

**ECHOING GOD'S WORD
IN THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY**

**OCTAVE OF CHRISTMAS
SOLEMNITY OF MARY, MOTHER OF GOD
JANUARY 1, 2024**

SCRIPTURES:

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| Numbers 6:22-27 | Aaron blesses the people of Israel in God's name. |
| Galatians 4:4-7 | God blesses time by sending his Son in history. |
| Luke 2:16-21: | On the eighth day, the child is named. |

READ THE SCRIPTURES:

Read the three Scripture passages given in the Lectionary for this weekend. Begin with the Gospel, since the other readings are always chosen in terms of the Gospel reading. (The second reading does not always have the same theme as the Gospel and the first reading. The first reading will be directly related to the Gospel in its content.) Repeat the Gospel reading. Remember that the word of God in the Bible is primarily addressed to the faith community and does not necessarily answer any questions which an individual may have. We simply ask, "What message does the Church (or this faith-sharing group or this family) need to hear?" We listen to the word with that question in mind.

Luke:

The Gospel does not hesitate to make the connection between this child who is born as a son of David, the shepherd king, and those shepherds who come in from the hills to bear witness to the boy as a great blessing from God. Shepherds were not well-regarded in Jewish society. They were rough individuals, living apart from the community, unable to fulfill the requirements of ritual purity and prayer. They were excluded from the fellowship of those who considered themselves faithful and close to God in religious observances. It is just to such as these shepherds that God chose to reveal his Son. Thus, Luke sets the pattern for God's gracious approach to humanity: to the rejected and the despised who are now first to receive the revelation of God's only Son.

It is not for nothing that the word *manger* is used three times! The Christ will be associated *with food* throughout this Gospel. Father Eugene LaVerdiere, SSS, (1936-2008), a Scripture scholar of unusual renown and a native of Winslow, tells us in his book, *Feasting in the Kingdom of God*, that Mary places the baby Jesus in a *manger, as food for the flock of Christ!* Here, he is presented as food for the lowliest of creatures.

"Mary treasured all these things and *reflected* on them in her heart." The Greek verb used in this sentence has to do with the kind of meditative application that is characteristic of those mystical persons who dwell with spiritual experiences to the point where they become joined to the source of the experience.

Mary's intuition was bent on God as the One who had never abandoned Israel, the Holy

One whose mercy was being played out now in her life for the sake of the world. She would become the bearer of that voice that came to the lowly and the poor. She would prove to be faithful even within the early community of faith after the death of her Son.

To treasure and to reflect on the works of God in our lives lead to love and perfect commitment for us, too. Only in prayer, motivated by love, can we come to know the wonders of God's blessings for us and for the whole world.

Numbers:

Numbers is one of the five books of the Hebrew Torah (Law) attributed to Moses. The title comes from the two lists or censuses of the people (numbers of persons) who depart for the Promised Land and who finally arrive there. There is great excitement and enthusiasm, and there is eagerness to be faithful at the departure. Later, all will not be so positive. After the sinful rebellion of the people in the desert, there comes a time for a new census, for it is an entirely new group of people who are finally admitted to the Land of Promise. God was faithful to the words of the blessing pronounced by Aaron; the people were not. God's very face will shine on them. That is how personal God's blessing is intended to be.

Galatians:

In God's good time, the greatest blessing of all has come upon the world: God's son comes into the human realm to bring the human condition from its slavery to sin into the freedom that only God can give. "Born of a woman" means that Jesus truly shared the human experience in the very core of his being. He was a Jewish man, born of a Jewish mother. Through his humanity, he was able to communicate the divine blessing beyond the scope of Jewishness into the hearts of all who are human.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What blessings are you asking for at the beginning of this New Year? How do these requests square with your responsibilities as a disciple of Jesus Christ? Do you feel that God's gracious countenance is truly turned toward you?
2. Discuss your understanding of the consecration brought to all humanity by the birth of God's Son from the Virgin Mother Mary.
3. How can the Church more closely identify with the shepherds from the hills around Bethlehem? In their humility? In their willingness to proclaim? In their joyful response?

THE APOSTLES' CREED

**I believe in God, the
Father almighty,
Creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus
Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was
conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died and was buried; he
descended into hell;
on the third day he rose again from the dead; he
ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty;
from there he will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and life everlasting. Amen.**

CATHOLIC DOCTRINE

January 1 is the new year in the secular calendar. In the Church, we do not celebrate the new year on that day. Rather, we celebrate the Octave of Christmas and the Feast of Mary, the Mother of God.

New Year's Day is preceded by a night of revelry, drunken orgies at times, Times Square in New York City (with its descending ball), and the singing of *Auld Lang Syne*. The Christian celebration for the Octave of Christmas and the Feast of Mary, the Mother of God, is spent in prayer, the celebration of the Eucharist and, often, a cheer to the new year.

When I was a child, it was a custom among the French-speaking people of northern Maine that neighbors would come to our home on New Year's Day to offer my parents good wishes for the New Year. My father was expected to offer these visitors, most often only men, a drink from a bottle of whiskey which was kept for that occasion from year to year. The visitors, after several of those visits from house to house, were "feeling no pain!"

Called in the Gospels '*the mother of Jesus*,' Mary is acclaimed by Elizabeth at the prompting of the Spirit and even before the birth of her Son, as the '*Mother of my Lord*.' In fact, the one whom she conceived as man by the Holy Spirit, who truly became her Son according to the flesh, was none other than the Father's eternal Son, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity.

Hence, the Church truly confesses that Mary is the mother of God (Theotokos). Mary is truly the 'Mother of God' since she is the mother of the eternal Son of God made man, who is God himself.

“The Virgin Mary ‘cooperated through free faith and obedience in human salvation.’ She uttered her yes ‘in the name of all human nature.’ By her obedience, she became the new Eve, mother of the living.”

This is the faith we share on New Year's Day. Mary, Mother of God.

See: The Catechism: #495-511

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