

I See It
In
Your Face



BLESSED VIRGIN MARY, MOTHER OF GOD

Year A

Numbers 6:22-27
Psalm 67:2-3, 5, 6, 8
Galatians 4:4-7
Luke 2:16-21

Gathering

(An unlit Christmas candle, a Bible open to this week's gospel and a painted or googled icon of Mary and Child rest on a table covered with a festive Christmas cloth.)

This Christmas week we celebrate with the shepherds the good news of Christ, born for our salvation. With Mary we ponder “all these things” in our hearts. In this Christmas celebration, we give thanks for the gift of Jesus, Emmanuel. How were you a gift for another this past week?

Prayer

(The Christmas candle is lit. A selection of instrumental music is played as members pause in silence. When the music is complete and after a time of quiet, the prayer continues as follows.)

Leader: Almighty and everliving God, in this season you remind us of the wonder of your coming among us. Change us more and more into the image of your Son. Be unfailing in extending this grace to us in the coming year. Make

us more mindful of she who is *full of grace*. May Mary, our mother, show us the path of graceful transformation, orienting our human possibilities according to your will. In Jesus' name, we pray.

All: Amen.

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. Pausing between them, the leader then poses these two 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

"Well...I can see it in your face..." How many times have we heard that? Our faces communicate even without words. How can we think about this when considering our God?

Ancient Israel believed that no person could see the *face of God* and live. Despite this, paradoxically, Israel believed that their relationship with God had a certain intimacy about it. They believed that they were sustained by the very glance of God. "Let your face shine on us and we will be saved!" Yet God remained mysterious, the transcendent "I am, who I am," whose face remained beyond sight and whose presence was illusive.

The Incarnation changed this as God assumed human flesh, being *born of the Virgin Mary*. In Jesus Christ, the face of God shines on us with a human face. This is the image of the unseen God, the reality that we affirm each Sunday. The Feast of the Nativity is a celebration of great merciful intimacy, shrinking the gap between God and humankind. This is the wonder of

Christmas, the season which we are still very much in the midst of (even though so many Christmas trees are already out on the curb).

Mary is a key player in the drama of this Christmas season. Mary is open to the initiative of God. In her faith response, she offers herself for the realization of the divine will. In doing so, she is instrumental in revealing the face of God to humankind. We are called to be like instruments.

As we face the year ahead, we could do no better than to model Mary's openness to God's will, along with her faith and trust. Let us show the face of God to the world around us, letting God's face shine on others through us. May it be said of us that through our face, others see the face of God. May this be our New Year's Resolution.

Questions for Reflection and Conversation

- ◆ What do images of Mary and the infant Jesus signify to you about your Christian faith?
- ◆ When might you have felt that the face of God had turned away from you in your life?
- ◆ The shepherds could not keep quiet. How about you? What do you do to *make known the message*.
- ◆ How does your face witness to your faith in the presence of God-with-us?

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 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

- ◆ Explore for yourself *centering prayer*. It helps us to become more aware of the significance and impact of our embodied natures and can help us to be better instruments or channels of Christ's mercy for others. See www.contemplativeoureacg.org.

- ◆ Support the mission of a local organization such as Birthright (www.birthright.org) that supports expectant mothers in need of assistance. Ask about what one mother in particular might be in need of. Purchase and donate items or services that meet this need. Ask for her first name and remember her in your prayers.
- ◆ Provide assistance or support to an organization such as Rachel's Vineyard (www.rachelsvineyard.org) that helps women who have had and regret an abortion to find God's mercy and the healing that they seek. Remember to pray for these women.

Prayer

(After a brief pause, the gospel or a portion of it, either of the other readings as appropriate or the responsorial psalm are proclaimed. The idea is to select a text that lends itself to inviting members to the time of silent prayer that follows. Following the proclamation, the leader poses these questions to the members: "What does Christ in his Spirit say to you now?" "What do you say to him in response?" The community pauses for a full five minutes of prayerful attention to God. A brief instrumental selection may be played during part of this time. After this time of silence, the leader invites members simply to mention a word or two, or a brief expression that captures what they hear Christ saying to them personally. The community receives this without additional comment.)

Following this sharing, members join in singing "Hail Mary, Gentle Woman." The song may be found on the Internet. When the song is complete, the community prays as follows in two alternating groups.)

All: O marvelous exchange! The Creator of all has become one like us. We have become sharers in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share in our humanity.

The Canticle of Mary

Leader: "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord;
my spirit rejoices in God my savior.
For he has looked upon his handmaid's lowliness;
behold, from now on will all ages call me blessed.

I: The Mighty One has done great things for me,

and holy is his name.

II: His mercy is from age to age
to those who fear him.

I: He has shown might with his arm,
dispersed the arrogant of mind and heart.

II: He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones
but lifted up the lowly.

I: The hungry he has filled with good things;
the rich he has sent away empty.

II: He has helped Israel his servant,
remembering his mercy,
according to his promise to our fathers,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

Luke 1:46-55

All: O marvelous exchange! The Creator of all has become
one like us. We have become sharers in the divinity of
Christ who humbled himself to share in our humanity.

(Members pray together the Glory be to the Father.)
