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Mary, the Holy Mother of God/World Day of Peace - 1 January 2023

Patricia Gemmell

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1 January 2023

Mary, the Holy Mother of God World Day of Peace

Reflection by Patricia Gemmell

Introduction

Divine blessing comes to us in many ways if we only have the hearts to receive it. Today we celebrate the woman, Mary, the one blessed among women, because she believed that what was said to her from the Lord would be fulfilled. In 431 the Council of Ephesus declared that Mary was to be called the mother of God.

Penitential Act

Use one of the *Roman Missal* texts or this optional litany form:

Lord Jesus, you came as the son of Mary. Lord have mercy.

You draw all creation to the Father. Christ have mercy.

You are our salvation. Lord have mercy.

Collect

The oration

O God, who through the fruitful virginity of Blessed Mary
bestowed on the human race
the grace of eternal salvation,
grant, we pray,
that we may experience the intercession of her,
through whom we were found worthy
to receive the author of life,
our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son.
Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever.

Our prayer highlights the role of Mary in the divine plan of salvation, and in this continues the liturgical sense of the Christmas season and the theology of the incarnation it embodies. Further, the collect brings out the way in which God's plans do not reflect human wisdom. After all, it is the virgin who is fruitful, and later in the petition we hear that the humble bearer of a life is carrying the author of all life. God has truly entered human history and become vulnerable to the conditions of human

and material life. As the new year begins, the faithful petition that they may feel, under Mary's intercession, a sentiment that resonates with the care of this mother for her new born infant. And so the year is commenced in prayer with the mystery of redemption, the unfathomable ways of God, the agency of the young woman, and a sense of the ongoing care of the mother.

Acknowledgement

The discussion of the collect, slightly adapted, was composed by Gerard Moore for the Canadian liturgical journal *Celebrate!* (Novalis Press). Our thanks to them for permission to reuse the material.

First Reading

Numbers 6:22-27

Aaron and his sons – the priests of Israel – are entrusted with the responsibility of blessing God's people.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 66(67): 2-3, 5, 6, 8

May God bless us in his mercy.

The psalm, a harvest song of both petition and praise, echoes the first reading and expands upon the meaning of blessing.

Second Reading

Galatians 4:4-7

For Paul, it is the Spirit of God's Son in our hearts that releases us from slavery to the Law of Moses.

Gospel Reading

Luke 2:16-21

The shepherds hasten to Bethlehem to find the baby who is the Saviour, Christ the Lord.

Reflection

It is hard to sit with today's readings and not be struck by God's graciousness and love for us.

In the reading from the Book of Numbers, it is still early days for the Israelites in the desert. They have been camped near Mt Sinai but soon will leave to continue their

wanderings in the wilderness. In this context, God tells Moses to instruct Aaron and his sons, who are the Israelite priests, how they are to bless the people.

In the Hebrew Bible, blessing is present in all of creation. We see this clearly at the very beginning, in one of the most familiar of all Biblical texts, when God creates the world and sees that everything is good. In other words, we are already abundantly blessed.

The role given to the priests is to invoke God's name, but it is God alone who does the blessing. Blessing is God's work. Nevertheless, the story affirms the place of blessing in public worship. We might see this as God's initiative to keep reminding us of God's watchful love and the relationship that God so desires to have with us.

This beautiful blessing tells us that the LORD will keep us – sheltered and safe from harm; the LORD will look upon us and be gracious – loving and merciful; the LORD will show his face to us and bring us peace – wholeness and harmony. This is sheer generosity and gift. This is what God wants to lavish on us.

It is worth noting that in the Hebrew, it is the word Yahweh that is translated as the LORD. Yahweh – “I am who I am” – is a word that has no gender, a word that is not a noun, but a verb. “The LORD” is a masculine metaphor that unfortunately dominates our thinking about God.

The psalm repeats the theme of blessing, but this time with an outlook on the whole world, asking all nations to join Israel in praise for God's saving help, justice and fairness, as well as for the harvest. As this is a harvest song, it is a pity that verse 7 is left out of the liturgy:

The earth has yielded its fruit
for God, our God, has blessed us.

In a post *Laudato Si'* world, we need, more and more, to see our earth and its fruitfulness as God's blessing, so that we might be moved to cherish and protect it.

In the Hebrew Bible, fruitfulness, as a measure of God's blessing, is often discerned in the birth of sons, especially in those births that are associated with some difficulty. We can see this too in Luke's account of the conception and birth of Jesus. In today's gospel reading the shepherds have heard an angel announce Jesus' birth – the good news is that he is the Saviour, Christ the Lord, and he will be found wrapped in swaddling clothes in a manger in Bethlehem. Just like Mary when she had listened to an angel, the shepherds set out in haste. They found the baby and told their story to Mary and Joseph.

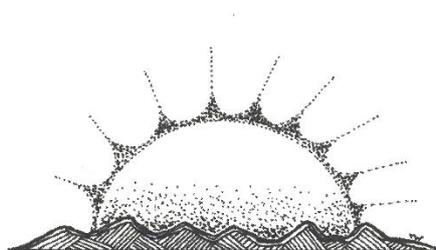
There is only one sentence here that tells us anything about Mary. “As for Mary, she treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart.” In these words we have a sense of a deep interior life in Mary, a woman who carefully observed and listened, a woman of faith constantly seeking to understand. And when she didn't understand, Luke will tell us later, “she stored up all these things in her heart.” She strikes us as a woman of deep contemplation. As a woman of her time and place, however, she would have had a hard physical existence, always busy with work to be done.

While there is no way of knowing what Mary pondered, we can always speculate. In her *Magnificat* she focuses on God's favour for the poor and lowly. Clearly this was who God was for her – someone who loved those who were of little seeming value in the world. It must have struck her, when she saw shepherds arrive to see her child, that these were the most marginalised of men, and yet God had chosen them to hear and proclaim the good news. Once again, God had privileged the lowly. God had proven to be true to Godself. For Mary, here was one more confirmation that God was as she believed.

She may have pondered that the shepherds had found what they were looking for, just as the angel had told them. And if by now, nine months after the angel Gabriel appeared to her, she had any doubts about what she had been told about the great blessing her son would be for Israel, the words of the shepherds must have banished them. Her son was indeed to be the saviour of Israel, as Gabriel had promised. Surely she was impressed by God's faithfulness to her, God's steadfast love in keeping her, in shining upon her, and in bringing a message of peace, not just to her but now to the whole world.

The shepherds returned home, praising and glorifying God, their spirits filled with joy and wonder. And yet, this was also an ordinary baby, born of a woman, wrapped in swaddling clothes. God's great blessing in the person of Jesus, son of Mary, came to the world in the ordinariness of messy lives. Like any other Jewish boy, he was circumcised on the eighth day as the Law prescribed.

St Paul is keen to point out in today's reading that although a subject of the Law, Jesus came to free us from slavery to it. He came to show us that it is relationship with a loving, generous God that sets us free, not necessarily to give up the Law but to let love be our primary guiding light. The Spirit of the Son in our hearts, the gracious gift of God, cries out to God as Father. We are caught up in the loving embrace of the mystery of God. So too was Mary, whom we honour today as the mother of God, and therefore our mother too. As her children, let us learn to see God's blessing in all things, let us be joyful in praise and thanksgiving, and let us be a blessing in our turn for all of God's good creation.



**A holy day has
dawned upon us.**

Prayer of the Faithful

Introduction

On this Feast of Mary, Mother of God, and the first day of the New Year, let us imitate Mary and turn to God, for all our needs as we pray.

Petitions

That the Church, through all the baptised, may effectively proclaim to the world the divinity of Christ and the special role of Mary, his mother. May this bring peace into our world.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

That Church leaders may be strengthened by God's grace as they face the challenges of the New Year. May they walk together in true synodality and promote peace in everything that they do.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

That the leaders of nations will, this year, seek equality and peace for all people as they enact just laws and equal distribution of wealth.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

That all parents and those who care for children may, like Mary, welcome new life and be strengthened to nurture and guide their children.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

That lonely and neglected people may come to understand the love of Mary and Jesus through the generosity and care of others.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

That those in our community who have asked for our prayers and those who are suffering during these festive days, may receive a spirit of grace and power to sustain them.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

Conclusion

God of peace, in our expectation of your answer to our prayer, we pray with hope through the strength of the Spirit and in the name of Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Music selections by Alessio Loiacono and Chris deSilva

Title	AOV1	AOV2	AOVG	GA	CWB	CWBII	S&S2
Among all			8				
Angels we have heard on high		140		286	622	255	
Canticle of Mary					606		
Come, Holy Ghost, Creator, come				376	654	382	
Good Christians all, rejoice					697	261	
Hail Mary: gentle woman							336
Hail Queen of Heaven, the Ocean Star					702		
Hark! The herald angels sing	171			294	704	262	
Holy Virgin, by God's decree					714	410	
Immaculate Mary, we praise God in you				549	723	416	
Joy to you, O Virgin Mary					729		
May God bless and keep you	177			441			
Mary, crowned with living light					742		
My soul rejoices				250		212	
O holy Mary	141					413	
O Mary of Graces and Mother of God					769		
O purest of creatures					775		
Salve, Regina					801	406	
Sing of Mary, pure and lowly					808		
The Angel Gabriel from heaven came					815	247	
Tell out my soul				550		213	
There is nothing told				548		418	
What child is this? (Verses 1-2)	165					275	

Psalms Selected by Chris deSilva and Angela McCarthy

Psalm 66: *May God bless us in his mercy.*

	CWB	JOBF	LPSF
Psalm 66	195	pg. 30	pg. 18

Music selections by Michael Mangan

There is a child (TT/SYJ) *based on Is 9:1-7* [Gathering]

Song of blessing (SHOF) *based on Numbers 6:22-27*

Glory to God (TT/SYJ) [Gathering, Recessional]

My spirit sings (FWS/SYJ/CWBII) *Magnificat* [Gathering, Recessional]