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1 January 2024

Mary, the Holy Mother of God

Reflection by Gerard Moore

Introduction

Our feast places the role of Mary in salvation at the first moment of our entry into a new year. Over the Christmas period, we have celebrated with Mary the young mother and her new family. This feast, while having a personal touch, is also deeply theological. The birth-giving of Mary is the foundation for our faith in the incarnation. The emphasis here is that the child Jesus is God. What, then, does this imply for us as we prepare to enter 2023 as a year of the Lord.

BACKGROUND

In the revised ordering of the Christmas period, it seems to us that the attention of all should be directed towards the restored Solemnity of Mary the holy Mother of God. This celebration, placed on January 1 in conformity with the ancient indication of the liturgy of the City of Rome, is meant to commemorate the part played by Mary in this mystery of salvation. It is meant also to exalt the singular dignity which this mystery brings to the "holy Mother...through whom we were found worthy to receive the Author of life."⁽¹⁷⁾ It is likewise a fitting occasion for renewing adoration of the newborn Prince of Peace, for listening once more to the glad tidings of the angels (cf. Lk. 2:14), and for imploring from God, through the Queen of Peace, the supreme gift of peace. It is for this reason that, in the happy concurrence of the Octave of Christmas and the first day of the year, we have instituted the World Day of Peace, an occasion that is gaining increasing support and already bringing forth fruits of peace in the hearts of many.

[Pope Paul VI, *Marialis cultis* 6. The document is an Apostolic Exhortation published 2 Feb 1974]

Penitential Act

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

Lord Jesus, you are the Son of Mary. Lord have mercy.

You came that we might see the blessings of God. Christ have mercy.

You came that we might always sing of our salvation. Lord have mercy.

First Reading

Numbers 6:22-27

The divine blessing, beautiful and simple, is a gift from God for the people of Israel and signifies the ongoing divine presence to the community.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 66:2-3, 5, 6, 8. R. v. 2

May God bless us in his mercy.

A beautiful psalm of praise to a God who is gracious, just and fair. The Psalms offer us a way of responding to God from the depths of our hearts for all the gracious gifts that we have been given.

Second Reading

Galatians 4:4-7

Paul speaks to our hearts of the intimacy of the relationship we have with God as adopted children through the birth of Jesus and the obedience of Mary.

Gospel Reading

Luke 2:16-21

The visit by the shepherds and the profound amazement in the people leaves Mary to ponder and reflect in her heart on the ways of God.

Reflection

How do we start this new year? How do we take up 2021? The wish is that we do not endure another climate emergency. The hope is we enter the year with a vaccine! And with that a return to life as we knew it. And perhaps we may have time for some reflection on what humanity has learnt from the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the liturgical year, the first day of the first month is a solemnity dedicated to Mary, Mother of God. Mary as 'Mother of God' is an ancient title directed not at the woman herself but as a defence of the incarnation of Christ. Jesus the Christ can only be comprehended as fully human (and fully divine) if he is born of a human mother. The human Jesus is divine, and it follows that Mary is the Mother of God. This absolutely central act of faith is brought home to us in the title and offers us an opportunity to glimpse the trust and love God has in humanity.

How do the readings interpret this solemnity? What orientation do they give to us as we move from worship into life in 2021? The opening lection is from the Book of Numbers and teaches us the great blessing of God. The divine blessing is

given over to Aaron and the priestly caste through the ministry of Moses. It is not the blessing of Moses, nor of the priests, but of God.

Interestingly it is bound up in the theology of the divine name. At the conclusion of the actual text of the blessing is God's teaching that this is the way to invoke the name of God. This point deserves some reflection. The theology of the 'name' of God is a theology of the nature of the divine presence. When God allows a feature to be a part of the divine naming, we have something of a revelation of how God wishes us to know and meet the divine. It is a revelation of the inner being of God. This heightens the sacredness of the blessing, a blessing already able to be acknowledged as beautiful, simple and life-giving.

So, what are the characteristics of the presence of God? The ancient passage speaks to us of the divine as protection, graciousness, presence, beneficence and peace. We now find ourselves in a new year and seek to bring these features of divine love into the lives of all around us. The calendar is pushing us forward into a second year of uncertainty, and while there are glimmers of relief around the pandemic, there is less certainty concerning the climate. The community that hears this reading is being offered a sense of hope, but also a challenge. For 2021, from within the feast of the divine nature of Christ and the motherhood of Mary, we are challenged to be a people marked by the protection of creation, graciousness, peace and offering the presence of God. We are to be the 'name' of God, a blessing for the world.

The reading from Paul stresses the meaning and impact of the incarnation. First up it addresses the coming of Christ in the flesh, born of a mother, born into a culture and religious tradition. These shape him. However, for Paul the emphasis falls on how he reshapes them. From now on, our own birth heralds our adoption by God as children and heirs. We are blessed with the presence of the Spirit enabling us to recognise God as father and know that our belonging is secure in the divine love.

Here for Paul, Mary is the guarantor of the humanity of Christ and so the first element of our understanding of Jesus as fully one of us. And so for our celebration, the reading reminds us of the humanity of Jesus, the pivotal theological and biological role of Mary the Mother, and that we enter all that is ahead secure in the knowledge of the love of God for us and our dignity and worth to God.

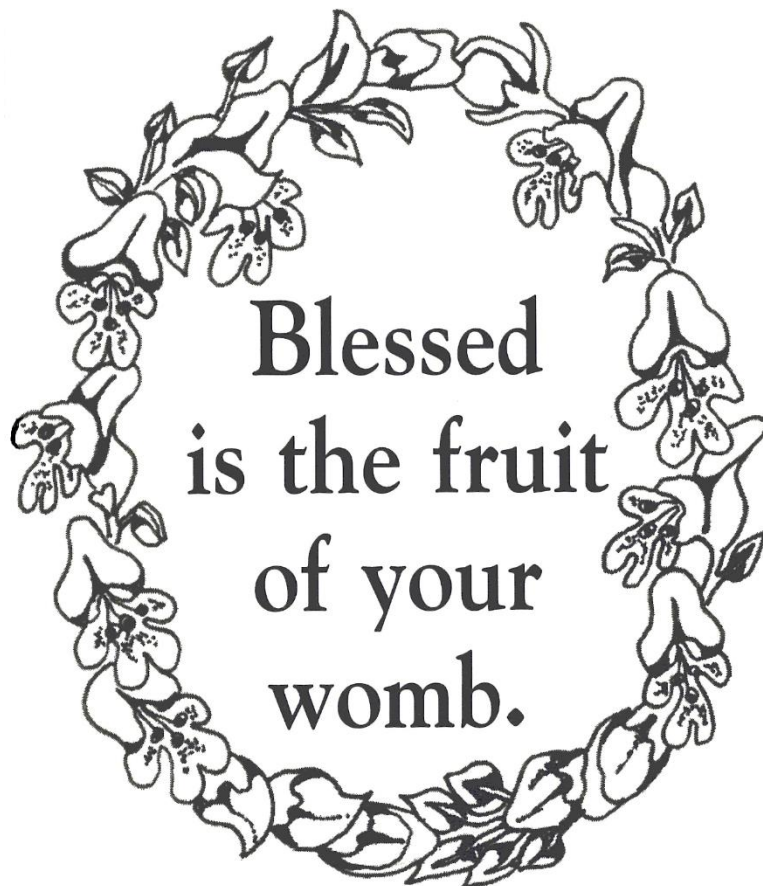
A caution needs to be added here. The choice of which translation of Galatians is important. Many do not use inclusive language and leave all the hearers as adopted 'Sons' of God. This falls far too short of the absolute meaning of our adoption: we are the adopted daughters and sons of God: we cannot let our language diminish God's proclaiming we are truly heirs.

The Gospel adds some ways to enter the new year. Shepherds were not quite renowned for their social graces, yet they visit the young family. Nor was honesty attributed to them, yet they tell the story and are believed. Nor were they particularly good at observing the religious traditions and rules, yet they glorify and praise God. This birth of a child then has already brought all sorts of surprises. Mary in particular can only ponder them, reflect on them across her lifetime, and in this instance proceed to name the child as foretold. Under the

name Jesus, the child is marked as a modern day 'Joshua', as one who will bring rescue.

It is interesting to pick up two things from this Gospel for our coming year. One is the question of what we will ponder. What mysteries of our lives will we be touched by in the course of the year? How reflective will we be? What wisdom from our lives will we need to call upon? What openness will we have to the unknown things that await us?

The second is the attitude of the shepherds, a group not always known for their spiritual guidance! They return to their flocks offering praise and glory for the hope that has been shown them. How attentive to signs of hope will we be this year? And will we respond with praise and glory?



Prayer of the Faithful

Introduction

The Son of God was born of a woman to enable us to also be sons and daughters and so we turn with our needs to our Abba, Father.

Petitions

We pray for the leaders of our Church in Australia, that they may always offer compassionate support to families in their struggles and joys and be mindful leading in a synodal way.

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

We pray for our leaders in Australia, that during this time of climate change we will make decisions that reflect peace and justice for all those who suffer from the effects of climate.

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

We pray for all mothers and fathers that they will increase in love of God through the love they show their children and that the children will forever hold them respectfully in their hearts.

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

We pray for peace in our world, particularly in the Ukraine, Middle East and other parts of the world being torn apart by violence. May the leaders truly work towards a negotiated peace.

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

We pray for all mothers and for those who had hoped to be mothers. May the generous nature that God has given to mothers be a healing balm for the wounds of our world.

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

We pray for our rural communities as they recover from drought and bushfire. May their harvest be rich and their communities strengthened in love.

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

We pray for mothers and fathers who mourn the loss of their children, and children who mourn the loss of their mothers and fathers; may they all be comforted in their sorrow and loss.

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

Conclusion

Abba, Father, we place these needs before you in confidence that they will be granted through the power of the Holy Spirit and in the name of Jesus, our Lord.

Amen.

Music selections by Alessio Loiacono and Chris deSilva

Title	AOV1	AOV2	CWB	CWBII	GA
Angels we have heard on high		140	622	255	286
Canticle of Mary			606		
Come, Holy Ghost, creator, come			654	382	376
Good Christians all, rejoice			697	261	
Hail Mary: gentle woman					544
Hail Queen of heaven, the ocean star			702		
Hark! The herald angels sing	171		704	262	294
Holy Virgin, by God's decree			714	410	
Immaculate Mary, we praise God in you			723	416	549
Joy to you, O Virgin Mary			729		
May God bless and keep you	177				441
Mary, crowned with living light			742		
My soul rejoices				212	250
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				213	550
There is nothing told				418	548
What child is this? (Verses 1-2)	165			275	

Title	AOVNG	S&S2
Among all	8	
Hail Mary: gentle woman		336

Psalms Selected by Chris deSilva and Angela McCarthy

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

	CWB	LPSF	PM3
Psalm 66	195	pg. 18	pg. 42

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* [Gifts]

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

My Spirit Sings (FWS/SYJ/CWB II) *Magnificat* [Gathering, Recessional]