdale Rd. Crestwood, NY 10707

(The leader takes up the figure of Mary, holds it for a moment and then passes it to the person nearest. When the figure has been passed to all, it is returned to the table.)

HEARING THE LORD'S GOSPEL

(The scriptures are proclaimed aloud with a pause after each reading. Following a pause after the proclamation of the gospel, the leader invites members to name a word or phrase from the gospel that stays with them, but without any additional comment. Some may repeat what another has already said.)

*When this naming is complete, the leader passes out copies of the scriptures of the week as needed. The leader then poses these questions: “**What draws you to this gospel?**” “**Where do you resist this gospel?**” The community pauses for a time of silent reflection. After about a minute, the leader invites members to consider the Reflection and Questions for the week. After a time for silent reflection, the leader invites members to re-arrange themselves in groups of three or four for sharing. The small groups move off so as not to intrude on one another.)*

Reflection

Who Is This Woman

Who is this woman who talks to angels
and is on intimate terms with divinity?
In the fullness of time,
She bore the fullness of grace.

The shepherds went in haste,
And found the angels' proclamation true.

All were there as they had been told,
Maiden mother, mentor, and male child.
Those who heard of it were amazed.

Mary looked on in gratitude.
The silence in her heart
Held the past and the future
In a balance.

Eight days passed before marking him,
Naming him,
Whose future pulls us forward.

Who is this woman
Who dared to say, "Yes"
And, now holds eternal vulnerability
In her lap?

Jo-Ann Iannotti, O.P. Reprinted with permission

That the church gives us this feast one week after Christmas speaks of the reverence we have for Mary as mother of Jesus and as our first model of faith.

She was a woman who held in her total person her commitment to incarnate the will of God. She did this not without suffering, and yet, not without joy as well. Mary lived the totality of her womanhood, her motherhood, and her spousal commitment through whatever circumstances were given her at the time. She knew everyday life was a mystery.

Mary lived her life looking forward, but with a reflective spirit that did not take the past for granted. Mary did what was necessary in each moment, and, in so doing, discovered God's will.

Let us start the new year honoring this valiant woman, reflecting on her responses to the circumstances that made up her life. Let us call on her as intercessor and friend. Let us pray for the grace to lead our own lives with the clarity that only faith creates and with the gratitude which only hope

can give us.

Questions for Reflection and Conversation

- ◆ Name a couple of meaningful mother figures in your life.
- ◆ How present is Mary in your life of faith?
- ◆ How has your image of Mary changed or developed over the years?
- ◆ Share some thoughts about women in the scriptures you admire.
- ◆ How deeply do you *keep the things of God, reflecting on them in your heart?*

HEARING THE GOSPEL'S LORD

(After about fifteen minutes of sharing in threes/fours, the leader re-gathers the community. Once back together, members pause for a moment. The leader then poses these questions: “What do you hear Christ saying to us in hearing and sharing his word?” “What do you want to hold on to for yourself from this session?” “How are you/we being called to live in response to God’s word?” After a pause, the leader invites the community to a time of conversation. When this sharing is complete, the community moves to a time of prayer.)

Response in Action Suggestions

- ◆ Set aside twenty minutes some day this week for reflection and prayer. Consider where and how God may be inviting you to be a peacemaker. Pray the prayer of St. Francis: “Let there be peace on earth....“
- ◆ Volunteer at your local hospital by offering to read to young children in the pediatric unit.
- ◆ Visit the Marianist Social Justice website (www.msjc.net) and under “Issue Teams“, click on “Alternatives to Violence“ to find and opportunity to promote the reign of God.

Prayer

(The leader invites the community to a time of quiet. After a minute of silence, the poem, “Who Is This Woman” is read by a member of the community.

Following the reading, the leader poses this question to the members: “Where do you sense Mary’s inspiration in your life?” The community pauses for a full five to seven minutes of prayerful quiet. After this time of silence the leader invites members simply to mention just a word or two how Mary might be speaking to their hearts.

Following this sharing, members join in singing, “Ave Maria.” The song may be found on the Internet. When the song is complete, the prayer continues as follows.)

Leader: Loving God, source of light in every age, the virgin conceived and bore your Son, who is called Wonderful God, Prince of Peace.

All: May her prayers, the gift of a mother’s love, be your people’s joy through all ages.

Leader: May her intercession, born of a humble heart, draw your Spirit to rest on your people.

All: We ask this through Jesus, your word made flesh. Amen.

New Saint Joseph Sunday Missal, Catholic
Book Publishing Co., NJ, 1999, pg. 195

(Members exchange a sign of peace.)