

Solemnity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God

January 1, 2012

It is interesting that on the day we begin a new year the Church celebrates the feast of Mary, the Mother of God. It is fitting to have a feast honoring her this way during the Christmas season. It allows us to approach again this great mystery of the Incarnation from a different angle. Today we focus on seeing Christmas through Mary's eyes.

Luke presents the brief scene of the shepherds suddenly showing up where Mary and Joseph were staying when the child Jesus was born. Luke focuses our attention immediately on the child lying in the manger. When the shepherds see the child, they began to tell Mary and Joseph what the angel had said to them earlier in the fields. It is the heart of the Christmas proclamation earlier in Luke:

“I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For today in the city of David a savior has been born for you who is Messiah and Lord.”

This infant lying there, sleeping, is the one long awaited. This baby, only a few hours old, who up until now has only cried, eaten, and slept – this is the Savior, the Anointed One, the Messiah, the Lord, the Son of God.

Two responses follow from this message. First is the response that all were amazed, astonished. No surprise there. This is a fitting response to such a message applied to such an unexpected figure: a baby lying in a manger. But then Luke moves Mary to the center of the picture. Her response is an inner one: “Mary kept all these things.” Some translations say, “She treasured them.” Or, “she reflected on them – pondered them – in her heart.” Mary in her first hours after giving birth is brought a message that staggers all who hear. And she quietly takes it in, to keep and ponder what it is all about. Today it is most appropriate that as we consider this woman, the Mother of God, she is presented to us as one who began her unique role in this life pondering what has just happened, pondering the meaning not only of this life in her arms but also of her own life. And she invites us to ponder what this child means for us.

By tradition, New Year's Day is a day to ponder. It is a day when many of us once again make New Year's resolutions. Sometimes these have to do with the physical side of life: weight loss, getting in shape. But just as often our resolutions are more interior. We might resolve to change how we act toward a particular person. Or we might resolve to enter more deeply into a particular relationship, perhaps to get married, or to have a child. Or we might resolve to take up a certain type of work or to change jobs. This may be the year you decide what high school or college you will attend, the year to make a life decision about how to spend one's retirement. All are important matters that demand resolve.

On this first day of the year, Mary is set before us pondering the meaning of her child. And we are invited to do the same. What does *he* mean for our lives? The first response to hearing the angel's words about him was amazement. But we have heard these words for so long that the wonder has worn off. We cease to be amazed. Can we stay still long enough to ponder this child – the treasure shared, the gift given – to recognize that, in this child who was born for us, and who wishes to be born in us, God has smiled upon us?

The words of the blessing we first heard this morning come true in this child. The Lord bless us and keep us – in Mary's Son Jesus. The Lord let his face shine upon us and be gracious to us – in Mary's Son Jesus. The Lord look upon us kindly and give us peace – Mary's Son Jesus. These are the gifts this child brings to us as we begin a new year: Blessing, light, kindness, and peace. So we can take a few moments and ponder the nativity scene in this church, and enter into the experience that Mary had. We can ponder and treasure the words spoken by the angel: "A Savior has been born *for you* who is Messiah and Lord."

Paul A. Magnano

Pastor