



THE SOLEMNITY OF MARY, MOTHER OF GOD

CYCLE C

Numbers 6:22–27

Galatians 4:4–7

Luke 2:16–21

GATHERING

(On a table in the gathering place are a Marian picture or statue and some other items recalling birth and motherhood: some pieces of straw, a baby bottle, teething ring, baby blanket. When members gather, they reminisce briefly about Christmas gatherings with family and friends.)

This week's liturgy celebrates the feast of Mary, mother of God.

OPENING PRAYER

Leader: Today we dwell on thoughts of *God-with-us*, and how we have been brought to new dignity because of our God enfleshed in Jesus. While we do this we also realize that we start another opportunity, another year of growing in wisdom and grace in this world. Let us look at our hands for a moment of quiet reflection and realize that God had hands because of Mary. And today he has hands because of us.

(After an extended pause, someone prays:)

Every good gift comes from the Father of light.
May he grant you his grace and blessing,
and keep you safe throughout the coming year. Amen.

May he grant you unwavering faith,
constant hope, and love that endures to the end. Amen.

May he order your days and work in his peace,
hear your every prayer,
and lead you to everlasting life and joy. Amen.

May almighty God bless us,
the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Roman Sacramentary

Focus Question

When a child is born, who gets the attention, mother or child? Or is it equal attention but just of different kinds?

SCRIPTURE SHARING AND REFLECTION

Commentary

This Solemnity honors Mary as the Christmas season winds down and we come into another phase of God's self-revelation, namely Epiphany. On this feast the Church gives special deference to Mary, even though Mary, from all scriptural indications, is not one to want nor need any special homage for her own sake. She is a humble woman. Furthermore, she is the *maidservant* of the Lord, the instrument, the medium, the way, for God to reveal God. Mary did not anticipate the pedestal the Church has given her. She has been given one because of her significance in the life of all God's people.

Oddly enough, the readings are not particularly pointed toward Mary. Perhaps that has something to do with the turns which this January 1 celebration has taken over the course of the church's history. We no longer consider it a commemoration of the circumcision of the child, nor

the naming. What has been revived is the ancient feast of the Mother of God, most likely borrowed in ancient times from the see of Constantinople, since the eastern churches were Mary oriented.

Our point of contact with the Lady of Incarnation: "Mary treasured all these things and reflected on them in her heart." As time went on, the reality of what occurred in her life became clearer, more conscious, and better understood. The key is *incarnation*, becoming flesh, God becoming flesh. Our work as evangelizers is to recreate the world for God, to return the compliment, to make God continually to be born on the earth. In short, the life of each of us and the life of the whole church is an incarnational one, to make God real on this earth. Perhaps an even better way of seeing it is to uncover and proclaim the God in all that exists, the whole cosmic reality. Thus the Church's task is to make obvious and alive the God that is hidden in life's realities.

We might look at it in the way that it is said Michelangelo looked at a chunk of marble that he was about to sculpt into something beautiful for all generations and ages to come. It is said that he *saw* in the rugged and unhewn stone the figure of its destiny; he saw what it would become. So it is with the church and the world and incarnation. We have to see what exists, buried in this good earth, and make it come alive and real. We need to make God come alive and real for us and then for our world. It is the incarnation of God. God takes flesh in our world, the invisible becomes visible. That is how sacraments are born. Mary is great because she made God real in a very unique way, unique in all the world and for all time. So we say, Mary, Mother of God.

FAITH SHARING AND INTEGRATION

(The community pauses in silence for several minutes to ponder the scriptures and the questions which follow.)

1. Looking back on the year, what was the most significant event that you or your faith community undertook to give birth to God in the community?
2. Where do you see God present and active in the world, apart from a religious setting or holy words?

3. As an individual, how do you add to the good of those around you, your community, church, family? To what have you given birth?

RESPONSE IN ACTION

Suggestions:

1. Broaden your horizons and order a subscription to a Catholic periodical, like **America, Commonweal, U.S. Catholic, or Today's Parish.**
2. Find out who in your parish gave birth to an infant close to January 1. Pay a visit; send a card; bring some flowers; mostly, try to absorb the feelings and wonder of giving birth, from the point of view of the new mother.
3. At your local Catholic bookstore, or religious goods dealership, buy a small icon of Mary, the Mother of God. Display it in your home and burn a candle in front of it, or give it as a gift to someone who would appreciate it.

SENDING FORTH AND CLOSING PRAYER

(The community prays one decade of the rosary, reflecting on the joyful mystery of the nativity.)

The community sings the song of remembering, "Auld Lang Syne", Scottish for old long since, old times; the good old days, long past but still remembered as good. When we sing "Auld Lang Syne", we think of how and when we became God's holy people. Following the song, a "cup of kindness", perhaps a glass of sparkling wine, is shared by the members of the community.)